

***“All I Want For Christmas”***  
*“The Gift of a Strong Foundation”*

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Key Text: Joshua 24:14-15

I can't think about what it means to have a solid foundation without thinking about a classic Children's story that I'm sure you've all heard and probably told countless times: the story of the three little pigs. Just in case it's been a while since you've heard the story, legend tells of three little pigs, who are being chased by a big bad wolf, who threatens the pigs! In an attempt at safety, the three pigs choose how to build homes that will keep them safe. The first pig quickly builds a house of straw, and then enjoys copious amounts of leisure time. The second pig spends a little more time on their house, building it out of sticks, but still has lots of down time. Needless to say, these two houses come crumbling down quickly at the first sign of the wolf! The third little pig is the wise pig, and this pig spends lots of time building a solid foundation of brick. This takes lots of time, and while the other pigs are having fun, this pig continues to build the solid house. However, in the end, when trouble strikes, it is only this third little pig's house that survives!

There are very few of us who will be put in this situation of having to build our own house, of fear of being eaten by a wolf – right? Maybe in the literal sense, but perhaps you can think of a real time in your own life where you've felt a real threat to your own foundation of sorts.

We're at week three of our advent series, called “All I Want for Christmas”. The last two weeks, we've talked about the gift of good news, and the gift of new understanding. Perhaps you've already picked up with where we are headed today, but we're talking about the gift of a strong foundation.

In our day and age, in this world in which we live, we have so many choices of things on which we can build our foundation. We can build our foundation on success, on wealth, on our jobs. We can build our foundation on who the world says we are, on what the world declares we should be. We can build our foundation on so many different earthly measures of happiness. And let's take a moment here to say that these are tempting – because it seems like these are good things, right? It seems like these things might make us happy.

But we know that's not the right answer, right? When we build on these things, we're like the little pigs building a house out of straw and sticks. As soon as something comes our way threatening our house, these foundations will crumble.

So what are the bricks? What is the only solid foundation we can build on? Christ.

Our scripture lesson for this morning comes from the book of Joshua. In the beginning of chapter 24, Joshua has gathered all of the tribes of Israel. When he has everyone gathered around him, he tells the story of God's faithfulness to the people. He reminds them of all of the things that God has done, and in doing so, reminds them of who and what their focus

should be. After this long discourse, after all of the listing and remembering and retelling, that's where our scripture for this morning comes in.

Our scripture, then, is a challenge in response to what Joshua has reminded the people. Our challenge is his way of saying "look, this is a reminder of who God is and what God has done. But now, the choice is yours. What do you want your foundation to be – God, or anything else?"

And something that's so important here is that the people can't pick both. They can't choose to live a life focused on God, and all of the other lowercase-g gods. And neither can we. Why is that? I read a book recently that I think talked about this really well. It's called "Essentialism: The Disciplined Pursuit of Less", by Greg McKeown, and it's incredible. In an early chapter, McKeown makes a case for only having a single priority.

He says "the word priority came into the English language in the 1400a. It was singular. It meant the very first or prior thing. It stayed singular for the next five hundred years. Only in the 1900s did we pluralize the term and start talking about priorities. Illogically, we reasoned that by changing the word we could bend reality. Somehow, we would be able to have multiple "first" things. People and companies try to do just that. One leader told me of his experience in a company that talked about five priorities, which gave the impression of many things being the priority, but in actuality, nothing was<sup>1</sup>."

He then goes on in the book to talk about the ways that trying to do all of the things all of the time leads to us doing everything less well. His point is simple: to do something well, all of the time and energy and focus must point back to one thing, to one single priority. And that's all.

For us, as Christians, this is the same point that Joshua is making. What is our priority? Is it Christ, or is it anything else? And, it can't be that it is Christ, and also something else. If that's the case, then it isn't Christ. We only get one foundation: we can't build our lives on Christ and wealth and success and happiness.

But there's good news here: today, on the third Sunday of advent, we lit a candle representing joy. And what's the good news in that, maybe you're wondering. Well, the good news is, when your foundation is built on Christ, joy is a natural outflow.

We live in a world though that gets happiness and joy confused. We sometimes use them interchangeably. We think that they're the same, and that we have a right to be happy. One time, I was having a conversation about these two things, happiness and joy, with my grandma. It was the Christmas season, much like we're in right now. She told me that happiness may be in the presents we give one another, or that we find under the tree, but that true joy is the people we spend our time with. And I just think that's beautiful. Happiness may come and go, but when we live our life centered on Christ, with Christ as our sole priority and solid foundation, we experience this true joy.

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<sup>1</sup> Essentialism, Greg McKeown, pg 16

As we all know, though, this doesn't mean that everything is always going to be easy and happy. But friends, joy is not a fleeting feeling like happiness. Joy instead is a choice. Each day, in whatever circumstances we find ourselves, when our foundation is in Christ, we have the option to choose Joy.

Maybe some of you have heard what we're talked about today, and have been thinking about your own foundation. Maybe it hasn't been built on Christ. Maybe in the story of the three little pigs, you resonate more with one who has a house built of straw or sticks than the solid rock of Christ. Friends, it's not too late. Each day, even each second of each day, we have a new opportunity to build our lives on Christ. Over and over and over again, we are given the opportunity to choose to accept this gift of a strong foundation. No matter what your foundation was when you walked through the doors this morning, it doesn't have to be the same when you walk out.

Just as Joshua says to the people in verse 15 "but if serving the Lord seems undesirable to you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" and that's true for us, right now, too. It's our call. It's both out CALLING to serve the Lord, and our call as to who we will serve. Just as Joshua ends it all by saying "as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord," I pray that you choose that, that you too choose the strong foundation.

Transition to prayer