Jesus our Rock

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[0:00] Good morning, everyone. Why don't we bow our heads and pray together before we open God's Word. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for your Word. And Lord, we thank you that Jesus taught that your Word is the kind of rock that we should build our houses upon.

And so, Father, we pray that you would open our eyes and open our ears and open our hearts that we might receive that rock. And Lord, we might hold fast to you for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen. So in Colossians chapter 2 and verse 6, which Tina just read for us, we read these words, So then, just as you receive Jesus Christ as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thanksgiving. If you've been around over the last few weeks, you will realize that we are midway through study in Paul's epistle to the Colossians. And just to remind you, when
Paul wrote this letter, he was under house arrest. I don't think they had ankle tags in those days, but nevertheless, he was under house arrest. And Paul had never himself been to Colossae.
It was his friend, Epaphras, who planted the church there. And then Epaphras had started to see that in Colossae, there were some false teachers who were beginning to be prominent.
And so Epaphras comes to Paul under house arrest. And off the back of that, Paul writes this letter. And Paul tells us that he has three primary aims in writing to the Colossian Christians.
[2:16] The first aim is to encourage them. Verse 2 of chapter 2, he says, My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love.

Secondly, he writes to warn them against these false teachers. And it wasn't in our reading today, but as we will do next week, read further in the epistle. We will see that Paul is very against what some of these people were teaching. But for today, in verse 4 of chapter 2, Paul says, I tell you this so that no one may deceive you by fine-sounding arguments.
I guess those of you who have a more cerebral type, that will be the kind of people who quite like to debate fine-sounding arguments. And I'm not saying all fine-sounding arguments are a waste of time. But what Paul is keen to stress is, don't let these arguments deceive you. Stick with what you know. So Paul writes to encourage them. He writes to warn them against these false teachers. And he writes to disciple them. In chapter 1 and verse 28, we read this.
We proclaim him, that is Jesus, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end, I labour, said St. Paul.
What Paul is keen to do is to help these relatively new Christians. We think that Colossians is probably written somewhere between 50 and 52 AD, which is pretty early on in the life of the church.
[4:10] Paul's very concerned that these Christians would grow up in the faith that they have received, and not be seduced by false teachers. This is the heart of Paul when he writes. He always wants to bring people back to Jesus. And those of you around earlier in this would know that in chapter 1 and verses 15 to 20, Paul writes really movingly about the supremacy of Jesus in all things.

He uses this amazing phrase to describe Jesus. He said, In other words, if you want to know what God is like, what you need to do is look at the life of Jesus Christ.
When you look at the life of Jesus, you begin to understand what God is like, his compassion, his concern for people, his desire that people live righteous lives.
So what does this passage have to teach us? I don't know whether you noticed this, but it stuck out a mile to me, partly because I was preaching today. But when Jean was praying, how often she used the word stability? It's a great word. And I think that we human beings would thrive a little more if we could build a little more stability into our lives. Paul says, continue with him. Don't be

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pulled out of shape.
Continue with him. Continue with him.
[6:23] Continue with him. It destroys markets. But it also destroys human souls. Because with uncertainty comes hopelessness and anxiety.

Today is surely a day of uncertainty, economic challenges. Heard a lot recently, haven't we, about rising utility bills? And I know some of you will be anxious about that. We've heard about inflation. That means that the cost of your weekly shopping is going to go up. You maybe don't know, but debt levels at a frightening level, not just at national level, but at personal level. There are certainly economic challenges and they will affect many of our lives. There are environmental challenges. Food security, water security, climate change. And again, I think the thing that in the end will probably make governments sit up and take notice of climate change. And that is the mass migration which is caused when parts of the earth become uninhabitable. Economic, environmental, and then just lurking in the background, the threat of extremism.
At one level, excessive aggression fanned into a flame by alcohol and social media. But on a macro level, the Islamist threat and the culture wars which threaten our free speech. At a time of great uncertainty, surely what we need is something that will give us a little bit of a stability. Something to tie our boat to in a storm. Back in the fourth century, a man called Benedict, Benedict of Nursia, was born. Nursia is in Italy. I think it's called Nursia today. And yeah. And he started, kind of, kind of, kind of, it's actually technically not an order of monks, but the Benedictines. Some of you will have heard of them. And we still have his writings in this rules of, for the conduct of life. For those of you who thought this might be thoughts of Chairman Mao. I mean, it's not really, you know, I'm not, I'm not brought this to kind of recommend that you would read it. But I mean, it is quite interesting reading because Benedict's idea was on all fours with St. Paul. And he writes these rules for the conduct of life. And actually, they're quite good.
I mean, they're slightly pulled out of shape by the fact that he's writing about life in the monastery, which is clearly not most of our lives here today. But it's interesting and good stuff. And one of the most notable things about Benedict was that instead of the traditional vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, monastic vows, one of his main qualities that he wanted to build into his monks was stability.
And I think that is really significant because the Bible, I don't know if you've noticed this, but it's full of talk about rocks and stones. Psalm 18, just a few examples here. The Lord is my rock, my fortress. Psalm 40, he has set my foot upon a rock. Matthew 7 teaches us that if you're going to go and build a house, you're going to build a house, you're going to build a house on rock rather than go ahead and build it on sand. The word rock or stone appears in the Bible over 200 times. And mostly, it's applied to describe the nature of God or what God will do for your life if you invest in him.
[10:55] In other words, he will give a little stability, a little rock into your life. And I want to try and help you understand today some things you might do that might build a little more rock into your life. And the first thing that is obvious is that unless you trust Jesus, really trust him, unless you understand the God of grace, unless you understand that he died for your sins, to quote Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, one of the earliest bits of writing in the New Testament, unless you get that, that's kind of base camp. You won't go any further in your walk with God unless you trust Jesus. Why? Because the fullness of the Godhead bodily dwelleth in Jesus.

But here are some things for those of you who trusted Christ that you could think about. One, build into his word. Chapter 1 and verse 25, Paul says this, I have become the servant of the gospel by the commission God gave me to present to you the word of God in all its fullness. If you turn to page 19 of the Sunday Times today, you will find that controversial columnist, Rod Liddle, writing about churches. And his little piece starts off quite positively saying, if you think that Christianity is dead, no it isn't. In evangelical churches, he said, it's growing. And then he's saying, these are the people who believe in that clapped out, boring old book, the Bible. As if he can't make a connection between the teaching of God's word and the attendance of God's people. Very strange in my mind. Now we want to build into his word. We want to be the kind of people who, to quote that wonderful old Church of England collect, will read, mark, learn, learn, learn, and inwardly digest the word. Eat it. I mean, not literally.
Why? Because God reveals himself to us in his word. How amazing is that, that the infinite God can communicate with us at a supernatural level by his word. Second thing is, and this is a big theme of Paul in Colossians, continue to live in Jesus. You know, some of you have been through a lot in

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your lives. You know, this crazy idea that seems to be around that somehow happiness is some kind of human right. Listen, life's tough. And the sooner you realize that, and the sooner you realize, you'd be better to equip yourself for the tough life that you will probably have. Life is tough. People die.
People get broken relationships. People get sick. People you love die. You could write the list yourselves. Paul's advice would be, whatever is going on in your life, hang on to Jesus.
You know, one of the greatest arguments launched against the Christian faith in the 20th century was why does God allow suffering? You know, there's some people in this church who are just about alive when six million Jews were slaughtered by Nazis in Germany. How could that happen? [15:14] And in one of the concentration camps in Birkenau, Auschwitz, a group of rabbis put God on trial.

And they tried God for the crimes of Nazism. And sadly, they found him guilty. Many of those Jews, religious, when they went into the concentration camps, understandably, I think you would say, came out atheists. How sad. What would St. Paul say? He'd say, hang on in there. Even if by the skin of your teeth, hang on in there. Continue to live in him.
The third thing I suggest, if you want to build some rock into your life, is live thankfully. What does Paul say in verse 6? He says, overflow with thankfulness.
It's been a tough time, hasn't it, this lockdown. Let's not be in any, you know, let's not confuse ourselves.
It's been tough. And it's having its impact on people. As we're reminded, today is Mental Health Awareness Day. A lot of people have been made unwell simply by their lack of social contact. [16:49] Paul says, give thanks in any and every situation. I had to read that again when I first read it because it sounds so counterintuitive.

I really love to moan when something goes wrong. Are you like that? You know, I mean, I think it comes on you at a certain time in your life.
You know, you kind of sit around dinner tables with friends, you know, moaning. No, says Paul, live thankfully. And do you know what? I think that's great spiritual advice, but I also think it's great psychological advice.
Somebody told me of somebody they knew. And they wrote on their bedroom wall in front of their bed in huge letters, be thankful.
So that they wouldn't forget every day to start with thankfulness. Not only is it spiritually good for you, I think it's psychologically good for you as well.
[17:54] It starts your day on a positive note. Do you think you could? Get up tomorrow and the first thing that you would do would be to say thank you.

If you're in bed with somebody, hopefully your spouse, turn to them and say thank you. Look out the window. Thank God for the sunshine.
Thank him for the rain. Thankful heart. Overflow with thankfulness, says Paul. Fourth thing is, be willing to be accountable.
Paul uses this word that I think is not popular in our churches. And I really get this. But when we see people going wrong in the Christian life, do we ever dare, do we love them enough to admonish them?
And nobody likes to be admonished. Ask my wife, you know, when she feels the need to offer me corrective therapy. Be willing to be accountable.
[19:02] That's why I think home groups are really important. You can build great relationships of trust. Where these kind of little peccadillos that can so mess up our Christian life can be brought out into the open and prayed through.

And finally, I go back to Benedict. And I haven't got this from the Bible. But I think it's a good thing to try and build some spiritual routine into your life.
I think that will give some rock to your life. What do I mean by that? Well, try and give some time to pray every day. Try and give some time to the reading of Scripture.
There's a great app that some of you have used. And I think it's called Lectio Divina. Actually, that was developed by, I mean, not the app, obviously.
Lived in the fourth century. But the idea of Lectio Divina, daily confrontation with the Word of God, was one of the things that Benedict was big on in the life of the monastery.

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[20:09] So, to conclude, you want to build some rock into your life? First, trust Christ. Second, build into His Word. Sorry, first. Second, continue to build into His Word.

Third, continue to live in Him. Fourth, live thankfully. Five, be willing to be accountable in your walk with God. And six, build some spiritual routines into your life.
In conclusion, Jesus told a story in Matthew chapter 7. You might like to set yourself some homework in. Go home and read this.
And He says, He's talking about house building. And before you wonder, why would Jesus be given any insight, you know, about the construction industry?
It's a parable. It's a story given to tell a truth. And He says this. There were two people who built a house. One built his house on sand. The other person built their house on rock.
[21:13] And then the storm came along and completely demolished the house of sand. And Jesus says, He who hears my words and puts them into practice is like a wise person who builds his house upon the rock.

The thing about foundations is they disappear pretty early in the process of building. And you only find out the strength of them when the storms blow against that building.
Listen, many of our lives look the same. Many of us have the same aspirations, the same ideas. But actually, you will only find out how much rock you've got in your life when the storms of life blow against you.
Where will you build? Where will you build? Rock holds fast. That picture of Cheddar Gorge.
Just a kind of, I know it's limestone and it does erode a bit. But I mean, it is a picture of a certain kind of stability. And if you're prepared to build your house on rock, you will find a new hope and a new security.
[22:54] And really importantly, you will minimize collateral damage in your life. A house built on sand delivers the absolute opposite.

Hopelessness, neurosis, anxiety. So here's my advice. Based on 55 years nearly of being a Christian.
My advice is, invest in the rock that doesn't roll. Let's pray. Our gracious Father, you know these are really turbulent times.
Lord, where there's a lot of uncertainty and fear and worry. And Lord, your word bids us to cast our anxiety upon you.
Because you care for us. Father, I pray for people in church who are worried about paying the bills. People who are worried about the kind of world we will bequeath to our grandchildren.
[24:20] And for those who live in fear of attacks on social media or in the wider world. The impact of global terrorism.

Dear Lord, if ever there was a time that we need to tie our boat to rock, it would be now. And so, Father, we ask that for those of us who have never trusted in Jesus the rock, Lord, today might be a big moment in our lives.
Lord, we pray for those who tied their boat to Christ, but haven't really continued with him and want to live off the spiritual experience of years ago.
Lord, Paul referred to the energy working within him. Lord, would you please bathe us afresh in the energy of your Holy Spirit. That we might continue in you, thankfully.
And Father, we pray for those who are feeling desperate. And Lord, we ask that you would become their rock. And Lord, as stuff happens, as it inevitably will in our lives, we might hang together and stick with you.
[25:50] And we pray these things, Father, because you are an amazing God. Lord, please visit us with your understanding that we may truly hold on to you and continue in you.

And we pray these things in Jesus' name. And the people who agreed said together, Amen. Amen.

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