

Theme: Building A Foundation for Life!

- 1. Build on the Best Foundation**
- 2. Build with the Best Materials**

Text: 1 Corinthians 3:10-16 (EHV)

¹⁰ In keeping with the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder, I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. But let each person be careful how he builds on it. ¹¹ In fact, no one can lay any other foundation than the one that has been laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² But if anyone is building on the foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, ¹³ each person's work will become evident. The Day will make it plain, because it is going to be revealed in fire, and the fire will test each person's work to show what sort of work it is. ¹⁴ If what someone has built remains, he will receive a reward. ¹⁵ If someone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but it will be like an escape through fire. ¹⁶ Do you not know that you yourselves are God's temple, and that God's Spirit lives in you?

All right, admit it, didn't some of the words of our sermon text for today remind you a little bit of a certain children's fairy tale called "The Three Little Pigs" (**cf. v. 12**)? Do you remember that story? [The play that our grade school students put on for Family Fun Night this past Wednesday, "Fairy Tale Court," referenced the characters from the story. And, in fact, one of our graduates here today (Serena) played the Big Bad Wolf]. As the story goes, one pig built his house out of straw, the second out of sticks, and the third pig out of bricks. Of course when the Big Bad Wolf showed up and "huffed, puffed and blew" the only house left standing was the one of the wise pig who had built his house out of the best building material he could find: brick. There are, no doubt, a number of life-lessons this fairy tale was meant to convey, such as, don't just take the easy way out; sometimes what is cheap and convenient will cost you in the end; and in whatever you're doing in life it pays to build carefully.

These lessons are important when it comes to physically building a building. In our text God, through His Apostle Paul, has a much more important lesson for us to learn: He reminds us to build our *lives* carefully. Graduates, during your time here at St. Stephen Lutheran School (SSLS) you've probably passed our school sign hundreds of times as you walked through the back gate to start the school day. Have any of you noticed the words of our school's motto beneath that sign? They are the same as the theme for our sermon for today: **Building a Foundation for Life!**

Graduation is a time to look forward. For you three graduates you are probably looking forward to the next big chapter in your immediate future: high school. Today, however, I want you and all of us who are gathered here today to look even further ahead than that—yes, even past the age of your parents! After all these words of God through the Apostle Paul aren't speaking about building a foundation for the type of major you're going to choose in college, or building the foundation for the type of career you're going to pursue. No, he is speaking here about building the foundation for our lives in a *spiritual* sense with our eyes fixed on our *eternal* future! Eternity is a long time—it is forever!

That's why God reminds us in our text that if we're going to build a foundation for our life it's got to be on a foundation that will last *forever*. He reminds us to first **1. build on the best and most secure foundation**, and secondly, to **2. build with the best and longest-lasting materials**.

He instructs us to use building materials that will not only stand the test of time and the "huffing, puffing, and blowing"—not of the "Big Bad Wolf"—but of Satan, "**the roaring lion**" (**1 Peter 5:8**), and the howling winds of the world around us, but also will stand for eternity, even when tested by the "**fire**" of judgment on the Last Day (**v. 13**).

We in California know all-too-well what wildfires can do to a home or a building. Some of the wildfires we've seen over the past few years have burned down entire neighborhoods and have at times almost completely destroyed entire towns and small cities. Many of those houses and buildings were built with some of the finest building materials available, and yet they did not stand a chance of surviving the wildfires. What could we possibly use to build our lives that could withstand even the **"fire"** of Judgment Day, in which the Bible tells us, even **"the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up"** (2 Peter 3:10)?

Paul gives us the answer in our text. First, we must build on the one, eternal, unshakable, indestructible foundation: **"In keeping with the grace of God given to me, as a wise master builder, I laid a foundation... In fact, no one can lay any other foundation than the one that has been laid, which is Jesus Christ."** (v. 10a, 11). If you don't have a solid foundation you, quite simply, won't have much of a building. If the church building we are in right now didn't have a solid, stable, and level foundation the rest of the building wouldn't be sturdy. It certainly wouldn't last very long and would be liable to collapse at any moment. The same is true of this church and of our lives *spiritually*. If our foundation isn't **Jesus Christ** and His work of salvation—His perfect life in our place, His sin-erasing sacrifice on the cross, and His life-giving resurrection—we're going to collapse altogether! There really wouldn't be anything to build on.

Once you have a solid, permanent foundation you then need the right "building materials" with which to build. Paul lists some possible building materials in our text, **"But if anyone is building on the foundation with gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw,"**¹³ **each person's work will become evident. The Day will make it plain, because it is going to be revealed in fire, and the fire will test each person's work to show what sort of work it is"** (v. 12-13). Jesus, our foundation has also given us the precious, indestructible "building materials" we need to build up His Church and strengthen our spiritual lives: His Word, the Bible. This is the **"gold, silver, and costly stones"** Paul is speaking of. The true teachings of the Word of God—not added to or subtracted from or mixed with error—are the permanent "building materials" for our faith and for Christ's Church. This is why we use the precious "building materials" of God's Word consistently and in harmony with the foundation of the soul-saving Gospel of Jesus Christ in both our church and school. We are truly building with "materials" that will endure even the revealing **"fires"** of judgment on the Last Day. We are building for our students and for our church family a foundation—not just for this life, but for eternal life in heaven.

Graduates, I am very happy to hear that you and your families have all chosen to send you to Christian high schools next school year. I am going to remind you of the same thing I reminded you about several times in your classes with me over the years: Don't just believe what you're taught because Pastor Luke said it, or because Ms. Hammond said it. Remember always to ask, "Is this what God's Words says?" Carry that thought with you as you learn from your teachers in high school and beyond. Don't just swallow everything you're taught by your teachers or professors just because they are smart, or caring, or kind. Always compare what they are saying and teaching to the precious, permanent life-building materials of the Word of God, just like you did here at SSLS. Don't build your life of faith on the **"wood, hay, or straw"** (v. 12) of the opinions, philosophies, or feelings of human beings—including yourself! Those are unstable, unsafe, and, at best, temporary "materials" to build your faith life on.

So, graduates, and all of you who are gathered here today: What are you building with in your life? Are you like the two foolish "little pigs"? Do you build your life with whatever's easiest, cheapest, or most convenient? Just like in the fairy tale that kind of a "building" will not last. In the end it will be costly. If we build our spiritual lives with the **"wood, hay, and straw"** of anything other than Christ and His Word we are in danger of losing our very "foundation" for salvation itself! Even if, by God's grace, we ourselves don't lose that "foundation" of saving faith in Christ, what good will it do for others who have heard us speak, and observed how we live if all we are giving them is "building materials" that will only last for this life, but won't do their lives and souls any good for eternity? Paul says in verse 15 of our text,

“If someone’s work is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but it will be like an escape through fire” (v. 15).

However, here and in several other places in the Bible it is clear that God will give a special **“reward”** by His grace, to those who were faithful servants; those who build with the “precious building materials” of His Word: **“If what someone has built remains, he will receive a reward” (v. 14) (cf. Daniel 12:3; 1 Corinthians 15:41).** What exactly this special **“reward”** in heaven will be the Bible doesn’t give us many details, but think of the **“reward”** that comes to those who build carefully with the Word of God: Paul says in **1 Timothy**, **“Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” (1 Timothy 4:16 - NASB).**

On this Graduation Sunday let us thank God that He has given us the Church’s One Foundation upon which to build: Jesus Christ our Lord, who has given us salvation through His life, His death, and His resurrection. Thank God that He has also raised up for us **“expert builders”** like the Apostle Paul, Martin Luther, many faithful pastors, and teachers, Christian parents and grandparents, and others who built carefully upon this foundation with the best “building materials” of the Word of God. May God grant that our graduates—and all of us—would continue to build carefully upon this **foundation for life** of Christ and His saving Word, for ourselves, for our loved ones and family members, and for generations still to come!

*How firm a foundation, O saints of the Lord, Is laid for your faith in His excellent Word!
What more can He say than to you He has said Who unto the Savior for refuge have fled? Amen.*
(Hymn 728 v. 1 LSB)