

2 CHRONICLES 5:1-14 & 1 CORINTHIANS 3:8-16

LABOR DAY, WAS ESTABLISHED AS A NATIONAL HOLIDAY, BY CONGRESS, ON JUNE 28, 1894. ACCORDING TO THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR, THE FIRST MONDAY IN SEPTEMBER WAS SET ASIDE TO RECOGNIZE THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CONTRIBUTIONS OF AMERICAN WORKERS, TO THIS NATION.

IN MANY WAYS THE ORIGINAL PURPOSE WAS TOO NARROW, SINCE THE CONTRIBUTIONS OF THOSE WHO LABOR IN THE HOME AND ELSEWHERE WITHOUT PAY, ARE JUST AS IMPORTANT.

THE APOSTLE PAUL, PERHAPS MORE THAN ANY OTHER APOSTLE, OR ANY PROPHET, RECOGNIZED THE VALUE OF ALL JOBS BOTH GREAT AND SMALL.

AND IN THE BUILDING OF THE TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM, THE LABOR OF THOSE WHO WORKED BEHIND THE SCENES WAS JUST AS IMPORTANT AS THOSE WHOSE WORK WAS MORE VISIBLE.

SCRIPTURE, HAS MANY REFERENCES TO THE VALUE OF WORK OF ALL KINDS FOR HUMAN LIFE AND SOCIAL WELL-BEING.

TODAY, WE LOOK AT TWO SCRIPTURE PASSAGES, THE FIRST, FROM THE OLD TESTAMENT CELEBRATES THE COMPLETION OF THE TEMPLE, AND RECORDS GOD'S BLESSING UPON THE FINISHED PRODUCT.

THE NEW TESTAMENT PASSAGE SPEAKS ABOUT THE WORK OF BUILDING THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH, MEANING THE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS WHO WORSHIP AND SERVE THE LORD.

SO LET US BEGIN WITH THE PASSAGE FROM SECOND CHRONICLES.

WHAT A WONDERFUL, AWESOME DAY IT WAS WHEN THE TEMPLE BUILDING IN JERUSALEM WAS FINISHED AND FURNISHED, READY FOR THE WORSHIP OF THE LORD GOD.

YOU SEE, EVER SINCE THE HEBREW PEOPLE LEFT EGYPT THEY WORSHIPED GOD IN A TENT, SOMETIMES CALLED THE TABERNACLE.

BUT ON THE DAY DESCRIBED IN THE READING FROM SECOND CHRONICLES THE TEMPORARY PLACE OF WORSHIP WAS REPLACED BY THE STONE STRUCTURE.

NOW, FOR THE FIRST TIME, GOD'S HOUSE WAS NO LONGER MOBILE, BUT FIRMLY SET IN PLACE.

THUS SYMBOLIZING THE DAYS OF WANDERING WERE REALLY OVER, AND THE PROMISED LAND WAS WHERE GOD WOULD STAY WITH THEM.

THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE BY THE KING AND THE PRIESTS MARKED THE CULMINATION OF THE PEOPLE'S DREAM, AND THE HARD WORK OF HUNDREDS OF LABORERS AND ARTISANS.

BUT THEN, SOMETHING MORE IMPORTANT HAPPENED THAN ALL THE SACRIFICES, PRAYERS, PRAISE MUSIC, AND ALL OTHER CEREMONIES HELD TO CONSECRATE THE TEMPLE.

THE GREAT THING THAT OCCURRED WAS WHEN GOD 'S GLORY, HIS PRESENCE- CAME, IN A FORM OF A CLOUD TO FILL THE TEMPLE, WHICH WAS WHAT ACTUALLY BLESSED IT.

TRULY, IT WAS GOD WHO REALLY DEDICATED THE TEMPLE BUILDING TO HIMSELF, REMINDING EVERYONE THAT- UNLESS GOD BUILDS THE HOUSE THOSE WHO LABOR DO SO IN VAIN.

AND SO, IT WAS ON THAT DAY THE TEMPLE CAME TO LIFE, NOT ONLY WITH THE WORSHIP OF GOD'S PEOPLE, BUT BY THE PRESENCE OF THE LORD HIMSELF.

THUS IT WAS THE ONE PLACE ON EARTH SET ASIDE, THAT WAS MADE HOLY, FOR THE WORSHIP OF AND SACRIFICE TO, THE GOD OF ISRAEL.

IT WAS THE PLACE ON EARTH THE JEWISH PEOPLE SAW AS THE ONLY PLACE THEY COULD MAKE SACRIFICES TO THE LORD, AND REALLY COME INTO GOD'S PRESENCE.

THE SACREDNESS OF THE BUILDING REMAINED STRONG IN THE MINDS AND HEARTS AND FAITH OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE.

PERHAPS, WE COULD SAY, IT WAS TOO STRONG, IN THAT FOR MANY THE TEMPLE ITSELF, RATHER THAN GOD FOR WHOM IT WAS BUILT, BECAME THE MAIN FOCUS OF THEIR FAITH.

IN FACT, ONE OF THE CHARGES MADE AGAINST JESUS WHEN HE WAS ON TRIAL BEFORE THE JEWISH COUNCIL- WAS THAT HE SAID HE WOULD TEAR DOWN THE TEMPLE AND REBUILD IT IN THREE DAYS.

THE SAVIOR, OF COURSE, WAS SPEAKING METAPHORICALLY ABOUT HIS OWN DEATH AND RESURRECTION, BUT NO ONE UNDERSTOOD IT AT THE TIME.

THAT IS WHY THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS SAID JESUS SPOKE BLASPHEMY, FOR IN THEIR VIEW- TO SAY SUCH WORDS AGAINST THE TEMPLE WAS TO SPEAK THEM AGAINST GOD.

LATER ON, WHEN THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TEMPLE BUILDING HAPPENED IN 70 AD, IT WAS A TERRIBLE BLOW TO THE JEWISH PEOPLE.

OF COURSE BY THAT TIME THE BUILDING WAS OBSOLETE, IN THAT THE ANIMAL SACRIFICES HAD BEEN REPLACED BY THE ONCE FOR ALL SACRIFICE OF CHRIST.

SO, IT WAS IN LIGHT OF JESUS' DEATH AND RESURRECTION THAT THE APOSTLE PAUL, EVEN WHILE THE STONE TEMPLE STILL STOOD, WROTE ABOUT THE CHURCH, MEANING CHRISTIANS, BEING GOD'S TEMPLE.

HE WROTE ABOUT CHRISTIANS LABORING NOT TO CONSTRUCT A BUILDING FOR WORSHIP, BUT RATHER THE BODY OF CHRIST ON EARTH, AS PAUL LATER DESCRIBED THE CHURCH.

REMEMBER, NEITHER PAUL NOR ANY ONE ELSE AMONG THE NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORS-HAD AN ACTUAL BUILDING MADE BY HUMAN HANDS IN MIND, WHEN THEY WROTE ABOUT THE CHURCH.

THIS WAS BECAUSE THERE WERE NO CHURCH BUILDINGS, NO PARTICULAR PLACES SET ASIDE FOR CHRISTIAN WORSHIP AT THAT TIME.

INSTEAD PEOPLE GATHERED IN HOUSES, OUTSIDE, OR ANYWHERE THEY COULD, TO WORSHIP AND FELLOWSHIP AS CHRISTIANS.

AN OLD V.B.S. SONG CAPTURES THE ESSENCE OF THE IDEA THAT THE CHRISTIAN CHURCH IS NOT A BUILDING BUT GOD'S PEOPLE- INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY.

IT SAYS-"THE CHURCH IS NOT A BUILDING, THE CHURCH IS NOT A STEEPLE. THE CHURCH IS NOT A RESTING PLACE, THE CHURCH IS GOD'S PEOPLE. I AM THE CHURCH, YOU ARE THE CHURCH, WE ARE THE CHURCH TOGETHER..."

YES INDEED, THE PRESENCE OF GOD IS INSIDE EVERY ONE SAVED BY JESUS CHRIST, RATHER THAN IN ANY STRUCTURE.

THIS REALITY FULFILLS THE TESTIMONY GOD GAVE TO THE PROPHET EZEKIEL, DURING THE BABYLONIAN EXILE.

EZEKIEL 37:26-27 DECLARES- "I WILL MAKE A COVENANT OF PEACE WITH THEM, IT SHALL BE AN EVERLASTING COVENANT..."

AND I WILL BLESS THEM AND WILL MULTIPLY THEM, AND WILL SET MY SANCTUARY AMONG THEM FOR FOREVERMORE.

MY DWELLING PLACE SHALL BE WITH THEM, AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD AND THEY WILL BE MY PEOPLE."

THUS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT WE HEAR HOW CHRISTIANS BOTH JEW AND GENTILE, WERE TAUGHT THAT THE FOCUS IS NOT ON A TEMPLE OR CHURCH BUILDING BUT ON JESUS.

IT IS ON CHRIST, WHO IS GOD INCARNATE, AND GOD'S SPIRIT WITHIN AND AMONG THEM THAT CREATES CHRIST'S CHURCH.

WORSHIP THEREFORE BEGINS IN THE BELIEVER'S HEART SINCE OUR BODIES, AS IT SAYS IN 1 CORINTHIANS 6:19, HAVE BECOME THE DWELLING PLACE OF GOD'S SPIRIT.

IN TODAY'S READING, PAUL REMINDS THE CORINTHIANS, WHO CAN'T SEEM TO GET ALONG WITH EACH OTHER, THAT TOGETHER THEY ARE GOD'S TEMPLE.

THE PASSAGE COVERS TWO MAJOR HUMAN INDUSTRIES OUTSIDE THE AREA OF DOMESTIC LABOR.

THE FIRST IS FARMING, IN VERSES 8-9 THE WORLD IS GOD'S FIELD, AND CHRISTIANS ARE THOSE WHO WORK IN THE FIELD.

THE SECOND, IS THE MORE FAMILIAR IMAGERY OF THE CONSTRUCTION OF BUILDINGS.

BUT IN THIS PASSAGE BOTH AND FIELD AND THE BUILDING ARE BEST UNDERSTOOD AS- SPIRITUAL IMAGES OF THE WORK OF CHRISTIANS IN LIVING OUT THEIR FAITH TOGETHER, AND SPREADING THE GOSPEL.

PAUL DESCRIBES HIMSELF, OTHER APOSTLES, LEADERS, TEACHERS, AND BELIEVERS, AS BUILDERS OF THE CHURCH- MEANING OF THE FAITH COMMUNITY.

HE SEES HIMSELF AS ONE WHO HAS LAID THE FOUNDATION, WHICH IS HIS TEACHING ABOUT JESUS CHRIST AS SAVIOR, WHICH OTHERS WILL BUILD UPON.

THE EMPHASIS IS ON JESUS CHRIST AS THE TRUE FOUNDATION-FOR HE IS OUR GREATEST NEED, BOTH INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY.

PAUL USED DIFFERENT KINDS OF BUILDING MATERIALS AS METAPHORS, COMPARING WORK THAT LASTS WITH THAT WHICH DOES NOT LAST.

THUS, GOLD, SILVER, AND PRECIOUS STONES REPRESENT CONSTRUCTION MATERIALS THAT BUILD A CHURCH THAT IS ABLE TO WITHSTAND THE FIRE OF JUDGMENT, OR WORLDLY ATTACK.

CONVERSELY, WOOD, HAY, AND STRAW ARE MATERIALS THAT ARE QUICKLY BURNED UP BY FIRE.

THIS IS WHY THE APOSTLE INSTRUCTS CHRISTIANS TO USE LASTING MATERIALS, MEANING THINGS LIKE-FAITH, HOPE, AND LOVE, IN OUR WORK FOR THE LORD

AND LIKE WITH THE STONE TEMPLE OF JERUSALEM- IT IS REALLY GOD WHO WILL BLESS AND SANCTIFY US WITH HIS SPIRIT, INDIVIDUALLY AND COLLECTIVELY.

WILLIAM BARCLAY EXPLAINS IT THIS WAY- "TO PAUL THE CHURCH WAS THE VERY TEMPLE OF GOD BECAUSE IT WAS THE SOCIETY IN WHICH THE HOLY SPIRIT DWELT."

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR US AND ALL CHRISTIANS IS THAT ALL CHRISTIAN CHURCHES ARE NOT ACTUALLY THE BUILDING.

INSTEAD, THE CHURCH IS THE PEOPLE, ALONG WITH OUR FAITH, WORSHIP, AND MINISTRY TO THOSE WITHIN.

BUT, JUST AS IMPORTANTLY, THE CHURCH IS THE PEOPLE'S MINISTRY AND OUT REACH IN CHRIST'S NAME TO THOSE OUTSIDE OUR WALLS, OR OUR FAITH.

THIS MEANS THAT WHILE BUILDINGS ARE IMPORTANT TOOLS TO ENHANCE THE WORSHIP AND MINISTRY OF CHRISTIANS, THEY ARE NOT ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY.

IT IS HELPFUL FOR CHRISTIANS TO REMEMBER THIS, LEST WE FALL INTO THE SIN OF THOSE IN ISRAEL WHO FOCUSED ON THE TEMPLE BUILDING MORE THAN ON GOD.

THIS IS WHAT PAUL WANTED THE CORINTHIANS TO REMEMBER ABOUT BEING CHRIST'S FOLLOWERS, AND THUS HIS CHURCH.

IT WAS NOT JEWISH RITUALS OR SACRIFICES OR CEREMONIAL PRACTICES, OR EVEN THE TEMPLE BUILDING THAT MATTERED, BUT HOW THEY LIVED OUT THEIR FAITH.

THUS, THE BUILDING MATERIALS OF GOLD, SILVER, AND PRECIOUS STONES ARE ACTS OF LOVE DONE IN CHRIST'S NAME.

THEY ARE PART OF OUR FOUNDATION ON JESUS, AND HIS MESSAGE TO THE WORLD.

USING THE RIGHT MATERIALS RATHER THAN THE WRONG ONES, WHICH DETRACT FROM CHRIST OR HIS GOSPEL, IS NOT ABOUT SALVATION, BUT CHRISTIANS WHO EITHER PLEASE OR DISPLEASE GOD.

THE POINT OF THESE AND ALL THE OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS WAS TO TEACH ABOUT HOW AND WHY WE SHOULD WORK TOGETHER AS CHRISTIANS.

AND OUR BEST WORK IS NOT IN THE AREA OF SUPERFICIAL OR TRANSIENT THINGS, BUT WORK OF SHARING CHRIST'S LOVE.

INDEED, THE WORK THAT ENDURES IS OUR WORK TO NURTURE, HARVEST, AND DISTRIBUTE- THE FRUIT OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

THIS FRUIT IS- LOVE, JOY, PEACE, PATIENCE, KINDNESS, GOODNESS, FAITHFULNESS, GENTLENESS, & SELF-CONTROL.

TOGETHER, OUR COLLECTIVE FRUIT AND INDIVIDUAL SPIRITUAL GIFTS, ARE WHAT BUILD A CHURCH THAT HAS A FOUNDATION ON JESUS.

AND SO WE LEARN THAT WHILE WE MAY MEET IN THE CHURCH BUILDING – WE OURSELVES ARE THE CHURCH, THE DWELLING PLACE OF GOD.

AS, THE COVID SHUT DOWN SHOWED US, WE REMAIN THE CHURCH EVEN WHEN WE DO NOT MEET IN THIS BUILDING.

AND SO AS WE CELEBRATE THE WORKERS OF OUR NATION, LET US ALSO REMEMBER OUR HIGHER CALLING TO WORK FOR CHRIST AND THE KINGDOM OF GOD, EVEN IN THE MIDST OF OUR DAILY LABOR OR LEISURE.

LET US PRAY- THANK YOU GOD FOR JESUS, FOR HIS SPIRIT, FOR MAKING US YOUR DWELLING PLACE. BLESS US WE PRAY, AS INDIVIDUALS AND AS A COMMUNITY, SO WE MAY BE A BLESSING TO OTHERS, AND SO -BRING YOU GLORY AS WE BUILD CHRIST'S CHURCH. AMEN

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