

Standing On the Rock

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[0:00] Well, before we return to the confession, I want to read a portion of Matthew 7. I'll assume that you've all seen those side-by-side pictures in children's activity books where you're shown two nearly identical pictures, and your task is to find the subtle differences between them.

Well, we have something like that in Matthew 7. This comes at the end of the Lord's Sermon on the Mount. Starting at verse 24, Jesus says, Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a man who built his house on the rock.

And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.

And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

So we have two illustrations here, two pictures, if you will, and they are remarkably similar. In both illustrations, we have a builder.

[1:22] In both, we have a builder who constructs a house. And in both, we have a storm that blows and beats against that house. Now, you'll notice that Jesus is not making a contrast between the builder's abilities.

Yes, one is wise while the other is foolish, but presumably they're equally capable of building a house. In fact, both of them do just that. They build a house.

And presumably, there's no difference between the houses. This isn't like the story of the three pigs, each building with a different material, straw, sticks, bricks, or whatever.

Jesus makes no distinction or contrast between their houses. As far as we know, they both build a perfectly decent house. And presumably, there's no difference between the storms.

In both cases, it rained, it flooded, and strong winds beat against the houses. So with these things being equal, what is the difference between them?

[2:28] What does Jesus say keeps one house standing during the storm while the other collapses? It's the foundation, right? The wise man built his house on the rock.

The foolish man built his house on the sand. So while the imperative here is teaching us to build on the right foundation or to build on the words and will of Christ, there's another implied lesson.

And I'll ask you, based on this passage, what gives strength to the houses? How is it that two identical houses facing identical storms meet such drastically different fates?

One remains standing while the other collapses. Who or what deserves the credit? Well, on the one hand, you might be tempted to say the builder.

But according to Jesus, while he may be the reason the house is on its given foundation, it's the foundation itself that determines whether the structure stands or falls.

- [3 : 37] Once the house is built, the builder is essentially removed from the equation. And Jesus makes no distinction between the two houses or the two storms, so the first house is spared only because of the solid foundation beneath it.
- Now, I point this out because when some people talk about persevering or enduring in the faith, it's almost as though they describe it as though the Lord's illustration is flipped upside down.
- In other words, they don't talk about persevering saints as a house resting on and aniding. Anchor to the rock. It's more like the saints are clinging from the rock from underneath.
- You know, holding on for dear life. Imagine one of those rock climbers hanging from a cliff. And with the illustration inverted, the credit for weathering the storms goes not to the rock, but to the one holding on to the rock.
- But that's not the Lord's illustration, is it? No, once the wise man built his house on the rock, it survives the storm only because it rests on the rock.
- [4 : 55] He's not holding the house together. He's not holding the rock with one arm, his house with the other to prevent it from falling. That's not the illustration. The house stands because the rock supports it through the storm.
- With that, I'll read the remainder of the first paragraph of the 17th chapter of the 1689 Baptist Confession. It says, Now, I should let you know that I have until approximately 10.15 this morning to finish my exposition of this chapter.
- And given how slowly I've moved up to this point, I feel pretty confident that I won't be able to cover it entirely. But that's okay, because you'll notice that in large part, the second and third paragraphs are essentially expansions of the first paragraph.
- So I may leave you to study the remainder on your own with everything we've already considered in mind. But for now, let's look at the remainder of the first paragraph beginning with the statement, Though many storms and floods arise and beat against them.
- Stop right there. You remember how I've said that the confession is saturated with Scripture, even when there are no footnotes to indicate it.
- [7 : 01] Well, here's an example of that. The framers seem to be borrowing directly from Jesus in Matthew chapter 7, and this imagery vividly describes a reality of the Christian life that is repeated to us over and over again throughout the Bible.
- Jesus put it this way in John 16.33, In the world, you will have tribulation. In Acts 14.22, Paul and Barnabas are trying to encourage the churches to continue in the faith, and we're told that they reminded the churches that through many tribulations, we must enter the kingdom of God.
- Then there's Peter, who says, Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you as though something strange were happening to you.
- 1 Peter 4.12 Christ and his apostles were abundantly clear about the fact that there will be hard rains, there will be floodwaters, there will be terrible storms.
- As Christians, we cannot avoid these trials. In this world, Jesus said, you will have tribulations. What kind of tribulation?
- [8 : 24] Well, for starters, there are outward storms. They come from without. Remember that both the Presbyterians who drafted the Westminster Confession and the particular Baptists who published the 1689 Confession both knew quite well what it meant to suffer for their faithfulness.
- They were fined. They were imprisoned. They were publicly shamed for their allegiance to God's Word. They knew firsthand what it meant to build their house on the rock only to be battered by storm after storm after storm.

In John 15, just before his arrest and crucifixion, Jesus told his disciples, If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own. But because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, A servant is not greater than his master.

If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. Now that's not to say every Christian, whoever lives, will face physical persecution, but it does mean that persecution and the world's hatred toward the church is not unusual.

[9:55] It should not be surprising to us in the least. Jesus told us to expect it. Oil and water don't mix. The church and the world don't really mix.

So we shouldn't be the least bit surprised if we personally come face to face with persecution. And perhaps we see a bit more of that hostility in this country today than maybe we have in the past.

Well, the Christian also faces, beyond the outward storms, also faces inward storms. In James 1.14, the Lord's brother says, each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire.

In Romans 7, you know, Paul describes the war within himself between the spirit and the flesh. And that war is not because enemies are attacking from without.

Instead, this conflict emerges from within himself. The flesh battling the spirit. Maybe the storm is sin. Maybe the storm is doubt.

[10:59] Maybe it's feeling like God is absent. Think of David who cried out in Psalm 10, why, O Lord, do you stand far away? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?

We could even add a third category. We have outward storms. We have inward storms. And we might simply call this one ordinary afflictions.

This would include things like sickness or poverty or grief or conflict of some kind or another. In fact, Job of the Old Testament experienced all of these at the same time.

He was covered in painful boils. He lost his livelihood. He lost his family. And then some of his closest friends come along and they think the best way to comfort him is by accusing him of committing all kinds of secret sins and angering God somehow.

No wonder, he said, man is born to trouble as the sparks fly upward. Afflictions of some kind or another are inevitable in this fallen world.

[12:06] And we all know this from personal experience, don't we? Just the other day, I was thinking about the Exodus story and how the story of Moses and the Israelites is really our story.

When God freed his people from their slavery, they didn't cross the Red Sea right into the Promised Land, did they? They wandered the wilderness for the next 40 years.

And as they wandered the wilderness, they struggled with sin, with doubts, with hunger, with thirst. They had all kinds of problems.

They had to weather a lot of storms before they finally reached the Promised Land. And the same is true for us. We may be, as the confession says, accepted in the Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by His Spirit and given the precious faith of His elect.

We may be freed from our sin and promised immortality, eternal life, paradise. But there's a gap between the two.

[13:16] Just like the Israelites in Exodus, we slowly and sometimes very painfully have to make our way through the wilderness of this world until we reach the Promised Land.

I love how honest the confession is on this point. I love how honest the Bible is on this point. Neither of them offer an unrealistic picture of the Christian life.

They're both very upfront about the fact that in this world we will have tribulation. In fact, Jesus often warned His disciples of this, especially regarding those outward storms of persecution.

Yet the confession continues. Though many storms and floods arise and beat against them, they, that is the storms, shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock which by faith they are fastened upon.

Though the storms will inevitably come, as Jesus teaches in Matthew 7, genuine Christians will survive those storms because they have a firm foundation.

[14:30] In 2 Corinthians 4, Paul mentions the many storms that he and others faced, but you'll note his optimism. He says, we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed.

Perplexed, yes, but not driven to despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed.

How can that be? Arguably, Paul and other Christians of the first century had it much worse than many others, certainly much worse than us. At times, they were hunted like animals.

They were despised. They were severely persecuted. So how could Paul express such confidence in the face of such adversity? Well, we read it in Matthew 7.

The believer who puts his trust in the Lord and in the Lord's will and in the Lord's word builds his house, builds his life, builds his everything on the only foundation that can withstand any storm.

[15:44] As Paul says to the Corinthians elsewhere, for no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Again, the builder in Matthew 7, he's not commended for building a better house than the other man.

He's commended for building on the right foundation. It is that foundation, Jesus Christ himself, that makes all the difference.

The prophet Isaiah foretold this when God said through him in Isaiah 28, 16, Behold, I am the one who is laid as a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone of a sure foundation.

Whoever believes will not be in haste. Peter later quotes Isaiah and he says, So the honor is for you who believe. You see, the one who believes in Christ, the one united to Christ in faith, is anchored to a foundation that cannot be moved.

Storms shall never be able to take them off that foundation and rock. But again, we don't want to invert the illustration here.

[17:05] It can be tempting to think that faith is what secures us, that it is from faith that we are able to survive these storms. And there is a degree of truth in that.

But notice what the confession says, echoing what Christ said in Matthew 7, By faith, they are fastened upon the foundation and the rock.

So faith is the means by which we are tethered to that firm foundation. But faith is not the foundation itself. We are not hanging from the rock, relying on our own strength or the strength of our own faith to survive the storms.

It is quite the opposite. When someone builds a house and the storm hits, the outcome is no longer in the builder's hands. That house is merely resting on its foundation and will stand or fall depending on the strength of that foundation.

And this principle is a common refrain of the Bible. So Psalm 18.2, for example, The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

[18:26] Isaiah 26.4, Trust in the Lord forever, for the Lord God is an everlasting rock. Psalm 61.

From the end of the earth I call to you when my heart is faint, lead me to the rock that is higher than I, for you have been my refuge, a strong tower against the enemy.

Now, of course, as we've read in some of those passages, the Bible does call us to put our trust in the Lord. Paul says in one place, stand firm in your faith. But the reason I stress the necessity of the foundation, the reason we put our confidence in the rock rather than faith itself is because, as we've talked about in previous lessons, our faith can ebb and flow.

It can be strong at times, it can be weak at times, it is always an irrevocable gift from God, it will never be taken away entirely. But its strength can vary throughout our lives, which doesn't make for a very steady source of confidence, does it?

Furthermore, what good is faith without a proper object? What good is faith if it has no rock upon which to build the house?

[19:47] I think we can assume that the foolish man in Matthew 7 truly believed his house would be okay. He had faith in that sand.

He had faith maybe in his abilities. He had faith in something, otherwise, why build the house? Faith is good and it's necessary, but we are only as secure as the object in which we place our faith.

What are we trusting in is the question. So the emphasis here is that while we are fastened upon the foundation of Christ by faith, it is only by Christ we are immovable.

So in terms of perseverance, God takes all the credit. Think of when Jesus said, no man will snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.

I love that picture. God the Father holds us from one side, God the Son holds us from the other side and there we are resting right between them.

[20:59] We're not going anywhere and it's not because you and I are that strong, but because the Lord is. And the Lord has said emphatically, no one will snatch them out of my hand.

Nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord. Nothing. Next, the confession continues to be quite honest with us, saying, even though through unbelief and temptations the sight and sense of the light and love of God may be clouded and obscured for a time, yet God is still the same.

Now notice how the confession frames this. It's not that God's love diminishes. It's that our sense of His love diminishes through unbelief and temptations.

In other words, our doubts, our trials, and even our sins, as the third paragraph lays out even more plainly, effectively produce clouds that block out our ability to see the sun or the light of God, He will not forsake us.

But from our perspective, some days or some even prolonged seasons can seem a bit more gloomy. Consider all of those laments in the Psalms.

[22:31] In Psalm 13, for instance, David cries out, How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? Or how about David's cry in Psalm 22, My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

Here's another from Psalm 42. I say to God, My rock, why have you forgotten me? Why do I go mourning because of the oppression of the enemy?

As with a deadly wound in my bones, my adversaries taunt me while they say to me all the day long, Where is your God? Now that's an interesting example because the lament begins by addressing God as my rock.

The psalmist is effectively saying, I know that God is my sure foundation. I know He's my refuge. I have security in Him.

[23 : 41] And yet, I feel lost. I feel alone. At this moment, I can't see the light of God. I can't sense His love. But notice how His faith, as weak as it was, remains.

He knows God is His rock. And He goes on to say, Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you in turmoil within me? He's speaking to Himself. Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, my salvation and my God.

God. So despite the cloudiness of the moment, David and these other psalmists do in fact recognize that their circumstances are to blame.

They know God has not abandoned them. They know God still loves them. They know He remains their refuge and their salvation. He is the rock beneath their feet.

But their perception of that is clouded through unbelief and temptations. Now, when the confession speaks of unbelief here, it does not mean utter, hard-hearted, persistent unbelief or total rejection of Christ.

[25 : 00] This is more like the man who said, I believe. Help my unbelief. It's speaking of genuine faith that has at times severe weakness.

even the greatest of saints can have moments of doubt or insecurities as David shows us in the Psalms. By temptations, the framers of the confession could be referring to any kind of trial or they may be referring specifically to temptations of sin.

Both could be true. We see this in Psalm 73. Verse 3, Asaph says, I was envious of the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked.

He says, My feet had almost stumbled. My steps had nearly slipped. It's like he's groping around in the dark because of his envy of the wicked.

it had clouded. It had clouded the light of God. But eventually, he says, verse 17, I went into the sanctuary of God.

[26 : 06] Then I discerned their end. And his turn of phrase is interesting because he says, Truly, you set the wicked in slippery places. You make them fall to ruin.

You see, once he's back in the presence of God and he can see and sense that light again, not only does he stop stumbling, but he also remembers that it's the wicked who will ultimately stumble.

They will fall to their ruin. This is something I have to remind myself of in the middle of every winter. After a few months of cloudy day, after cloudy day, I have to remind myself, yes, the sun still exists.

It's up there somewhere and perhaps someday I will see it again. And that's what the confession says. Even though the sight and sense of the light and love of God may be clouded and obscured for a time, yet God is still the same.

We talked about this last time. God is unchanging. That is what we mean when we say he is immutable. Isaiah 54.10 says, For the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but my steadfast love shall not depart from you, and my covenant of peace shall not be removed, says the Lord who has compassion on you.

[27 : 39] So you see, our unbelief and temptations may cloud our assurance, but the sun is still there. the storms may blow, but the rock is still under the house.

God is still the same. Next, the confession says, They shall be sure to be kept by the power of God unto salvation.

salvation. I read this last time, but let me read it again from 1 Peter 1. Peter writes, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading.

Notice, kept in heaven for you, who, by God's power, are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

[28 : 44] Even if we didn't have the footnote, it would be pretty clear that the framers had that passage from Peter in mind. Now, Peter uses two similar military terms, kept and guarded.

The confession uses the word kept. It paints the picture of God himself standing guard like a soldier. Jude uses similar language at the end of his epistle.

He says, in verse 24 of Jude, now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy.

The Lord will keep believers. He will guard them. He will preserve them to the end. This is why I would be perfectly fine with changing the name of this chapter to The Perseverance and preservation of the saints.

Yes, the Bible commands us to persevere. Jesus said, only the one who endures to the end will be saved. But everywhere we look in Scripture, notice it.

[29 : 59] And once you do notice it, you'll never be able to unnotice it. It is God by his power who keeps or guards us to the end. There is no other way.

He is credited with salvation from beginning to end. The saints persevere, absolutely, but only because God preserves. And this is great news.

If we invert the Lord's illustration in Matthew 7, we're left dangling, holding on for dear life. And I hate to break it to you, but if that were the case, we'd never make it.

just as we cannot save ourselves in the beginning, we cannot keep ourselves saved. Thankfully, though, we're not dangling from the rock.

We're resting on top of the rock. And even better, that rock cannot be moved. Furthermore, Psalm 121 tells us, the Lord will not let your foot be moved.

[31 : 06] He who keeps you will not slumber, behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep. The Lord is your keeper. He is your guard.

He is your protector through everything. Next, the confession says, where, that is, salvation, they shall enjoy their purchased possession.

Now, we don't have time to talk about everything the Bible says about heaven or final salvation, possession. So, I just want to focus here on that word purchased. We shall enjoy our purchased possession.

Peter says it this way in 1 Peter 1, verses 18 and 19. you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

Or, consider Romans 8, 32. He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

[32 : 26] So, this touches on the L of TULIP, limited atonement. However, I, like many others, prefer the term definite atonement. Limited simply means that the death of Christ secured salvation for a limited number of people, not for everyone in all times.

Right? But I prefer the term definite because the atonement of Christ, while it was for a fixed number of people, definitely secured salvation for that fixed number of people.

As Jesus said, again, I give my sheep eternal life and they will never perish. And no one will snatch them out of my hand.

My father who has given them to me is greater than all and no one is able to snatch them out of the father's hand. So, the father gave a specific people to Christ.

Christ then shed his priceless blood for them and the result is clearly definitive. They will have eternal life. They will never perish and no one will snatch them out of God's hand.

[33 : 49] Here's what John Owen says in his work, *The Death of Death and the Death of Christ*. Christ did not die for an uncertain end.

He did not shed his blood at random or pay a price of redemption without knowing what he bought. For to affirm that the Son of God should lay down the infinite ransom of his life for those whom he never intended to save is to make his death an ineffectual purchase and his blood of no certain value.

Obviously, if we turn that around, we would say that Christ did die for a certain end. Right? The infinite ransom of his life absolutely and utterly saved those the Father gave him to save.

His purchase was effectual in his blood of infinite value. I mean, I won't name any names, but I know people who will spend an hour talking to customer service trying to get that 10% discount they were promised.

And I don't blame them. Of course, we want to get what we paid for. So what are the chances that a Christian will not receive his or her eternal possession when it has been paid for, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ?

[35 : 24] This is expanded upon in the second paragraph, and I'll read it because this may be the most important part when it comes to understanding why God will always ensure the perseverance of his people.

Here's what it says. This perseverance of the saints does not depend upon their own free will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, which flows from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father.

It also rests upon, note this, the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ and union with him, the oath of God, the abiding of his spirit, and the seed of God within them.

It also depends upon the nature of the covenant of grace from which arises the certainty and infallibility of their perseverance. Now, to some degree or another, we've covered all of this, but at this point, I especially want to emphasize that statement, the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ and union with him.

That word efficacy means effective. Christ's merit is not waiting to be made real by us.

[36 : 49] His blood actually purchased, his death actually redeemed, his resurrection actually secured eternal life.

If Christ paid the price for our sins, then justice itself demands our salvation. God cannot require a double payment.

Either Christ bore the penalty in full, or he didn't. And if he did, and we are joined to him by faith, then we are free forever.

God cannot do it. That's why Owen and so many others are so insistent that the atonement must be definite. Because to say Christ paid for all sins of all people everywhere and then countless souls still perish under judgment is to say that the blood of Christ really didn't purchase anything.

What did Paul say? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn?

[38 : 00] Christ Jesus is the one who died. If Christ has made the payment for our sin and we are united to him through faith, condemnation becomes impossible.

Impossible. There is now no condemnation for those in Christ Jesus. or as the confession continues, the saints are engraved upon the palms of his hands and their names have been written in the book of life from all eternity.

I'd love to spend more time on that part, but if we are in Christ, our inheritance is not maybe, perhaps, if you make it.

no, it is purchased by that precious, priceless blood of Christ. It is sealed and it is kept by the power of God himself.

Now, bringing this back to the subject of perseverance, briefly, look at the final paragraph of this chapter of the confession. They may fall into grievous sins and continue in them for a time, through the temptation of Satan and of the world, the power of the corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation.

[39 : 26] In doing so, they incur God's displeasure, grieve the Holy Spirit, bring damage to their graces and comforts, cause harm to others, and bring temporal judgment upon themselves.

Yet, they shall renew their repentance and be preserved through faith in Christ Jesus to the end.

And that is the note of confidence that the confession leaves us with. Yes, the saints will stumble, yes, they may even fall into terrible sin and endure seasons of darkness and doubt, but God is the same.

the foundation beneath them does not shift because God is unchanging. And the purchase price has already been paid.

Christ's blood has secured their inheritance and God's power preserves them until they receive it. Perseverance, then, is not ultimately about our strength, the strength of our grip on God, if you will, but the strength of His grip on us.

[40 : 44] The house stands because it is founded on the rock. And once again, I think this is a fitting way to close out the study.

I'll once again cite Philippians 1.6, a verse that I pray is running through our minds every single day, but especially when we feel ourselves stumbling, we feel the light and love of God is clouded and obscured from us.

Remember this, Philippians 1.6, Paul says, I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

Let's pray. Father, we thank You that You have given us a sure foundation in Christ, the solid rock on which we stand.

Storms will come, as You've told us, trials will rage, and even our faith may falter at times, but we rest in the confidence that You are unchanging and Your promises are secure.

[41 : 51] Lord, forgive us when our unbelief and our temptations cloud our sight of Your love. Lord, remind us that Your hand still upholds us. Teach us to trust in the strength of Your grace that keeps us to the end.

Anchor our hearts to Christ that we may persevere with hope until we enter the joy of our purchased possession. It's in Christ's name we pray.

Amen. Amen.