

WORSE THAN YOUR CLASS REUNION
1 Corinthians 3:10-15

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Let me see if you can solve a riddle this morning.

Plastic surgeons love them. Everybody else dreads them. And I've only been to one. They come in 5s, 10s, 15s, 20s, 25s and beyond.

Made a lucky guess yet? The old high school reunion.

I have been to one, a year-and-a-half ago. A bunch of old people showed up. How is it I look the same and they all turned into their grandparents?

What is it about high school reunions that people dread so much? **In fact, just 22 percent of adults in a poll done by Roper Starch Worldwide say that a class reunion will mean a good time. That compares with 72 percent who say that if they go to eat at a restaurant they are going to have a good time. In fact, even more – 39 percent – profess to having a good time at a wedding. (Paula Mergenhausen, “The Reunion Market,” *American Demographics*, April 1996)**

Nobody wants to go to a high school reunion. In fact, most people don't. (We had 10% in attendance.) There is usually more of the class not there than actually attending the reunion.

They may have another reason on the surface, but the biggest reason – a deep down, honest emotional response – is they are too afraid to face it.

High school reunions are such a monumental occurrence in the life of people that plastic surgeons say it brings business their way. **Face lifts and eyelid surgery are the procedures most commonly requested by reunion goers, says Sharon Dobratz, a plastic surgery nurse. “They want to look the best they can,” she said. “Most women plan their surgeries to take place six months to a year before the reunion. But every now and then you'll get somebody who'll come in and say, ‘Hey, I got a reunion in six weeks. Can you make me look good?’” (“The Reunion Market”)**

Some of you have butterflies in your stomach just because I'm talking about the dreaded high school reunion, because you've worried about your image. Are you up to par? Do you look as good as your classmates? Have you been as successful as your classmates? Can you brag on your children as much as your classmates are going to brag?

Sweaty palms and a fluttering heart happen on the day of the dreaded high school reunion. It's a day of reckoning. Why do we even care what they think?

Well, it's a whole lot like Judgment Day – a time of reckoning for what we've done, whether good or bad.

- Who drove up in the BWM?
- Who drove up on the old, battered Crown Vic?
- Who still has hair with color? Hah – never mind. Who still has hair at all?
- Who caught a trophy wife, married way above himself?
- Who did about what we expected?
- Who has the most prestigious job?
- Who commands the crowd when she drives up?
- Who lives on the best side of town?

On and on we go in this reckoning at the reunion.

- “Who do you think looked the best?” “Judy.”
- “Now what about Sarah? I can't believe how much she has changed. I did not even recognize her! And she thought she was so hot in high school.”

You're at the reunion. Some people can hardly wait for somebody to ask that all important question. “What are you doing now?” They are dying to spurt out, “This is what I'm doing. I'm so important.” Others, on the other hand, go, begging the Lord that nobody will ask. It all depends on their own perspective of their success.

Success is our national battle cry. We eat it, breath it, caress it, baby it, and, even worse, judge ourselves by it. And if I think I've lived up to society's standards for success, I'm a success. But if I don't think society sees me as a success, I may see myself as a failure. In America, we pay homage to the holy trinity of power, wealth, and prestige. We bow down before them. And if we cannot find them, we think we've missed our mark. (Mike Cope, *Living in Two Worlds*, p. 21, found it www.homileticsonline.com)

One thing about high school reunions: things are never like they were. “You mean to tell me she was the Homecoming Queen? Ha. Who would have ever thunk it?” “That guy over there was the quarterback? I don't think he could run ten yards right now if his life depended on it.” And, “Who is Richard McClenney? Drove up in a Mercedes, dressed to the nines. I don't even remember him. I'll have to look back in my yearbook.” Too much of a nerd to notice then, but now he's started his own software company. The one you didn't even notice might end up being the most successful in the world's eyes.

High school reunions are full of surprises, but so is Judgment Day. There is a way in which the 25th high school reunion is somewhat like Judgment Day. It's a time of reckoning to what we've done, who we have become – good or bad.

Paul speaks of a judgment day, one to be dreaded even more than a high school reunion – the one that really counts, the one that uses measures true and sound, not judging peripheral things of beauty, wealth, popularity or prestige. Here in 1 Corinthians 3, we find out what kind of life really makes a difference for the kingdom of God, what kind of life counts for eternity, why kind of life you can show up and not be shamed on the day of judgment.

In 1 Corinthians 3:9, Paul switches to the image of the people of God as a building. “You are God’s building.” Paul compares himself to the head building contractor who has carefully laid the foundation of the building and then left the rest of the work to subcontractors.

And their work must be up to code, for if they fail to use suitable materials, there will be dire consequences.

I. The foundation has been laid.

Look at verses 10-11.

According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I laid a foundation, and another is building upon it. But let each man be careful how he builds upon it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

In starting this church in Corinth, Paul had laid the foundation. The foundation of the church, the foundation of Paul’s work, is Jesus Christ – the preaching of the gospel. Look at 1 Corinthians 1:23. “But we preach Christ crucified...” Or 2:2, “For I determined to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ, and Him crucified.”

The foundation of the church is the story of Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ crucified. Jesus Christ resurrected. Jesus Christ coming again one day for His people. Whatever else the church in Corinth might do, whatever else First Baptist Church of Amarillo might do, we cannot move away from our foundation. Our foundation is the preaching of the story of Jesus – the story of God’s love poured out to us in the form of His Son, dying on the cross for our sins. The foundation is that Jesus demonstrates God’s love toward us while we are still sinners, that Christ dies for us, that God has done His work in the person, that He has shown His power in the cross of Christ Jesus. That is the foundation of the church. The fixed base of construction is the kerygma, the story of Christ crucified.

So, first of all, we see that the foundation had been laid.

II. A time of testing is coming (verses 12-13).

W. C. Fields once said, “I have spent a lot of time searching through the Bible for loopholes.” Haven’t we all? Paul is telling us there is no loophole. There is going to be a judgment.

Sometimes as the church, as the people of God, we have in our own minds that judgment is just for those who are outside of the church, outside of God’s people. That’s not true. Every passage in the New Testament where God’s people are judged, where the members of the church are judged, they are judged based upon what they have done, their deeds, the works they’ve

accomplished for the kingdom of God. We are not saved by our works. The foundation is our salvation laid by the crucified Christ. But we must build upon that foundation of our salvation. Paul laid the foundation in Corinth, but the work of other leaders will be tried and tested. And what we build upon the story of Jesus will be measured. It will be tested. It will be tried. “The fire is coming,” he says. Fire, over and over again in the Old Testament, is the symbol of the judgment of God.

Look at verse 13. “...revealed with fire to test the quality of each man’s work.” To see if, indeed, we have worked “up to code.”

In Pensacola Beach, Florida, a man came up with what he thought was a brilliant idea. He decided that he would build a “dome home.” The shape of his home is what you would expect from its name. It was designed by Mark Sigler to withstand winds up to 300 miles per hour and a direct hit from a hurricane. FEMA, the federal agency, approved the plans, and even provided a small grant to the beachfront project. The house sits on 16 pilings, driven 17 feet into the sand. It’s a solid concrete house with 5 miles of steel reinforcements for added support. The shape of the house, in conjunction with the pilings, was designed to allow water to literally wash around the house, rather than knock it down. The stairs are designed in a way to break away from the house should a hurricane come. But the house should stay standing.

Hurricane Ivan was approaching Pensacola Beach, Florida. An NBC News team hunkered down inside the dome home to see if it would survive the storm. First light in the morning revealed that, indeed, the dome home had made it through the night and did exactly what it was designed to do – survive even the worst hurricane. You look to the left and the right of the dome home and you’ll notice that conventional construction homes were brought to nothing. Demolished. Destroyed.

While his neighbors were washed away, the family in the dome home survived it all. The stairs, indeed, broke away as planned, and the family is 22 feet above ground with no way down. But there is not a thing wrong with the house. The house stands surrounded by water, but it stands. The generator kicked in; they have power. The floors are just a little bit damp. And in the morning they discovered that a small, green tree frog in the kitchen. The little frog discovered the dome home was a great place to hide. Even the designer, Sigler, said he was amazed at the performance of the home. Craig White, an NBC News cameraman, said it was even quiet inside the dome, and he slept through most of the storm. (“Dome Home Weathers Storm,” www.msnbc.msn.com/id/6011773)

Like the hurricane approaching Florida, fire is approaching you and fire is approaching me. Fire is approaching the church as a time of testing. “Each man’s work,” he says in verse 13, “will become evident; for the day will show it, because it is to be revealed with fire.”

The day to which he refers is that day of the Lord of the Old Testament, that Day of Judgment – the judgment of all human deeds, an eschatological justice (Romans 2:5, 16; Romans 13:12; 1 Corinthians 1:8, 2 Corinthians 1:14; Philippians 1:6, 10; 1 Thessalonians 5:2).

The prophet Malachi had said (4:1-2), “For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven; when all the arrogant and evildoers will be stubble; the day that comes shall burn them up,” says the Lord of hosts, ‘so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who revere My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its rays....”

“What you’ve laid upon the foundation of the gospel is going to be measured,” Paul is saying. What type of substance have you used? Gold? Silver? Precious stones? Or wood, hay, and straw?

Six different building materials mentioned. They range in descending order of value. The first three will make it through the fire, and the last three are combustible. They will burn. They will be destroyed.

The materials of gold, silver, and precious stones are mentioned in the building of Solomon’s temple. Those who use these types of materials are excellent builders, using materials of exceptional quality. Some deeds will endure. Some will not.

Sometimes we have this terrible fear of getting to the end of our lives and discovering that we have wasted our life. What we have done really doesn’t matter. It has all turned to ashes in the fire of God’s judgment. The kind of life that matters is the kind of life spent building up the church, building up the body of Christ, bringing people into the kingdom of God.

As we evaluate our lives, we need to ask ourselves how we’re spending our time and talents. “Am I building up people or am I just building my own little empire? Am I going for power or trying to be a servant?”

Paul is saying that quite frankly there is a real possibility that a person can come to the end of life only to discover that he has lived a wasted life. What they have done, worked for, perhaps even in the church, will be burned up because it didn’t contribute to the kingdom of God.

We give you so many opportunities to make a difference in the lives of people here at First Baptist Church. This summer, we give you opportunities to share Christ’s love in Lebanon, serving with kids at a residential children’s home. We give you an opportunity to minister through music, service projects, and prayer in Costa Rica. We give you a chance to serve with our partner church in Zambia, providing medical clinics and leading a retreat for the girls from a transit home. We give you a chance to serve alongside Baptists in Hungary, teaching English, leading Bible camps, and sharing the love of Christ. We give you a chance to be a chaplain, to sign up here at church and say, “Give me the names of four or five senior adults, maybe someone who has no one else visit them, but let me go by and check on them once a month. Let me make sure somebody celebrates their birthday with them. Let me make certain that someone is there for him, that someone brings her a rose on Mother’s Day.”

You’ve got that opportunity right here. We give you an opportunity to hand out food and clothing to meet the basic needs of Amarillo’s population through our Perkins Community Service Center at our Buchanan Street Chapel Perkins Ministry Center. We give you a chance to teach someone who has just come to our country, just come to our city, someone who doesn’t know a word of

English – to sit down with him or her and teach him English. We give you that chance. We give you a chance to hold babies so mammas and daddies can worship – to teach children, change lives.

To blow a whistle at a kid's basketball game and, instead of yelling at that kid, to be in a league that allows you to encourage that child. To sing in a choir – one of the most powerful things you can do, leading in worship to God. We give you a chance to do that. Using the gifts that God has given you, gifts of mercy, gifts of kindness, gifts of teaching. To give you a chance to support us financially, to undergird the work of this church as we try to reach our own city and the whole world for the kingdom of God. It's an opportunity to support your own ministries here at this church. We ask you to do the important work of prayer. You can make meals for those who have experienced the death of a family member. The simple and quiet ministry of taking a flower to someone in the hospital is available to you. Or helping foster families. The list is endless.

Don't come to the end and find out all that you've built upon Christ will be devoured by fire. To find you've been wrong all along.

Professor Fred Craddock says that his mother took him to church and Sunday School; his father didn't go. He complained about Sunday dinner being late when she came home. Sometimes the preacher would call, and his father would say, "I know what the church wants. Church doesn't care about me. Church wants another name, another pledge, another name, another pledge. Right? Isn't that the name of it? Another name, another pledge." That's what he always said. Year after year he resisted the church's love and outreach.

He was in the Veteran's Hospital. He was dying. He was down to 73 pounds. They had taken out his throat. They said there was nothing else they could do. They put in a metal tube, and X-rays burned him to pieces.

Professor Craddock flew in to see his father. He couldn't speak. He couldn't eat. Fred looked around he room – potted plants and cut flowers on the window sills, a stack of cards twenty inches deep beside his bed. And even that tray where you put food – if you can eat it – on that was a flower. And all the flowers beside the bed, every card, every blossom, were from persons or groups from the church.

Craddock says: "He saw me read a card. He could not speak, so he took a Kleenex box and wrote on the side of it a line from Shakespeare. If he had not written this line, I would not tell you this story. He wrote: 'In this harsh world, draw your breath in pain to tell my story.' I said, 'What is our story, Daddy?' And he wrote, 'I was wrong.'" (Fred Craddock, Craddock Stories, p. 14)

Don't wait until the end to find that you've been wrong.

III. There are rewards.

Verse 14

If any man's work which he has built upon it remains, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he shall suffer loss; but he himself shall be saved, yet so as through fire.

As Protestants, we have so long heard the message, “Faith alone. Faith alone. Faith alone.” I’m here to tell you today that faith is a foundation, and everything built above the foundation is works and deeds.

Some will receive a reward. That’s like the wage paid to the good contractor. Some will suffer a loss, being fined because you’re not “up to code.”

This same language has been found in ancient Greek inscriptions in regard to penalties given to contractors who do inferior work or fail to meet their obligations. You don’t lose your salvation (v. 15), but you’ll walk to the throne of God smelling like smoke.

It’s a hard word this morning, but it’s the word of God. It’s January. It’s a new month. It’s a new day. A new opportunity for us as individuals, a new opportunity for us as First Baptist Church of Amarillo. It’s a new chance to recommit ourselves – recommit ourselves to the work of God, recommit ourselves to each other as First Baptist Church. Recommit ourselves to being here – working and serving and loving and sharing – because even worse than going to a high school reunion, even worse than a hurricane off the coast of Florida, is the trying and testing of our God.

If you wanted to join a church where you could be “entertained,” you’ve come to the wrong place, for at First Baptist Church of Amarillo you are going to be engaged in eternal matters.