

RUBBISH

NO. 1156

A SERMON DELIVERED BY C. H. SPURGEON AT THE METROPOLITAN TABERNACLE, NEWINGTON

*“There is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall”
Nehemiah 4:10*

REMEMBER that Jerusalem had been totally destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar, and what destruction by the Babylonians meant may be inferred from the vast heaps of the dust of powdered bricks and charred wood which have been discovered upon the sites of cities which were utterly razed to the ground by the fierce soldiery of the terrible king.

The ruins are frequently so complete that even tradition has forgotten the name of the mound or heap which is the sole memorial to mark the sepulcher of a queenly city. The Babylonians made sure work when they did it, their ploughers made deep furrows, and their destroyers cried one to another, “Overturn, overturn, overturn, till not a stone shall abide in its place.”

They reaped a nation with their swords as corn is cut down by the sickle, and they beat their cities till the ruins thereof were small as the dust of the summer threshing floor. Do you wonder that on the site of Jerusalem there remained much rubbish? Many modern destroyers have done their desolating work most wonderfully, and I may venture to quote what I have seen of their doings as an example of the much rubbish with which the foundations of a ruined city are sure to be covered.

I have stood upon the Palatine Mount in Rome, where formerly the pale of the Caesars raised themselves in more than imperial grandeur. But what an Alp of fragments! What a mountain of broken walls and columns, and stones peering upward like the natural rock of mother earth!

Houses, convents, palaces, have been built upon the mass and for many seasons trees have bloomed and fruited, and gardens have brought forth their harvests above the spot where once the imperial tyrant was wont to awe the nations with a nod. To restore the palaces of the Palatine, the first labor would be the unearthing of the foundations, and this would probably be as huge an undertaking as the rebuilding of the palaces themselves. A mountain must be carried away ere a stone can be laid.

If you were able to visit the Forum at Rome, you would see, if you were there today, numbers of laborers with horses and carts continually at work taking away hundreds of thousands of tons of rubbish, which have covered up all that still remains of the ancient center and heart of Rome.

So that Jerusalem, I do not doubt, was one vast heap, made up of the *debris* of its houses, of the tower and armory of David, of the palace of the king, and of the temple itself. And though now, at the period we are about to speak of, the temple had been rebuilt, and modern houses covered the site of the older Jerusalem, yet, when they came to the wall of the city, with the view of thoroughly restoring it, they found it a complete ruin, and such a ruin that the mass which covered it up was difficult to dig through. They could not build the wall because there was so much rubbish.

Now, this, it seems to me, is intended, or at least may justifiably be used, for a type of the work which God’s people have to carry on in the name of Jesus, and in the power of His Spirit, in the world. We have to build the wall of the church for God, but we cannot build it, for there is so much rubbish in our way.

This is true, first, *of the building of the church, which is the Jerusalem of God*. And this is equally true *of the temple of God, which is to be built in each one of our hearts*. Full often we feel discouraged. Though we hear the voice that saith, “But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God,” still we are apt to feel that we cannot build this wall because there is so much rubbish.

I. I shall speak first, then, of the great work comprised in THE BUILDING UP OF THE CHURCH.

Now, this enterprise is the work of God. He alone can build the church. “When the LORD shall build up Zion, he shall appear in his glory,” and we may build as we may, but “except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it.” Still, our full and firm conviction that it is God’s working does not at all interfere with the grand truth that He employs agents for the building up of His church in the world, that, in fact, He has commissioned us, His chosen servants, and sent us into the world, each one according to our ability and opportunity, to labor for Him.

We work because God works by us. We are hindered, however, in this service by the fact that there is much rubbish in the way. It was always so. When Paul began to build for God, and the apostles went forth as wise master builders, there lay before them in towering heaps the old Jewish rubbish, hard to remove, heavy to bear away, and in quantity equal to a huge hill.

The foundation was there, thank God we have not to lay that, that is laid in Christ Jesus, and firmly laid, and “other foundation can no man lay.” But the Jews, with their traditions, had overlaid the foundations, they had added to the Word of God, they had put glosses upon it, they had taken away its real meaning, and put to it a meaning of their own.

They had invented rites and ceremonies innumerable, and traditions of the fathers dark and mysterious, so that though a man should seek to find out the truth, he could not by reason of the abundance of the confused material and traditional superstition with which they had covered it up.

The apostles had to begin their Gospel labor amongst their fellow countrymen in the midst of this much rubbish. No sooner did they begin to remove the worthless deposits than the lovers of tradition assailed them, raised a great dust, and became their violent persecutors, following them from city to city, scandalizing them, and committing all manner of violence against them. You cannot remove ruins without awakening the owls and bats.

The most rotten rubbish upon earth is sure to find some defender. By this rubbish many have gained their wealth, and they are full of wrath if any threaten to disturb it. The apostles soon found that they had fallen upon troublous times, yet by God’s help they cleared away that rubbish, and were enabled to build their wall till the New Jerusalem became famous in the earth.

They encountered, in the wider world of the Roman Empire, the rubbish of old paganism, and oh, what rubbish that was! He who is acquainted with the classic writers knows how polluted were the people of their times. Their satirists ascribe to them mirthful vices which even with tears we would not dare to mention.

The superstitions of the age were groveling to a hideous degree, their very gods were monsters of crime, and their sacred rites orgies of lust and drunkenness. The priests had successfully endeavored to make vice into a religion and under the pretence of mysterious worship had devised means for pandering to the basest passions of the most corrupt human nature.

It is no small mass of rubbish which the student of today sifts over as he makes researches into the Greek and Roman mythology. Men could not find out God, for gods many and lords many stood in the way. Neither could they believe in the simplicity of Jesus Christ because their foolish heart was darkened. “God made man upright, but he hath found out many inventions.” And all these inventions helped to turn him from his uprightness, and to pervert his judgment.

Yet those who went before us labored on amidst that foul and noisome rubbish, and were so successful in their earnest excavations, that at this day no one thinks of worshipping Jupiter, or Saturn, or Venus, or Mercury. These demon-deities have gone to the limbo from where they came. They have been smitten—smitten by the Gospel, and they have withered like grass, so that no man boweth himself before them anymore.

The God of truth has come, and these bats and owls of the night have betaken themselves into obscurity and oblivion. This rubbish was cleared away, and the foundations were built upon by earnest men that went before us, though they had to lay each stone in martyr blood, and cement it with agonies and tears.

Moreover, remember that in those early days the church in her building had to encounter the very much rubbish of the various philosophies of mankind. There was a kind of “feeling after God” in the heathen mind, but this feeling after God was misdirected and proudly self-confident, and therefore it missed its way.

And in the process of thought, the more spiritual-minded amongst men (if I may venture to call men spiritual at all who were not renewed grace) invented theories and imaginings, which they thought to be exceeding wise, but which in fact were folly itself dressed out in the robes of vainglory. These philosophies had a great following, and exercised so subtle and powerful an influence that they were felt even in the church itself.

In the writings of the apostles Paul and John, you continually meet with allusions to the great Gnostic philosophy which perverted so many Christians. Ever since that day human wisdom has been a greater curse to the church than anything else. The ignorance of Christians has never been so evil a thing, bad as it is, as the vain knowledge, the false wisdom, with which men have been puffed up in their fleshly minds.

It is an ill day when men know too much to know Christ. It is a great misfortune when men are too manly to be converted and to become as little children, and sit at the feet of the great Teacher, yet there are many professors of religion who talk as if this was their condition, and as if they were proud of it.

Even at this present time the outside philosophies of unchristian men infect the church, spoil her, injure her, dilute the wine of the kingdom, overturn the children’s milk, and to a great extent poison the bread of life. Sad that it should be so, but the rubbish of philosophy has always been in the way of the building up of the wall of the church of God, and the story of the apostolic age may serve as a great comfort to us in these evil times. As they were hindered so are we, but as they persevered and overcame even so will we, by our great Master’s aid.

After that lot of rubbish had been cleared away, the task was only begun, for soon after apostolic times, and the first zeal of Christians had gone, there came the old Roman rubbish, which in the end proved a worse hindrance than all which had preceded it.

This Popish rubbish was found in layers—first one doctrinal error, and then another, and then another, and then another, till at this time the errors of the Church of Rome are as countless as the stars, as black as midnight, and as foul as hell. Her abominations reek in the nostrils of all good men. Her idolatries are the scorn of reason and the abhorrence of faith. The iniquities of her practice, and the enormities of her doctrine, almost surpass belief.

Popery is as much the masterpiece of Satan as the Gospel is the masterpiece of God. There can scarcely be imagined anything of devilish craftiness or Satanic wickedness which could be compared with her, she is unparalleled, the queen of iniquity. Behold upon her forehead the name, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

The Church of Rome and her teachings are a vast mountain of rubbish covering the truth. For weary years good men could not get at the foundation because of this very much rubbish. Here and there a Wycliffe spied out the precious cornerstone, and leaped for joy because he could get his foot upon it, and say, “Jesus Christ Himself, elect and precious, is the stone on which I build my hope.”

Here and there a John Huss, or a Jerome of Prague, or a Savonarola, in the thick midnight, yet nevertheless found out the foundation, and wept their very hearts out because of the much rubbish which threatened to bury even them while they were seeking the foundation.

A master excavator was Martin Luther, how grandly he laid bare the glorious foundation of justification by faith alone! An equally grand worker at this great enterprise was Master John Calvin, who laid open long stretches of the ancient foundations of the covenant of grace. Well was he supported by his brother of Zurich, Zwingle, and John Knox in Scotland, and others in this land. They cleared away for a while some of the rubbish, but there was such a mass of it that they had to throw it up in heaps on either side, and it is beginning to come crumbling down again onto the foundation, and to cover it up once more.

A perfect reformation they could not work, and the remnant of the rubbish is now our plague and hindrance. Everywhere the much rubbish is being diligently cast upon the wall by the emissaries of the evil one, and we can scarcely get to the foundations to build again the gold and silver and precious stones which God commits to us with which to build up His own house. Alas, there is very, very much rubbish.

I saw in Rome that the wagons which took away the earth from the Forum were marked “Regia Scava.” They belonged to the royal excavations, and I long to see royal excavators, employed by the King of kings, get to work to excavate again the foundations of the wall of Jerusalem, and cart away some of the tremendous heaps of rubbish that still lie upon the walls. God grant we may see good and great work done in this direction before long.

But beloved friends, if this rabbinical, and pagan, and philosophical, and Romish rubbish, were all gone, still the work would scarcely have begun, for there is yet very much rubbish of other kinds lying hereabout. There is much rubbish arising from the world, the flesh, and the devil, so that we are not able to build the wall. Look at human sin, how that impedes us!

Oh, if there were no false systems of religion, if priest and scribe were silent, if false prophet and Antichrist were both out of the way, yet the sins of men are a vast and hideous mass of rotten rubbish, and our labors of love are hindered thereby. How hard it is to get at human ears, for the world has the first word, and often the last word, with the most of men. Eargate is choked with rubbish.

How harder still it is to get at human hearts, for there Satan reigns as in his own palace, and takes care to erect huge barricades and earthworks of the rubbish of carnal lust and pride and unbelief. Men are wrapped up in indifference to eternal things, like mummies in their bands and gums.

They give all their energy to the answering of the question “What shall we eat and what shall we drink, and with what shall we be clothed?” Immortal as they are, they live only for mortality. Though their grandest destiny lies in eternity, yet all their efforts are bounded by the narrow space of time. Charm, O thou charmer, never so wisely, but this adder hath no ear for thee. This people, bent on its lusts, will still follow its own devices.

Though Christ beckons with His pierced hand, yet turn they their back on Him, and even He from Calvary cries—

*“Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by,
Is it nothing to you that Jesus should die?”*

He is despised and rejected of men. They see no form nor comeliness in Him whose countenance contains within itself all celestial beauty. They cannot be got at by love or law, by tears or terrors, by prayers or preaching. They are absorbed in earthly things. We cannot build the wall for their much rubbish. They are wedded to their sins, they cling to their idols, they will not even think upon their soul, and their God, or their Savior, they choose their own delusions and reject their own mercies.

And it seems as if everything in the world helped them this way, for the business of life, the care and the ease, the quiet and the noise, the tumult and the turmoil thereof alike ensnare them, all these things are transformed by their alienated hearts into a mass of rubbish.

With one man it is the pursuit, the arduous pursuit of learning, with another an intense greed for gold, with a third ambition, with a fourth the lust of pleasure. But in each man the heap of rubbish prevents our getting at the heart. We cannot build the wall. Who among us has not often gone back to his God and said, “Who hath believed our report, and to whom is the arm of the LORD revealed?” And this age of competition seems to make the thing worse than ever.

Some are so poor that they tell us they cannot listen, for they have to work and toil like slaves for their bread merely to keep body and soul together. And as for those who are rich—O God, help the rich! Still it is true, and perhaps truer now than ever, that “it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a

needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.” For the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches are a mass of rubbish, so that we cannot build the wall.

Oh, how sad is the retrospect of the pastor as he remembers the many in whom he could never reach the conscience because of the intervening rubbish, and how mournful is the prospect that lies before him! Our only consolation is that if *we* cannot build, there is One who can, and if the rubbish be so much that the strength of the bearers of burdens is decaying, yet there is a strength which is not decayed, there is an arm which is not weary, and can perform all that is needed.

I am afraid, dear brethren, that in the work of building up the church the rubbish does not lie all with the sinners, but there is much of it also with the saints. There is very much rubbish among professors, so that we cannot build the wall. I would be very patient with all men, for I need much patience toward myself, but there are far too many dear brethren in Christ who seem to me to spend all their time in diligently doing nothing.

I have heard of a man who had, by dint of great patience and much skill, after many days of work, very splendidly carved the image of Caesar on a cherry stone. What a splendid result to have achieved! The exploit was duly reported and chronicled. But what of it? Truly, I have read books which seemed to me to be elaborately learned about nothing of any practical value, and to amount to about as much as a carving on a cherry stone and no more. What good was to come of it I am sure I could not tell.

Brethren come out every now and then in the religious world so splendidly with some new fad and fancy of theirs, some grand discovery that they have made, some wonderful point of doctrine, some marvelous soul-stirring discovery, as it seems to be to them, and all the world is to stand still, and all the churches to be broken up, and I don’t know what, until they have exhibited this precious thing, which when you have carefully looked at it, turns out to be very like the mouse which was the famous product of the labor of the mountain. It comes to nothing more.

There is very much rubbish about, brethren, and therefore, for the present distress, if every Christian minister were to keep to preaching Christ and Him crucified, and nothing else, I think he would do well. And if every Christian man were to just keep to the plain truths of Scripture, and have them worked into his own soul by the Holy Spirit, and then speak them out with power, and live for soul-winning, and care for nothing else, he would do well. But there is very much rubbish.

A whole evening will be spent by brethren in discussing a question about as valuable as the famous inquiry of the schoolmen, as to how many angels would be able to stand on the point of a single needle. After discussing it with some little temper, perhaps, and having prayed over it a good deal too—though I wonder how they dared do so—the whole of it ends in a bag of wind or a bottle of smoke, and nothing else.

Had that same time been spent in the visitation of the sick, and reclaiming the Arabs of our streets, the lifting up of the ruffianism and the blackguardism of London into something like decency, morality, and Christianity, it might have been much better. But there is very much rubbish, and I am very much afraid we all of us contribute to that rubbish heap a little.

We have all some favorite notion, some conceit, some invention of our own, some addition to the Word, some subtraction from it, some impossible theory, some dogma or doctrine rather of our own inventing than of Bible teaching, and so there is very much rubbish, so that we cannot build the wall.

Does not one feel inclined, full often, to say, “Oh, how I wish I could get at it—really get at it—get to doing something for God, and Christ, and the souls of men.” Just let the dust cart come and clear the way. These very excellent works upon futurity, and profound books upon nothing—yet, let them go, beautifully written as they are, and let us plunge into the middle of affairs and say, “God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Now, two or three things here about this matter by way of comfort. And the first comfort to us is, well, well, the foundation is laid, the foundation is laid, and in addition to the foundation there are goodly rows of precious stones builded up thereon. The Lord has not yet laid all the twelve bejeweled courses, but the instructed eye may see some of the lower bands of precious stones.

Looking back in history I can see a foundation of martyrs built upon Christ, who with the apostles and confessors make up the lower foundations of jasper and sapphire and chalcedony. I can see the glitter of those rows of gems upon the wall already. Read in the book of Revelation and see how they are described. For the last eighteen hundred years, stone upon stone, without sound of hammer, they have been built, and the walls are rising still.

Glory be to God, the Gospel is a success, notwithstanding the sneer of Sanballat, and the cruel speech of Tobiah the Ammonite, the wall is being built, and the divine eye is upon it. It is God's great piece of architecture and He regards it with delight. Concerning it, it may be said, "I the LORD do keep it; I will keep it every moment; lest any hurt it, I will keep it night and day." There is for this building, the divine decree, "Thus saith the LORD, Behold the man whose name is THE BRANCH, He shall build the temple of the LORD, even he shall build the temple of the LORD, and he shall bear the glory." That decree is omnipotent. It is being fulfilled, and shall be fulfilled unto the end.

I see at this moment the master mason upon the wall, and I read concerning Him, "He shall not fail or be discouraged," and I read yet again of Him, "The pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in his hand." I see with Him, moreover, a band of men whose hearts the Lord has touched, and these labor day and night, and cease not, neither will they cease till the walls of Jerusalem are finished.

He is the great master builder, and we, each one of us, bearing both sword and trowel, as we are taught by Him, must be wise builders under His direction. The work is going on, for it is in hands that never weary, and it is directed by a mind that never faints. By firm decrees, also, is it banded and builded and cemented, so that it cannot fail, or so much as a stone be cast down.

And we have this to encourage us—that God never has left a work unfinished yet. He began the creation. 'Tis true it was not so difficult a task as this building up of His church, for in the creation, though there was nothing, there was nothing in the way, and He spake and all things came into existence.

Here in the building of the church there are two works—destruction and creation, the removal of the old and the erection of the new. But nevertheless, He who said, "Behold, I make all things new," is quite equal to the task to which He has set Himself. And as He did not leave the world half finished, did not make it a garden without a man to tenant it, nay, did not leave the man unfinished, but made the woman to be his helpmeet, so He will not leave the work of salvation to which He has once put His hand, unfinished, but course upon course shall the jewels be laid.

Emerald shall follow chalcedony, the sardius shall be piled upon the sardonyx, the beryl upon the chrysolite, and the chrysoprasus upon the topaz, till at length, in the appointed age, the last garnishing of jacinth and amethyst shall crown the wall. And they shall bring forth the top stone with shoutings of "Grace, grace unto it!"

He did not pause when He made the world because He needed fresh strength, or wait and say that the undertaking was too much. But its story ran on gloriously through all those wonderful six evenings and mornings until the seventh day came, and the Lord rested from all His work. The six days are passing over us now with their evening gloom and morning brightness, the Lord is making the new world and He is building up His church, slowly, as we think, but surely and in fit time and due order.

Wait ye, and in patience possess your souls, for there shall yet come that Millennial Sabbath, in which again the sons of God shall shout for joy, and the angels shall sing, because the Word of God is accomplished and His work is done.

Have courage, my brethren! Bear your burden in removing the rubbish. Use your sword and your trowel still, for the work is the Lord's, and it shall be accomplished. If it were ours, woe worth the day in which it was laid upon such feeble shoulders. But since it is His we need not indulge a solitary trembling thought, but arise and be of good cheer.

II. Now I change the subject to OURSELVES awhile, and may God grant we may speak to profit for a few minutes upon that branch of our topic.

There is a building going on in us. It is the Spirit's work to edify us, that is to say, to build us up in grace, and that building up is carried on by the grace of love. "Knowledge puffeth up, but love buildeth up." We are each one of us called to be builders, builders in God's strength, as I have said before, and let that not be forgotten. But beloved, I am afraid most of us have to say, "There is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall."

Do you not often feel that you cannot be built up in heavenly graces because of the rubbish of your own corrupt nature? Oh, what a fall the fall was! What a total ruin did it make of our moral nature! Brethren, do you not discover—I do, almost every day—some fresh heap of rubbish which I hardly knew was there? Points in which we thought ourselves strong turn out to be our weaknesses.

There was an infirmity from which we half indulged the thought that we were clear, and therefore we were rather severe upon others for having such an infirmity and sin. But at last it broke out in ourselves, it always had been in us, but it had not had the occasion and opportunity. At length the provocation came, and the hidden evil was revealed.

Ah, brethren, much more of such rubbish remains in us. Oh, the rubbish of pride, of unbelief, of evil lustings, of anger, of despondency, of self-exaltation! Brethren, it is not worth while to stir it, it is such a foul heap! I have no desire to turn a cinder sifter to it, for there is never a jewel in it that will pay for the sifting. But there it is and the building of grace does not advance as we could wish because of the corruption which still abideth in us, notwithstanding all that some may say.

Then there is oftentimes in Christian people the old rubbish of legal thought, of legal acting, and legal fearing. In our old estate we were going to be saved by our own merits. That was our notion. Since our conversion, we doctrinally abhor the idea of any thought of human merit, but experientially we indulge in it. The legal spirit will come in, like an ill weed it springs up spontaneously in the garden from which grace uprooted it. Though we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free, yet the flesh often tries to put the old yoke of bondage upon us, so that if Paul were here he would say to us, "Having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?"

Ishmael tries to domineer over Isaac, though driven out of the house, he shows his tyrant face at the window. We get the bond slave's dread, ay, and sometimes entertain the bond slave's hope, and think that we are to work for wages instead of understanding that the *gift* of God is eternal life, while the only wages we could earn would be the wages of sin, which is death.

Oh, the old legal tendency! How deep-seated! How prone to revive! It will scarcely be conceived that sinners should at the same time be self-righteous and guilty, but yet it is so, that, abounding as we do in the tendency to sin, we equally abound in the tendency to fancy that in us, that is, in our flesh, there dwelleth some good thing. Hence arises another heap of rubbish.

And then old habits—what rubbish they are! You who have been before your conversion guilty of gross sin, do you not often find the recollection of those old times coming over you like a hideous dream?

I know some who, when a hymn is given out, cannot help recollecting an old song which they used to sing, which is suggested to them by, perhaps, the holiest word in the psalm. Ay, and a text of Scripture has sometimes conjured up before their memory a sin which they wished with all their hearts had never occurred, and which they would give their eyes to forget. Yes, the old habits win struggle for mastery, and if we do not fall into them, as I pray God we never may, yet will they vex and trouble us, and herein also, the much rubbish prevents the building up of the wall of the divine life.

So is it with worldly associations. Do you not find that even the common associations of business into which you are obliged to enter do very much heap rubbish upon the wall of your spirit? You have to meet with ungodly men. You cannot commend their tongues, you may rebuke their language when it becomes profane, but there is very much of talk which is not profane, and which we could not very well rebuke, but which, nevertheless, is not sweet with godliness, or savory with grace, and it damages us.

We wish sometimes that we were altogether away from worldly men. We cry, “Woe is me that I dwell in Hesech, and tabernacle in the tents of Kedar!” And so again as the result of our being in the world, there is very much rubbish.

And I will tell you another kind of rubbish that I think some brethren have quite enough of, if not too much, that is, the rubbishing idea that they have come to be somebody after all. Many acquire that notion if they are getting on in the world. If God prospers them, then they say, “Ah, now I really am a great one, and worthy of much honor. I am not now like my poorer brethren.” It is sad to see what fine airs certain prosperous professors give themselves, they forget the rock whence they were hewn, and lift up their horn on high, as if they were more than mortal. That is rubbish indeed.

But there are some others who have had choice seasons of fellowship with Christ, and they have been for a while free from temptation, and there has been no great upbreking of the great deep of corruption within them, and therefore they say, “Ah, now I am getting on: I think, somehow, I am getting up to the higher life. I should not wonder that I should be perfect one of these days.”

Rubbish, brother! It is all rubbish, every bit of it, it is not worthy harboring for an instant. It may be very glittering rubbish, it looks amazingly like gold, but “all is not gold that glitters.” Any notion of our own attainments which could lead us for a moment to speak of what we are with any degree of complacency is only rubbish. For my own part, I desire constantly to stand at the foot of the cross, with no other testimony concerning myself than this—

*“I the chief of sinners am,
But Jesus died for me.”*

Personal holiness is to be sought for with all our hearts, and it can only be obtained by faith in Jesus Christ—by simple faith in Him. He gives us power to overcome sin through His precious blood, but depend upon it, the moment we conclude that we have overcome and can say what Paul could not say—that he had attained and was already perfect—we are in an evil case. Our pride has overpowered our judgment and we are fools.

If anyone here is in a condition in which he is able to open his mouth wide in his own praise, I would advise him to fetch a big dust cart, or rather all the dust carts in the parish, and take that boasting, every shovel full of it, away. For it is of no use to him, and it will very soon make such dust as to fly in the eyes and ears of his Christian brethren. Build the wall we cannot while there is so much of this proud rubbish!

“In me, that is in my flesh, there dwelleth no good thing.” Low down at the cross-foot, in the dust, be still our place, for we are in ourselves nothing, less than nothing, emptiness, vanity, death. That is our place. Christ is made of God unto you “wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption.” In Him be all your glorying, and in Him alone, for if not so, the rubbish will cover up the foundation.

Now, I will suppose that some of you are mourning tonight—some of God’s people—because of all this rubbish. I want to say to you this to. First, dear brethren, thank God that you have the foundation surely laid. Are you sure of that? I pray you rest not till you are certain of it.

*“I know that safe with Him remains,
Protected by His power,
What I’ve committed to His hands,
Till the decisive hour.”*

“I know whom I have believed.” None but Jesus, none but Jesus. There rests our souls’ only hope, upon His precious blood and righteousness, every other hope we heartily abhor. Well, the foundation is laid. Blessed be God for that! When a man is brought to rest alone in Jesus, then there is laid for him in Zion a sure foundation stone, and to that he is cemented by sovereign grace.

Now, let us thank God again that the building up of His temple in us is His own work. He began it. He dug out and made clear to us our own emptiness. He cast out our self-righteousness, and He laid Christ where our self had once been. The Lord did that, and He has done everything else which has been done in us that has been worth the doing.

I cannot, I am sure no brother here can, look upon any step he has ever taken as a real advance in divine life which was taken in any strength but in the strength of God. Whatever we have done of ourselves had been much better undone, for all that nature spins will have to be unraveled sooner or later.

“Salvation is of the LORD.” Jonah learned that in the whale’s belly. It was worthwhile getting into the whale’s belly to learn. We want to know it through and through. Salvation is of the Lord alone, and unto Him must be all the praise. And there is our comfort. It is His work to save us, we are not our own saviors, Christ is the Savior.

It is the Spirit’s work to make us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. It is the Bridegroom, not the bride, that is to make the bride fit for her Husband. So says the Scripture. “Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it, that He might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself, a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing.” It is He that presents the bride to Himself, and He that makes her fit to be presented. Blessed be God, the work is in sure and competent hands.

And therefore, finally, let us by divine grace work on in faith, with diligence. In faith, I say, believing that our work of faith and labor of love are not in vain in the Lord, believing that prayer is not a vain exercise, that drawing near to God in communion is not a vain thing, that trusting in the Lord is no idle dream, but that surely He will complete what He has begun.

But let us add to faith the most earnest endeavors, let us diligently strive to get away this rubbish. Whatever bad habit obstructs our edification, God help us to conquer it. Whatever sin there is about us, may the blood of Jesus enable us to subdue it.

Let us press forward, dear brethren and sisters, never content, never satisfied till we wake up in His likeness, and as we have not all His likeness yet, not satisfied with ourselves, let us press forward, looking to that which is before us, and forgetting that which is behind. Faith and diligence, by God’s good grace, shall give us to be built up on our most holy faith, not with wood and hay and stubble, but with gold and silver and precious stones, which will abide the fire.

Look that ye be built on the foundation. That is the last and yet the first question. Are you on the foundation? Some build very rapidly, but they are not on the foundation. Yes, you have a fine character and you make a noble profession, but is the palatial structure based on the rocky foundation, or on the sand?

Our little children at the seaside will build very fine castles with their wooden spades, but the next tide sweeps all away because it is sand built on sand. I am afraid the religion of multitudes is just that—sand built on sand. Is that your religion, dear hearer? Does it consist of church-goings, or chapel-goings, and prayer meetings, and sacrament-takings, and all that? Well, then, it is sand built on sand.

But if you are a poor and needy sinner, and you have rested your soul on Jesus, and then, renewed in heart by His Spirit, have been zealous for good works, then is it no longer sand built on sand, but the work of the Spirit of God upon the one foundation which God laid from all eternity, in the person and the work of His only begotten Son.

The Lord bless you, every one of you, for Jesu’s sake! Amen.

PORTION OF SCRIPTURE READ BEFORE SERMON—NEHEMIAH 4

HYMNS FROM “OUR OWN HYMN BOOK”—623, 641, 665

This sermon I have revised at Mentone after an attack of severe pain, from which I am recovering by God's good hand. I beg, in my great feebleness, to ask the prayers of my friends that I may return to my beloved sphere of labor, free from the disease which is my constant cross, and that every personal trial may work in me for the good of others, by rendering my ministry more deeply experiential. From this delicious retreat I desire Christian love to all the people of God, of whom I am both the servant and friend."

C. H. SPURGEON

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.