

## **Our Solid Foundation**

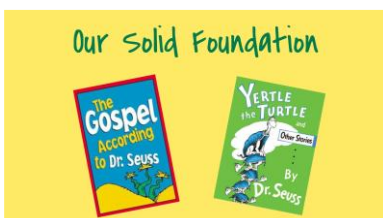
June 15, 2025

### Matthew 7:24-27

<sup>24</sup> “Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. <sup>25</sup> The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn’t fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. <sup>26</sup> But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn’t put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. <sup>27</sup> The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed.”

### Matthew 5:1-12

<sup>1</sup> Now when Jesus saw the crowds, he went up a mountain. He sat down and his disciples came to him. <sup>2</sup> He taught them, saying: <sup>3</sup> Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs. <sup>4</sup> Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad. <sup>5</sup> Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth. <sup>6</sup> Happy are people who are hungry and thirsty for righteousness, because they will be fed until they are full. <sup>7</sup> Happy are people who show mercy, because they will receive mercy. <sup>8</sup> Happy are people who have pure hearts, because they will see God. <sup>9</sup> Happy are people who make peace, because they will be called God’s children. <sup>10</sup> Happy are people whose lives are harassed because they are righteous, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs. <sup>11</sup> Happy are you when people insult you and harass you and speak all kinds of bad and false things about you, all because of me. <sup>12</sup> Be full of joy and be glad, because you have a great reward in heaven. In the same way, people harassed the prophets who came before you.



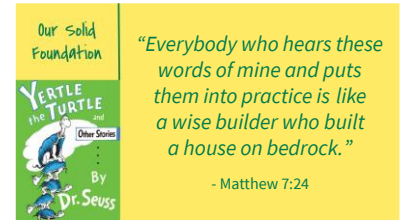
*Yertle the Turtle* is the story of a turtle who got the idea that he was king of all he could see. The problem was, he couldn’t see very far.

His 'throne' was just a stone in the middle of a small pond. So, Yertle decided to build a taller throne. Being the self-proclaimed king of the pond, he ordered nine turtles to climb one on top of another. Yertle climbed up to the top. One would think he was satisfied. Atop the tower he could see for almost a mile. Yertle was "now the ruler not just of his little pond, but also of a cow, a mule, a house, a blueberry bush, and a cat" (page 9.) But instead of being more content, Yertle was less content. You see, the more he could see, the more he wanted to see. So, Yertle ordered more and more turtles to stack themselves up for him.

Perhaps you were like I was on Monday when I read this book today as I told the story during the Kids' Message. Perhaps you too thought of people you knew who climbed on top of or over others, one after another, in order to get to the top. Perhaps you too thought of people who look down on others or just see others as a means to get what they want. Yertle was driven by greed and selfishness, by the desire for more and more – more power, more control, more to reign over. This, my friends, remains the way of the world. This, my friends, is not the way of Jesus. As we prepare to dive into the way of Jesus, we turn to Matthew 7. As we do so, let us pray...

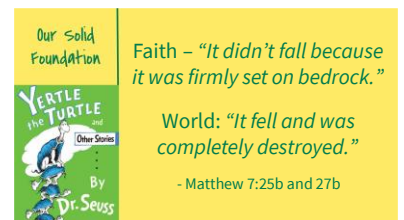
The way of Jesus, the rock upon which we build, is the focus of Matthew 7:24-27. In this week's children's book, we were reminded of the results of building on an unstable base. Yertle built upon a teetering, shifting, temporary base. It was all good and dandy until it wasn't. Every day we have a decision to make: What will we build our lives upon? Put another way: What will be the foundation for our lives? We can choose to build upon greed and selfishness and other matters of this world. We can be inwardly focused, ignoring the need that surrounds us. Or we can build upon the teachings and example that we find in the scriptures. We can build upon the values and traits put forth in God's word.

In verse 24 we read, *“Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock.”* When we read or hear the Word proclaimed and when we obey or remain committed to the teachings and ways of Christ,

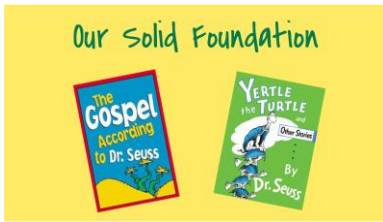


then we are building a solid foundation. The other choice, as Jesus lays out, is to build like a *“fool,”* to build upon the proverbial sand. People who choose to ignore or not follow Jesus’ words are the people building on their own values and on the values of the world. When we choose to build our lives upon these temporal values, we are at risk of being toppled over.

In the next verses we come to understand the outcome of our choices – of choosing Jesus or the world. In verse 25 we read, *“The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house.”* In this life, this certainly will happen. Our faith, our finances, our relationships, our health, our jobs, our communities, our churches – all will experience times when the rain falls, when the floods come, when the wind blows. These things do “beat” against our figurative houses. The outcomes of these storms are correlated to the foundation upon which we build. Here is the correlation: Faith – *“It didn’t fall because it was firmly set on bedrock.”* World: *“It fell and was completely destroyed.”*



The question is this: Which foundation do we choose to build our spiritual houses upon? If we choose to build upon the rock, on Jesus Christ, then even the wildest, fiercest storms can be weathered. It will not be without struggle, prayer, and effort on our part. But with Christ as our foundation, our faith and our values will survive these storms. If, however, we choose to build upon the things of this world – wealth, power, status, popularity... - then we are ever at risk of being toppled, even in the midst of the mildest of storms.

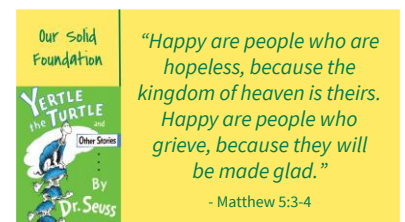


So, the question then becomes, ‘How do we build upon a solid foundation?’ To begin to answer that question, let us turn to Matthew 5. Chapter 5, verses 1-12, contains the Beatitudes – the rocks or firm foundation upon which to build our faith houses. Our two readings for today come from the end and the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount. As a whole, these three chapters fully answer the question of how to build upon and how to sustain a firm foundation of faith, rooted in Christ.

As chapter 5 begins we see that a crowd is gathered. Jesus heads up the mountain to create a natural amphitheater from which to teach the crowd. In verses 3-12 we find the “*Happy are...*” or the “*Blessed are...*” statements, depending on your preferred translation. In these statements, Jesus is laying out a description of what it looks like to follow him. These statements describe who or what we are to be in God’s family. On the surface, some do not look like things that would make us happy or feel blessed. But as one delves deeper into these statements, they all lead to the building of our solid foundation upon the rock that is Jesus Christ. They all lead to understanding how God wishes to see us as followers of Jesus.

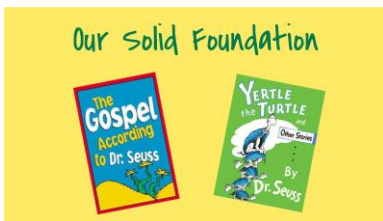
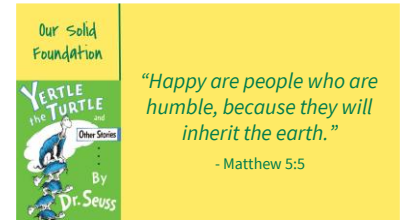
The first two Beatitudes fall into what I’m calling the “what?” then “oh yes!” category. Here are the first two: “*Happy are people who are hopeless, because the kingdom of heaven is theirs. Happy are people who grieve, because they will be made glad.*” Our “what?” comes on the surface level as we wonder who could be happy or blessed when they are

hopeless or grieving. We find the “oh yes!” in the ‘because...’ parts of these statements. When we are hopeless or grieving and we turn to God instead of to self, then we experience God’s presence, God’s hope, God’s comfort because we’re rooting our lives in Christ.



Turning to the next Beatitude, we read, *“Happy are people who are humble, because they will inherit the earth.”* Some translations read “meek” instead of “humble.” In the Biblical sense, to be meek or humble meant to see ourselves honestly, as we truly are, as

being no better or worse than we are. From this place of humility, we keep a great perspective on who we are in God’s family and on how God sees us within that family. From this perspective and from this place of understanding, we can easily grasp the “what?” (being humble) and we grasp the “oh yes!” (our eternal inheritance in heaven.)



To illustrate who we are in God’s eyes, we turn to our *Gospel According to Dr. Seuss* book. James Kemp recalls a children’s story that helps us understand who we are and who everyone else is in

God’s eyes. Reading this extended passage from pages 10 and 11: “This brings to mind another children’s story, a story about a land where everybody, including the butcher, the baker, and the candlestick maker, wore a crown. One day a traveler came into this country. This traveler was a photographer who made his living by taking pictures of the royal families. He would take his camera into a country and take a picture of everyone wearing crowns. Then he would put them in an album and sell them to the king of the country for a healthy price.

The traveling photographer set up his camera and started taking pictures in the land where everyone wore a crown. Person after person — man, woman, and child — walked by and, since they all wore crowns, the photographer snapped his camera for everyone. He was busy all day and on into the night. “How could it be?” he wondered. “How could so many people be part of the royal family?”

And so he began asking questions. “Excuse me, Mister Butcher-with-the-Crown. What relation do you have to the king?” “I’m one of his children,” the butcher replied, “so I guess I am a prince.”

The photographer asked the baker, “Excuse me, ma’am. How are you related to the king?” She answered, “I’m one of his children, a princess.” In fact, everyone he met was either a prince or a princess (or at least they claimed to be).

Finally, he had used up all his film, so he headed to the castle with an album full of photos. He knocked at the door, only to be greeted by another man wearing a large crown. “You must be the king,” the photographer said. “No, I am one of the king’s helpers. I’m also a prince.”

“Another prince!” The photographer was amazed. “Tell me, prince, how can there be so many crowns? How can everybody be a prince or a princess? Doesn’t it make the king quite mad that everyone is wearing a crown?”

“Mister Photographer,” the king’s helper replied, “there is a crown here for you, too, if you want it. The king issued a royal decree that everyone who enters this land becomes a member of his family. Everyone here is allowed to wear a crown. Everyone here is a prince or princess. But there is one rule in order to wear a crown: we must remember that he is the king. Here’s some more film. Take everybody’s picture. We all belong to the king’s family!”

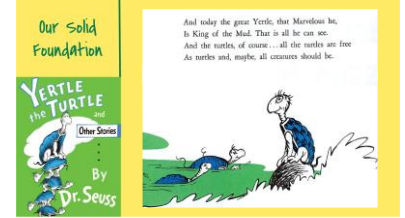
The lesson here for all of us is that meekness helps us to understand accurately our identity as human beings. This means recognizing that God calls all of us to be God's children. We are all princes and princesses in the kingdom of God. But we must always remember that God is the King. Meekness or humility leads us to always remember that God is the head of the royal family. Remembering that God is king reminds us that we are called to live a life that obeys and follows the king's good and perfect will.

The act of living a life that is pleasing to God should be the most important thing in our lives. Pushing on just past today's Matthew 5 passage, we are reminded that we are to be the salt and the light of the world. At its most basic sense, we are salt and light when we choose to love God and to love neighbor. This is obeying God's commands. This is living a life that is pleasing to God. Shining the light and being salt involves sharing Jesus and his teachings and ways with others. We share best by modeling who and what Jesus was, by allowing Jesus to always be the king of our hearts.



Returning to our Dr. Seuss story, *Yertle the Turtle*, we see that Yertle did not let his light shine very brightly. His light only shone on himself. Yertle was not salt either. He only cared about himself, his wants, his needs. He did not bring anything to those around him. Yertle did just the opposite: he only took from the other turtles. As the story unfolds, soon enough the plain little turtle on the bottom – Mack – decided he'd had enough. Mack had lifted up a meager protest. His back and knees and shoulders were sore. After more and more turtles perched on Mack, he finally let out a little burp. But the burp reverberated up the stack, shaking it and ultimately bringing it down. Poor Yertle ended up face-first in the mud.

On the last page of *Yertle the Turtle*, we read, “And today the great Yertle, that marvelous he, is King of the mud. That is all he can see. And the turtles, of course... all the turtles are free as turtles and, maybe, all creatures should be” (page 28.) Apologies to Dr. Seuss, but I believe that there is no ‘maybe’ in God’s kingdom.



The rock that you and I stand upon is Jesus Christ. We build upon our solid faith foundation by following his teachings and the example that he set as he lived on this earth. We build on this rock by remembering that we are all children of the great king, the Lord our God. We build not only our own foundation but others’ foundations as well by being light and love, by being caring instead of selfish, by being generous instead of greedy, by seeking justice instead of power, by being humble instead of arrogant. Following Jesus’ teachings and walking in his footsteps, may we lay a solid foundation for our faith. May it be so for you and for me. Alleluia and amen.

### **GPS - Grow, Pray, Study**

- 1) *Grow*. How can you be more intentional this week about choosing the practices or characteristics spelled out in the Beatitudes (Matthew 5:3-12)?
- 2) *Pray*. Where are you struggling to choose God’s ways versus the world’s ways? See what the Bible has to say about this topic/area and then take it to God in prayer.
- 3) *Study*. Read Matthew 5:43-48. How does practicing the “law of love” apply to the ways that we build our solid foundation in Christ?