

JESUS CHRIST,
THE
*Foundation of the
Apostles and Prophets'*
AND
CHIEF CORNER
STONE
IN THE
BUILDING OF
ZION.

BY JOHN BAILEY.

SERMON

“And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone. In whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord. In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.” Eph. ii. 20,21,22.

IN addition to the figures used by the apostle in the preceding verse to my text, (from which I discoursed this morning) on the union between Christ and his dear people, he here makes use of another in the words of my text; declaring they were not only citizens and saints of the household of God, but lively stones in the building of mercy, of which Jesus Christ is the only foundation, and chief corner stone.

Various are the figures the Holy Spirit is pleased to make use of, to set forth the union between the Lord Jesus Christ and his people: and none are more striking than the one before us. There are citizens of the heavenly city, and saints of the household of God; hence they are called in scripture, “the household of faith and these lively stones are built upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

Many speak in our day, as if it was simply by faith in Christ, that I am made a citizen, a saint, or a lively stone. To this I reply, whatever I am made in time, is according to the eternal purpose. If that is true, then faith does not make me a citizen, a saint, or a lively stone, no; it only discovers I am one. That which makes me any of these characters, is God’s everlasting love fixed upon me, “who am less than the least of all saints

and in the fulness of time called by his grace, that it might be made manifest, that one so vile and sinful is built upon “the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner.”

I shall now proceed to give you a few plain thoughts from this passage, in the following order.

First—The people of God, or the church of Christ, are represented under the figure of a building. It is necessary that every building should have a foundation: the building of mercy has one—and this foundation is eternal, immovable, and for ever the same.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the only foundation of the church, of which the Lord himself is the builder; and he is laid in the eternal mind as a foundation. We will consider it in a fourfold point of view.

1. The Lord Jesus Christ, as the foundation of a poor sinner’s hope, is laid typically by all the types and shadows under the law. The apostle speaking of them, declares, “they were shadows of good things to come, but the body is Christ.” Every type and shadow (more or less) under the ceremonial law, represented and set forth the person, work, obedience, blood-shedding, and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ—“for without shedding of blood, there could be no remission of sins.” And you will find in the writings of the apostle, that he shews all the types as centering in the Lord Jesus Christ, and his sacrifice, of nobler name, than the sacrifices of bulls, or of goats under the law; “for by one sacrifice, or offering, he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.”

2. Christ, as the foundation, was laid prophetically. Holy men of God wrote and spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost, and pointed him out as the true Messiah, the rock of Israel, and only foundation of the church. They represented him under the figure of a stone, “a tried stone, a precious corner stone, and a sure foundation:” and this stone, which the builders refused, is become the head-stone of the corner. “This is the Lord’s doing, and marvelous in our eyes.” This is “the stone that was laid before Joshua; upon one stone shall be seven eyes.”

3. He is laid as the foundation stone of the church historically. Hence the evangelists give us a clear and faithful account of his incarnation, life, death, resurrection, and ascension; of the miracles he wrought, and the wonders he performed. And they all prove him to be the head stone in this building of mercy, and the Saviour of the ends of the earth.

4. Christ, as the foundation of the church, is so described ministerially. Hence the language of all his sent servants is, with the apostle—“we preach Christ crucified.” In preaching Christ, we lay him as the foundation, which God has laid in Zion: and as it refers to his person, he is God-man Mediator; and as such, he is a sure foundation, a desirable foundation, a foundation which can never be removed, or destroyed; “for if the foundation be removed, what shall the righteous do?”

The prophet, under the inspiration of God, tells us, “he is a tried stone.” Yes, he was tried by God, his heavenly Father—tried by Beelzebub, the prince of devils—tried by his own dear people through every age of the church to the present

time: and blessings on him he has proved to be a sure foundation, and a precious corner stone. But the poor sinner that believes in him, shall not make haste. These words are rendered different by Paul and Peter: one says, “he shall not make haste;” the other, “he shall not be confounded.” And the Lord Jesus Christ declares, “he that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, is like unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock; and the rains descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock.” Thus you see he was neither ashamed, nor confounded, because his house stood firm on the rock Christ; whose house are we, who through grace believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. “But he that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, is like a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand; and the rains descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it,” So this foolish builder was confounded. And every man, let him build on what he will, *except Christ*, will be ashamed and confounded; but he who builds on Christ, “shall stand every storm, and live at last.”

God’s people are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets; yes, “to him gave all the prophets witness;” and their witness was, “that through his name, whosoever believeth in him, shall receive remission of sins.”

There is nothing can rejoice the heart of a poor sensible sinner more, than a feeling sense of interest in the Lord Jesus Christ: and there can be nothing more truly astonishing, than

that God in mercy should from everlasting, choose us in Christ Jesus to eternal life and glory—that he should bless us in his Son with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places—that he should reveal and make known, and sweetly apply these things to our souls, and seal us with the Holy Spirit of promise unto the day of eternal redemption.

These things are what the apostles and prophets declared, preached, and set forth in their ministry. Hence the prophet Daniel declares, that “seventy weeks are determined upon thy people, and upon thy holy city, to finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness, and to seal up the vision and prophecy, and to anoint the most holy.” Now Messiah being cut off for the sins of his people, and having risen again as a conqueror, the apostle says, “be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Here the apostle sets forth the blood-shedding, obedience, and righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ, as necessary for the salvation and justification of a poor sinner.

Jesus Christ is the chief corner stone, as well as the only foundation. He cements and keeps the building together—angels and men, old and new testament saints, saints above and saints below—for “we are made complete in him.” “This phrase (says Dr. Gill) a cornerstone, is used by the Jews to denote excellency in a person; so a wise scholar is called **פִּנֵּה**

אֶבֶן a corner stone. See Psalm cxviii. 22. Isa. xxviii. 16. Zech. x. 4. It may be rendered the chief cornering stone, it being such an one that is a foundation stone, as well as a corner stone, and reached unto, and lay at the bottom, and supported by the four corners of the building; for the foundation and corner stone in this spiritual building, is one and the same stone, Christ.” And although there is no other substantial foundation, yet men in general are fond of building on others. One is saying, “thank God, I am not as other men, no; not like that publican.” A second says, “that he does as he would be done by.” A third trusts in the mercy of God: and as he believes he is merciful to all men; he has no doubt but that it will be well with him in the end. A fourth talks about his repentance and godly sorrow; but if it is not a repentance needing not to be repented of, it is the sorrow of the world, that worketh death. Another supposes he is very charitable, and gives liberally to the poor, by way of appeasing the wrath of God, and obtaining a passport to heaven. But I am confident, however fair these different foundations may appear to those who build thereon, their building will not stand against the rains, and winds, and floods, of divine vengeance. And those who build their hopes for eternal salvation upon the covenant of works, will find they can never raise a building likely to stand, but it will prove like Babel, and be a shame and a confusion of face. Now hear what God says—“behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth, shall not make haste.” Many of our modern

building divines say, the building is begun by God, but carried on by the free will and power of man. But this is contrary to scripture; for it is said, “the hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it.” And the apostle when discussing this subject, declares, “if it is of works, then it is no more of grace; and if it is of grace, then it is no more of works.” And every heaven-born citizen of Zion knows, “that it is not by might, nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord of Hosts!” that the work of grace is carried on in his soul; and he rests firmly fixed, “that he that has begun the good work, will carry it on until the day of Christ.”

But again—the Lord Jesus in the days of his flesh, proposed this question to Peter: “whom say ye that I am? Simon Peter answered, and said, thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God! And Jesus answered, and said unto him, blessed art thou, Simon Barjona, for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I say also unto thee, thou art Peter; and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”

The act of building, relates to the conversion of God’s elect. They are taken out of the quarry of nature, polished and fitted by the teaching of the Lord the Spirit, to be laid on and built up in Christ. And the Lord declares, I will build my church. To this end, “he must needs go through Samaria: and he came to a city called Sychar. Now Jacob’s well was there; and being weary, he sat on the well; and a woman of Samaria came to draw water. He asked her to give him drink? She replied, how is it, that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, who am a

woman of Samaria? (for the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans.) Jesus answered, and said unto her, if thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee, give me to drink? thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee living water. And the woman saith unto him, sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep, whence hast thou that living water?" O the darkness of the mind of every unenlightened sinner! Well may the apostle say, "that the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him." Yet the Lord is pleased to open the heart, and illuminate the dark understandings, and then, like the woman of Samaria, we say, "come, see a man, (O wondrous man!) which told me all that ever I did: is not this the Christ?"

Thus we see why Jesus must needs go through Samaria. Again, he must needs go to Jericho, to call Zacchaeus, another stone in his spiritual building. He cast seven devils out of Mary Magdalen—called Saul, of Tarsus, going from Jerusalem to Damascus—and saved the thief on the cross, in the eleventh hour, in order to forward the building of mercy; for it is in Christ Jesus the building is fitly framed together. He is the great master-builder, and every living stone is put in its proper place.

The church of God consists of various parts, as all buildings do; some saints are comparable to beams, some to rafters, others to pillars, &c. And these are joined and united to one another in love, for love is the bond of union; and union to Christ, produces communion with God, and with one another.

Thus every believer is set in exact proportion and symmetry in the building of God. The great master-builder employs labourers, whose blessed work is to preach Christ crucified: and the Lord the Spirit gives them to see and feel that without an interest in him, they would perish for ever. But as he has “brought them out of a horrible pit, and out of the miry clay,” and put their feet upon the Rock of Ages, they go forth in the strength of the Lord, being determined to know nothing among men, but Jesus Christ and him crucified.

Paul, as a good master-builder, and according to the grace of God, ministerially laid Christ as the one and only foundation in Zion; “for other foundation can no man lay, than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation, gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble, every man’s work shall be made manifest, for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is.” By gold, silver, and precious stones, I understand the glorious doctrines of the gospel; such as, everlasting love, sovereign mercy, electing grace, predestination to the adoption of children, eternal justification, effectual calling, regeneration, sanctification, redemption, the final perseverance of the saints to eternal glory, &c. Now these are represented and compared to gold, silver, and precious, stones, for their great value, solidity, and durability; yes, they do contain durable riches and righteousness: inasmuch as all the doctrines of free and sovereign grace center in and proceed from, the Lord Jesus Christ. But notwithstanding this is the case, yet many will

bring their wood, and hay, and stubble, by which empty, trifling, and useless things, are meant; such as old wives' fables, endless genealogies, human traditions, vain philosophy, oppositions of science, falsely so called, curious speculations, vain and idle notions, duty faith, duty repentance, free will, and human power of man, &c. &c.

This is the work that is going on in our days. Many begin by laying Jesus Christ as the foundation, and build on it excellent, glorious, and valuable truths of the glorious gospel of the blessed God, and thereby raise a superstructure of gold, silver, and precious stones; but they cover it in with their own inventions, their wood, hay, and stubble, and so make it like a thatched house. But all that is of God will stand the fire, viz. the gold, the silver, and the precious stones; but the wood, hay, and stubble, will be burnt: for the Lord will not have the stately building of Zion covered in by men's human inventions.

It may be asked, what is the fire that will burn up this trash? I answer, the word. The Lord Jesus Christ, the essential Word, is as a refiner's fire; and every minister, as well as every believer, must be tried by his written word, which is the fire. Is not my word a fire? All our doctrines and experience must be tried by this word, which is the law and testimony of the Lord.—The Lord open our eyes, that we may daily behold the wondrous things contained in his law.

Observe, in the next place, this building is said to grow—"it groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord" which is expressive of the work of God going forward. For remember, the building

of mercy is not yet complete, but grows by an accession of new stones, *i.e.* poor sinners, called by grace, and added to it.

The re-building of the temple was opposed by Sanballat, Tobiah, and Geshem; so is the work of God opposed by sin, Satan, and the world; yet, as the building of the temple went forward in the days of Ezra, in the midst of all opposition, so now the Lord doth work, and who will let it. We may say with Dr. Watts,

What tho' the gates of hell withstood,
Yet must this building rise:
'Tis thy own work, Almighty God!
And wond'rous in our eyes.

Again, this growth may be understood also of an increase of those whom the Lord is graciously pleased, openly, to lay as lively stones upon Jesus Christ, the chief corner stone, and only foundation; and they grow up in him in faith, and every grace; in one word, they increase with the increase of God—they grow unto an holy temple; they are called to holiness, even as God is holy.

The church of Christ is called a temple, in allusion to the temple at Jerusalem, whose materials were stones made ready, and hewn before they were brought thither. So poor sinners are hewn, fitted, and squared, by Jehovah the Spirit, and put and jointed in among the saints in the temple of the Lord.

Again, the church of Christ is called a temple, because of its glory. Solomon's temple was all glorious within, expressive of the internal glory of the church of Christ; for the Lord Jesus Christ himself is the glory in the midst of her.

The church may be compared to the temple also, for the firmness and stability of its foundation. Nothing can be more firm than the foundation which God the Father has laid; and that itself is the pillar and ground of truth.

Again, it is called an holy temple, being set apart for a holy use, the worship of God. So believers are set apart for an holy use, even as priests of God, to offer up the spiritual sacrifices of prayer and praise, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ, their great High Priest.

Once more. This temple is said to grow in the Lord, which denotes the increase of both persons and grace, the building of mercy, as in and from the Lord Jesus Christ—"in whom ye are builded together, for an habitation of God through the Spirit."

Thus we see Father, Son, and Spirit, are equally concerned in this building. The Father laid the foundation—Christ is the foundation laid—the Holy Spirit makes true believers, or living stones—Christ, and faith in him, is the door—the ministers of the everlasting gospel, are pillars in it—the ordinances are its windows—its furniture are vessels of small and great quantity which are hung upon Christ—and its provision is the fatted calf, the bread of life, fat things full of marrow, and wines on the lees well refined.

Again, "ye are builded together;" joined together by agreement, and are knit together in love; "for if we love him that begat, we shall love them that are begotten of him. And hereby we know we are passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren." And the end of being thus built and knit

together, is for an habitation for God, Father, Son, and Spirit. “Here will I dwell, (saith Jehovah) for I have desired it.” Again, God declares, “though heaven is his throne, and earth is his footstool, yet to that man will I look, that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.” Which manifests his grace, mercy, and condescension, the high esteem and special regard he has for his church and people. “He rests in his love”—he rejoices over Zion with singing, and has pronounced his blessing upon all that wait continually at his gates, watching at the posts of his doors.

May the Lord the Spirit be pleased to enable us to see we are lively stones, built up as an habitation for God to dwell in; and that Christ dwells in our hearts by faith: and that we grow up in him in faith, in hope, in love, and in holiness; and increase with the increase of God. AMEN.

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