

CCLEB SERMON NOTES



SUNDAY MAY 26, 2024
1 CORINTHIANS 3:1-23

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OUR ARRIVAL IN HEAVEN

An airplane is flying through a terrible storm. They divert to the nearest airport, but due to bad visibility, there is no navigation, no autopilot, no nothing.

The pilot turns to the copilot and says, "If we don't try to land this plane, we're not going to survive. Go back and tell everyone to buckle in and then get right back here." Both pilots are sweating profusely—not a good sign if you're in a plane. They point the plane at where they think the airport should be based upon the last look they got. The plane is getting rocked by wind, lightning, hail, and rain, when suddenly a small break in the clouds appears. The pilot thinks he sees runway lights. They turn on course. They are jostled as the landing gear hits the unseen ground. The pilot hits the brakes as the smell of burning asphalt fills the cabin. The plane lurches to a stop just inches from the end of the runway. Drenched in sweat, the pilot leans back in the seat and wipes his brow. He says, "Wow, that is the shortest runway I've ever landed on." The copilot looks out the left window and the right window and says, "Yeah, and the widest."

He landed sideways.



But here's the application: It's been said to people that fear flying, "Don't worry, going up, you'll always come down." That is true, but how you land makes a big difference, right? In today's lesson, we're going to look at how we land in heaven, what that landing will look like, and what we can do to prepare ourselves for that time.

In today's lesson, Paul now revisits the very first issue he addressed in this book back in Chapter 1: the Corinthian church arguing over which teacher they preferred. In that setting, back to Chapter 1, he makes this point (Chapter 1, Verse 12): Some of you are saying, "I am a follower of Paul," others are saying, "I follow Apollos," or some, "I follow Peter," or "I follow only Christ." And again, here in Chapter 3, the same thing surfaces in Verse 4: "When one of you says, 'I am a follower of Paul,' and another says, 'I follow Apollos,' aren't you acting just like people of the world? Who is Apollos, and who is Paul, that we should be the cause of such quarrels?"



So, with that background, let's dig into **Chapter 3, Verse 1**: "Dear brothers and sisters, when I was with you, I couldn't talk to you as I would to spiritual people. I had to talk to you as though you belonged to this world or as though you were infants in Christ. I had to feed you with milk, not with solid food, because you weren't ready for anything stronger. And you still aren't ready."



There are several key practical principles that apply to you and me this morning. Number one: You can count on this, that God will feed you with only milk until you are ready for meat. The revelation of God's Word is progressive. So, how does God determine how quickly you will progress? It's determined by your obedience to what the Holy Spirit has already revealed to you. As you obey, He takes you to deeper levels of understanding. **Hebrews 5:14** makes that point: "But solid food, meat as Paul calls it here, is for the mature, who by constant use have trained themselves to distinguish good from evil." The Living Bible puts it this way: "You will never be able to eat solid spiritual food, meat, and understand the deeper things of God's Word until you become better Christians and learn right from wrong by practicing doing right."

You've all seen it. You'll see some new Christians, brand new Christians, and they get on this fast track. They're growing, they're learning, they're having amazing insights; they're just so submitted to God. And it's because they obey as God continues to reveal truth to them. And God specifically commits to revealing Himself to those with a greater knowledge if and when they obey



(John 14:21): "Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them, listen to those who obey, and I will love them and reveal myself to each of them." He will continue to reveal as we continue today.

Paul echoes the same thought in **Philippians chapter 3**. He says, "I hope all of you who are mature Christians will see eye to eye with me in these things. And if you disagree in some point, I believe God will make it plain to you if you fully obey." Here's the progressive revelation: if you fully obey the truth, you have obeyed what God has shown you, and He will continue to take you to greater truths.

So, when I disobey, my spiritual growth is stunted, it's arrested. Now a question: who is the one who suffers for that? You say, "Why do I? I'm the one that loses out." Well, although that is true, I don't think that represents the greatest loss. When you disobey, the greatest loss will occur in the lives God wants to reach, to touch through you. Because folks, we've said this before: every gift, every blessing, every insight that God ever gives you will always be primarily for the benefit of others whom God wants to bless through you. Knowing those things, being able to share those things.



So, as an example, fathers, if you don't mature spiritually, your children, your spouse, your coworkers will forfeit the spiritual insights, the godly example, the biblical counsel, the biblical principles that God wants them to see lived out in your life by you as you share with them. That would be forfeited, lost.



Paul goes on and ends **verse 3** by saying this: "For you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal? By behaving like mere men." Envy, strife, and divisions. Here Paul lists three sins: envy, the green-eyed monster, strife, and divisions. And folks, the Bible says that these sins give an open invitation to Satan and give him permission and his hordes of demons to infiltrate the church or family where those are present. Envy, strife, and division.



James 3:15 makes that very clear: "This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there."

For where you have
envy and selfish
ambition, there you
find disorder and
every evil practice.
James 3:16

People think that is a big box, but it's an open door. Satan's activities in the lives of believers are greatly restricted by God, but where a scripture gives Satan license to move in, you can be sure he will always take advantage of that unlocked and open door. So, wherever there is envy and self-seeking, confusion and every evil thing are there. Consider social media—what does social media feed? Envy. Why do you think so many kids are confused? Why do you think so many kids are into every evil thing? Envy brings that, opens that door. Be careful of envy, be careful of self-seeking.

Verses 4-9 "When one of you says, 'I'm a follower of Paul,' and another says, 'I follow Apollos,' aren't you acting just like people in the world? After all, who is Apollos, who is Paul? We are only God's servants through whom you believed the good news. Each of us did the work the Lord gave us. I planted the seed in your hearts, and Apollos watered it, but it was God who made it grow. It's not important who does the planting or who does the watering. What's important is that God makes the seed grow. The one who plants and the one who waters work together with the same purpose, and both will be rewarded for their own hard work. For we are both God's workers, and you are God's field; you are God's building."



Now, I addressed this back in Chapter 1, this quarrel that had taken place in the Corinthian Church over who their favorite teacher was. The idea presented here, once again, is that God called these preachers to serve the Corinthian Church in different ways and in different seasons. In **verse 6**, Paul says his job was to plant the seed in their hearts. He said Apollos' job was to water the seed. But Paul says it was God who made it grow. **Verse 7**: "It's not important who does the planting or who does the watering. What is important is that God makes the seed grow."

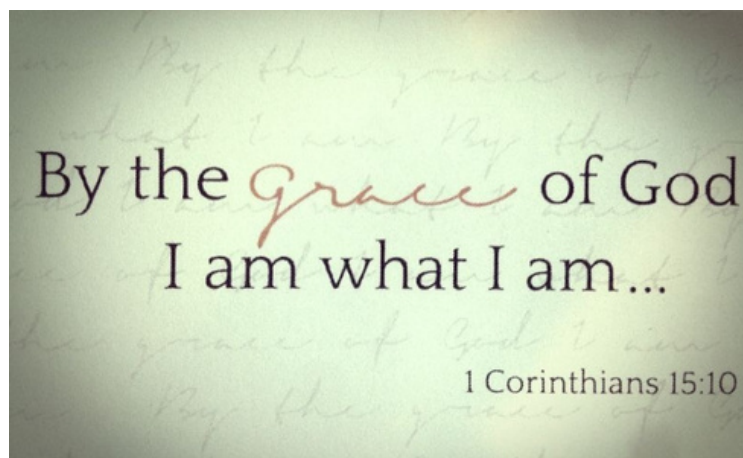
And in **verse 9**, Paul so clearly models that there is no envy or self-seeking between him and Apollos. He says, "We are both God's workers, and you are God's field; you are God's building. You are His church. You are God's church. You are His body. We are a little part, and Calvary Chapel is a little part of the body of Christ. But it is His church. People say to me, 'Tom, how's your church going?' I say, 'It's not my church, right? It's not my church. It's God's church. It's His church.' You know, I'm just an under-shepherd. I often say I'm a little sheep leading little sheep. And that's important to remember because if I think I'm a big sheep, I'm not a big sheep. I'm a little sheep leading little sheep. That's who I am, folks. I'm just a little sheep, and you're a little sheep. But we have a big Good Shepherd that we follow."



homecoming in heaven is going to look like. **Verses 10 and 11** pre-introduce us to that scene that will take place as you pierce that veil and go on into heaven."

Verse 10: "According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Christ Jesus."

Paul says that the only reason he was able to be "a wise master builder" was because of the grace of God which was given to him. This grace of God was Paul's enablement to do ministry. The word "grace" represents a huge, profound principle that I believe the church today, to a large extent, has minimized. You don't hear people talking a lot about grace, which is not what you find in the Epistles. Almost every book begins with extolling grace and ends with pleading for grace. Grace can be defined as the desire and the ability to do the will of God—the desire and ability to be a master builder. In fact, Paul credits God's grace for everything he had ever accomplished



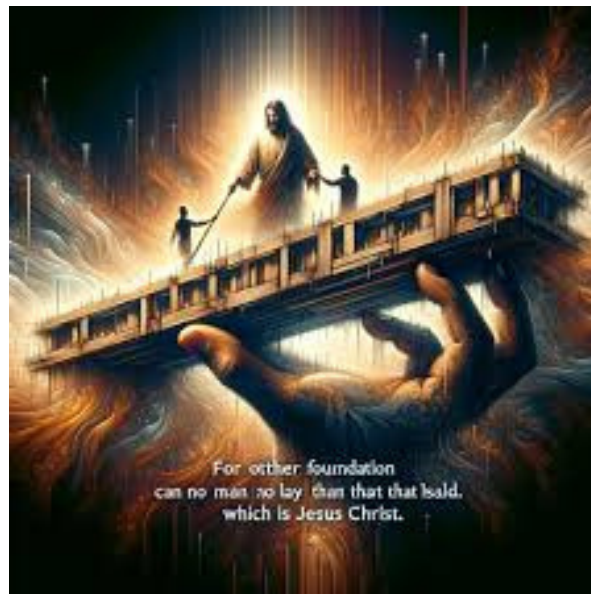
(1 Corinthians 15:10): "But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain; on the contrary, I worked harder than any of them—though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me."

So, a practical teaching point is this: I would suggest that we ask the Lord for grace over and over: "God, give me grace, give me grace, give me the desire to do your will, give me the ability to do your will."



And one last point on this: beware of pride, because pride kills God's grace. The Bible says, "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." If you're prideful, you don't get grace. If you're prideful, you don't get the desire to do God's will, you don't get the ability to do God's will. That means if you see a prideful man or woman in ministry, listen— all they are doing is in the flesh; it's not the spirit, because they don't get God's grace. Pride is devastating to any ministry, any minister, any person in ministry.

Verse 11: "For there is no other foundation that our lives can be built upon, for no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."



So, we're told that the foundation of our faith, which, you know, is Jesus Christ, if the 400 or so people here this morning are all saved, you all have this same single foundation. Every one of you that is saved here this morning, salvation by and in Christ alone. Any other foundation will fail you at the point of death; it will not save you; it is sinking sand.

"But," Paul says, "of the 400 or so believers gathered here this morning, each and every one of you has a choice as to which kind of building materials you will use to build upon that foundation, which represents your life's work, what you do with your life"

(1 Corinthians 3:12): "Anyone who builds on that foundation may use a variety of materials— gold, silver, jewels, or wood, hay, or straw."

So, here Paul lists for us two different groupings of building materials that you can use to build your house on top of that foundation:

- Group one: gold, silver, jewels.
- Group two: wood, hay, or straw.

Let's look at some attributes of those two groups-

Group number one: gold, silver, jewels:

1. Everyone knows these represent materials of the highest grade in value. No one would argue that.
2. Although these are affected by fire, they endure through fire. In fact, some are even purified through fire.
3. Every one of us, in this analogy, wants our life's work to, in the end, be of high value. We don't want to squander our lives in empty, vain striving.

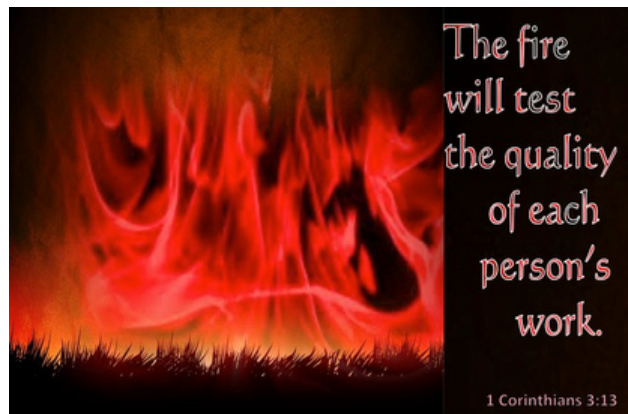


Group two: wood, hay, or stubble:

1. Everyone knows these represent materials of the absolute lowest value.
2. Germaine to our next part of this verse, unlike gold, silver, and jewels, fire will totally and fully consume these materials.
3. Every one of us instinctively recoils in this analogy at the thought that, in the end, our lives will be accounted as having been of no value, no worth. We don't want to squander our lives in the pursuit of trivial, meaningless pursuits.



And Paul now goes on to give the context of these desirable and undesirable building blocks of life. Here's the context (**verse 13**): "But on the Judgment Day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but like someone barely escaping through a wall of flames."



Now, a very important understanding here is we are given that as both categories of builders, they both get to heaven, even though they use different materials. Both builders get to heaven.

Verse 15: "But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but only as through fire." Why do both builders get to heaven? Because they both have the right foundation.



Listen again to **verses 12 to 15:** 'Anyone who builds on that foundation, Jesus Christ, may use a variety of materials—gold, silver, jewels, wood, hay, or straw. But on the Judgment Day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward. But if the work is burned up, the builder will suffer great loss. The builder will be saved, but only as through fire.'

The question is, when is this day of judgment? When does all this take place? Most commentaries I looked at point to the Rapture, as in **1 Corinthians 1:8** makes this point: "He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be free from all blame on the day when our Lord Jesus Christ returns." So, when the Rapture takes place is when most believe this scene takes place.



Let me paint a picture for this, if I may. Picture two men standing at the veil, getting ready to go into heaven. They've just died and they're at the Rapture, ready to go to heaven. One man has this huge birdhouse made out of twigs and sticks, and his knees are buckling under the weight; it's so big. But it's made out of sticks and wood, stuff like birds find things, but it's huge. And next to him (and I'm not sure if this is how this man will think, because he's not in heaven yet), but he may look across and say, "What a loser! Look at my house, look what I built, look at this thing, man, I can't wait to get in there!" And when they go through the fire, that man with the big birdhouse made out of wood sees it all burn away, and I picture the guy coming into heaven with just a little piece of smoke coming off his butt, you know, a little smoke coming up because everything burned. And he made it, he made it, and it was across that the other guy had, this little gold, silver, jewels, it's too all these blessings, all this value in heaven. See, that moment is going to reveal what someone built their life around.

Verse 14: "Please don't minimize the significance of these words due to their brief mention. He says, 'If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward.' The Bible confirms these rewards many, many times. I could quote a lot of verses: **Matthew 16:27** says, 'For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.' **Revelation 22:12** is clear: 'Look, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will repay all people according to their deeds.' **Matthew 25:21**, 'His master said to him, 'Well done, my good and faithful servant. You have been faithful in handling this small amount, so now I will give you many more responsibilities. Let's celebrate together.'"



Just think about this for a moment: how long are we going to spend in heaven? A million years times a million years, because we are eternal beings. The joys of heaven will go on forever. So, the reward we receive in heaven will last throughout eternity. Putting all of that together, if you choose to build on that foundation using gold, silver, and jewels by blessing and serving others (because how else do you serve God except by blessing and serving others? People tell me, 'I want to serve God,' and I say, 'Well, that means serving people.' See, I don't want to serve people, I want to serve God. What does that mean? You bring slippers to him, you know, you bring him a drink at the end of the evening of water before coffee in the morning. What does it mean you can't serve God; you serve God by serving other people? That's just it. You want to serve God; you serve his other children.)

So, what that means is that your ten or forty or eighty years of serving people, of serving God, of building that reward will last a period of eternity. So, you only spend forty-six to eighty years building, but that reward lasts for millions and millions of years. Is that disproportionate? It sure is. Forty years determines millions of years of reward. Yes, I've used this example before, but let's say the United States government decides on a new system determining who will advance in life and how you will be treated in life and they just, they say that it'll be decided based upon your grades your senior year in high school, just that one year of grades will determine how you get treated every year for the rest of your life. So, I hate to use it bringing this down to material things, but Paul does the same thing with gold, silver, and precious stones.

So bear with me. Your performance for just one single year, your senior year, will determine what you receive every year for the rest of your earthly life.

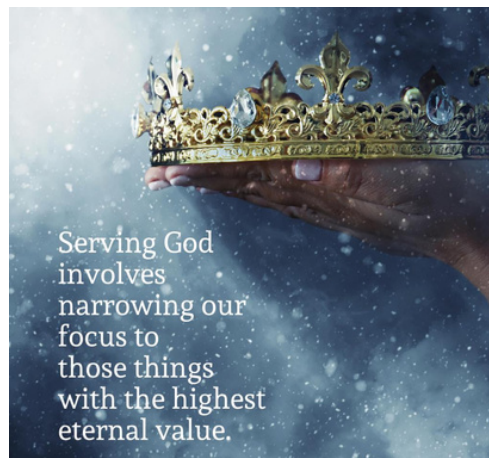


So, if you get an A your senior year, you're going to be given a \$500,000 home, \$100,000 a year for the rest of your life, and a new Ford Explorer. If you get a B, you get a \$250,000 home, \$50,000 a year for the rest of your life, and a new Ford Escape. You probably have an idea where this is going. If you get a C, you get a \$100,000 home, \$25,000 a year, and a new Chevy truck. If you get a D, you get a \$50,000 home, \$10,000 a year, and a used Dodge truck. And if you get an F, you get a used travel trailer, \$100 a year every year for the rest of your life, and a used Hugo. How many people remember those?



So, your performance for just that one year is going to determine your reward for every year the rest of your life here on Earth. Now, is that a disproportionate return? Yes, it's disproportionate. But it doesn't compare to 40 years compared to a million years, just one. So, question: Do you think that would motivate high school seniors to study hard their senior year? It should. You know, a high school senior, some would, some would not. Isn't that true? Well, you know, we think, how foolish for that senior not to take that seriously. What about us? It's more disproportionate for us than it is for that senior.

Now, there's been and remains much commentary concerning should we do our acts of service to others in order to get rewards in heaven or should we even consider that there are rewards as we serve? Personally, I don't think so. Now, that's just my opinion. But, is the Bible true? That's not a trick question. Is the Bible true? Okay, then rewards in heaven will follow our selfless acts of service done to others. And the same day these rewards are handed out to some other survival says we'll experience a huge loss.



I want to say something about rewards. You've got to get outside of human understanding when you think about rewards. You think about Billy Graham and say, "What a huge reward he will get." What he will. But, you know, there are people that are in positions in public where they receive accolades from people. Any minister gets praised from people. We get some of that reward down here. Don't be thinking that we're going to get a greater reward.

Let me tell you, I think it's going to get the great works. Those people that serve silently, quietly, in selfless, self-sacrificing ways, they're going to get a lot of rewards. You know, there was a man that I worked with at Keller Brothers, and he had a heart bypass, and he got an infection in his sternum and labored with that for probably nine months. His wife just so dutifully cared for him during that period of time.

She was so long-suffering and patient and loving to him. And after the funeral, I said, "I'm sorry for your loss." She said, "Well," she said, "I buried my first husband. He had cancer, and I helped Jack face death here." And she said, "Now my daughter has cancer. She's dying from cancer. I'm going to go move in with her and care for her." And as she said that, I thought, "You know, I have never lived a life like that." You know what I mean? I've never sacrificed my life in that kind of way for people.

So those are the people I think are going to get huge rewards in heaven. So don't think of this in the way men would think of rewards. There are so many words for praying people that have been on their knees for years, finally praying. They're going to get their reward in heaven someday.

In **1 Corinthians 3:16-20**, Paul emphasizes that all believers collectively form the temple of God, where the Spirit of God resides. He warns against defiling this temple, as God will hold accountable those who harm His holy temple. He challenges the Corinthians not to deceive themselves with worldly wisdom, which often contradicts the wisdom of God. Instead, Paul urges them to embrace true wisdom by acknowledging their dependence on God rather than relying on human understanding alone.

Paul's reference to believers as the temple of God likely refers to the culmination of their collective good deeds, selfless acts, and loving service over the past 2,000 years as the body of Christ (the church). This concept underscores the sanctity and unity of believers under the guidance and indwelling of the Holy Spirit.



Reflecting on this truth, it's profound to consider that the Spirit of God resides within each believer. This reality was brought to mind during a marriage seminar where participants were invited to take communion together. The symbolism of Christ's presence within us was a powerful reminder that every interaction, even in moments of tension or conflict, should be tempered by the awareness that Christ dwells within each partner. This understanding encourages humility and fosters a deeper respect and love in all relationships.

This is simply a summary of Paul's argument, but he continues, and this applies to you and me. First Corinthians 3:18 says, "Stop deceiving yourselves. If you think you are wise by this world's standards, you need to become a fool to be truly wise." Now, here is a simple truth: the unsaved world will consider you to be a fool if you pursue Christianity. You can count on it. It doesn't make sense to them; it's foolishness, and this can take many forms—some hostile, like a Muslim father killing their daughter who converts, or rather benign.



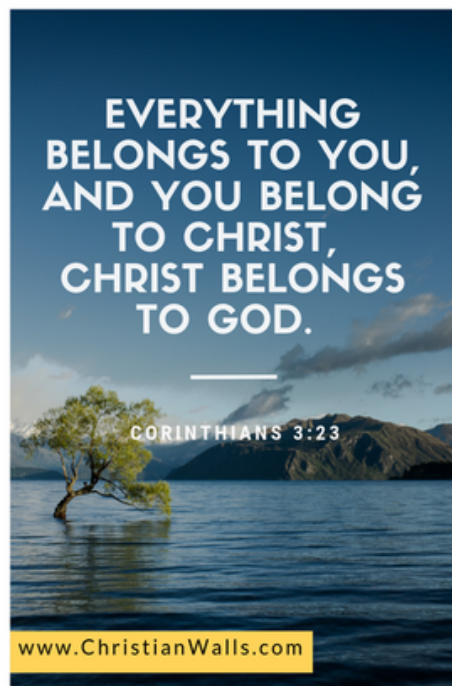
A Foolish Messenger

1 CORINTHIANS 3:16-23

I remember years ago, we used to have our managers' meeting at the Quality Inn every Friday morning for breakfast, and there was a woman who waited on us. She was about 65 years old, a quiet little woman. She would come in, get the coffee out, and then when she saw we were ready to begin the meeting, she would say, "Oh, I'll leave now so you can have your little prayer." Did you hear the condescension in that? She was sweet, but "your little prayer," just what the world thinks of us. You know, "your little prayers," "your little Jesus," "your little church." They don't get it.

Then Paul quotes **Job 5:13** and **Philippians 4:1** in **verses 19 and 20**, he says, "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness to God." As the scripture says, "He traps the wise in the snare of their own cleverness." And again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise; he knows they are worthless."

Then, **verses 21 to 23**, "So don't boast about following a particular human leader." He gets back to the subject again, "For everything belongs to you—whether Paul or Apollos or Peter, or the world, or life and death, or the present and the future. Everything belongs to you, and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God. Everything belongs to you—all the world, even life and death, even the present and the future. Everything belongs to you." Listen to Matthew Henry's words on this; I think this is so beautiful. Listen closely, he said, "Life is yours that you may have a season and opportunity to prepare for heaven; death is yours that you may go to the possession of Heaven. Death is the kind Messenger to remove you from sin and sorrow and guide you to your father's house. Thanks, present, are yours for your support on the road; thanks to come are yours to delight you forever at your journey's end." Isn't that beautiful?



So, how does today's lesson apply to me? Please listen carefully. Each one of us has a choice as to what kind of house we are going to build. Jesus tells us that. I think there are only four houses that you can build. Only four. **Matthew 7:24** says this, "Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash."



Putting this story together, we can determine that there are four possible houses you can build. The first house is a good house on rock—that's you saved. You have Christ as your foundation, and you're building your life with things that will have eternal value.



The second example is a house that is built on the rock—a good foundation but a wasted life. That's your choice.



The last two are ones that don't have a foundation. This is a good house built on sand, so this person's done a good job in doing good deeds during their lifetime, but when they die, they go to hell. Ultimately, what good has it done? It's so shortsighted. And the last is the most tragic of all houses, and that is a worthless house built on sand—a life thrown away, and at the end, hell.



You have a choice. And I think there are only four houses. I assume you are on the right foundation.

But then it comes down to what kind of house are you building, and that then begs the question: what kind of reward will you have in the end? You know, my prayer for you on this subject is the same as the Apostle Paul's, where in Philippians, speaking of a kindness that the Philippians did to him, he says this: "Not that I seek the gift itself, but I do seek the profit which increases to your heavenly account, the blessings which are accumulated for you." He said, "I'm happy for the gift you sent me, but I'm more happy for the reward that will one day be yours because of your kindness." And that's my prayer for you. I hope and pray you build your house on that solid rock; you build it with things that will last into eternity, and on that day when you hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant," those joys of the Lord will be great because of your faithful service. We will observe, we will see these things take place, and I pray, Lord, you help us to be so heavenly-minded that we would be of earthly good, that we would not do our acts of service in order to get a reward, but we would do our acts of service because we so appreciate what You did for us, and we just want to spend our lives making a difference.