

'For God so Loved the World' – Part 3*'Rock solid foundations'*

by Rev. Robert Griffith

Some years ago, a ministry colleague of mine told me a story about a builder he knew when he lived in Canada and this story serves as a brilliant illustration of our lives. This builder was constructing a large, luxurious two-storey house overlooking a golf course. It was towards the end of winter and the temperature had been well below freezing for many weeks. The builders over there are accustomed to the cold weather and this builder couldn't afford any down-time so his team put on their woollen beanies and their working gloves and pushed on through the freezing temperatures.

Now in that part of the world, to build such a house they usually dig this massive hole which they can finish into a liveable basement if they like or just keep as a storage area. But beneath that hole they drill down and construct some reinforced concrete piers deep enough below the ground to find some bedrock. Then they pour the reinforced concrete floor and walls to form the basement and the foundation for the two levels of house above. They put centre pier supports on top of the basement floor and then pour a reinforced suspended concrete sub-floor on top. Only then, when that strong foundation is complete, can they commence building the main house which everyone will see.

So this builder and his team laid the foundations as they had done so many times before with projects like this one. Then they began building this very impressive house. After a couple of months of hard work, they were actually running a little ahead of schedule and were now constructing the roof. The weather was warmer too. The gloves and beanies were off and the whole team were up on the roof in the glorious spring sunshine nailing down the last sheets of plywood, upon which the shingles would be laid. Then it happened ... everything changed in the blink of an eye.

As they had all climbed to the top of the house and began to work that morning, something happened which had never happened before to this builder or his team in their whole careers and it was frightening, to say the least. As the combined weight of these four tradesmen shifted to one side of the roof, the entire house lurched forward and off to one side. Just imagine it. You're on top of this huge two storey house, working away, when in a matter of seconds, the whole structure decides to become the next Leaning Tower of Pisa! The crew went flying, ladders toppled over, tools fell to the floor below or the ground and the builder himself just hung on and laid there on the piece of plywood he had been nailing. As he looked around at his now broken masterpiece, this incredibly astute builder said, "Something is wrong here." As he clung to the only rafter left exposed, this discerning tradesman thought: "I doubt this is what the owners had in mind when they contracted me to build their dream home. This house has got to be fixed. But first of all, I need to find out what the real problem is here."

So he pulled up one of the pieces of plywood and carefully dropped down to the top floor bedroom. He looked up and saw that every rafter was now twisted - some of them were actually splintered and broken. He said, "Well, that's got to be fixed - but that's not the problem." So he went to his wonderful spiral staircase connecting the two floors and noticed it had totally torn away from the top floor. He said, "Well that's obviously got to be fixed - but that's not the problem." Then he shimmied over and hung and let himself down onto the ground floor and he looked at the windows on the east side and they had all popped out of their frames and one of them had shattered in the process and the door jamb was now a parallelogram instead of a rectangle. Once again he said, "That's got to be fixed - but that's not the problem."

So he went into the kitchen and opened the now twisted door that led down into the basement. He grabbed his torch and sat down on the stairs and looked into the basement and shone his torch on the far eastern corner of the house, which was now the lowest point of this tilted, twisted mess. There he saw this massive crack in the concrete slab at the very base of the whole structure. That's when he finally said, "Now *that's* the problem and that is where we have to start."

They had laid the concrete foundation in sub-zero temperatures which is not a problem – as long as you leave considerably more time than normal for the concrete to cure. Even though concrete generates its own heat - it needs a lot more time in cold temperatures to cure properly. So the builder concluded that he must have started building too soon and the concrete eventually cracked and gave way under the weight of the building. But it still didn't make sense to him. Such an extreme amount of movement and damage should not have occurred from a cracked slab. So he would need to go even deeper. His suspicions were confirmed a week later after they had demolished the whole house and excavated below the basement. The concrete slab was not even the real problem.

The underlying cause of this disaster was much deeper and completely invisible. It was actually the piers beneath the foundation which were the problem. One of the piers below the bottom slab was not resting on bedrock, but clay. They had not drilled down far enough on the east side. The bedrock was another three feet below and some lazy tradesman had stopped short when he thought he had hit rock. Perhaps he believed the design of the house with its massive all concrete basement was more than enough support. So when he hit some pretty hard clay, he decided to pour the concrete pier on that side and the clay turned out to be pretty soft after a bit of rain, combined with the weight of a concrete basement and a two storey house.

It doesn't matter how great the building is - a weak foundation will eventually bring it down. They had to demolish absolutely everything and start with a rock-solid foundation. The second house they built looked exactly like the first one, but the difference was massive, you just couldn't see it. The strength, stability and long-term viability of that home was now very high, thanks to its really strong, appropriately supported foundation - a foundation which would now last a lifetime.

Well friends, that story basically sums up this sermon and maybe even this whole teaching series! Many people inside and outside the Church experience what that house did at some point in their life. Just as it took months of building before the weight of the house was sufficient to challenge the weakness in the foundation, so too it can take years of living before our foundations are challenged and found wanting. When that happens - the result can be just as devastating, as our outwardly-strong house; our carefully constructed life, starts to tumble. At such a time, we need our qualified Master Builder, Jesus, to take us on a tour down through the various levels of our life until we find our foundational problem.

Now from my experience over many years, having been called in as a 'building consultant' as people's lives lurch to one side and threaten to collapse entirely, I have found that in the vast majority of cases the foundational flaw in all those people's lives is exactly the same. The bedrock beneath every secure, stable, strong, enduring Christian life, must be God's love. The starting point, the foundation beneath this complex and magnificent life we have spent years constructing, must be God and God is love. The unconditional, never-ending love of God has to be our point of reference; the cornerstone; the bedrock we drill down to and upon which we build the piers, the basement, the floor, the walls and the entire 'dwelling' of our life.

Christian counsellors will testify to this. A good counsellor is like a building inspector on the construction site of a house that's about to collapse, or has already collapsed. As they talk with the person they will discover various symptomatic problems.

For example, the person might struggle with anger or depression or fear or resentment and there are ways of coping with each of those things - but none of those issues are the real problem. So, like a building inspector, a good counsellor moves further down to the heart of the building. On the way they may discover all kinds of fears, doubts, destructive habits and many things which need to be fixed for the person to be healthy again. But those things are not the main problem, they are merely the symptoms or the by-products of a deeper problem. The real problem always lies at the foundation level and for many of us those emotional, relational, psychological and theological foundations were never laid properly or cured correctly and so we have not grounded our house on the bedrock of God's revelation of love in Christ. It may take years but eventually our 'house' will begin to fall.

I believe this modern parable of a poorly constructed house applies to every single one of us, regardless of how loved we may have been as a child, because every one of us was born into a sinful, fallen, broken world. As such, we were born with a huge flaw in our foundation already. That flaw is called sin and from the very beginning sin created a barrier to us fully experiencing God's love personally, directly and intimately. We may have been blessed to have God's love flowing through our parents and others but many people didn't even have that. Even if we did, in our sinful condition we were all born outside of the full experience of God's love.

Now God has always loved us. He loves His whole creation. But we were cut off from knowing or experiencing God's love personally from the day we were born until that barrier of sin is removed in our minds and our hearts. That is exactly what God did in and through Jesus Christ. That's why they call the Gospel *good news!* Praise the Lord! God sent His own precious Son to take your sin and mine upon Himself so that anyone who embraces His free gift of love and salvation will discover that the barrier to God's love has been permanently removed by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. As that revelation comes, our spirit is regenerated and we are born again into a new relationship of love and intimacy with God. The entire foundation of our life is effectively replaced at that moment.

Jesus, the man may have been a carpenter but Jesus the Christ was the Master Builder (Creator) Himself in human flesh and He came to totally re-create, rebuild, renew and re-construct the very foundation of our lives. So now from God's point of view there is no longer any barrier; no longer any obstacle to His overwhelming love flooding into our lives and transforming us from the foundation of our being and impacting every part of our life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son. God gave His Son for the world - that is, every last human being ever to have lived. The barrier between all of humanity and God's love has been removed, once and for all time - in Christ, through Christ and for Christ!

So if there is no longer any barrier, from God's perspective, to His life-changing, nation-transforming love flooding our very being and flowing through us into the community around us; if our sin no longer separates us from God, because all sin has been atoned for by Christ and in Christ, then we need to face some hard questions today:

- > Why are there just as many believers seeing counsellors and therapists as there are unbelievers?
- > Why are there just as many Christian marriages ending in divorce as non-Christian marriages?
- > Why is the joy of the Lord not oozing out of all believers and inspiring all those around them?
- > Why can we pack 80,000 screaming, excited, joyful fans into a football stadium to watch a bunch of grown men play with a piece of leather for 80 mins, while at the same time, the people of God, the ones who are supposed know the secret of life and are supposedly filled with the fullness of God Himself, gather in decreasing numbers in funny shaped buildings to meet with their like-minded brethren to worship and encounter this God, and most of them leave the same way they arrived: no happier, no more empowered or transformed or impacted in any significant way?

What have we missed? There can be only one answer and we won't like it. Many of the people sitting in Church buildings today are yet to fully understand and fully encounter the awesome power of God's unconditional, overwhelming, life-changing love and presence; the outrageous and mind-blowing love of God has not fully penetrated our experience in a tangible, observable, foundational way. The full reality of what God has already done in eternity for us through Jesus Christ has not burst forth into the experience of so many people in Churches across this nation. That dynamic, powerful, heart-wrenching truth of God's love and grace still needs to make that 40cm journey from our heads to our hearts.

Perhaps we have known this love that surpasses knowledge, but we may have allowed the pressures of life in this world to rob us of that experience as we lost our first love. Millions of Christians across the world have spent years, maybe even decades, building this great big house - their life. They have worked hard to become successful as a husband or wife or father or mother; as a business person or employee; as a disciple in the Church. They have built an enormous, impressive, outwardly beautiful house - their life - but deep down below the floor, below the basement even, in that hidden place, there is a flaw in the foundation of their life, in their thoughts or their theology or their understanding of themselves, their God and the world or all of the above!

The most serious flaw and the most common foundational deficiency is the same for many: they never really learned how to receive the fullness of God's overwhelming love – from which flows His amazing grace, His abundant mercy and His cleansing forgiveness. It is entirely possible for us to be heavily involved in the life of the Church all our lives and still not fully embrace the radical fullness of the Gospel. This can happen to any of us. In our head we can understand the love of God; we can read about it, talk about it, sing songs about it, write songs about it, be moved by it, teach it, even share it and lead people to Christ - but none of that means we are really experiencing the fullness of the love of God personally - living day by day in the power of God's love - truly experiencing it, knowing it, letting it bomb-proof our life as we understand how central, how permeating, how foundational God's love is to every part of humanity. That is not the experience of many Christians.

Perhaps you are relating to this right now and you know without a doubt that I'm talking about you - that's great - keep engaging with this teaching series because God has a treat for you which is beyond your wildest imagination! Or perhaps you are one who is thinking you do know God's love experientially - and if that's really true then your life will be showing that in so many ways and you will be saying 'amen' to all this and you will be really encouraged because the Holy Spirit will be affirming God's truth in your experience. That's great - be affirmed and then pass this teaching on to others. But there will also be those who *think* they know God's love but have actually settled for second-best or third-best and are yet to really taste the sweetness and depth of God's love and experience the transforming power of a love that is literally out of this world!

Regardless of where you are on that spectrum, I plead with you to persevere and press on with this teaching. I would encourage to take time after each message and let it percolate within you as God prepares you to venture further into what I believe could be life-changing teaching for some of us. I am not going to do anything amazing, I am just going to read some Scriptures which we have had in our possession all our lives, tell some stories and expound some clear truths of the Gospel. I am just a messenger God has sent – and all I can do is be faithful to that message. But God is going to do a lot in and through those who embrace that message. I firmly believe that God is going to refresh, renew and revive many of His people as He confronts the barriers to His love and pours out His very essence and presence into our lives and into His Church like never before. Regardless of where we are now in our pilgrimage, we can all grow into a person who has been overwhelmed by the love of God and who knows how to receive that love and in the process, the Holy Spirit is going to renew the very foundation of our lives. With that solid foundation of God's love - there is no danger of our house ever moving off its foundations again.

And friends that is what I want for all of you. That is what God wants for all of you and for me and that is why I am praying for you what the Apostle Paul prayed for his brothers and sisters in the Church in Ephesus all those years ago:

Ephesians 3:14-19 *“For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, (because you are rooted and grounded in love – you then) may have the power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge - that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.”*

Are you hearing what God saying here? Do you believe that it's possible for you to be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God? It's mind-blowing. It's incredible. It's beyond our comprehension. But it also happens to be God's plan and purpose for you and for me and the whole reason we live and breathe. It's also God's plan and purpose for all those people who are not with us yet – those who are not part of the life of the Church yet. So what better time to connect them with the liberating good news - the love of God - the gospel of Jesus Christ? Don't be selfish and keep all the blessings for yourself - spread them around! Why not email a friend or family member and send them a link to this series, encouraging them to connect to the truth which will set them free forever? Then pray for them every day, that God will draw them to Himself.

Brothers and sisters, God is speaking to us all at this critical time in the life of the Church in Australia. A fresh wind of the Holy Spirit is blowing across the Church. The Spirit of God has been working behind the scenes for many years, preparing hearts, positioning people, releasing gifts and laying the foundation for a whole new chapter in our journey as the people of God. I plead with you to open your minds, open your hearts, cultivate a teachable spirit, and I promise you, God will bring you a revelation of Himself and His plan and purpose which is beyond your wildest imagination, because we belong to the God Who is able to do exceedingly, abundantly more than all we ask or even imagine, according to His power that is at work within us. Do you believe that? We belong to the God Who has promised to bring to completion that which He began in each of us. We belong to the God in Whom there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus because through Christ Jesus, the law of the Spirit who gives life has set us free from sin, from guilt, from shame, from every barrier and obstacle and doubt and fear which can hold us back from being right in the middle of the next great move of God in our nation.

This teaching is not just for us. We are not here to just be reminded of the great truths of the gospel – as important as that is for us all. We are here to be equipped to take that gospel to those who are not here. As our lives are transformed by the power of the God's love and we are filled to the measure of all the fullness of God, that love will overflow and people around us will notice. When you are full of God – everyone notices! They may not know it's God in you that sets you apart in this broken and dysfunctional world, but they will be drawn to His presence and they will want to know more. The future of the Church and the mission of Christ in our community and our nation is in our hands as God's people. We are not called to build the Church, we are called to testify to the life-transforming love of God in Christ Jesus to any and all those whom God leads our way. As we fulfil that calling, Jesus can and will build His Church in us and through us.

Lord, we believe ... now help us in our unbelief! Come, Holy Spirit, come, renew our heart, firm up our foundations, overwhelm us with Your Love, revive Your Church, Lord. Amen.