

EASTER – A NEW FOUNDATION

In May of 1981, a woman named Mae Rose in Winter Park Florida heard her dog barking outside. She thought that maybe it was barking at a squirrel. Turns out the dog was barking at a sinkhole that was opening up in her back yard. It kept opening until it had swallowed up her entire home. But it didn't stop there. It continued to open until it engulfed several other homes and the local community pool. In the end it did about \$4 million worth of damage. Nearly thirty years later in 2010 in Guatemala as Tropical Storm Agatha swept across Central America, a sinkhole opened up in Guatemala City and swallowed up a three-story building.

Building our lives on the rock of God's Word is the only sure foundation. Every other foundation is shifting sand. As I look at our world today, it seems like culture is working overtime to promote its own version of what truth is. The foundation that it is laying is well advertised and may seem like an attractive place to build but in the end, it is just another sinkhole waiting to happen. Whatever you build on that warped worldview is just going to get swallowed up.

Today we are starting a new series and we are calling it the Easter Challenge. For the next couple of weeks leading up to Easter we will be looking at the difference that Easter makes in our lives. Because of Easter we have a new Foundation, Fellowship, Focus and Future. The challenge is to take these 4 principles and make them real in your life this Easter season. Today we want to talk about the new foundation that we have in Jesus.

Mat 7:24-27 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.

In this scripture, Jesus talked about 2 builders. You will notice that it was not a matter of IF the rain would come, it was a matter of WHEN. The rain did come, the waters did rise, the winds did blow, and they did beat against the house. The reality is that all of us will face storms in life. The rain, the waters, and the wind will come into your life and my life. I know of many people that could give a testimony of this from their own life. The question is whether or not your foundation will stand. Will it stand firm or get swallowed up?

Every day you and I are laying down bricks in the structure of our lives. What we are living today is the result of what we were building yesterday. Every day at work, every weekend, every interaction is part of the structure you are building called your life. Whether you're an atheist, agnostic, or a Jesus follower, most of us build lives with careers, families and friendships. The main difference is found in the foundation that undergirds all that we're building.

What is undergirding and shaping everything that you are building? Is your career built on your desire to know, follow, and glorify Jesus or is it built on your desire to get what you want? Those who have built it all on Jesus can lose it all, yet they still possess everything. And those who have built on the desire to get what they want can lose it all and . . . they've simply lost it all.

I want us to consider 3 truths today;

1. Hearing the Truth – hears these words

Verse 24 starts by saying “everyone who *hears* these words of mine ...” The first thing we have to be able to do is identify what truth is. Did you know that 29 times in the gospel of Matthew Jesus repeats the same line – ‘I tell you the truth.’ Jesus wants us to be able to distinguish between truth and error. So how do we know what truth is?

John 17:17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth.

Jesus said that God’s word is truth. This includes the teachings of Jesus;

John 8:31-32 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

At least twenty times in the four Gospels, Jesus pointed to the Old Testament when He said, “It is written.” Isn’t it amazing that the One who had the power to cast out demons and to command them where to go and what to do used the words of the Bible to resist Satan? If Jesus used the bible to resist Satan, how much more should we?

God’s Word is truth, but it is a different kind of truth than something that just works or makes sense. It is God breathed. It has authority and power. It is the kind of truth that can cut spiritual chains that hold your heart. It can produce a fountain of joy deep within your spirit. Truth is not simply a matter of right vs. wrong. It is life vs. death. It is freedom vs. slavery. It is an alignment with the Creator of the universe and the way He intends things to be. Because of this, it carries His power and authority.

Think about the power of this statement: “I was wrong.” Have you ever been wrong about a person? Wrong in your approach? When you finally understood the truth, there was not really anything different about your circumstances, yet that truth changed your entire outlook? The truth is beautiful. The truth is powerful. God has been so kind to reveal the truth you need for this life in the Bible.

There are things you believe and hold onto that just aren’t true. For example, did you know that Napoleon was not really short? He was five feet six, which was average for a Frenchman in the early 1800s. Did you know that there is not really zero gravity in space? It’s just that the distance between the objects reduces the force of gravity significantly, so it seems like nothing compared to the pull we feel while standing on Earth. Did you know that it is impossible to fit your thumb inside your nostril? Actually, you can do that. I just wanted to see if any of you would try it.

There are all sorts of little lies that attack us every day. Without the truth of God’s Word to show us differently, we feed them, we believe them, we live by them, and we fall and fail because of them. But if we don’t get some outside help, we’ll never know any difference.

There are little things that you have taken to be true your whole life that God’s Word would say, “No, that’s not the way it is.” Here are a few you might believe: “I won’t ever really recover from this.” “I’m always one step away from it all falling apart.” “I can keep getting away with this, and no one will get hurt.” “I’m not as good... not as lovable, pretty, capable, or godly as he or she is.” “God is boring.” “God is uptight, angry, unfair, uninvolved, unloving, and unkind.” God’s Word dispels every single one of those lies.

When we hold onto the truth of God's Word concerning those things and put that truth into practice, everything changes.

One of the complaints about the Bible is that it is an old book. Now, if we were talking about a manual for building a computer, I would be concerned because the manual would talk about vacuum tubes or data cards and old technology that doesn't help at all today. However, we are talking about guidance for what we believe, how we live, and what's always true. For that I prefer a guide that's been tested and proven over time. The reason I'd prefer an old Bible is because I know every generation has its own biases and ideas. Culture changes so fast, but God's written Word has been proven true for every generation for the last 3,500 years!

There is so much power in the truth. The clearest way to see that is just to consider the destruction and devastation that come from a lie. Consider the lie that was penned by Sergei Nilus in 1905. He wrote down the lie that the Jewish people were conspiring to take over and corrupt the world. His lie was picked up and spread by the Nazi party, taught to their children in schools, and eventually led to the extermination of six million people. That's the power of one lie.

We need to hear the truth. We first need to recognize what truth is.

2. Living the Truth – puts them into practice

The second thing that we need to be able to do is not only understand the truth but apply the truth. Jesus says here, "everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice." It is not just what we hear but what we put into practice that is important. That means that we live it out in our day to day lives. We make it part of our life, we make it a habit in how we live and interact with others. The book of James reminds us;

James 1:22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

It is not enough to simply believe the right things. Even the demons do that, they know that Jesus is God. Acceptance must be followed by action.

Back in September of 2008, Hurricane Ike hit Galveston, Texas. I remember seeing a picture of the last house standing following that hurricane. Why did that one house survive when everything around it did not? Was it a bigger house or better-looking house than all the others? No. Its foundation was just better. In an interview after the storm a local news channel did an interview with the home owner. They asked why his home survived and all the others were swept away. He told the reporter that it was because he followed the strict building codes when he built his home. When it called for 12 inches of concrete, that is what he used. When it called for reinforced support beams, that is what he used. It was much more difficult in costly to build initially, but the results were clear. That owner did not simply know or understand the code, he followed it. He applied it.

One of the shifting and shaky foundations our world is currently building on is the weight and emphasis it puts on our experiences and our feelings. The problem is that our feelings shift daily, and our experiences are so limited. One of the many differences between God's perspective and our perspective is that we have at best seventy to ninety years on this earth. Our knowledge and experience is limited. God's perspective is infinite. He sees the beginning and the end and everything in between. He is infinite, we are finite.

The rallying cry of our culture seems to be: “But that is how I feel. You cannot tell me my feelings are wrong.” Feelings are important, and your feelings are valid. However, if your feelings don’t line up with God’s truth, I can tell you that they will NOT withstand the storms of life because they are not based in fact. People say things like “I don’t like what the bible says. I don’t agree with it. I don’t feel like following what God is telling me to do.” So what! Part of maturity is doing things that are right, even if you do not feel like doing them. Living a life based on a lie will always lead to destruction. Living a life founded on truth may be more difficult and may cost you more, but it will endure.

1Co 3:11-13 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.

The foundation again is Jesus. It is His word. That is why we need to be studying the bible and applying it. Your feelings come and go like shifting sand. The wisdom of our culture changes and shifts multiple times in every generation. But God’s Word endures. God’s Word stands firm. God’s Word will always be proven true. Get into His Word. Pray through His Word. Determine that you won’t just hear His Word, but you will put it into practice. When the waters rise, when the questions and doubts come, when tragedy strikes, when life pushes back, you will stand firm.

When I was in my first year at the University of Guelph, I came to a crisis in my faith. I began to question everything I believed in and had been taught about Jesus. There came a point in my life where I had to decide. I had asked Jesus to save me years before, but I had never really made Jesus Lord of my life. Moving forward I was either going to throw it all away, or I was going to be all in. I remember that day I told Jesus that my life was over, that He was in control now. I would do whatever He wanted me to do, go wherever He wanted me to go. I was all in. Not just hearing the truth but living it.

We need to hear the truth and we need to be living the truth.

3. Resting in the Truth – it did not fall

The third thing we need to be able to do is to not simply hear the truth and live the truth, we need to learn to rest in the truth. We need to be at peace.

Mat 7: 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.

What do you think the owner of the house was doing when the steams rose and the wind began to blow and beat against the house? Do you think he was nervous? Do you think he was tempted to run from the house in fear thinking that the whole thing was going to come tumbling down? I think he was calm in the storm because he knew that his foundation was secure. He knew he was safe.

Anyone here like roller coasters? I know that they can be scary. You are high up in the air going down a steep hill at high speed. The whole thing can seem a little dangerous. The reality is that they are very safe. They are designed to be scary, but when you understand how they are built and how much care has gone into their construction and safety, you can enjoy the ride knowing that you are not going to be hurt by it.

Life can be like that. It can be scary. There are so many uncertainties, so many unknown twists and turns – ups and downs. Life can make you nervous, but not fearful. We can be at peace because we know that our foundation is secure. Afterall, what is the worst that can happen to us?

Php 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.

There once was a king who offered a prize to the artist who would paint the best picture of peace. Many artists tried. The king looked at all the pictures. But there were only two he really liked, and he had to choose between them. One picture was of a calm lake. The lake was a perfect mirror for peaceful towering mountains all around it. Overhead was a blue sky with fluffy white clouds. All who saw this picture thought that it was a perfect picture of peace.

The other picture had mountains, too. But these were rugged and bare. Above was an angry sky, from which rain fell and in which lightning played. Down the side of the mountain tumbled a foaming waterfall. This did not look peaceful at all. But when the king looked closely, he saw behind the waterfall a tiny bush growing in a crack in the rock. In the bush a mother bird had built her nest. There, in the midst of the rush of angry water, sat the mother bird on her nest - in perfect peace. Which picture do you think won the prize? The king chose the second picture. "Because," explained the king, "peace does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble, or hardship. Peace means to be in the midst of all those things and still be calm in your heart. That is the real meaning of peace."

Everything that I have experienced in my life since I came to Christ affirms this truth.

Have you ever given anyone Power of Attorney over your affairs? When Naomi and I went on the Doulos we knew that we would be out of the country for several years and that there might be legal things like filing taxes that would come up while we were absent. We also knew that, if anything were to happen to us while we were gone, that it was important to have someone who could look after our stuff. Because of that, I gave my dad Power of Attorney. Basically, that meant that he could legally do anything on our behalf. His signature was given the same power as my own. Everything we had was in his hands. It was comforting to know this as we left.

Years ago, I gave my heavenly father Power of Attorney in my life. This is the difference that Easter makes. It is knowing the truth, living the truth and then being at peace no matter what happens in life. Foundations are important. What kind of foundation are you resting on today? How is your life different today because of Easter? Do you know the truth and are you living it out in your day to day life and resting in it?