

Welcome

Good morning everyone. My name is Ashley and I'm on the preaching team here at Catalyst. Today, we're talking about foundations and I thought a good way to start us off would be to talk about the most well-known building foundation: the Tower of Pisa.

[Tower of Pisa] For those of you who don't know, the tower of Pisa is a building that, during the 200 years that it took to build started leaning because the soil was too soft to hold it. Now, the failing foundation is heralded as the best object to pretend to hold up in a photo.

The original plan for construction, started 1173, was going to be famous for totally different reasons. It was planned to be 8 stories, which meant it was going to be one of the tallest bell towers at the time. That, combined with the ridiculously high number of arches that it was going to have, and that it was going to be built out of marble just blew people's minds. Unfortunately, by the time they reached the 3rd story, it became clear something was off. Because the ground was so soft, the building had sunk in enough places to thoroughly crack the foundation.¹

They stopped building to figure out how to help the foundation. Then there were wars and lots of different engineers that came and went and they realized how expensive it would be to fix it and so it ended up taking 226 years to finally finish,² which was actually good because it allowed the ground to harden in places so that it stopped sinking in some. They finally get to the end and it's leaning about 10 degrees.³

So, imagine being the initial guy who planned this (who actually started it is unknown - it's attributed to a few people, but nobody actually knows). At first, it starts getting a lot of fame. So, it's kind of a cool thing to do - kind of trendy, and he's getting famous. But then, they get to the third floor and it dawns on this guy - well of course it wouldn't make sense to build a tall skinny building that is so extremely heavy (marble is suuuuper heavy) on ground that is so soft. Ground that is so soft, in fact, that the cathedral right next to it is already starting to sink and tilt.

I imagine this guy was pretty confident in that foundation at the beginning. Then in hindsight he probably realized how inadequate it was. And that's hard because it comes down to small decisions after that - had he just chosen a different material, or had he just made it a little wider, or any number of things, maybe they wouldn't be in the position they were in. But, because of his decision on the foundation, everything that came after it was a little wonky.

So, now we look at this building and we laugh - its "fun," but I think we would all agree that it's not "good." Like, we wouldn't want to live in this house. We wouldn't suggest someone we care about to live in a house like this. And as time has gone on and on, that foundation has gotten worse. I'm not an architect, and neither are you. But that tower makes me think about faith. I know a lot of people who can relate to that architect better than they think - we're building a life of faith, and we think we're building on a good foundation. But how can we be sure? Because

¹ <http://www.towerofpisa.org/tower-of-pisa-historical-facts/>

² <http://www.towerofpisa.org/leaning-tower-of-pisa-facts/>

³ <http://www.towerofpisa.org/>

the last thing we want to do is get three years or thirty years into our life of faith and discover we've been building on the wrong foundation. No one wants a leaning tower of faith.

So, the question I want to propose today is about the foundations of your faith. As Christians, our faith is one that should be built to last, but so often we find ourselves facing difficulties or doubt and find that our foundations fail us. We're going to examine those foundations today and talk about what it means to have our faith built on the foundation of Jesus, which is a lasting foundation. So, let's begin this morning by worshipping this God, who has sought us out for our benefit.

Message

We're kicking off a new series today called "A Faith that's Built to Last". For the next month, we are asking, "What are the essential components of a strong faith? How do we build a faith that can weather the storms of life? A faith that keeps us secure no matter what comes our way, a faith that is open and courageous. How do we get that kind of faith that makes us infectious, that person who has a deep love of God, a person you just want to be around. A person who is actively making their world a better place.

We're going to be in 1 Corinthians chapter 3 for the next month. This church is pretty young - maybe only a couple of years old at this point. And the Apostle Paul, who planted the church, is writing to address some cracks he's noticed in their congregation. Paul uses a building metaphor to advise the Corinthian Christians on what they need to grow stronger.

Today we're talking about the most basic, fundamental part: the foundation. You can't build a house without laying a foundation first, and faith is no different. But what is the 'foundation' of a solid faith? This is something that we talk about in a really broad way a lot of the time. It's a really easy phrase to just throw out there - and we do - if you've been in the Church for any amount of time, someone has probably said to you that your foundation should be Jesus. But what in the world does that even mean? Is it to go to heaven? Is it just not going to hell? Is it that God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son so that whoever believes in him would have eternal life? It's hard to pin down. In fact, in planning for this and talking through it with JR, I tried for 45 minutes to nail down what 'Jesus is our foundation' actually means.

[**Scripture Slide 1**] Fortunately for us, Paul talks about it in 1 Corinthians 3. When Paul starts writing to them, they are a divided church where people are fighting over who is the correct person to follow: Paul or Apollos. Basically, both Paul and Apollos were both a part of the leadership of the church at one time. Paul came first and founded the church. After Paul left, Apollos came in and filled in that leadership role for a while. So, that's the question: who was the correct "leader"? And this wasn't something the church took lightly. On both sides there were people who *knew* they were right. They'd suggest that one person should be the next leader because they followed in Apollos' footsteps. And the other side would offer up their own mascot to lead them. And you can imagine pretty easily how it would devolve from there: all of Pauls followers would sit on this side and all of Apollos' followers would sit on this side. And the

only appropriate interaction between the two groups were dirty looks and side eye. These weren't small cracks, but deep building shifting cracks.

When Paul hears of this, he writes to them to remind them what he taught while he was there: it's always Jesus. Not us, but Jesus. To do this, he uses this building metaphor that I mentioned earlier. Let's see what he says, starting in chapter 3, verse 10:

Because of God's grace to me, I have laid the foundation like an expert builder. Now others are building on it. But whoever is building on this foundation must be very careful. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one we already have—Jesus Christ. -- 1 Corinthians 3:10-11

So now we know - Jesus is the foundation. Not Paul or Apollos, or you or me, or anyone else. It's Jesus. Well, glad we were able to clear that up. See you next week!

Okay, but let's say that we take him seriously. Because let's think about this -- Paul is faced with a church that is severely divided and who is taking sides over who is right and who isn't and Paul's literal response is "y'all need Jesus." So, if he's being honest and serious, then *how* is Jesus the foundation?

And this is the part where I think things get vague. So, let's get back to the basics: if Jesus is the foundation of our faith, then what is faith? This is an easy one: we've talked about it and defined it a lot over the last couple months: faith is a relationship with God. Jesus is the foundation of that relationship - one, in fact, that is only possible because Jesus came *to us*. We are only able to have a true relationship with God because He made the first move towards us by becoming human and walking the Earth.

That's it. That's the foundation - God made the first move. And because God made the first move, we are able to have that relationship with Him, and *that* is what we build the foundation of all of our faith on. And it's actually that simple. That's kind of the scandal of grace: that it is just that easy to enter into such a holy relationship and build a faith out of nothing - and, moreover, that God so freely gives such a valuable and powerful foundation for our faith by coming to us first.

The problem is, it's not that easy to actually *believe*. So we make it really complicated and Paul dealt with that a lot - just read almost any of his letters and you'll see the pattern. God says, "I was not content to leave you in your sin, so I came down to you," and we say, "Well, God needs us to *do* the right things. So you have to follow the Torah because it's more than just faith." God says, "I came to you first and that's what matters," and we say, "Well, God isn't that patient, so you better do the right things and believe the right things." God says, "I love you enough to rescue you," and we say, "Well, God can't really love *everyone*, so He only loves you if believe the right things."

We can't believe that entering into faith with a strong foundation is as easy as trusting in a relationship that is unailing, so we have to over complicate it. We're constantly waiting for the

other shoe to drop; surely something is going to come along and show us that it's not that easy and that we were silly to have been fooled this whole time. If we just have physical, tangible things, then it'll be easier to believe. The foundation is the Law - the Torah. That came from Moses and he was definitely holy so he must be right. The foundation is our actions and if we always act right, then the foundation is always good.

Here's the thing: Jesus literally told us NOT to do this. In Matthew 7 he says:

“Anyone who listens to my teaching and follows it is wise, like a person who builds a house on solid rock. Though the rain comes in torrents and the floodwaters rise and the winds beat against that house, it won't collapse because it is built on bedrock. But anyone who hears my teaching and doesn't obey it is foolish, like a person who builds a house on sand. When the rains and floods come and the winds beat against that house, it will collapse with a mighty crash.” -- Matthew 7:24-27

He says we are to be built on Him alone. So, if that's what Jesus says and we know we don't usually do it right, then how do we do it? What does it mean to be built on Jesus alone? The most tangible way that I can explain it is to tell you what it has looked like in my life:

I did not grow up in a Christian home. I grew up in a broken home. A home that was bound so tightly by anger and pain that it squeezed the life out of every other living thing. And I came to a point in my life where I asked myself if what I was experiencing - the anger and mistrust and hatefulness towards everyone and everything - was really how life was supposed to be. And if it was, then how had people done it for thousands of years? So, I asked myself what was I missing that other people had? Because I must've been missing something if I hadn't even lived 20 years and I was already over it. I was literally just sitting in my room, thinking about life (I do that a lot) and I was just kind of throwing stuff out into the universe. And God kind of hit me. God spoke and He basically said “It's Me.” God is what I was missing. And honestly, it just kind of all made sense; even though I didn't really know what it meant to follow God, or what it meant to be part of a church, or to be Christian, this revelation started the most wonderful journey of my entire life.

That experience is what led me to this relationship where I saw what I was missing: love. And that relationship is where I was encountered so wholeheartedly by that love that I knew I couldn't go back. I wasn't looking for God, but God was looking for me. I didn't encounter God, but God chose to encounter me. I didn't love God, but God knew every part of me and loved me first. Because that boundless love is like no other. It's the love that seeks out those who are alone and sits with them. It's the love that was not content in letting us stay in our anger and pain. It's that love and the kind of scandalous grace which only comes from God that changed everything for me.

And it is that relationship - that experience where I was sought out in my brokenness - that caused the faith that I have today. That experience laid the foundation for my faith. It is a foundation on which the rest of my faith is built: God will always love us enough to seek us out.

And that has carried me through so much growth and change and pain. Even through all the storms, growing pains, and life changes, there is still a part of me - however small - that believes down to the core of my being that God is not content to let us sit in our despair. God will seek us out.

For some of you, you know exactly what I'm talking about because you're there now. Your foundation is fresh and you haven't built a lot of stuff on it. For others of you, it's been a while since you felt that way. It's been a while since you remembered your first love of Jesus. Your wide eyed and bushy tailed Christianity.

Today I'm asking you, wherever you might be, to examine your foundation. Really look at it. What's it made up of? What kind of experiences shaped and molded that foundation? Or what kinds of beliefs have shaped and molded that foundation? Listen, we build a lot of crap on top of our foundation - and don't worry, we'll get to that in the coming weeks - but right now, don't look at all of that. Take all of that away. Imagine sweeping everything off a table.

What's left? Is it a religious legalism that says God will only love you if you do the right things, or is it an unconditional love that embraces you on your best and worst days? Is it an exclusionary faith that says God only loves those on the inside, or is a love that leaves the crowd for the one who isn't there? Is it a faith founded on a distant and sometimes hateful God who has left you to figure it out in the world, or is it a God that sought you out and continues to seek you out because of His love for you? Is it a faith in yourself and what you can do, or is it a faith that is so deeply outside yourself that you forget about yourself? Only you can look to see what made your foundation what it is today, but one thing we know for certain: if your foundation is anything other than Jesus, then your faith will have cracks, it'll sink and lean to one side, and you'll put a lot of extra work into fixing the cracks, when the foundation is what is wrong. Let me be clear: if there is anything, even something small, that's not Jesus in your foundation, it will cause cracks. And that foundation - that faith - will not stand the test of time.

One of my favorite parables is in Luke 15. In it, there is a shepherd who has a hundred sheep and notices that one has gone missing. And that shepherd makes the decision that even though it was just one sheep, it was worth seeking out. It is that love that helps to build our faith relationship with God. It is that God - who seeks us out first. It is that God who leaves the 99 for the 1. And we have all been that 1 at one point in our life or another. That love. That love is the foundation. So, let's sweep away all of the crazy and random things we've built on that foundation. For just a minute with me today, what would it look like for you to sweep all that's been built away and just be sought out and loved by God? What would it look like to rest in a love that is so deep that there is nothing else to do other than just be?

It's that kind of love that creates a foundation for your faith that will be built to last. Rest in that love with me today. Remake your faith on the foundation of that love.

Communion + Examen

[Communion Slide] There's no better reminder of Jesus' love for us than the Communion Table. Jesus invites us to share a table with him, to come as we are and eat with him and his disciples the meal they shared the night before he was killed. At that meal, he broke bread and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, broken for you. Eat it and remember me."

After the meal was finished, he gave them a cup of wine saying, "This is my blood, poured out for you for the forgiveness of sin. Drink it all."

You don't have to be a member of Catalyst to receive communion with us today. If you're willing to build your faith on the simple truth of God's love, then you're welcome to join us this morning.

Before we come, I'm going to lead us in a Prayer of Examen. I'm going to give you time to reflect in prayer on some questions, and then I'll pray for us.

1. As I think of my faith, what is the foundation?
2. On a scale of 1-10, 1 being very hard and 10 being very easy, how easily do I receive God's love for me?
3. When can I make time this week to receive God's love?

Prayer

God, you have gathered us here today to call us back to a simple truth: that we love because you first loved us. We confess we find that simple truth scandalous. We struggle to believe your love could truly be free of charge, that you love us wholly and completely right where we are.

So you invite us to your communion table today. You call us your friends and invite us to receive your very self as a gift. As we receive these wafers and juice, we pray they become a spiritual food. May we be reminded yet again of your infinite, unconditional love for us. And may we be ever transformed by that love to be your people. We offer these prayers and approach your table today in the name of your son, Jesus.

Assignment + Blessing

Thank you to all of you who support Catalyst through your giving and serving. Thank you for making our ministry possible!

If you're a guest with us, thank you again for worshipping with us. If you're looking to get connected to a new congregation, sign up for our Newcomers' Lunch. The next one is next week, October 13. It's right after this, and in 45 minutes, we tell you who Catalyst is and how to get connected. If you want to sign up, use the box at the top of the tear-off.

Now, as you're going, I want to challenge you to meditate on Luke 15. Meditating on Scripture is sitting with the passage and allowing God to be present with us. Luke 15 is three stories about God's love for us. Take at least 5 minutes a day this week to just sit and be loved by God. God is the one who seeks us out, even when we've wandered. Even when we've *walked* away.

Immerse yourself in that love this week as we prepare to talk about the rest of the bones of our faith through this series.

Catalyst, let's be a people who build our faith on the good news that God seeks us out. Let us put away our striving and earning and trying and scraping to be loved so that we can receive God's infinite, endless love for us. As you go, know that the one who created you and loves goes ahead of you, preparing good work for you to do. The one who calls you goes beside you to empower you to do that work. The one who is faithful comes behind you to keep you. Go in the grace and peace of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit!