

Foundations: OUR FOUNDATION
Matthew 7.24.29 (AFBC EASTER 4/16/17)

For some time now, we've been focusing on foundational passages of Scripture—notably the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament and Jesus' Sermon on the Mount in the New. Today, Easter Sunday, we continue this emphasis by affirming the most important foundation of all, our Risen Lord and Savior!

Never under-estimate the importance of a good foundation. For our lives and families, our faith and our future, a solid foundation is essential. Today we celebrate the unshakeable foundation of our faith—that Christ Jesus is alive. He is risen indeed!

We don't often turn to the Sermon on the Mount on Easter Sunday, but given how Jesus chose to end this sermon, it seems appropriate to do so. Look at what He talks about—what we've been talking about for weeks: "foundations." Listen to how His sermon ends:

Matthew 7:24-29 The Wise and Foolish Builders

²⁴"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

²⁸ When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹ because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

Jesus ends His Sermon on the Mount by affirming the absolute necessity of building our lives on a strong foundation—a lasting foundation.

Foundations hold everything up. They keep the entire structure together.

No matter how well a house is built, no matter what quality of materials are used or how skillfully the craftsmen do their work when joining the frame together--if the foundation isn't solid, that house will be a headache.

Cracks will form in the walls and floors. Windows will stick. Roofs will leak. A solid foundation is vital.

Did you notice that in Jesus' story He makes no distinction concerning the appearances of the two houses or in the magnitude of the storms that hit them?

Being foolish will often bring bad weather into a person's life, but Jesus makes it clear that being wise—yes, even following His teachings--does not exempt anyone from life's storms.

The same storm hits both houses. The only difference between the house that collapses and the one that remains standing are their foundations.

There's a tower located in Italy. I've never seen it, but some of you have. You've told me about it. I also heard about it from my parents after they visited there.

It's called the "Leaning Tower of Pisa." Here's the story. Work began on this 185-foot tower in the year 1174. It was built to serve as a bell tower for the cathedral located in Pisa, Italy.

Before long, however, it began to lean; and it's been tilting further and further away from vertical for hundreds of years now. It got so bad that the top of the tower was seventeen feet further south than the bottom. Concerns were mounting that if something wasn't done, it would collapse.

What was the problem? Bad design? Poor workmanship? Inferior building materials?

None of the above. The problem was all located underneath the tower. The sandy soil on which it was built was not stable enough to support a tower of that height. Its foundation wasn't firm.

Recent earthquakes in Italy caused concern for anyone who's visited the tower; but as it turned out, the region around Pisa was not affected by these quakes. One would hope the tower could have survived them anyway since, a few years back, engineers

completed a 25 million dollar project designed to stabilize it. They reduced its lean a bit, and then firmed up its foundation.

Foundations are important! We have this on the authority of Jesus Himself. On this Easter morning, I want to suggest to you a few elements that are absolutely essential if you and I are to build our lives on a strong, solid, lasting foundation.

1. First, consider THE AMAZING FOUNDATION OF JESUS' TEACHINGS. Early in Jesus' ministry, He was often asked to speak at local synagogues.

People would show up at church like it was just another Sabbath, but they'd soon learn otherwise. They often had visiting teachers; but when Jesus spoke, there was a difference. He didn't sound like those other teachers.

They came across as rather tentative and uncertain. They began each sentence with "Perhaps" or "It has been said" or "It might be the case that..."

They quoted traditions that had been handed down and committed to memory. This is simply the way they taught. The people, no doubt, expected much the same from Jesus.

But when Jesus spoke, it was like a breath of fresh air. As Matthew tells us at the end of the Sermon on the Mount: **"the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law." (28b-29)**

Jesus broke away from the old way of doing things. He had the authority to do so. People sensed in the teachings of Jesus a new way to see life, a new foundation on which to build their lives.

Why, in just this one sermon, He tells them that God's blessings will spring from unusual places: their meekness and mercy, for example; even from being insulted and persecuted, they'll find blessing. He speaks of their great worth in God's Kingdom, calling them "the salt of the earth" and "the light of the world."

Jesus affirms the truth of the Old Testament Scriptures, but then demonstrates that He's Lord over them by giving those ancient words new meaning. He gets deep inside of folks when He talks

about issues like anger, adultery, and divorce. It's the condition of the heart that matters more than the act itself, He tells them.

Jesus teaches that God looks after them just as He does the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, so they need not worry so much. Just focus on today's needs and challenges, and trust the Heavenly Father with the rest.

He tells them to love their enemies, and pray for them; to treat all people the way they would want to be treated in return—and to do this, no matter how THEY are treated.

He talks about many other ways in which His followers are to live differently from the world about them, and He makes it clear that not everyone will choose to do this—that sadly, only a narrow gate and road will be necessary to accommodate His followers.

On other occasions, Jesus says things like: 'I've just come from God, and I'll tell you what He is like. He's like a shepherd who's lost a sheep, and spends day and night searching every ravine, every mountain gully, until he finds it.'

He speaks of the Father's house, where there are no tears, pain, or darkness, but joy and light in God's presence. He says that God accepts us as we are, that He's anxious to forgive us; and He comes running out to meet us when we return to Him after going astray. He insists that we also forgive each other like this.

Is it any wonder that people were so amazed by what Jesus taught—why His teachings still find their way into our hearts and cause you and me to change for the better? His words are true.

This is why Jesus finishes His sermon by saying: **"...everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall..." (vv.24-25).**

That's a strong foundation, friends. It lasts. We can build good, solid lives on these amazing teachings. Is anything else needed?

2. Well... yes. We also need **THE UNEQUALLED FOUNDATION OF JESUS' LIFE.** Let's review just a few of the big "life moments" for Jesus:

1) Like... His baptism--when the heavens opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on Him like a dove. The Heavenly Father said: "You are my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased."

This was God's stamp of approval on His life, and Jesus could now speak and act with Divine authority—which He did when he cast out demons, and healed diseases, and raised the dead.

Do you remember the story of Jesus meeting the man who was possessed by evil spirits? When Jesus approaches him, all that evil inside of him calls out: "Let us alone, Jesus. What do you want with us? Are you here to destroy us--is that it?"

But Jesus commands him to be quiet. He's not there to destroy the man, but to rid his life of all the evil inside. "Come out of him!" Jesus demands. "The man cried out with a loud voice," the Scripture says, "and the unclean spirit left him."

And then, of course, there is the way He dies. We could consider many passages from the Gospels here, but we know this story. One reason it surpasses all others, though, is the way the prophets described His life in such detail hundreds of years before He spent time on this earth. Here's a powerful example:

**³ He is despised and rejected by men,
A Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief.
And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him;
He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.
⁴ Surely He has borne our griefs
And carried our sorrows;
Yet we esteemed Him stricken,
Smitten by God, and afflicted.
⁵ But He was wounded for our transgressions,
He was bruised for our iniquities;
The chastisement for our peace was upon Him,
And by His stripes we are healed.
⁶ All we like sheep have gone astray;
We have turned, every one, to his own way;
And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all.
⁷ He was oppressed and He was afflicted,
Yet He opened not His mouth;
He was led as a lamb to the slaughter,
And as a sheep before its shearers is silent,
So He opened not His mouth. Isaiah 53:3-7 (NKJV)**

When we speak of building our lives on the foundation of Christ's life, we must understand that His purpose, in addition to all the wonderful things He taught us, was to DIE—to give His life as a ransom for many.

To follow Christ, then, means you and I must confess that we're sinners who needed for Jesus to do what He did in order for us to be forgiven and set free from our burden of sin.

Until this is the conviction of our hearts, and the content of our faith and witness, we're not building our lives on the foundation of Christ's life—which is one of the essentials. And there's one other indispensable ingredient that we must affirm today; and that is:

3. THE ENDURING FOUNDATION OF JESUS' RESURRECTION.

I like Max Lucado's story of a missionary who discovered a tribe of Indians in a remote part of the Brazilian jungle. The tribe lived near a large river. They believed it was inhabited by evil spirits and to enter its forbidden waters would lead to sudden death.

But the tribe was in trouble. An infectious disease was spreading through the tribe. People were dying. They desperately needed medical attention.

There was a hospital close by, but it was on the other side of the river. The missionary explained how he had crossed the river unharmed, but the tribe wouldn't listen. He went to the riverbank and placed his hand in the water, but they kept their distance.

He waded waist deep into the river and splashed water on his face, but they were not convinced. They were too afraid.

Finally, he dove into the river and swam beneath the surface to the other side. He got up on the bank and raised his hands into the air. Only then were they willing to follow him across the river.

During his earthly ministry, Jesus told his followers not to fear death: "**Let not your hearts be troubled. I go to prepare a place for you,**" he said. "**I am the resurrection and the life... whoever lives and believes in me will never die.**" But there's no indication they actually believed His teachings about death and resurrection.

He also demonstrated His power over death by raising back to life a widow's only son and a distraught father's little girl. He raised his good friend Lazarus too; but still... most of them didn't get it.

Finally, Jesus immersed himself in unimaginable suffering on the cross. He plunged into the river of death, if you will, and remained there for two days.

But on the third day, Jesus emerged on the other side ALIVE! He held out his nail-pierced hands in victory, but also as an invitation to all to come and follow Him, the crucified but Risen Savior.

On this Easter Sunday, I urge you to get off the shifting sands of fear and doubt and allegiance to things that can never make you strong. Build your life upon Christ Jesus. Put your faith in Him.

Make a commitment to live your life for Him, obeying His teachings, following the example of His life, and finding an enduring hope in the Good News of His resurrection.

Build your life on this unshakeable foundation of faith, and...

stand strong—when up against any storm;

stand strong--even in the face of death itself;

stand strong--knowing that your life and your eternity are secure in Christ Jesus!

Thanks be to God who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! Amen.



The "Leaning Tower of Pisa"