The Gift of a Firm Foundation

Second in the series, “Gifts of Grace”

# Scripture: Isa. 33:2-6; Matt. 1:1-5; 7:21-27

# Key Thought: Jesus had a firm spiritual foundation and He offers the same to us.

# Intro:

I for one was fascinated with the process of building the Freedom Tower. But one thing that particularly amazed me is how long it took before anything rose about ground. Construction started in 2006. In some of my notes, I found that in 2007 all that could be seen above ground was an entrance to the subway. A website I checked said that it was 2008 before the concrete core of the building reached street level. For a building like the Freedom Tower, the foundation is the critical thing.

At the close of his most famous sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus spoke about building our lives on a solid foundation.

“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.” Matt. 7:24-27 NIV

Jesus urged us to make his words part of the spiritual foundation of our lives. Did you ever stop to think about the spiritual foundation of Jesus’ life? Now, I know that he was both God and human, so his case was a bit special, but as an example par excellence for us, Jesus built his own life on earth in a perfect way. So, if we look at the foundation upon which Jesus built his own life and ministry, it can help us in establishing a firm foundation for our own lives.

Jesus had a firm spiritual foundation and He offers the same to us.

Christmas every year is an invitation to establish and confirm the foundation for our lives. If we have not done so before, Christmas is a great time to become a Christ-follower. This is the best way to steady our lives amid the inevitable struggles of life. If this is not your first Christmas as follower of Jesus, then this Christmas is another opportunity to affirm the foundation upon which your life and future is built.

This morning, I’d like us to look at the example of Jesus. What was the foundation of his life and ministry? What does his example say to us?

# The firm foundation for Jesus’ Life and for ours

## His ancestry (Matt. 1:1-17)

This week I was contemplating the part of Matthew 1 that we always skip over, the genealogy part. Like a good Bible student, I was asking questions. Why is this section here? What are its purposes? As I studied and read about it, I discovered that there was more here than I suspected. I had much to learn.

To summarize, I learned that the genealogy is here because it is in some ways a summary of the preparations God has made in history for Jesus’ life.

* I learned first that the genealogy section is here to prove Jesus' Jewish lineage. Demonstrating your family lineage was very important for all Jewish people, but especially if you were in the tribe of Levi or if you were in the direct line of the kings. The genealogy in Mathew traces Jesus’ lineage back to Abraham, but it also clearly shows that he was in the direct line of the kings of Israel.
* It becomes clear upon study that the triple reference to fourteen generations at the end of the genealogy (Matt. 1:17) is not meant to be an exact count but must serve another purpose. Its purpose is to note the historical epochs in Israel’s history and to point out that Jesus is the next and climactic highpoint in a very condensed plot line of Israel’s history – beginning (Abraham), early highpoint (David), low point (exile), historical climax (Messiah).
* Lastly, you may have observed in your readings that some details in Matthew's genealogy differs from Luke's. There are several possible reasons that have been advanced by scholars. My favored thinking is that Matthew preserves the official genealogy of Joseph, who was Jesus legal father while Luke gives the genealogy of Mary who was Jesus’ actual human parent. Both were descendants of David.

[Other possible reasons for differences include the fact that genealogies of the time could skip generations, something that we would not consider doing. Another factor in Israel was the role that Levirate marriage may have played. A third interesting observation is that Matthew's genealogy takes advantage of a Jewish custom of altering a letter here and there purposefully to avoid a bad character or add in a good one to the family line (see Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible). For example, the genealogy on Matthew changes the name of Amon, an evil king, to Amos, a prophet.]

## His family

I also thought about the fact that both Matthew and Luke, two of the four Gospels start with stories of Jesus’ family of origin, including the stories about both his mother and his father at the time of his birth. We understand from the beginning of the Gospels that both Mary and Joseph are devout and observant Jewish people (Matt. 1:19; Luke 1:30,38). We see them observing properly the Jewish rituals surrounding Jesus’ birth. And we read about them taking Jesus to the temple in Jerusalem at twelve. This information about Jesus’ family of origin helps us to see that having a devout family was part of the foundation of faith that Jesus had.

So, if God thought that it was important for Jesus to have a devout family who gave him an example of devotion and provided opportunities for him to learn Scripture, then don’t let anyone tell you that it is not important for you to do the same. Today, we have people in our land who say they will not teach their children any faith but let them decide when they grow up. What a case of parental neglect! Do you let children decide whether they will go to school? Do let an elementary student decide whether they will brush their teeth? It should be a similar no-brainer. It is a parental responsibility to provide the spiritual example and early training for our children.

A family heritage of faith is an important enough treasure that God chose Jesus’ parents so that his Son would have such a heritage.

## Family heritage plays a big role

I am so thankful for the heritage of faith that I have. (show my mother’s Bible, my grandfather’s first family Bible, and my picture of Haskinville church family when my parents were children.)

You and I are building a heritage of faith today. A generation from now, people will look back to the values we taught, the examples of faith and love that we gave, both as parents and as a church. They will treasure the Bibles that we marked in—the spots where they will be able to tell that we prayed for them. How are you and I building?

I read about one ancient Indian ruler who was building a gate for his fortress. He was advised that the site was a quagmire. But he had a dream that he should make a golden foundation. So, he had two large holes excavated and filled them with gold brick from his wealthy treasury. Then he built his gate over them. According to the article, both the gold and the gate are still there in Purandhar, India. Apparently, the heavy metal made a sturdy foundation that has stood the test of time. (7700 #4910)

We need a valuable foundation for our lives that will stand the test of time too. Not one of gold, but one of great spiritual value; a foundation that will withstand the storms of life. Remember what Jesus said in Matthew 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 was that rock? It was hearing Jesus’ words and putting them into practice.

## His heritage of faith from the OT

Another thing I learned as I prepared for today’s message is that Matthew's genealogy sets the tone of this Gospel by evoking the Biblical history of Israel" (Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible p. 1608). In other words, one purpose of the genealogy is to point the reader back to the history of Israel as the overall background setting for the life of Jesus. Matthew is saying from the start that if you are going to understand Jesus, you will have to see his life and ministry with reference to the history of Israel in which the life of Jesus fits. Matthew follows this implication up with numerous Old Testament quotes to help us see the interrelationships. The implication is that Jesus is the climactic fulfillment of the story of Israel's most significant people.

Jesus’ life and message grew out of the heritage of faith that was passed down to him in what we today call the Old Testament. These Scriptures were read and taught every Sabbath in the synagogues of Palestine and we know from the Gospel records that it was Jesus’ habit to attend. The NT evidence is that Jesus was very familiar with the OT. At an early age the Jewish leaders were amazed at how much he knew (Luke 2:47). As an adult, he confounded them with his understanding of it. He quoted from it and referenced it. The Jewish OT with its records of God’s interventions in Jewish history, its major theological motifs and key words; these were the foundation upon which Jesus built his own teachings. Ultimately, one cannot read just the NT and understand Jesus. You must go back and read the OT in order to fully get the picture. The Scriptural heritage of faith is that essential.

## Our heritage of faith

Today we live in an era that does not want to do the work of learning Scripture. We don’t want to take time to read it much. We don’t like to memorize. Even in Sunday School curricula, there is a temptation to settle for a contemporary story, a quick moral values lesson and a craft. Only much later do we begin to understand that the disciples of Jesus that we have taught do not have the Scriptural background to understand the “why’s” behind their values, if indeed they have caught the values at all. It’s a lot like American culture today. Students can take more electives in college. Curricula focuses more on lifestyle and culture and less on basics like history and geography. The result is dumb things happen like the couple this last week that went in for a marriage license in an Eastern state and had to prove to a marriage clerk that their New Mexico driver’s licenses weren’t from a foreign country. That is unfortunately, a good parallel to the sad state of biblical literacy in this country today.

This desire to create a genuine heritage of faith is one reason why here at Copper Hill, one of our priorities is reading and teaching Scripture. I read, quote, and reference the Bible all the time. Unfortunately, in many churches, you will get a good motivational talk, but almost no Scripture. When people hear me preach, they should go away knowing more about Scripture and what the Bible says as well as feeling encouraged in their walk of faith. We usually read two passages on Sunday. I encourage reading from the pew Bibles. I encourage private reading. We hold Bible studies. We teach the children to read it and use it in their classes. Why? Because just as Jesus drew support and knowledge of faith from his OT, we draw spiritual knowledge and faith from the New Testament as well as the Old. The Bible tells us to know the reason for the hope that is in us.

Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect. (1 Peter 3:15 NIV)

We cannot do this if we do not read and study our Bibles. The Bible is a huge part of the foundation for our lives. It is a huge part of the heritage of faith that we pass down to the next generation.

## His intimate relationship with His heavenly Father

As the Son of God, Jesus was intimately connected to his heavenly Father. He knew he had come down from heaven (John 3:13; 3:34; 6:38, 58).

I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. (John 6:38 NIV)

He was very aware that the words that he spoke were given to him by His Father (John 14:10,24).

Don’t you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The words I say to you I do not speak on my own authority. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the works themselves. (John 14:10,11 NIV)

This awareness provided a solid foundation for his elevated spiritual life.

## Our personal relationship to Jesus

A little girl had somehow received a bad cut in the soft flesh of her eyelid. The doctor knew that some stitches were needed, but he also knew that because of the location of the cut, you should not use an anesthetic. He talked with a little girl and he told her what he must do. He asked her if she thought she could stand the touch of the needle without jumping. She thought for a moment and then said, “I think I can if daddy will hold me while you do it.” So, the father took his little girl in his lap, steadied her head against his shoulder and held her tightly in his arms. The surgeon then quickly did his work and sewed up the cut in her eyelid. All the while the little girl did not flinch. She just held on tight to her father. (All I Want for Christmas p. 76)

At Christmas, we have a special opportunity to learn to hold on tight to Jesus. Paul said,

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal. 2:20 NIV)

Becoming a follower of Jesus is the beginning of a great foundation for your life and for mine! Jesus said,

 “You must be born again.” John 3:7

Devotional writer, Oswald Chambers wrote, “This is not a command, it is a foundation fact” (Oswald Chambers Quotations #879). It is where our spiritual foundation in Christ begins. When we decide to follow Jesus, God responds by empowering us with his Holy Spirit. His Spirit moves into our life, our motivations, our minds, our plans. We become new creations!

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!” 2 Co 5:17 NIV

But we have only begun. A great foundation requires the continuing journey of discipleship. I read a parable about two trees. One tree felt itself becoming weaker, so it grew branches to look better. When the storm came it fell against its neighbor who held it up. So, the tree that fell asked its neighboring tree why it had been able to hold them both. The reply, “While you were busy growing branches, I was growing roots.” (7700 #4639)

When we are nourishing our personal relationship to Jesus Christ, we are growing roots, we are becoming established in our faith just as Jesus was established in his relationship to his heavenly Father (Eph. 3:17).

# Conclusion

As the heritage of faith from the OT and the lineage of his family provided a sound foundation for the life of Jesus, so the life and words of Jesus and of his disciples in the NT and the heritage of faith from our own families and church families provide a firm foundation for us. As Jesus was intimately connected to his heavenly Father, so we are intimately connected to Christ. In this way we have a great foundation for the long term! Commentator William Barclay said it this way,

“Happy is the man who never barters future good for present pleasure. Happy is the man who sees things, not in the light of the moment, but in the light of eternity. When we learn that the hard way is often the best way, and that the long view is always the right view, we will found our lives upon the teaching of Jesus and no storms will ever shake them.” William Barclay Luke p 83