

Isaiah and the gospel - the Saviour

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[0:00] Now I'd like to talk about this morning about foundations and about your foundation for life.! What is your foundation for life? What do you base your life on and trust in as life ticks forward?

! I think some people might say, well, I'm just roughly speaking trusting that everything will turn out alright in the end. Somebody might say, I've been told and I'm trusting in this in my life that you can be anything you choose if you want it badly enough.

I don't think you can. Little children, when I used to teach computers, little children, the first you showed them how to type something on the computer, it would come up on the screen. And quite often, particularly the little boys would write, I am the greatest.

And others would come on the screen. And some people, I think, go through life thinking that that's the basis of their life, that they're absolutely superb and faultless and brilliant. And of course that's not true either, is it? None of us is like that.

Other people go through life thinking, I'm rubbish and useless. Or, I suppose a lot of people, I've never really thought about it, I just get on from day to day.

[1:33] And the problem with all of those statements is that they leave Jesus out. Everything will turn out alright in the end if it's something that Jesus has got in his hand to turn out right in the end.

We can't be anything we choose, but we could be everything he chooses. He's the greatest, not us. And if we're in his hands, nobody is rubbish and useless.

Well, let's think about foundations for life. Because the Bible says that we were never built to live without a foundation.

We weren't built just to live making our own foundation. But we were built to have our feet firmly on a rock.

And the Bible says things like this in Psalm 40. He lifted me out of the mud and the mire, and he set my feet upon a rock. And it says things like this that I quoted earlier.

[2:42] Praise the greatness of our God. He is our rock. His works are perfect, and all his ways are just. So the Bible tells us that there is a rock for people to have under their feet, and their lives to be built on that.

Now in the book of Isaiah we've been thinking about many things, but thinking about the identity of Jesus. He is the promised king, the child who was to be born unto us.

A child is born unto us. A son is given. He is the servant. You remember this, the lamb servant, the suffering servant. He is the branch that, where new life comes, the royal branch.

He is the coming Lord in the desert. Prepare a way for the Lord, says the voice. And then comes Jesus. And I'd like us to look this morning at the fact that Jesus is the stone or the rock.

Now there's many other things as well, so I could add to that list. But this morning I'd just like us to look at this one thing, of how Isaiah particularly shows us Jesus as the stone or the rock.

[3:58] And so I'm going to ask why we need such a thing, and I'm just going to look at two examples. Jesus as the foundation stone, and Jesus as the tripping stone. So that's all I'd like us to do this morning, as God helps us.

But let's just first of all ask the question, why do we need a foundation? And I'm going to answer that we need a foundation or a stone, a rock under our feet, to cope with the quakes and storms of life.

Because life contains quakes and storms, doesn't it? It contains losses. We can't hold on to everything.

God removes things from us. Life contains sickness, illness, perhaps minor illness, perhaps big illnesses.

Life contains bereavement. People whom we care about are taken from us. And life contains disappointment. Things that we had really thought, that's a definite, and we found it isn't.

[5:13] And in these quakes and storms of life, we need a foundation that's faithful and dependable.

Second answer. To cope with the quake and the storm, a final judgment. So there will be a day when God tests and shakes everything.

And you could compare that with an earthquake or a storm that will knock everything down. And only the things that are on a firm footing will stand.

And the things that are passing and pointless and unworthy will fall away. But lives will be secure if they're founded on the rock.

Jesus told a story about that, didn't he? Slightly different tweak to it. But he says that when the storms come, if your life's built on mud and sand, it will fall down.

[6:11] If your life's built on a rock, it will stand firm. And let me just add one more answer to this. I think we need a foundation to cope with ease and plenty and comfort.

Because our lives in the West are predominantly ease and plenty and comfort. We don't hardly need God if we've got all those things.

But these things are not the foundation that we need. They don't last. They're not eternal. They are just passing things.

They are gifts from God that we should be thankful for. But not the basis that we should build our life on. We need to build our life on the rock.

So let's look at these couple of examples in Isaiah. So would you like to turn please to Isaiah 28? No, we haven't had that read.

[7:15] So I'll take you through the Isaiah chapter 28. Verse 16 is the verse that was quoted in the reading and indeed in the song.

So this is what the sovereign Lord says. See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone for a sure foundation.

So that's the God saying he lays a stone. But let's see what it's compared with. At the beginning of the chapter, it's compared with or contrasted with rather, the trust and the foundation that the leaders of the northern kingdom had been depending on.

And chapter 28, verse 1 says, Woe to that wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, to the fading flower, his glorious beauty set on the head of a fertile valley to that city, the pride of those laid low by wine.

See, the Lord has one who is powerful and strong like a hailstorm and a destructive wind like a driving rain and a flooding downpour. He will throw it forcefully to the ground.

[8:42] So to this nation back in those days, God said there will be a storm and you need a foundation. And the storm is there in verse 2, the driving rain and the flooding downpour.

And it's there in verse 15. You boast, we've entered a covenant with death. When the overwhelming scourge sweeps by, it cannot touch us. Well, there's an overwhelming scourge coming.

Or verse 17. The hail will sweep away your refuge and water will overflow your hiding place. There's a storm coming. End of verse 18.

When the overwhelming scourge sweeps by, you will be beaten down by it. And then in verse 19. It will carry you away morning after morning, by day and by night, it will sweep through.

So the storm will come to these people. And the foundation that they have, well, what foundation do they have? Well, they have their beauty and plenty.

[9:43] So I'm told, read it in a book, that the northern kingdom was prosperous and fertile. And that's why it talks about the flowers and the glorious beauty in 28 verse 1 at the head of a fertile valley.

So they had their prosperity. They had their beauty. They had their fertility. And another thing that they seem to have founded their lives on was alcohol.

Verse 1. Their drunkards, it says, Ephraim's drunkards. And in verse 7, it says, They stagger from wine and reel from beer. Priests and prophets stagger from beer and are befuddled with wine. They're real from beer, etc. So alcohol seemed to be a big part of their life. Of course, we have other substances nowadays that you can lose touch with reality through. For them it was alcohol. And that was a foundation, it looks, for their life. And they seem to have security in reliance on human power.

[10:51] Because without going into the history of it, they were faced with insecurity. And the way they dealt with it was to make a political and military alliance with, depending on which part of history this is referring to, either the big nation of Egypt to the south or the big nation of Assyria to the north.

And they said, OK, that's our foundation. We can be happy and at peace because we've got this political agreement in place.

And Isaiah is a bit sarcastic about it because he says, Yes, you've got a covenant, but it won't help you, it will kill you. And so he puts into their mouths these words, verse 15, We have entered into a covenant with death.

With the grave we have made an agreement. It says that the covenant that you've got with, whether it's Egypt or Assyria, is just going to kill you, actually. It's a covenant with death.

And he refers to it as a lie. We have made a lie our refuge and falsehood our hiding place. And that's the foundation that they have.

[12:01] Their economic success, their fertility, substances, having a good time, alcohol, and then getting it all sorted out with one or another human power.

And Isaiah says, How foolish. How very, very foolish. And let's just turn and look at our own society for a moment. And actually our society seems to have no alternative than these things in which to find security.

Western culture is, well, particularly our bit of it in Brighton here, is aggressively atheistic, isn't it? We don't have idols that people worship.

We don't have a lot of religion in our country in that identifiable sense. Certainly the idea if we were to say, Oh, there's a problem with Brexit, let's have a day of prayer.

National day of prayer. As they had that in the war time, didn't they? A national day of prayer. That would be laughed out of court immediately. And what's left?

[13:14] Well, what's left is lies. Insubstantial. Nothing that you can actually depend on. When people say there is no God, there's not much left, is there?

We turn to the prophets, the economists, the gurus, or the human power of politicians, or the Richard Dawkinses of science, and they will say, here's a foundation.

And of course, there's no foundation at all. No foundation at all. So if you're a Christian person this morning, aren't you glad that you're not in that position? Aren't you glad that you've got something more solid under your feet than just what economists think or scientists have told us, or the fact that you've got several bottles in the cupboard at home?

Glad about that? So let's think about this foundation that God offers. He says, I've got something to base this culture on.

And that's what we read in verse 16. So this is what the Sovereign Lord says. See, I lay a stone in Zion. And that's the stone we think about.

[14:31] The stone's a foundation stone. Maybe you're going to build Zion on it, a city, or maybe it's for building the temple on.

Or maybe it's both in some combination. But it's not just a stone by itself. It's for building on. But he says, I lay a stone. And there's some, actually quite a list of words to describe it.

It's a tested stone. Well, I looked that up. And it's similar to the word for tower. So I guess the idea of it is it's really solid.

You could really build something strong on this stone. And it's said to be a precious stone.

Now, for us, precious stone means a jewel, doesn't it? Precious stone? Semi-precious stone? I don't know whether that's what we're meant to think of it. The word means rare. So when it says the word of the Lord was rare in the days of Samuel, it uses the same word here.

[15:33] Precious. So whether we think of it as being like a diamond, or whether we think of it as just something that is very specially made, you don't get many of these stones.

You know, if you were doing the engineering of it, you'd have to order this stone specially because it needs to be just right. And you don't get many of those, but this is the precious stone.

And it's a cornerstone. So I don't know how this translates into building practices in those days, but I'm assuming it's saying that this stone is a particular role in the construction of the building.

That this is the stone that perhaps locks it all into place. Or this is the stone perhaps that makes sure you've got all the angles going off correctly from everywhere else. But it's a key part of the building.

And it's a sure foundation. And I look those words up, and the words sure and foundation are linked. So it's almost like saying a foundational foundation, or a sure sure stone, or something like that.

[16:45] But it's just trying to build up on us this idea that this stone is solid. You can build on this. It won't let you down.

And if you're interested in a little bit more of the engineering of this, it says there's going to be a measuring line. Verse 7, And I will make justice the measuring line.

Mishpat. That word again. And righteousness the plumb line. That's the word tzedekah. So it's a great building that's being planned here based on this stone.

This foundation can be depended on. And it actually says, I'm just trying to find it, The one who trusts. Yeah, it's the precious cornerstone for a sure foundation.

The one who trusts will never be dismayed. The word for trust is linked to our word amen. Amen meaning, yeah, definite.

[17:46] So the person who says of this stone, yes, definite. That's it. That person will never be, well, depending on your translation, Mine says, will never be dismayed.

Has anybody got a different translation there? Never? Okay, never panic. Never stricken with panic. Yeah.

Okay, yeah. Good, thank you. Authorized version said, not be in haste. So what does this mean? You won't panic or be pushed off into exile if you trust in that stone.

Or you'll never be panicked and have to rush off and find a better shelter because there isn't one and you won't need one. Or is it the sort of stone that if you stand on it, it won't suddenly give way and you find yourself falling over and hurting your back.

Whatever we're meant to think of it, the stone won't let us down. The one who trusts in this stone will not be dismayed, will not be in haste, will not be panicked.

[19:01] This is a good foundation, isn't it? This is a good foundation. And it is exactly this that Peter picked up in the reading that Christopher read to us.

Please can we turn to that, 1 Peter chapter 2. 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 4 says, Peter has actually been quoting from Isaiah already, all flesh is as grass, the word of the Lord stands forever.

Excuse me. And he's now going to talk about tasting that the Lord is good, verse 3, and then coming to him, verse 4, the living stone, rejected by men, but chosen by God and precious to him. You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

For in Scripture it says, See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone. The one who trusts in him will never be put to shame.

[20:28] To you who believe this stone is precious. But the stone is Jesus Christ. And it talks about coming to him. And he says to Christian people, You are coming to this stone.

And as you come to him, and if I may put words into his mouth, build your life on him, you are built up together with your brothers and sisters into a living house, a spiritual house.

And he says also that we believe, You believe in him. And the ones who believe in him, the one who trusts in him, will never be put to shame.

So here are some wonderful promises, taken from Isaiah, fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and promises made to those who put their trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Promises made to those who build their lives on this foundation. So just let me ask you, do you trust him? And have you built your life there?

[21:41] Is that where you are building your life? It's a very simple question. I couldn't really ask any other question with promises like this, could I? But let me ask you if that's you.

Because I'm sure there are lots of people who sit in churches, as we are sitting this morning, who hear about it, but don't put it into practice.

But in reality, they're building their life on something else. And I simply want to say, what a silly mistake that would be. Here you've got it spelled out to you, that the person who trusts here, who says, Amen to this stone, will never be put to shame.

Now I don't think you're going to get anything better than that. So I want to invite you this morning, if you haven't already done so, to come to Jesus Christ. To say, that's where I'm going to build my life.

He's the one I'm going to trust in. And all those other things that I used to trust in, bye-bye to them. I'm for Jesus. I want to invite you to do that, if you've never done it before.

[22:50] Or get it sorted, if you've never sorted it out before. Let's come and look at a second passage. So this is the passage that Christopher read to us.

We're going to come back to Peter, so keep a finger in there. And now we're going to look at Isaiah chapter 8. So this passage I'm entitling, The Trip Hazard Stone.

The stone that you might trip over. And this is in chapter 8. And we had it read to us from verse 11. Or I think it was verse 11 or verse 12. The Lord spoke to me with his strong hand upon me, warning me not to follow the way of this people. He said, etc, etc.

The Lord Almighty, verse 13, is the one you are to regard as holy. He is the one you are to fear. He is the one you are to dread.

[23:59] He will be a sanctuary for both the houses of Israel. He will be a stone that causes men to stumble, and a rock that makes them fall. So let's try and dig into that a little bit.

So the background of this one goes into the previous chapter, chapter 7, where it says that King Ahaz was frightened, and his people were frightened.

It says that in verse 2. End of verse 2. Chapter 7, verse 2. So the hearts of Ahaz and his people were shaken, as the trees of the forest are shaken by the wind.

So they were all turned to jelly in fear. What they were fearing was in chapter 7, verse 1. Ahaz, the son of Jotham, the son of Uzziah, was king of Judah.

King Rezin of Aram, and Pekah, son of Remaliah, king of Israel, marched up to fight against Jerusalem. They could not overpower it. So these two smaller northern kingdoms combined together to threaten King Ahaz.

[25:13] And that made him frightened. And the Lord sent the prophet Isaiah to comfort him, and to give him hope and courage.

But he was not prepared to trust the word of the Lord. In chapter 7, verse 9, it's put this way. End of verse 9. If you don't stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all.

He says, you have to stand firm in faith. That's faith in God's word. Or you won't stand firm at all.

This exact issue, isn't it? And the Lord says, I will show you another way than being frightened of these threatening nations, and refusing to trust the word of the Lord.

And that's what he's showing in chapter 8, verse 12. And he says to Isaiah, Don't you get taken in to live and think the way those other people do.

Don't get taken in by that. So he says in verse 12, Do not call conspiracy everything that these people call conspiracy. Do not fear what they fear.

[26:33] Don't dread it. So don't be intimidated the way that they are. And don't go the way of conspiracies and taking in all that sort of thing.

He says, this is what you should do. And it's in verse 13. The Lord Almighty is the one you are to regard as holy.

You are to honour and fear him. That's what it says, isn't it? You are to regard him as holy. He is the one you are to fear.

He is the one you are to dread. So the thing that you're most frightened of is offending him. The thing that most scares you is that you should miss out on what he wants you to do. The thing that most looms large in your thinking is the Lord and his holiness and his glory. That's what it ought to be, he says.

[27:33] Now, let's think about a trip hazard. As I was looking around a couple of minutes ago, Jack had his feet out into the gangway.

And I was thinking that would be a wonderful example of a trip hazard. Because if anybody ran past and tripped over his feet because they weren't looking, then it would be health and safety, accident book, all that sort of thing.

That would be a trip hazard. But he's moved now, so that illustration won't work. When we do work at home, we've been doing some painting and decorating.

We've had loads of trip hazards. We've had wires draped across because you need a light there to see what the painting is here. And there's a wire draped across. And if you were to go past without looking where you were going and not notice that, you could trip over.

We've been sweeping up. And of course, a broom is a wonderful trip hazard. Because if you don't put it up against the wall, put it on the floor, you can easily trip over that. Though it has a use. It's there to sweep up.

[28:35] There are piles of materials, piles of bricks. If you're not looking carefully, particularly if you've got very focals, and you focus that way, but you don't focus on the things down here. I'm not going to trip over this here.

But I do notice it's there. Trip hazards. Something that is not a useless thing, has a function, but it's in your way.

And if you don't regard it, if you disregard it, you can hurt yourself very badly. You will sustain an injury. Now the Lord says, I'm trip hazard.

That's what he says, isn't it? Verse 14. The Lord himself will be a stone. It says it twice. A stone that causes men to stumble.

So you could translate that. A stone that causes injury. And then, what's the second thing? A rock that makes them fall. A rock that people can trip over.

[29:34] The Lord says, I'm a trip hazard. If you don't notice that I'm there, if you pretend that you can make your way without noticing that I'm there, you can inflict a serious injury on yourself.

Now the Lord is not useless. He is the key to security. But, and there's a big but.

If you ignore him or disregard him, he is the cause of injury. A stone that causes men to stumble. A rock that makes them fall.

And it uses another illustration afterwards there. It says, And for the people of Jerusalem, he will be a trap. So now let's think about a loose piece of wire that's got a knot in it.

So you trip over that, catch yourself, and it strings you up or grabs your leg so that you can't get out. A trap and a snare. And he says, many people will stumble.

[30:45] Verse 15, they will fall and be broken. They will be snared and captured. Because he says, this is the reality. That people do disregard the Lord.

They do try to live and walk through life as though there were no Lord. As if he'd said nothing. As if he didn't exist. As if he was no power at all.

People do disregard him. So the same stone that is a sure foundation is also a stone that people stumble over.

And it's still Jesus Christ. So let's go back to 1 Peter. And just compare that. Because Peter makes this exact same point, doesn't he?

In 1 Peter chapter 2 verse 7. He says, To you who believe this stone is precious. And that's true, isn't it?

[31:47] Am I right? To you who believe this stone, Jesus Christ is precious. But, to those who do not believe.

It gives us two quotes. The stone that the builders rejected has become the capstone. And, a stone that causes men to stumble on a rock that makes them fall.

They stumble because they disobey the message, he says. So let's just ponder this for a minute or two. So notice we're still talking about the Lord Jesus Christ.

And notice that the original that he's quoting was about the Lord. Jehovah, Yahweh, the Lord Almighty.

So we just notice that in passing. That what was said about the one and only Lord Creator God in the New Testament. The writers say, that's Jesus.

[32:49] They have no embarrassment. It doesn't make any apology for making this equation. Jesus Christ is spoken of as the Lord Almighty.

So that's a wonderful thing. So, Jesus Christ is spoken of with mighty divinity. And the highest name that there is, is the name of Jesus.

You see what I mean. His is the name. I'm using it in that Jewish sense. The name being a reverent way of speaking about the Lord himself.

And this text tells us that Jesus Christ is a serious trip hazard. And people trip over him and injure themselves.

Now, let me just give you a couple of illustrations as to how this might be. How might Jesus Christ be the cause of tripping over and injury?

[33:52] Well, one is by his ordinariness. Do you remember when people saw Jesus and they saw the mighty works that he did? And some of them said, well, hold on a minute.

Now, we know his mum, because she just lives around the corner. And we know his brothers and we know the carpenter shop where he used to work. And we know all of that.

He can't be anything special, can he? Because he's so ordinary. And people tripped up over his ordinariness. Of course, how else could it be?

Because part of his glory is that he came down from heaven to be one of us, so that he could understand from the inside what it was to be human, so that he could be tested and tempted in every way just as we are, yet without sin, to make him into a merciful and faithful high priest.

And he came down to be human, so that he could die a human death on the cross and pay for human sin without cheating. And that would make him ordinary, wouldn't it?

[34:59] And people see this act of his humility and glory and say, oh, well, I can't really trust in him then. And they trip over. And they don't believe.

And that's to their eternal injury. I suppose another way that people could trip over is by his kindness. Because Jesus was very kind and very welcoming and very forgiving.

And people trip over and they say, oh, well, if he's so kind and forgiving, he must be very inclusive. And he must be non-judgmental.

And he can't be discriminatory. He would never condemn anyone for anything at all. And of course, that's not what he came to do at all. That's confusing his grace with the idea of being completely amoral.

Jesus is not a moral. He's holy. His grace says to sinners, come to me and I'll forgive you. I'm going to say your sins don't matter.

[36:03] I'm going to pay for them. That's a different thing altogether. And sometimes people get this hang of a Jesus who is so inclusive, he wouldn't judge anybody for anything.

And that's not the Jesus who really exists. And people think that they've tripped over. And of course, there is another tripping over that in Jesus Christ, we have righteousness given to us through him.

He is our righteousness. He gives righteousness to us from outside ourselves. What Martin Luther, the reformer, called an alien righteousness.

It's not something that we've worked up. It's something that comes to us from outside. And he gives us this. And we don't do anything to deserve it. We put our trust in him and he makes us righteous by himself through faith.

And of course, you can trip over that. And people do. Because they say, I don't want that. I don't want a righteousness that I am just given.

[37:13] I want at least to be able to say, well, I did some of that. They do. They want to be able to say, I don't want charity from God. I want to

earn my salvation.

I mean, why shouldn't I? I'm a good person. A lot of people say that. And the Apostle Paul will tell us in Romans 9, verse 30, that as a national way of thinking, as he wrote then, Israel was not prepared to accept righteousness as a gift.

They wanted to earn it. And they stumble over the stumbling stone, he says. Please don't do that yourself. Please don't. I think Peter was doing that when Jesus said he'd wash his feet.

And Peter says, oh, no, no, no, you won't wash my feet. I can't accept that sort of charity from you, Lord. I'll wash my own feet, thank you. And Jesus says, unless I wash your feet, you don't have anything to do with me.

And I think it's the same sort of thing. Unless you have been prepared to say to the Lord, I can't be righteous. I can't earn my righteousness. That will never, never work.

[38:28] I'll have to have it as a free gift. Unless you've come to the point of saying that, you've tripped over Jesus in this matter of righteousness. I suppose some cultures are more into that than others.

If you're from a culture in which earning and achieving is very important, and if you feel that it's a humiliating thing to receive a gift from anybody, you'll find this particularly difficult.

But this is what it is. And to fail to receive righteousness as a gift is to trip over the stone of stumbling.

Jesus Christ is the trip hazard. So we've looked at two things this morning. Of the stone that we're to build our lives on. Or indeed, perhaps to be more accurate, the stone that God builds his church upon, which is Jesus Christ.

And I want to invite you to consider that stone. He is there. You can't avoid him. He's not there only if you believe in him.

[39:36] He's there anyway. You can't avoid him. You can't take him out of history. You can't take him out of God's reality. He's there. He's done those things. He's said those things.

And that's how he stands. You can't avoid him. He's there for a purpose. He's there to be a strong foundation. Remember those wonderful words piled up about him being sure and strong and precious.

And if you choose to ignore him, you will be injured. You will trip over. Don't trip on the stone that is there for you to believe in.

And what does that mean? Well, it means hearing his word, trusting him, doing what he says. And when the storm comes, which it surely will, you will stand firm.

That's what it's all about. But the opposite is forgetting he's there, walking through life ignoring him, misunderstanding him, trying to live as though he'd never said what he said or never did what he did.

[40:46] That's a self-inflicted injury if you do that. It's your own hurt. And you will be left without a refuge in the storm.

Without a refuge in the storms of life and without a refuge in the storms of judgment. There's no place to be. I invite you to come to this precious stone and put your trust in him.

And one other thing, as a little footnote. The stone picture is not the whole story because, well, stones don't bleed.

Stones don't die. But Jesus did. Let's close by singing together. Number 682. Let's close by singing together.

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