

1 Cor 3 v 10-11 16-23

Matthew 5 v38-48

Leviticus 19 v1-2 9-18

Building the Church

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus concludes with a challenge to his hearers, are they a wise or foolish builder?

Are they building their lives on sand or rock?

He tells them that the only way to truly know, is when the storm comes for both houses will be tested but only one will stand.

Today we are thinking about foundations and how important they are in our lives?

One person whose foundations were severely tested was Victor Frankl. In his book, *The Meaning of Life* he wrote about how some people survived the holocaust, but so many didn't. As a survivor, one of the things he identified was that those who survived had a purpose or reason to continue to live that was beyond themselves, while those who were focused primarily on themselves perished.

Those who survived the storm of the holocaust found some meaning in their painful circumstances. The meaning they found was simply in caring for and helping others in this time of great evil. They built their lives in the most horrendous of circumstances through service. Their lives survived that particular storm.

Another great example of surviving a storm is that of Eric Liddell the great athlete. When Eric is mentioned, we usually focus on his athletic ability and we marvel at his stance in not running on a Sunday because he put God first, and how God blessed him with winning the 400 yard race, something he hadn't trained for. *Chariots of Fire*, that great film, build its story about this race, but what the film doesn't show is that the real Eric shone in a concentration camp in China. In these cruel inhumane conditions he took it upon himself to look after the needy and the children, and he went about caring for others. He stood the test of the storm; tragically he died through a brain haemorrhage, but his legacy lives on as one who survived the storm of this camp, because his foundations were not built on his own strength or wisdom but they were built on serving God and serving others.

Jesus finishes his sermon with a simple but deep challenge, what is your foundation?

Leviticus is a book in the Old Testament, that I'm sure few of us have studied. It simply means 'Law of the Priests'. Leviticus is a shared vision for the community of the Jewish people. God is laying a foundation for them to build their lives on.

Moses gathers the community together and inspires them with a vision that is about caring for their community. But not just their own community, it is caring for the outsiders. At harvest time, they were told not to reap the edges of their fields or to gather the gleanings of their harvest from the edges, and not to go back to their vineyard a second time to pick up what they had missed – Why? They were to leave it for the poor and the foreigner. What a shared vision! It is a vision that inform us to share and to be generous – right there in the heart of the Old Testament.

Then Moses goes on to tell them what type of community that they are to become; a community that is built on values of honesty, truth, love, care, justice, all shown to their neighbours and to strangers.

This is what God's community should look said Moses, a community of people, who build their lives upon foundation.

700 years later, Jesus arrives on the scene – what does he do? He begins to share this ancient vision, and he does so by pronouncing that God's Kingdom was now breaking into the world; he was calling them to a new way which was actually the old way that the religious leaders of his time had forgotten!

But Jesus does more than just share the foundation, he becomes the foundation.

It's a foundation that is filled with grace and mercy; it is a foundation that cuts across the path of revenge and hostility. It is a foundation that teaches his people to live in a way that brings healing and peace. Doesn't our world need this today!

In his foundation there is no room for revenge; there is no room for hatred. It goes against the grain of human selfishness; if someone slaps you on one cheek, turn the other cheek; if someone sues you and takes your shirt give him your coat also.

Its radical and transformational!

It's a foundation that transforms communities. It puts the needs of others before our own; it goes against human selfishness and it says to the world, there is another way.

This vision of Jesus was seen in his journey to the cross; it became evident that he was willing to live out this vision and die for this vision, and on Wednesday we begin the journey of Lent.

So Moses laid a God-given foundation for his community, Jesus for his community, and the Apostle Paul for his community.

The church in Corinth was fractured and divided by strong charismatic leaders and the Apostle Paul has to speak into this context – he was facing people with big egos, people who thought that they could do things their way, and so the Apostle tells them to check their foundation of their faith. He said, “Each one of you should build with care. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ”. 1 Cor 3 V10 &11

He calls them to go back to the foundations of their faith, and to ask the question, who, what and why am I building my faith on?

And Paul tells them that there is only one foundation that will last and that is Jesus. Strong words by the Apostle and words for us today, what is our faith built on?

So, this leads us to our own community in the 21st Century!

How can we build strong foundations of faith.

1. Dig deep into the life of Jesus

Dig deep into God's Word – read the Scriptures, they are our main source. Attend Church regularly. Have fellowship with like-minded Christians. Develop your prayer life. Pay attention to your grounding beliefs; unpack and evaluate why you believe what you believe consistently.

Doing so strengthens you, so that you're not derailed when faced with distractions, expectations and demands. Good foundations of faith depend on us drilling down deep.

2. Develop the Character of Jesus

This is what the Sermon on the Mount is all about, Jesus is pointing out the way for us to walk and by imitating his ways we begin to develop his character traits.

He is the sun we are the moon simply reflecting his light. He came to give us light and that light is found in Him. Come and follow he said, learn from me, join me on the journey.

3. Persevere through life's challenges.

Everyone gets storms in life – no one escapes them. That is why we need a strong foundation!

Chiselled into pillars that once held a bridge across the Clyde are the words, greatness stands strong in the storm. Those pillars have stood the test of many storms and their secret is their foundations. If your lives are planted deeply in the life of Jesus, then you will remain standing, not just for this fleeting world but for all eternity.

Let me conclude with this final thought about foundations, Jesus didn't say, "Everyone who hears my words will be like the wise person who built their lives on the rock" but "Everyone who hears my words and acts upon them will be that wise person".

Amen