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A SERMON

by

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SERMON XXVIII.

JESUS CHRIST THE ONLY FOUNDATION.¹

ISAIAH xxviii. 16, 17.—*Behold, I lay in Zion, for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place.*

THE context, like many other passages of the prophetic scriptures, seems to have a double sense. The primary sense may be thus represented. The judgments of God were ready to break in upon and overwhelm the impenitent nation of the Jews, like “a tempest of hail, and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing,” and bearing all before it. (ver 2.) The prophet had repeatedly given them timely warning of these approaching judgments; but they still continued secure and impenitent, and unapprehensive of danger. They flattered themselves they had artifice enough to keep themselves safe. They thought themselves impregnable intrenched and fortified in their riches, their strongholds, and the sanctity of their temple and nation. They might also think their arts of negotiation would secure them from the invasion of the neighbouring powers, particularly the Assyrians, to whom they were not exposed. These were the lies which they made their refuge, and the falsehood under which they hid themselves. These, they imagined, like moles or ditches, would keep off the deluge of wrath, so that it should not come to them, much less overwhelm them; and they were as secure as if they had made “a covenant with death, and entered into an agreement with hell, or the grave,” not to hurt them. Therefore the prophet represents them as saying, “We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement: when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come to us; for we have made lies (that is what the prophet calls lies,) our refuge;” and under what he calls falsehoods have we hid ourselves. (ver. 15.) It is in this connection my text is introduced; and it points out a solid ground of hope, in opposition to the refuge of lies in which these sinners trusted; as if he had said, since the refuge to which you

flee is not safe, and since my people need another, Therefore, thus saith the Lord, behold, I lay in Zion, for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation;" that is, "My promises, my providential care, the supporting influences of my grace, and the various means I shall take for the comfort and safety of my people in this national distress, shall as effectually bear them up, as a firm foundation of stone does a building erected upon it. They that build their hopes upon this foundation shall stand unshaken amidst all the storms and tempests of the national calamity, that may beat upon our guilty land." *He that believeth shall not make haste*; that is, "he that trusts in this refuge shall not be struck into a distracted hurry and consternation upon the sudden appearance of these calamities. He shall not, like persons surprised with unexpected danger, fly in a wild haste to improper means for his safety, and thus throw himself into destruction by his ill-advised, precipitate attempts to keep out of it; but he shall be calm and serene, and have presence of mind to take the most proper measures for his deliverance." Or the meaning may be, "He that believeth shall not make such haste to be delivered; as to fly to unlawful means for that purpose; but will patiently wait God's time to deliver him in a lawful way." The prophet proceeds, "Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet;" that is, "God will try the Jews with strict justice, as an architect examines a building with a line and plummet. Such of them who have built their hopes upon the foundation above described, shall stand firm and unshaken, whatever tempests fall upon them, like a regular and stately building, founded upon a solid rock. But as to others, they shall be overwhelmed in the public calamity! the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies in which they trusted; and the waters shall overflow the hiding-place." And then your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand: "when the overflowing scourge shall pass through then shall ye be trodden down by it." (ver. 18.)

This seems to be a primary sense of the context; and thus, it is probable, the Jews understood it, who did not enjoy that additional light which the gospel sheds upon it. In this view it is very applicable to us, in the present state of our country and nation, when the enemy is likely to break in like a flood upon us. But I must add, that it is very likely, that even in this primary sense of the context, the text refers to Jesus Christ. There seems to be an unnatural force put upon the words, when they are applied to any other and the connection will admit of their application to him, even in this sense, thus, "Since the refuge of sinners is a refuge of lies, behold I will provide one that will effectually secure all that fly to it from all the judgments to which they are exposed," *I lay in Zion, for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, &c.* "I send my Son into the world, as an Almighty Saviour; and all that put themselves under his protection, and build their hopes upon him, shall be so safe, that all the calamities of life shall not do them a lasting injury; and the vengeance of the eternal world shall never fall upon them."

But whether we can find Christ in the primary sense of these words or not, it is certain we shall find him in their ultimate, principal sense. And we have the authority of an inspired apostle for this application. St. Peter quotes this passage according to the LXX, with some improvements, and applies it expressly to Christ, "To whom coming," says he, "as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious, ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house. Wherefore, also, it is contained in the

Scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief corner-stone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.” 1 Peter ii. 4, 6. Taking the passage in this evangelical sense, the general meaning is to this purpose:—The Lord Jesus is represented as a tried, precious, and sure foundation, laid in Zion, that is, in the church, for the sons of men to build their hopes upon. His church thus built on him, is compared to a stately, regular, and impregnable temple, consecrated to the service of God, to offer up spiritual sacrifices; and proof against all the storms and tempests that may beat upon it. It shall stand firm and immoveable through all eternity, for its foundation is sure.

But, alas! though Jesus Christ be the only foundation, yet the sons of men are so full of themselves, that they venture to build their hopes upon something else, and promise themselves safety, though they reject this sure foundation. They think themselves as secure as if they had entered into a treaty with death and the grave, and brought them over to their interest.

But, lo! the wrath of God will at last beat upon a guilty world, like a storm of hail, or break in upon it like an overwhelming torrent; then every soul that is not built upon this rock must be swept away, and all the other refuges and hiding-places shall be laid in ruins for ever.

The great God will also strictly inquire who is founded upon this rock, and who not. He will critically try the temple of his church, like a workman, with line and plum met; he will discover all irregularities and useless appendages. And in consequence of this examination, the storms and torrents of divine indignation shall sweep away and overwhelm all that are not built upon this foundation, and that are not compacted⁵ into this building.

These remarks contain the general meaning of our text but it is necessary I should be more particular.

Brethren, our nature, our circumstances, and the important prospects before us, are such, that it is high time for us to look about us for some sure foundation upon which to build our happiness. The fabric must endure long, for our souls will exist for ever; and their eagerness for happiness will continue vehement for ever. The fabric must rise high, for the capacities of our souls will perpetually expand and enlarge; and a low happiness of a vulgar size will not be equal to them. The fabric must be strong and impregnable, proof against all the storms that may beat upon it; for many are the storms that will rise upon us, upon our country, and upon this guilty world in general. Losses, bereavements, sicknesses, and a thousand calamities that I cannot name, may yet try us. The enemy is now breaking in like a flood upon our country, and we and our earthly all are in danger of being overwhelmed. Death will certainly attack us all; and that must be a strong building indeed which the king of terrors will not be able to demolish. Besides, when all the purposes of divine love in our world shall be accomplished, an almighty tempest of divine indignation shall break upon it, and sweep away all that it contains; and blend cities, kingdoms, plains and mountains, seas and dry land, kings and beggars, in one vast heap of promiscuous ruin. Or, to shift the metaphor according to the emphatical variety in my text, the fiery deluge of divine vengeance, which has been gathering and swelling for thousands of years, but has been, as it were, restrained and kept within bounds by divine patience, shall then rise so high as to burst through all restraints, and overwhelm the guilty globe, and turn it into an universal ocean of liquid fire. This resistless torrent shall sweep away all the refuges of lies, and them that trusted in them, into the gulf of

remediless destruction. We, my brethren, shall be concerned in this universal catastrophe of nature; and where shall we find a support to bear us up in this tremendous day? Where shall we find a rock to build upon, that we may be able to stand the shock, and remain safe and unmoved in the wreck of dissolving worlds? What can support the fabric when this vast machine of nature, formed with so much skill and strength by the hands of a divine Architect, shall be broken up and fall to pieces? Now is the time for us to look out; it will be too late when all created supports are swept away, and this solid globe itself is dissolved beneath our feet into a sea of fire. Now, now is the time for you to provide. And where will you look? whither will you turn? This earth, and all its riches, honours, and pleasures, will prove but a quicksand in that day. Your friends and relations, were they ever so great or powerful, can then afford you no support. If they can but find refuge for themselves, that will be all; therefore bethink yourselves once more; where shall you find a rock on which you may build a happiness that will stand the shock in that day?

If you are anxious and perplexed, I need only point you to my text for relief. "Behold," says the Lord God, behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation; he that believeth shall not make haste." Let me expatiate a little upon the properties of this foundation.

1. It is a stone; a stone for solidity, stability, and durability. "Every thing else," says the charming Hervey,² "is sliding sand, is yielding air, is a breaking bubble. Wealth will prove a vain shadow, honour an empty breath, pleasure a delusory dream, our own righteousness a spider's web. If on these we rely, disappointment must ensue, and shame be inevitable. Nothing but Christ, nothing but Christ, can stably support our spiritual interests, and realize our expectations of the true happiness." And blessed be God! he is sufficient for this purpose. Is a stone firm and solid? so is Jesus Christ. His power is almighty, able to support the meanest of his people that build their hope upon him, and render them proof against all the attacks of earth and hell. His righteousness is infinitely perfect, equal to the highest demands of the divine law, and therefore a firm, immovable ground of trust. We may safely venture the weight of our eternal all upon this rock: it will stand for ever, without giving way under the heaviest pressure; without being broken by the most violent shock. Let thousands, let millions, with all the mountainous weight of guilt upon them, build upon this foundation, and they shall never be moved. Is a stone durable and lasting? so is Jesus Christ; the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. His righteousness is an everlasting righteousness, his strength an everlasting strength, and himself the everlasting Father. He liveth for ever to make intercession for his people, and therefore he is able to save to the uttermost, to the uttermost point of duration, all that come unto God by him. Here is a stone that can never moulder away by the waste of all-consuming time. Parian marble, and even the flinty rocks decay; the firm foundations, the stately columns, the majestic buildings of Nineveh, Babylon, and Persepolis, and all the magnificent structures of antiquity, though formed of the most durable stone, and promising immortality, are now shattered into ten thousand fragments, or lying in ruinous heaps. But here is a foundation for immortal souls, immortal as themselves; a foundation that now stands as firm under Adam, Abel, and Abraham, as the first moment they ventured their depend-

ence upon it; a foundation that will remain the same to all eternity. Therefore it deserves the next character given to it, namely—

2. *A tried stone.* “Tried,” says the same fine writer, “in the days of his humanity by all the vehemence of temptations, and all the weight of afflictions; yet, like gold from the furnace, rendered more shining and illustrious by the fiery scrutiny.” His obedience was tried; and it appeared upon trial that it was perfect and universal. His meekness was tried, by the abusive treatment he met with from men. His patience and resignation to the divine will was tried, when the bitter cup of the wrath of God was put into his hand, and when the absence of his Father extorted that bitter cry from him, *My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?* Matt. xxvii. 46. His love to his Father, and his zeal for his honour, were tried, and they were found an unquenchable flame, that glowed without once languishing through the whole of his life. His love to men—to sinners—to enemies, was tried: tried to the uttermost: it was put to the trial, whether his own life or theirs was most dear to him; whether he would rather see his enemies perish by the sword of justice, or that himself should feel the agonies of a cross. This was a trial indeed; and you know how it issued. The severity of the trial did but render his love to us the more illustrious. In short, this stone was thoroughly tried by God and man, and it still remained firm without a flaw.

Jesus has also been tried under the capacity of a Saviour, by millions and millions of depraved, wretched, ruined creatures, who have always found him perfectly able, and as perfectly willing to expiate the most enormous guilt; to deliver from the most inveterate corruptions; and to *save to the very uttermost all that come unto God through him.* Ten thousand times ten thousand have built their hopes upon this stone, and it has never failed so much as one of them. Manasseh and Paul, that had been bloody persecutors, Mary Magdalen, that had been possessed of seven devils, and thousands more that were sinners of the most atrocious characters, have ventured upon this rock with all their load of sin upon them, and found it able to sustain them. This stone is the foundation of that living temple, the church, which has been now building for near six thousand years, and the top of which already reaches the highest heaven. All the millions of saints from Adam to this day, both those in heaven and those on earth, are living stones built upon this foundation-stone; this supports the weight of all. And this trial may encourage all others to build upon it; for it appears sufficient to bear them all.

But I must farther observe, that a new translation of this sentence, still nearer to the original, will give a new and important view of the sense of it. Instead of a *tried stone*, it may be rendered, “a stone of trial;” or, “a trying stone;” that is, this is the true touch-stone of men’s characters. It is this that, above all other things, discovers what they really are, whether good or bad men, whether heirs of heaven or hell. Only propose Jesus Christ to them as a Saviour, and according as they receive or reject him, you may know their true character, and their everlasting doom. If with eager hearts they spring forward and embrace him as a Saviour, they are true subjects to the King of heaven; they give the highest, the last, the most decisive proof of their subjection to his authority. That men should submit to Jesus Christ as a Saviour, is not a single command of God, but it is the drift, the scope, the substance of the whole law and gospel; it is the grand capital precept; it is a kind of universal command that runs through all the dispensations of heaven towards the sons of men. And

therefore, while men refuse to submit to this command, they are guilty of a kind of universal disobedience; and it is in vain for them to pretend to have a real regard to God and his authority in any one instance whatsoever. If they obey God sincerely in falling in with this command, they will obey him in everything; but if they will not obey him in this, they will truly obey him in nothing. Hence it is that good works are the inseparable fruits of faith in Christ, and that unbelief is the root of all evil. Submission to Christ is also the most effectual trial, whether the corrupt dispositions of the heart, whether the innate enmity to God, pride, stubbornness, &c., be thoroughly subdued. If a man is once made so dutiful, so humble, so pliable, as to submit to this humbling, mortifying method of salvation through Jesus Christ, it shows that divine grace has got an entire victory over him, and that now the rebel is so subdued that he will be obedient in anything. There is nothing in the whole law or gospel to which the hearts of sinners are so averse, as this method of salvation; and therefore, when they are subdued. to this, and made willing captives of the cross of Christ, we may be sure they have surrendered themselves to universal obedience.

This text has made strange discoveries in the world in every age. This touch-stone has discovered many glittering virtues to be but dross. The pharisees and scribes had a high character among the Jews for piety, till this trying-stone was applied to them; and then it appeared what they were; and then it appeared they were the most inveterate enemies of God upon earth. These were the builders that rejected this stone, and would not build upon it. They rather chose to build upon the sandy foundation of their own righteousness. Nay, instead of making him the foundation of their hopes, they made him *a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence*, Rom. ix. 32, 33. 1 Pet. ii. 8, and they stumbled and fell into destruction. Christ crucified, says the apostle, *is to the Jews a stumbling-block*, 1 Cor. i. 23. This test made strange discoveries also in the heathen world. Many of the sages of Greece and Rome had a high reputation for wisdom and virtue; they gloried in it themselves, and they were admired and celebrated by the populace. But when this stone was pointed out to them as the only foundation of their hopes, they rejected it with proud disdain, and thought it much more safe to depend upon their own virtue and merit, than upon the virtue and merit of one that was crucified like a malefactor. And thus it appeared they were not truly good and virtuous. Let this touch-stone be applied likewise to the men of this generation, and it will discover a great many counterfeits. You will find some who have an amiable, ingratiating conduct, who are temperate, just, charitable, and shine with the appearance of many virtues. You will find others who are very punctual in the duties of religion; they are frequent in prayer, and strict attendants upon all the solemnities of divine worship; all this looks well. But tell them that all this is no sufficient ground for their hopes of the divine acceptance; nay, that they must renounce all this in point of dependence, as having no merit at all; and that they must, as helpless, guilty, self-condemned sinners, place their trust only in Jesus Christ; and they then begin to show their pride: then their hearts rise against this mortifying doctrine, and perhaps against him that inculcates it. They cannot bear that all their imaginary merit should have such contempt cast upon it. They will own indeed, as others around them do, that Christ is the only Saviour; but their real dependence is at bottom upon some supposed goodness in themselves. And thus they discover that all their righteousness is but the proud self-

righteousness of a Pharisee, or the self-confident virtue of a stoic philosopher, and not the humble religion or genuine sterling virtue of a true Christian. Thus the reception which men give to Jesus Christ is the grand criterion of their character. And this is agreeable to the prophecy of good old Simeon concerning him: *Behold this child, says he, is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel, and for a sign which shall be spoken against; that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.* Luke ii. 34, 35. The secret thoughts, reasonings,³ and dispositions of many hearts, that were before unsuspected, are revealed by this trial. And I wish it may not make very ungrateful discoveries among you.

As this is a trying stone with regard to men's present characters, so it will be also as to their final doom and everlasting state. All that are built upon this foundation, however frail and tottering in themselves, shall grow up into a glorious impregnable temple, and stand firm when the frame of nature is dissolved. But all that are not built upon this foundation, however strong or well established in their own conceit, or however high they raise the fabric of their hopes, shall be demolished and laid in ruins for ever. The one may be likened, says Christ, *unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock.* And the other may be likened *unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand and the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.* Matt. vii. 24, 27. What a confounding fall will this be to those that have built a towering Babel of hopes that reaches to heaven! But,

3. This is a precious stone. "More precious than rubies, (to borrow the words of Mr. Hervey,) the pearl of great price, and the desire of all nations." Precious with regard to the divine dignity of his person, and the unequalled excellency of his mediatorial offices. In these and in all respects greater than Jonah; wiser than Solomon; fairer than the children of men; chiefest among ten thousand; and, to the awakened sinner, or enlightened believer, altogether lovely."

He is precious in himself, as possessing all the fulness of the Godhead bodily, the sum total of all divine excellencies, and as clothed with all the virtues of a perfect man. In short, all moral excellency, divine and human, created and untreated, centre in him, and render him infinitely precious and valuable. He is precious to his Father; his *beloved Son, in whom he is well pleased*; his elect, in whom his soul delighteth. He is precious to angels; *Worthy is the Lamb that was slain*, is their eternal song. He is dear to all good men in all ages. *Unto you, therefore, which believe he is precious*, says St. Peter: 1 Peter ii. 7. How precious are his atoning blood and meritorious righteousness to the guilty, self-condemned soul! how precious is his sanctifying grace to the soul heavy-laden with sin, and groaning under that body of death! how precious the assistance of his almighty arm to his poor soldiers in the spiritual warfare! how precious the light of his instructions to the benighted, wandering mind; how sweet the words of his mouth; sweeter than honey from the honey-comb. How precious the "light of his smiling countenance, and the sensations of his love to the desponding, sinking soul! how precious that eternal salvation which he imparts! and how precious the price he paid for it! *Not corruptible things, such as silver and gold*, says St. Peter, *but his own precious blood*: 1

Peter i. 18, 19. In short, he is altogether lovely, altogether precious. Diamonds and pearls, and all the precious stones in the universe, cannot represent his worth. Oh that a thoughtless, world did but know how precious he is! Surely they would then say to his friends, *Whither is thy beloved gone, that we may seek him with thee?* I enlarge upon this article with the more pleasure, as I doubt not but the experience of several among you can affix your Amen to what I say, and to much more. I am now but complying with the request of one of my friends,⁴ at the distance of near four thousand miles, who writes to me thus:—"Dear sir, recommend him to poor sinners, recommend him to poor believers, as a most wonderful Saviour and Redeemer; abundantly able to deliver them from all that hell and sin can do to destroy them. Oh that his divine excellencies and worth could be set forth! Surely the most abandoned sinners would fall before him with ravishment and wonder." These are British sterling thoughts concerning this precious stone, my brethren, and I hope the same thoughts are to be found among you. Oh that they were universal among us, and among all the sons of men!

4. This stone is a sure foundation. "Such (says Mr. Hervey) as no pressure can shake; equal, more than equal to every weight; even to sin, the heaviest load in the world. The rock of ages, such as never has failed, never will fail those humble penitents who cast their burden upon the Lord Redeemer; who roll all their guilt, and fix their whole hopes upon this immovable basis." The foundation is sure, because it is of divine appointment. *Behold*, says the Lord God, who has authority to make the appointment, "behold I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation." It is also sure, because of the extent of his power, the perfection of his righteousness, and the eternity of his existence. But these I have already touched upon. Indeed, his excellencies are so sweetly blended and complicated, like the colours of the rainbow, that it is hard to describe one of them, without running into another.

The author, whom I have repeatedly quoted, thinks the words may be otherwise rendered: "A foundation! a foundation!" "There is," says he, "a fine spirit of vehemency in the sentence thus understood; it speaks the language of agreeable surprise and exultation, and expresses an important discovery. That which mankind infinitely want; that which multitudes seek, and find not; it is here! it is here! This, this is the foundation for their pardon, their peace, their eternal felicity."

5. This is a corner-stone. "It not only," says Mr. Hervey, "sustains, but unites the edifice; incorporating both Jews and Gentiles, believers of various languages and manifold denominations, here, in one harmonious bond of brotherly love; hereafter, in one common participation of eternal joy." To this purpose, and in this style, speaks the apostle: *He is our peace who hath made both*, that is, both Jews and Gentiles, *one*; one regular, compact, magnificent superstructure, "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom all the building fitly framed together, groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye [*Gentiles*] also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit:" Ephes. ii. 14, 20, 22. Materials for this sacred temple are collected from thrones and cottages, from bond and free, from Jews and Gentiles, from Europe, Asia, Africa, and America: but notwithstanding these distinctions,

they are all united in this cornerstone; all harmoniously compacted into one regular, magnificent temple, where the God of heaven delights to dwell.

Jesus Christ may also be called a corner-stone, to signify his peculiar importance in this spiritual building. Hence he is elsewhere repeatedly called the chief corner stone, and the head of the corner: Psal. cxviii. 22; Matt. xxi. 42; Mark xii. 10; Luke xx. 17; Acts iv. 11; 1 Peter ii. 7; Ephes. ii. 20. We are *built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets*, in a subordinate sense; but *Jesus Christ himself is the chief corner-stone*. He has the most important place in the building. It is he that holds up and connects all. Apostles, prophets, and all, are but sinking sand without him. Their righteousness, their strength, are nothing without him. On him all their doctrines depend, in him they all terminate, and from him “they derive all their efficacy. Take away this cornerstone, and immediately the saints in heaven fall from their throne; and the saints upon earth, that are gradually rising heavenward, sink for ever. Take away this corner-stone, and this glorious living temple, that has been building for so many ages, breaks to pieces, and covers heaven and earth with its ruins.

Having thus illustrated the particular properties of this stone, I shall take notice of this general property of it, that it is a foundation. So it is repeatedly called in my text, “It is laid in Zion as a foundation:” It is a sure foundation. It must be the foundation, and have the principal place in the spiritual building, or none at all. “No other foundation,” says St. Paul, “can any man lay, than that which is already laid, which is Jesus Christ.” And he must lie at the bottom of all, or the superstructure cannot stand. To join our own righteousness with his in our justification, is to form a foundation of solid stone, and hay, straw, and stubble, blended together. To make our own merit the ground of our claim to his righteousness; that is, to hope that God will save us for Christ’s sake, because we are so good as to deserve some favour at least for our own sakes, that is to lay a foundation of stone upon a quicksand. The stone would have stood, had it been in its proper place, that is, at the bottom of all; but when it is founded upon the sand, it must give way, and all the superstructure must fall. This is the grand fundamental mistake of multitudes in the Christian world. They all own Christ is the only Saviour; but then the ground of their expecting salvation through him, is not his righteousness, but their own. Their own worthless works, which their ignorance and vanity call good, lie at the bottom of all their hopes, as the first foundation; and Christ’s righteousness is rather part of the superstructure, than the entire foundation. This is *the refuge of lies*, the delusive hiding-place which multitudes are building all their lives with a great deal of pains, and, when they think themselves provided with a strong everlasting mansion, suddenly they feel themselves swept away into destruction by the overwhelming torrent of divine indignation.

Here, brethren, let us pause a while, and turn our attention to a question that I hope you have anticipated—“Am I a living stone built upon this foundation? Are all my hopes of acceptance with God and eternal happiness founded upon this rock?” Are you not desirous to make this important discovery? To make it now while you have time? If you have made a mistake, to correct it, by pulling down the old building, and beginning a new one on the right foundation? Have you no anxiety about this? If not, I must tell you, you care not for the God that made you, or the Saviour that bought you with his blood: heaven and hell are but trifles to you, and you are indifferent which should be your eternal lot. You have not the sensibility of a man, with regard to pleasure

and pain, but the stupidity of a brute, or rather of a senseless stone. And if you continue thus stupidly careless about eternal things, you shall for ever be cut off from the rewards of pious diligence, and feel the dreadful doom of the slothful servant. Brethren, can you be indifferent in a matter of such infinite consequence? Let me remind you, that a dreadful hurricane is gathering over this guilty world, which will burst upon you, and sweep you away, unless you be founded upon the rock of ages. Think of the last part of my text: *the hail shall sweep away the refuge, or hope of lies, the waters shall overflow the hiding place.* You may be parts of the outward court of this spiritual building; I mean, you may be members of the visible church; but that is only a scaffold to the sacred temple, and when this is finished, that shall be pulled down. Remember, this building will be critically inspected: the great Architect “will lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet;” and if you do not stand that test, you will be demolished, as useless appendages or incumbrances, and you never can be built up again; the temple of God will then be complete, and no new stones shall be added to it for ever. Therefore now is the time to discover fundamental errors, and correct them. Discover them you can and will in the eternal world: but oh! it will then be too late to correct them. Would you, then, know whether you are really built upon this sure foundation? If so, I shall willingly assist you to make the trial. And for this purpose I solemnly propose a few questions to your consciences in the sight of God.

1. Have you ever seen the utter insufficiency of every other foundation? You will never build upon Christ, while you can build any where else with hopes of safety. If you have ever fled to him as a hiding-place, you have seen it was your last refuge. And have all your false hopes, all your refuges of lies been swept away? Have you seen that honours, riches, pleasures, and all the world were but breaking bubbles? Have you been sensible that your own righteousness was a rotten foundation, and that you were just ready to sink every moment under the burden of your sins, and to be swept away by the torrent of divine vengeance? Like a sinking man, you have been ready to catch at every twig or straw for support; but were you obliged at length with Peter to turn to Christ, and cry out, *Help, Lord, I perish?* Have you let go every other hold, and taken fast hold of him as the only support? Have you given up all other grounds of hope, and as poor, guilty, perishing, helpless creatures, placed your whole dependence upon this foundation? If you can honestly give a satisfactory answer to these inquiries, it looks encouraging: but if not, you may be sure you are building upon some sandy foundation; you are lurking in some refuge of lies, and must be overwhelmed at last in inevitable ruin.

2. Have you ever been sensible of the preciousness, the excellency, and the stability of this divine foundation? If you have ever built upon Christ, it has been at once an act of the last necessity, and of the most free choice. Oh! how precious did this stone appear to you! like the loadstone, it had a strong attraction upon you, and you were effectually drawn to it. You need go no farther than your own hearts to find the truth of what I have said of the preciousness of Christ; the preciousness of his strength, his righteousness, and every thing in him. *To you that believe he is precious.* 1 Pet. ii. 7. This is the assertion of an apostle concerning all believers, without exception. And shall I conclude this is the real sentiment of this assembly concerning Christ? Shall I conclude it, brethren? Oh shall I allow myself to be so happy? Does your conscience tell

you there is ground for your saying that Christ is precious to you? Alas! is it not quite the reverse with many of you?

3. Where is your habitual dependence? Is it upon Jesus Christ alone? or is it upon something else? Do you not feel the need of strength, of spiritual life, of pardon, and righteousness, and eternal life? Certainly, if you know yourselves, you feel the need of these things. And upon whom do you depend for them? Is it upon Jesus Christ alone? Is it habitual, and, as it were, natural to you, since you first ventured upon this foundation, to rest there, sensible that you have always needed this support, and that every other foundation is but sinking sand? Brethren, what does conscience reply to these questions?

4. Have you been formed into proper stones for this spiritual temple? Has God hewn you, may I so speak, by his word, and broken off whatever was rugged, irregular, and unfit to be compacted into the building? Has he shaped and polished your souls for a place in it? Do you feel this divine Architect daily carrying on this work in you, polishing you more and more into a resemblance to Christ? Or are you still the same rough, irregular unpolished pieces, with human nature unsanctified in its present degenerate state? Then you may be sure you are not built upon this foundation.

I think I may pronounce these few queries fully decisive in this case. And what discoveries do they now make among you? Where, now, appears to be the foundation of your hope? Have not some of you rejected the chief cornerstone which God has appointed, and built upon a quicksand? If so, even a friendly tongue cannot but denounce some terrible things to you.

While you are not founded upon Christ, you shall, you must, unavoidably sink for ever. There is nothing that can support you. Build your hopes ever so high, the fabric will fall, and bury you in its ruins. Nay, this only foundation of hope and happiness will be to you a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence, the occasion of your more aggravated guilt, and more dreadful destruction. There are a few texts of Scripture which I would ring like peals of alarming thunder in your ears. The same Lord of hosts who shall be for a sanctuary to his people, "shall be for a stone of stumbling and for a rock of offence, for a gin and for a snare; and many shall stumble and fall, and be broken, and be snared, and be taken." Isa. viii. 14. "Unto you which believe," says St. Peter, "he is precious; but a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to them which stumble at the word." 1 Pet. ii. 7, 8. If this stone be not made by you the foundation of your hopes, it will fall upon you and crush you in pieces. Remember the declaration of Christ himself, "Whosoever shall fall upon this stone shall be broken;" that is, whosoever shall reject him while in an humble form in the days of his flesh, shall perish, "but on whomsoever this stone shall fall, it shall grind him to powder;" that is, whosoever shall reject him in his state of exaltation, shall perish in a still more dreadful manner. And will not all these alarming considerations have a weight with you, to persuade you to make him your only foundation?

If you have already made him so, then be assured you are safe and immovable for ever. Let storms of private or public calamity rise and beat upon you; let your fears and doubts rise to ever so high a deluge; let temptations make ever so severe attacks upon you, still the foundation on which you stand abides firm and unshaken. Nay, let all nature go to wreck, and seas and land, and heaven and earth, be blended together, still this foundation stands firm, and the living temple built upon it will remain immovable for ever. You that believe

need not make haste, you need not be struck with consternation upon the appearance of danger, nor fly to unlawful means of deliverance; your all is safe, and therefore “you may be serene and calm. Is the burthen of guilt intolerable, and are you ready to sink under it? Or are you sinking under a load of sorrow? Whatever be the burden, cast it upon the Lord, and he will sustain you. This foundation is able to bear you up, however great the pressure. Come, ye that are weary and heavy-laden, come, and build your hopes, and place your rest here. Oh! what joyful tidings are these! I hope they will prove a word in season to some soul that is weary.

What now remains, but that I should more explicitly point out this precious stone to you all, by illustrating the emphatical word *behold*, prefixed to the text.

Behold, ye poor sinking souls, behold with wonder and gratitude: here is a sure foundation for you; cast your whole weight, venture your eternal all upon it, and it will support you. Say no more, “Alas! I must sink for ever under this mountain of guilt;” but turn to Jesus, with sinking Peter, and cry, *Help, Lord, I perish*; and he will bear you up. Yes, whatever storms may blow, whatever convulsions may shake the world, you are safe.

Behold, ye joyful believers. See here the foundation of all your joys and hopes. Do you not stand firm like Mount Zion? See, here is the rock that supports you. Gratefully acknowledge it, and inscribe this precious stone with your praises. Point it out to others as the only ground of hope for perishing souls.

Behold, ye wretched, self-righteous Pharisees, the only rock on which you must build if you expect to stand. Your proud, self-confident virtue, your boasted philosophical morality, is but a loose, tottering foundation. Virtue and morality are necessary to complete and adorn the superstructure; but when they are laid at the bottom of all, they will prove but a quicksand.

Behold, ye despisers, and wonder and perish! perish you must, if you set at naught this precious stone. To you this only foundation is like to prove a *stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence*. To you the nature of things is inverted; the only ground of hope will heighten your despair; and the Saviour of men will be your destroyer.

Behold, ye glorious angels, behold the firm foundation divine love has laid for the salvation of guilty worms. It is as firm as that on which you stand. Are the affairs of mortals beneath your notice? No, we are concerned with Jesus too who is your Head; and our connection with him must give us an importance in your view. Therefore join with us in celebrating the praises of this foundation. This precious stone appears to you in all its splendours; its brilliancy dazzles your admiring eyes. We also admire it as far as we know it; but to us it is like a foundation laid deep under ground, that supports us though we see it not. When shall we be placed in your advantageous situation, the heights of the heavenly Zion, where it will appear full to our view, and be the object of our delightful contemplation for ever and ever?

FOOTNOTES

1 This sermon is dated Hanover, February 13, 1757.

2 Theron and Aspasia, Vol. II. p. 361, &c.

3 *διαλογοισμοι.*

4 Mr. Benjamin Forfitt, of London.

5 See the original word, *συναρμολογουμενη.*

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