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Sermon Notes

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Building With Gold, Silver, and Costly Stones

1 Corinthians 3:10-15

Two summers ago, I was in London to meet with some missionaries serving with the IMB. I found myself walking in Trafalgar Square, and there was a huge crowd gathered around a sidewalk artist. This man was using chalk to draw a picture, but I couldn't quite figure out what it was. So I climbed up the steps of the National Gallery building to gain some height so I could see the sidewalk art more clearly... it was a breathtaking picture of Buckingham Palace, with its columns and fences and palace guard... so lifelike, architecturally accurate, skillfully shaded, it seemed almost like a photograph. People were staring at it, chattering about it, and many people were putting money in the buckets he had set up to pay for his work

A year later, I happened to be in Trafalgar Square again... and as I walked by that spot, there was no sidewalk artist... instead, there was a group of jugglers who were amusing the crowd with their skills. I looked down at the sidewalk where that amazing chalk portrait of Buckingham Palace had been, and... of course... it was GONE... nothing was left. What did I expect? It was done with chalk on a public walkway. Once the artist was done for the day, he packed up his chinks and went to his flat somewhere in London. His masterpiece began to be destroyed by scuffling feet. Maybe by the next morning, it was marred and distorted, but still recognizable. But by the time the next rainstorm came – perhaps that very evening – all his work would have been washed away, not leaving a trace.

The Bible reveals that that is how it will be with all human works that have not been done for his glory. In Daniel 2, the King of Babylon – Nebuchadnezzar – has a dream of a massive statue with head of gold, chest and arms of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, feet partly iron, partly clay. This statue represented the world's empires and all their glory and splendor. But in the dream, a rock cut out but not by human hands comes and strikes the statue on its feet of clay... and the whole thing comes CRASHING DOWN in a massive pile of rubble, like chaff on a threshing floor. Then a powerful wind came and swept away everything NOT LEAVING A TRACE. This represents the TEMPORARY NATURE of all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. The rock

that struck the statue became a massive mountain that filled the whole earth. This represents the Kingdom of Christ.

The lesson is clear: “Only one life, ‘twill soon be past. Only what’s done for Christ will last.”

The massive efforts of the world at building empires for their own glory will one day be swept away, like chaff on a threshing floor, like dust in the wind. But the Kingdom of Christ will last eternally and will fill the whole world with its glory.

The amazing grace of God is that we sinners can be rescued from WASTING OUR LIVES building little kingdoms that will be swept away on Judgment Day not leaving a trace

Not only has God by his grace FORGIVEN all our sins – past, present, future – he has given us a CHANGED HEART to love the glory of God and to yearn to join him in building the Kingdom of Christ; AND he has given us the indwelling Spirit – a limitless power source to drive us on to achieve great things for his glory; AND spiritual gifts, special abilities that enable us to do a specific pattern of good works – like teaching, preaching, giving money, caring for the poor and needy, prayer, encouragement, hospitality

AND by his grace he goes ahead of us every single day and prepares eternally significant good works for us to do:

Ephesians 2:10 For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance that we should walk in them.

This is the life the Apostle Paul was leading when he came to Corinth almost twenty centuries ago and preached the gospel

1 Corinthians 2:1-4 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. ² For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. ³ I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. ⁴ My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power

By preaching like that, the Apostle Paul LAID A FOUNDATION for that local church... a foundation of Christ in their hearts

But God called Paul to move on to another place and do the same trailblazing, churchplanting work in the next Gentile city... and he had to entrust the work to others

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 is his call to those who followed him in Corinth to build carefully and skillfully

But the words go far beyond that immediate setting... they speak to every generation of Christians that would follow him to build their lives and their Christian service wisely and skillfully

For Judgment Day is coming when all our works will be tested with fire:

1 Corinthians 3:10-15 *By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. ¹⁴ If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. ¹⁵ If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames.*

Last week, we focused on the warning not to build with WOOD, HAY, STRAW... not to waste your lives in SIN and SELFISHNESS and WORLDLY PURSUITS that you will certainly regret and mourn over on Judgment Day

Paul says that when Christ tests all of our life's work and some of it is proven to be WOOD, HAY, and STRAW... it will BURN UP... it will be gone, without leaving a trace... like the chaff on the threshing floor under Nebuchadnezzar's statute, like the chalk drawing in Trafalgar Square, washed away by the rain

GONE!

And we will SUFFER LOSS on that day... a sense of grief over the waste of those hours and days that could have been spent in building the Kingdom of Christ; grief over the loss of those dollars, that could have been invested in spreading the gospel or the relief of human suffering; grief over the loss of the energy, the strength we spent on worldly pursuits – the hours we put into entertainment or excessive allegiance to sports' teams or hobbies or collections or selfish desires. All those resources... lost for eternity.

Paul wants us to FEAR that loss NOW, and do something about it

The best thing I can do is describe what is GOLD, SILVER, or COSTLY STONES... to teach what the Bible says God will reward on Judgment Day

To give you a theology of rewards, and to exhort you to be WISE in how you invest your life and its valuable resources

I. Why Should We Desire Rewards?

A. People Feel Squeamish About Rewards... But they SHOULDN'T

1. Our passage clearly teaches rewards

1 Corinthians 3:14 If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward.

2. Paul speaks about rewards in many places

1 Corinthians 3:8 The man who plants and the man who waters have one purpose, and each will be rewarded according to his own labor.

Ephesians 6:8 the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free.

Colossians 3:23-24 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, ²⁴ since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

3. Jesus taught more about rewards than anyone

- a. In Matthew 6, Jesus goes on at length seeking to protect his people from losing their rewards

Matthew 6:1-4 "Be careful not to do your 'acts of righteousness' before men, to be seen by them. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. ² ¶ "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. ³ But when you give to the needy, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, ⁴ so that your giving may be in secret. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.

He does the same thing with prayer and fasting... do it secretly, just to please your Father, and he will reward what you did just to please him

But the things you did to be noticed and praised by people on earth will receive no reward... they are WOOD, HAY, STRAW

- b. If rewards were a bad thing, why would Jesus give us special instructions so that we will NOT lose our rewards

- c. The culmination of this teaching on rewards comes at the end of that chapter

Matthew 6:19-21 *"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. ²⁰ But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.*

The TREASURE we STORE UP in heaven MUST BE REWARDS, as Jesus has been telling us...

The GOLD, SILVER, COSTLY STONES that survive Judgment Day will be our heavenly treasure

These are good works done for the glory of God

We cannot STORE UP righteousness before God by which we earn our salvation, our forgiveness of sins, our right standing before God

NOT AT ALL!

Romans 3:28 *For we maintain that a person is justified by faith apart from observing the law.*

Titus 3:5 *he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.*

4. Rewards come as a matter of AMAZING GRACE to us in Christ

a. We don't deserve rewards... everything is of grace

1 Corinthians 3:10 *By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder*

1 Corinthians 15:9-10 *I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. ¹⁰ But by the grace of God I am what I am*

b. As servants, we should only do our duty

Luke 17:7-10 *"Suppose one of you had a servant plowing or looking after the sheep. Would he say to the servant when he comes in from the field, 'Come along now and sit down to eat'? ⁸ Would he not rather say, 'Prepare my supper, get yourself ready and wait on me while I eat and drink; after that you may eat and drink'? ⁹ Would he thank the servant because he did what he was told to do? ¹⁰ So you also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty.'"*

c. All of our best works are still flawed and need to be CLEANSED by the grace of God

- d. The image here is that our gold, silver, and costly stones are NOT ONLY TESTED and PROVED by fire, but they are REFINED by fire,,, purified from all our pride and mixed motives and impure understanding

Malachi 3:3 [Christ] will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness

B. So... We Should Desire Rewards Because Both Paul and Jesus Tell Us To!

1. We should live a life RICH in good works, and be rich in heavenly treasure
2. We should BUILD on the foundation that has been laid, using GOLD, SILVER, COSTLY STONES... and if we do, we will receive our reward

II. What Is the Reward?

A. Clearest teaching:

1 Corinthians 4:5 wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men's hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God.

B. More Famous Passage

Matthew 25:21 "His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'

1. This is PRAISE FROM GOD
2. God expressing his pleasure in your good works... telling you how pleased he is with what you did
3. That is exactly why we should want to store up as much of those expressions of praise as we can
4. That we would MANY TIMES give money in secret, and pray in secret, and fast in secret... so that our heavenly Father, who sees what is done in secret WILL REWARD US by telling us how much joy our works brought him
5. That's what it means "enter into the JOY of your master"

C. Crowns of Honor

1. Along with this are the emblems of honor that God will give for exemplary service

1 Thessalonians 2:19 For what is our hope, our joy, or the crown in which we will glory in the presence of our Lord Jesus when he comes? Is it not you?

1 Corinthians 9:25-27 *Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. ²⁶ Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly; I do not fight like a man beating the air. ²⁷ No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize*

Philippians 4:1 *Therefore, my brothers, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, that is how you should stand firm in the Lord, dear friends!*

2 Timothy 4:7-8 *I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸ Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day-- and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

Revelation 4:4 *Surrounding the throne were twenty-four other thrones, and seated on them were twenty-four elders. They were dressed in white and had crowns of gold on their heads.*

Crowns are emblems of honor and glory... they are given based on service to the Lord on earth

They also represent positions of heavenly power

D. Positions of Heavenly Power

Luke 19:17-19 *"Well done, my good servant!" his master replied. 'Because you have been trustworthy in a very small matter, take charge of ten cities.' ¹⁸ "The second came and said, 'Sir, your mina has earned five more.' ¹⁹ "His master answered, 'You take charge of five cities.'*

Matthew 20:20-24 *Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. ²¹ "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom." ²² "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said to them. "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?" "We can," they answered. ²³ Jesus said to them, "You will indeed drink from my cup, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father."*

Sitting at Jesus' right and left are positions of HONOR and GLORY

III. What Will Christ Reward?

A. That Passage also Gives us a Clear Glimpse into What He will Reward on Judgment Day... here is the GOLD, SILVER, COSTLY STONES

B. Key Question: "Can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"

1. That cup was the cup of SELF-DENIAL and SUFFERING under the will of God the Father
2. Gethsemane:

Matthew 26:39 *Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."*

Matthew 26:42 *"My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."*

3. So, when James and John wanted to sit at Jesus' right and left in his Kingdom, he did not 1) DENY THAT SUCH PLACES OF HONOR EXIST, or 2) REBUKE THEM for desiring to sit there!
4. He taught them what it would take to be rewarded with such an amazing honor... SELF-DENIAL and SUFFERING... and more clarity comes in the rest of the instruction that day

Matthew 20:24-28 *When the ten heard about this, they were indignant with the two brothers. ²⁵ Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. ²⁶ Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, ²⁷ and whoever wants to be first must be your slave-- ²⁸ just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

5. Servanthood... humble service to others
6. Putting it all together: the places of authority and honor in Christ's kingdom go to those who suffered the most in service to others in the name of Christ's Kingdom

C. Other Criteria

1. The Glory of God

1 Corinthians 10:31 *So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.*

(Put God on display!!)

Matthew 5:16 *In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.*

2. Living by Faith

Romans 14:23 *everything that does not come from faith is sin.*

3. Obedience to Christ's Word

John 14:15 "If you love me, you will obey what I command."

4. Loving Demeanor

1 Corinthians 13:3-5 If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing. ⁴ ¶ Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. ⁵ It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs

Putting it altogether, when Christ tests our works, what will remain? Everything done for the glory of God, by faith in Christ, in obedience to his word, with a loving demeanor, in service to others. The more sacrificial and costly it was to you, the greater glory it will have.

IV. How Are Gold, Silver, and Costly Stones Different from Each Other?

A. Gold is more precious than silver, diamonds more precious than gold

B. The level of sacrifice and suffering

1. Jesus asked "can you drink the cup I am going to drink?"
2. The cup of suffering is not given equally to all
3. The greater the sacrifice, the greater the reward

Luke 21:1-4 As he looked up, Jesus saw the rich putting their gifts into the temple treasury. ² He also saw a poor widow put in two very small copper coins. ³ "I tell you the truth," he said, "this poor widow has put in more than all the others. ⁴ All these people gave their gifts out of their wealth; but she out of her poverty put in all she had to live on."

C. The Apostle Paul's Credentials

2 Corinthians 11:23-27 Are they servants of Christ? (I am out of my mind to talk like this.) I am more. I have worked much harder, been in prison more frequently, been flogged more severely, and been exposed to death again and again. ²⁴ Five times I received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. ²⁵ Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, I spent a night and a day in the open sea, ²⁶ I have been constantly on the move. I have been in danger from rivers, in danger from bandits, in danger from my own countrymen, in danger from Gentiles; in danger in the city, in danger in the country, in danger at sea; and in danger from false brothers. ²⁷ I have labored and toiled and have often gone without sleep; I have known hunger and thirst and have often gone without food; I have been cold and naked.

2 Corinthians 11:28-29 Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. ²⁹ Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn?

Not everyone will be rewarded equally on Judgment Day

Paul's level of suffering that he endured in planting the churches he planted will result in a far higher level of honor and reward in heaven... as it SHOULD!!

Hebrews 6:10 God is not unjust; he will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them.

D. The Suffering Church Throughout Time and Around the World

1. Adoniram and Nancy Judson

The level of suffering they endured in service to Christ and the people of Burma is staggering... and they will be rewarded with far greater glory in eternity because of their service

Judson had to bury two wives and two children, lost to the steamy jungle fevers of Burma

Judson was unjustly imprisoned, and the physical agonies he suffered was almost indescribable... hung with shackles upsidedown every night, hanging by his ankles... swarms of bloodthirsty mosquitoes would torment him; the guards were sadistic and loved to beat him

His wife Nancy continually petitioned the governor for his release, and in some ways suffered more than her husband

The progress of the gospel was brutally slow, and they endured a great deal of mocking and hostility, in addition to indifference and rudeness

Their willingness to suffer for the cause of Christ makes it RIGHT for both of them to be honored with greater glory in heaven than me... they are both like DIAMONDS in the walls of Christ's church

2. All over the world RIGHT NOW are people who are drinking from Christ's cup of suffering so that the church might advance

a. Pastors in China are being imprisoned and continually interrogated so that they will divulge the names of their fellow Christians

b. Christians in the horn of Africa—the Sudan, Somalia—face terrors day after day at the hands of Muslim extremists

c. Their sufferings position them to receive a much higher reward in heaven

E. BUT a Simple Cup of Cold Water Will Be Rewarded

1. Some things are diamonds... some are gold... but there's still silver as well

Matthew 10:40-42 "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me. ⁴¹ Anyone who receives a prophet because he is a prophet will receive a prophet's reward, and anyone who receives a righteous man because he is a righteous man will receive a righteous man's reward. ⁴² And if anyone gives even a cup of cold water to one of these little ones because he is my disciple, I tell you the truth, he will certainly not lose his reward."

V. Applications

A. Come to Christ: No Rewards are stored up until you do

B. Christians: Redeem the time every day

1. One way or another, you are building something every single day

2. Do your basic works for the glory of God... with a mind focused on him

a. If you have a secular job, work hard at it as though you were working for Christ

b. Seek opportunities to be a witness for Christ there... you are surrounded every single day by lost people

c. As God to set up opportunities to speak to people about Christ

d. If you are a college student, build friendships with your fellow students for the sake of Christ's Kingdom

e. Seek to study and live and eat and work out in a way that displays the glory of God

f. If you are a homemaker... do it for the glory of God; raising your kids to delight in the Word of God and the Kingdom of God... even doing laundry and cooking a meal can be rewarded on Judgment Day

g. If you are retired, use your retirement days to grow in Christ and pray for missions and do ministry

C. Look at the BIG PICTURE

1. Day to day godliness is vital... but God may be calling on you to make a **RADICAL CHANGE** in your life so that you can build with gold instead of silver or diamonds instead of gold

2. That would mean a willingness to put yourself and your family in harm's way
3. Example: one of our church families recently moved to Morocco specifically to use business as mission to reach lost Moroccans for Christ

Don't let your lifework be like sidewalk art... a temporary masterpiece that will get washed away like it never existed.

Build Christ's church using gold, silver, and costly stones!

On Judgment Day, GREAT WILL BE YOUR REWARD!!