

The Easter Challenge 3 – The Foundational Challenge
GFC – 4-26-2020 – Pastor Deborah

In May of 1981 Mae Rose's dog, Muffin was barking loudly in the yard. Mae Rose thought she was chasing a squirrel and came out to quiet her down. But she didn't see a squirrel. Instead she found a sinkhole opening up in the front yard of her Winter Park, Florida home. It kept opening until it swallowed up Mae Rose's entire home. But it didn't stop there. It continued to open until it was 350 feet wide, 75 Feet deep and engulfed local businesses and the community pool. It resulted in about \$4 million worth of damage.

Keep this image in mind as I read Jesus's words in Matthew 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. 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. 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. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

We are in a sermon series called The Easter Challenge. On Easter we spoke on The Challenge of the Evidence where we examined the biblical and historical evidence for the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The last week Pastor Joe spoke on The Challenge to Change.

The reason this series is called The Easter Challenge is because Easter is all about transformation. And if our lives are going to be transformed for good – we must begin with the right foundation. So, my sermon is called The Foundational Challenge.

You can build a house that is structurally sound and looks pretty – but if the foundation is faulty – your house will not stand.

If your marriage is not built on a sure foundation, it will fail.

If your career is not built on a sure foundation, it will fail.

If your life is not built on a sure foundation, it will fail!

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 the craziness in our world today, it seems like our culture is determined to build on a shaky foundation. I'm afraid that much of what people call "truths" that are guiding our world today may look like a decent foundation, but in the end they are more like a sinkhole that threatens to swallow us up.

In the parable that Jesus told – it was not a matter of IF the rain would come - it was a matter of WHEN.

Some Christians get the wrong impression that when we serve God, we will never have any storms or tough times. They think the Bible should say the unbeliever's

house fell because the rain and wind came against it. And the believer's house stood because the rain and wind did not come against it.

But that's not what the Bible teaches. In this passage, Jesus said that rain, floods and winds came against everyone - the believer and the unbeliever. The difference was not their circumstances, but their foundation!

And what determined their foundation? It wasn't just hearing the word because the Bible says they both heard the word. The difference is one obeyed the word and one did not! If you want stability in your life – you must obey the word of the Lord.

The rain, the waters, and the wind will come into all of our lives. And the foundation of your life is the difference between a life that stands firm and a life that swallows itself up.

So, how do you know if you have the right foundation in your life? Well, in the parable what revealed who had the right foundation and who had the wrong foundation? The Storms!

When the storms come, we find out what's really in us.

When life lets us down we discover our faith or our lack of it.

When trials come to test us we either stand or we crash.

It all depends on our foundation.

Think about the situation we are all in right now with the coronavirus. It has impacted everyone in the world in some way. Some people are holding it together – but some are falling apart. Some are thriving – and some are barely surviving.

We're all going through the same thing – but it affects us differently. Why? Jesus said it was because of the foundation we are building our lives on.

Every day you we are laying down bricks in the building called our lives. What we are living today is the result of what we were building yesterday. What is undergirding and shaping everything that's built in your life? Is the career you're building standing on your desire to know, follow, and glorify Jesus or is it built on your desire to get what you want?

Did you notice what Jesus said about how we build the foundation? He said in verse 24:

Everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a man who built his house on the rock.

While this building is intimately linked with our salvation, I don't think this is a saved or not-saved passage.

You can believe in Jesus, sneak into heaven, and waste much of your time on earth with nothing to show for it when it's all over. Paul talked about this in 1 Corinthians 3:11–15 when he said,

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their 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 person's work.

If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames. I believe Jesus's words in Matthew 7 are more about being wise or unwise in the way we live. I believe He's showing us the difference between a life full of joy or a life full of misery. He's pointing out the way to a faith that endures and overcomes no matter what comes against it - compared to a faith that crumbles and collapses with the slightest resistance.

And Jesus said that it all comes down to two things: first, "You hear My Word"; second, "You live My Word." There is no way around the authority and the importance Jesus put on the truth of the Bible. In John 10:35, Jesus said,

The Scripture cannot be broken.

Jesus' example shows us the truth and power of God's Word are the foundation for living our lives and having victory in our lives. Hebrews 4:12 says:

For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.

God's Word is the truth, but it's a different kind of truth than something that just works or makes sense.

Because it is breathed by God, the Word of God is a kind of truth that can cut spiritual chains that hold your heart. It can produce a fountain of joy deep within your spirit.

It's not just about right or wrong. It's an alignment with the Creator of the universe and the way He intends things to be. Therefore it carries His power and authority. There is so much power in the truth. The truth changes everything.

Think about this: Have you ever been wrong about a person? You thought they were one way – but when you finally understood the truth, not a single thing changed about them, yet with that one realization everything changed at the same time.

The truth is beautiful. The truth is powerful. God has been so kind to reveal the truth you need for this life.

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.

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 doing wrong, and no one will get hurt."

"I'm not as good, not as lovable, capable, or godly as he or she is."

"God is boring, uptight, angry, unfair, uninvolved, unloving, and unkind."

God's Word dispels every single one of those lies. And 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's an old book. And if we were talking about a manual for building a computer, I'd be concerned. Because the manual would talk about vacuum tubes or data cards and old technology that doesn't help at all today.

But because we're talking about guidance for what we believe, how we live, and what's always true, I'd actually prefer a guide that's been tested and proven over time. Culture changes so fast, but God's written Word has been proven true for every generation for thousands of years! That's because the Bible is not an old book – it is the eternal word of God! When God had it written – He saw the end from the beginning and He spoke truth that applies to every person in every culture in every generation!

If you are a follower of Jesus, you need to be in the Bible every day. Imagine eating only on Sunday and going with nothing except water the other six days every week. You might survive, but you wouldn't be very healthy, and I don't think you'd be very happy. Just ten minutes every day in God's Word will make all the difference in all you do. It will even change the way you pray.

The clearest and most complete way to know God's will is to regularly be in His Word and to have a two-way conversation with God through prayer centered on His Word. God's Word and prayer work together to change us and to change the world around us.

Jesus reminded us of this amazing combination when He prayed for us and for His disciples in John 17:16–17. He prayed,
They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. Sanctify them by the truth; Your word is truth.

The Greek word translated as "sanctify" means to be holy and set apart for a special purpose.

One thing you must remember is that as a follower of Jesus, you are not of this world. You're different. The world has diverged from God's plan. It is building on a different foundation. It holds different values and different goals.

That worldly foundation is ultimately a sinkhole that will swallow people up. Jesus doesn't ask for us to be taken out of the world. Rather, He declares that we are not of the world. Rather, we are people of the Word! People who read the Word, memorize the Word, study the Word and know the Word. But above all, we are doers of the Word!

Our responsibility goes beyond just hearing it or even accepting it. We're responsible to do what it says, because it is the truth.

Your feelings come and go like shifting sand. The beliefs of our culture change and shift multiple times in every generation. But God's Word endures! God's Word stands firm. God's Word will always be proven true.

And when you are grounded in the word of God - when the waters rise, when the questions and doubts come, when tragedy strikes, when life pushes back, you will stand firm.

Jesus said in John 15:7 - *If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you...*

As Christians we are supposed to be people of the Word: Bible-reading, Bible-believing followers of Christ. I know people who say, "I believe every word of the Bible," yet they hardly ever read it! No wonder Christians are living less and less like Christ. We know less and less of the Word. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says:

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The word "complete" means mature. You will never grow to spiritual maturity apart from abiding in the Word. We all know the Scripture, You shall know the truth and the truth will make you free. But do we know what comes before that - what freedom is contingent upon? John 8:31-32 says:

If you continue in My word, then are you My disciples indeed, and you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

Change comes as we continue in the Word.

The word "continue" is the Greek word "meno" which means abide. Abide means to live there! So basically this passage is saying, "If you live in God's Word you will be free." Or you could say it like this: change comes as you live in God's Word.

Whatever you need from God comes through abiding in His Word. Abiding in the Word is more than occasionally reading your Bible. Abiding in the Word is more than hearing a sermon once a week.

Abiding in the Word means to read the Word regularly and then to meditate on the Word, which means to think about it through the day. Joshua 1:8 says:

Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.

Notice that successful people don't just read the Bible; they meditate on it, they think about it, they speak it, they do it and they live it. They live in the Word for revelation and for transformation.

People who abide in the Word make the Word of God their plumb line. Everything is measured by the Word of God. They hunger and thirst for the righteousness that is found in the pages of the Bible. They seek for God on every page. The written Word leads them to the living Word: Jesus. Nothing equals the impact of the Word in their life.

In contrast, immature Christians live on spiritual junk food. They would rather listen to Oprah or read a romance novel or flip through the pages of People magazine. They spend more time on Facebook than they do in God's book. Then, they wonder why they have no strength, no wisdom, no direction, no life or no growth.

In order to grow as Christians we need to get God's Word off our shelves and into ourselves. There is no "instant maturity." Christian growth comes through hard-core, deliberate determination to read and obey the Word.

One of our favorite places to visit is Venice, Italy. I am fascinated with this city that was built on a swamp. I wondered how the Venetians built on a foundation of mud. So I did some research.

Here's what they did: They brought tree logs over from the mainland and drove them into the earth – one by one – until they hit rock bottom. Then on top of the logs they put concrete and marble slabs. They did this over the entire Island. Why? Because they knew they needed a solid foundation to build on. If they had built on the mud Venice wouldn't be standing today. And if we build our lives on anything other than Jesus Christ, we will not stand either!

We must build our lives on Jesus Christ who is the rock of our salvation.
1 Corinthians 3:11 says:

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ is the only way to true salvation!
And building your life on Christ is the only way to stand in the storms of life!

Abiding in Christ requires abiding in His word.
Here's what happens when you abide in God's Word:
When you're down it will lift you up!
When you're lost, it will show you the way!

When you're fearful, it will give you courage!
When you're hurting, it will give you healing!
When you're weak, it will give you strength!
When you doubt, it will build your faith!
When you're in despair, it will give you hope!
When you're spiritually hungry, it will feed you!
When you feel spiritually dead, it will give you life!

So I challenge you today to get into the Word and get the Word into you and God's truth will set you free and build a strong foundation for life!