

## Firm Foundations

1 Corinthians 15:1-11  
Matthew 7:24-27

A sailor meets a pirate in a bar, and talk turns to their adventures on the sea. The sailor notes that the pirate has a peg-leg, a hook, and an eye patch.

The sailor asks, "So, how did you end up with the peg-leg?" The pirate replies, "We were in a storm at sea, and I was swept overboard into a school of sharks. Just as my men were pulling me out, a shark bit my leg off."

"Wow!" said the sailor. "What about your hook?" "Well", replied the pirate, "We were boarding an enemy ship and were battling the other sailors with swords. One of the enemy cut my hand off."

"Incredible!" remarked the sailor. "How did you get the eye patch?" "A seagull dropping fell into my eye," replied the pirate.

"You lost your eye to a seagull dropping?," the sailor asked incredulously.

"Well," said the pirate, "it was my first day with my hook."

I might not have a hook, but I do have a license from the Bishop to be the Vicar here – and that is far more dangerous than a hook! I'm very conscious that one wrong move and I might have my eye out. Or rather, embarrass myself, or even worse, unwittingly offend someone else.

So to get ready – over the last few months, and indeed the last few years, I've been asking various ministers for their advice for a new vicar.

"Make 2 or 3 big changes in the honeymoon period."

"Don't make any big changes for the first year."

"First thing to do is make sure the services are okay."

"Forget the services, your priority is young people."

Where do I start with all that?

Essentially the question is: where should I stand my ground? What is the foundation for the decisions I need to make?

There will be many things in the life of this church that are good and need to continue. Some that need to change or end. How do I judge? When difficult decisions need to be made, where do I stand? What do I hold on to?

This passage from 1 Corinthians tells me to stand on the cross and resurrection of Jesus. My priority is to hold firmly to this message. At a training day I had back in March, the Archdeacon of Lichfield: Vicar is not primarily there to do fundraising, maintain a building, organise rotas. A vicar's priority is to keep the church faithful to the gospel. The gospel is the foundation. It's where I stand.

It's where all of us need to stand. Listen again to the apostle:

**1**Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. **2**By this gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain.

**3**For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance...

The good news of Jesus' death and resurrection is our sure foundation. It's the message we need to receive and take our stand. Hold firmly to it. It is of first importance.

I want to pick our three implications of this fact. If the good news is the foundation of my ministry, this church, our lives – what does it mean for our minds, our hands, and our hearts.

**First: Implication for mind.**

The gospel, the message of the cross and the empty tomb, needs to change our mind. I will grow as a Christian as my mind is transformed and my thinking shaped by Jesus.

As we make decisions in life, our thinking is based on certain assumptions. Our mind has a foundation. So, for example, someone's thinking might be based on the fact that they need more money. All their decisions revolve around that key truth. Or a church family might make all its decisions around, say, the desire to keep the building open.

The foundation for our mind must be Jesus Christ.

That's easy to say, but in practice, our foundation is often elsewhere.

[Pause]

In the parishes I've just come from, the church of All Saints stands in the village of Moddershall. It was built by the Wedgwood family in 1904. A lot of coal mining took place in that area and many buildings were badly affected by subsidence. Large cracks appeared in the walls of the church. Eventually, the Coal Board paid to have the whole church building taken down, stone-by-stone, a large concrete raft laid as a new foundation, then the church re-built on top.

The church building needed a new, secure foundation. A bad foundation will not keep a building safe when pressures and changes come.

The foundation for this church must be the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Please pray for me, the wardens, the PCC as we use our minds to think about what this means for all we do.

But all of us need to do this. Jesus' death and resurrection is a foundation, not simply for the religious part of your life. It is the foundation for everything.

It's Father's Day today. For many fathers it will be a day of cards from the children, booze from the supermarket and World Cup pint glasses, or World Cup boxer-shorts, or a World Cup toolset.

Fathering is under pressure. Cracks are appearing. Fathering needs a good foundation – fatherhood needs to be built on the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

So does your retirement. Your career. Your unemployment. Your leisure. Your marriage. Your child-raising.

The message of Jesus' death and resurrection is of first importance – for every part of life. We need to think about how we build every part of life on this good foundation. When the storms come, every part of our life needs to be built on rock, not sand.

That's the first implication: for your mind. Our thinking must be shaped and grounded on the good news of Jesus.

**Second: Implication for hand.**

The hand represents the work we do. Here I want to say a big thank you for those who have worked hard in the life of this church, especially over the last 2 ½ years of interregnum. I know it's been a

long time; I'm sure it's been discouraging at times. You've kept things going, dealt with the crisis of the theft of lead, organised weddings and funerals, and given me a great welcome this last Wednesday. Well done.

Well done to all of you. Well done to Brian and Malcolm in particular. You have carried a huge responsibility and I hope many people have expressed their thanks to you.

Here in 1 Corinthians 15, the verses we have had read are the start of a long chapter in which Paul persuades the Christians in Corinth about the reality of the resurrection. Not Jesus' resurrection – he assumes that, it's the foundation he builds on. He is trying to persuade this young church that, because Jesus died and rose again, so also THEY will die and rise again. They and we will be raised. On the day of Christ, at his return, when the archangel blows his trumpet – we will be raised, we will be changed, we will be given immortal bodies to enjoy life with God forever.

It's an amazing chapter. If Paul's writings are the Himalayas, maybe 1 Corinthians 15 is Mt Everest – the pinnacle. And the view from the top is amazing. Listen to how Paul ends:  
Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain.

See what he's saying? Because of the resurrection, your work for the Lord, your labour for Christ, is not in vain.

Think about it this way.

You've had endless paperwork to fill in. But eventually it will all crumble and turn to dust. Ultimately it's a waste of time, isn't it?

You've organised weddings, baptisms, funerals. But one day everyone who attended them will have died. When you're dead and your children are dead and their children have long been forgotten, all the hard work you've done – it's all in vain, isn't it?

No. No – gloriously no. Walls may crumble. Papers will fade. But everything you have done for the LORD will last forever. When you struggled on, kept things going – when you worked hard to serve the Lord Jesus and love his people – this will last forever! On the last day YOU will be resurrected, you will see the Lord, and all that you have done for him will go with you.

Have you seen the film *Gladiator*? Full of great lines. As Maximus prepares his cavalry for the attack on the barbarians, he says these words: “What you do in life echoes in eternity.”

He's right. Because of the resurrection – your labour for the LORD is not in vain. What you do in life echoes in eternity. So thank you for your hard work. Make sure you thank those who have served you.

Our foundation is the good news of Jesus Christ.  
Implication for the mind: we need to think about all of life and shape it around the cross and resurrection.  
Implication for the hand: your hard work has eternal value when done for the Lord.  
Finally, implication for the heart.

### **Third: Implication for heart.**

What is of first importance to you? What makes your heart sing?  
What do you daydream about?

It could be your children or grandchildren. And so your timetable revolves around them.

Freedom from debt and worries about money. And so you keep looking for a job.

Of first importance is this. “For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Peter and then to the Twelve.”

Why is this first importance?

Through the gospel of Jesus Christ we find eternal life.

Christ died for our sins. On the cross

- our sins are forgiven
- our guilt is washed away
- God's anger is turned back
- God's mercy is revealed

When Jesus rose again

- we are given new life in the Spirit
- we are adopted as God's beloved children
- we are given spiritual riches
- all our enemies are defeated

Through this good news, this message of salvation

- God is made our father
- Jesus is our brother
- heaven is made our future
- glory is our destination

- hell is trampled down
- hope is made certain

That is truth to warm the heart. That is why this is of first importance.

Friends, we have an adventure ahead of us. By God's grace, I pray that everything I do will be built on this foundation: that Jesus died and rose again. My prayer is that together:

- our minds will be transformed by this message
- our hands strengthened in God's service
- our hearts captured by the display of his love.

And so to Jesus be all the glory.