

# **Sermon: "Futuring on a Firm Foundation"**

By Dr. Donald. W. Haynes

Have you ever looked over the bank down into a rock quarry? One of my most vivid early childhood memories was my father's holding my hand as we peered over the precipice of a rock quarry about seven miles from my home farm. They were digging so deeply into the ground, that as we stood on the bank, the steam shovels at the bottom looked like toys. When I went to Duke Divinity School, I learned that all the rock used to build Duke University were dug from the same quarry over in Orange County. I also learned that geologists can trace a rock back to the quarry from which it was dug. Later in life, when I discovered in Isaiah 51 the words, "remember the quarry from which you were dug," I had a picture in my mind to go with God's word.

I love to ask people about their journey--where they "learned to talk," the kind of neighborhood they lived in during childhood. I like to ask where you believe your core values were embedded in your conscience. Certainly, our early childhood home life is a predominant shaping influence on our personality, our self esteem, and the way we react to challenges in life--to see them as something we can overcome or something from which we must shrink. Our DNA and early home life become the "quarry from which we were dug."

What influence did schoolteachers, pastors, and family members have--"on a scale of 1-10"? For me the 4-H Club and the high school agriculture teacher for "Future Farmers of America" had profound influences; they gave me a platform for public speaking that was the major boost in my self esteem. Then in my mid-teens a summer camp meeting imposed a holiness code on me. They insisted that dancing, movies, cardplaying, and holding hands with a girl were unacceptable!

The next impressionable influence on me was college. Most college graduates like their college faculty, the voices of academia. We admire them, we see them as authorities. They dominate the college culture. Those who teach us the courses in our major instill a belief system that is hard to shake. College culture is a major foundation for our developing philosophy of life, our politics, our morals and ethics, and our career ambitions. The faculty is a shaper of conscience. From the sexual revolution of the 1960's to the typical Christian family's acceptance of single young men and women living together, to the use of marijuana and beer as a refrigerator beverage, to alternate life styles and genders; seldom in world history has any culture changed its boundaries of right wrong more dramatically and more bloodlessly than the Christian church members of the late 20th and early 21st centuries.

**Getting the balance between living by law and living in grace is a difficult challenge. I am not here to lay down the law. However, we must as Christians turn to the Holy Spirit rather than the daily soaps or American Idol or Lady Gaga for the shaping of the quarried stone. We must lay a moral and ethical foundation of choices that will give us a maximum of good consequences and a minimum of sad consequences.**

In the scripture I read today, the children of Israel did not live in their homeland but in Babylonian exile. They were more disenchanting and frightened than we are today. Jerusalem had been leveled to the ground and the people had been force marched across the same desert some of you or your sons or grandsons fought to convert into a democracy a few years ago. They were exiled from Palestine to Mesopotamia, to the land between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers where Iraq is today'

**They had lost heart and were losing faith.** They were surrounded by the temptations of a pagan culture. Then God called a man whose name we do not know. He is called the "prophet of the exile." I challenge you to go home and **read Isaiah, Chapters 40-55.** The social and historical setting is different from chapters 1-39. Chapter 40 begins, "**Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people.**" These are words that captured the imagination of Handel when he wrote the oratorio *Messiah* with its mighty "Hallelujah Chorus."

In 40:10, we read encouraging words of the prophet to the enslaved people in exile, far from home with no hope of ever returning to their Holy Land. God is present with them. From this we can become convinced that God has not abandoned us, regardless of our situation right now:

**"Look!" he said, "Your God! Like a shepherd he will care for his flock, gathering the lambs in his arms, hugging them as he carries them, leading the nursing ewes to good pasture."**

Whatever the bad news tonight; however alone you might feel or however guilty, **that is the good news for all time.**

### **The Gospel Truth**

We cannot deny or overlook all the hate, neglect, abuse, addiction, racism, and other forms of sin right around us today in the workplace, where our kids go to school, and even in places of worship. **However, the condition of our culture in this present generation is not the quarry from which we were dug. The quarry from which we were dug is the narrative of the Bible.** The Bible is God's revealed message to humankind, and in a nutshell, it is this:

"I love you so much that your sins though your sins be as scarlet, they can be as white as snow. I remove them from you as far from you as the east is from the west. I have cast them into the depths of the sea. I remember your sins no more. You are forgiven. When

we take communion, the pastor says, "In the name of Jesus Christ, you are forgiven." And the congregation responds to the pastor who is also a sinner saved by grace, "IN the name of Jesus Christ, **YOU ARE FORGIVEN.**"

**Another important dimension of the message indigenous to the quarry from which we were dug is that the omnipotent, almighty God knows us by name and cares for us. Jesus spoke of Jesus knowing his sheep. We have a gospel hymn that has us sing, "His eye is on the sparrow, and I know he watches me."** When one of my friends, Wayne, was twelve years old, the pastor gave an altar call and only one little boy came forward to give himself to Christ and become a candidate for Confirmation. Some pastors would have said, "Wait until next year when we have enough to have a real class." Wayne's pastor told him that every Thursday when Wayne got off the school bus at the base of Pilot Mountain north of Winston Salem, he would be waiting for him. The two of them would sit at Wayne's kitchen table that his mother covered with a red and white checked cloth. Week after week after week the pastor drive to the Wayne's home and met with him. Wayne was discipled and ready to take the vows of church membership. Today he is pastor of a great church. **Was that one little boy worth a pastor's investment? This is a example of the importance of every individual and every human being in the sight of God whose name is "Heavenly Father."**

We are immersed in the culture of this present age, but our Christian faith is grounded in God and in the church as a caring community of sinners saved by grace; we are not grounded in this generation and tonight's news.

If you define the foundation for our future, remember the words of a great hymn:

"How firm a foundation ye saints of the Lord is laid for your faith in His excellent Word.  
What more can we say that to you we have said, to your who for refuge to Jesus have fled?  
Fear not I am with thee, O be not dismayed, for I am thy God and will still give thee aid.  
When through the deep waters I call thee to go, the rivers of woe shall not thee overflow;  
For I will be with thee, thy troubles to bless, and sanctify for thee thy deepest distress.  
When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie, my grace, all sufficient shall be thy supply;  
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.

The quarry from which we were dug teaches us to turn to God for our help because everything else in life changes like the moon. We read in Isaiah 51 the prophet's words,

*Lift up your eyes to the skies and look at the earth under your feet. The clouds will vanish like smoke and the earth will wear out like a garment and those who live on it will die like flies.*

Listen to the refrain that occurs twice in this chapter alone and dozens of places in scripture:

*MY salvation will be forever and my deliverance will never end. My salvation will be to all generations.*

We must lift our eyes beyond the horizons of our time and the broadcasts that we foolishly call "the news." Tune out and turn off the nightly news with its drumbeat about

a tenuous economy, volatile political scene, natural disasters, and global instability.

Read your Bible, not just the internet news or social media. Let us not lose our memory about the quarry from which we were dug. Yes, we are in this world, but no we are not **of** it! Follow the current news of today; but never forget that it will be old news next week. **The message from the quarry from which we were dug is the same yesterday, today and forever.** It is the same when we are young and when we are old. The man who wrote I, II, and III John in the New Testament was older than I am when he wrote,

*Children, do not fall in love with this present age--the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride of riches. This culture and its appeal will pass, but the Word of God will abide and God's kingdom will come and God's Will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Let us pray this way: "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in **me, in me.**"*

**Do you remember the quarry from which you were dug?** Why are you a Christian today? Who led you to Jesus? Some of us were the good kid or teenage "stone" to be shaped gradually and polished to become the Christian person we are today. On the other hand, some of you were thrown a lifeline of God's amazing grace **when you were drowning in a sea of sin.** This might be your story:

"I was sinking deep in sin, far from the peaceful shore, very deeply stained within, sinking to rise no more. When the Master of the Sea heard my despairing cry, from the waters lifted me; now safe am I. **Love lifted me, love lifted me. When nothing else could help, love lifted me!**

If we **remember the quarry from which we were dug, here will be our creed:**

Count your blessings, not your crosses; count your gains and not your losses,  
Count you joys instead of woes; count your friends instead of foes;  
Count your smiles instead of tears; count your courage, not your fears.  
Count full years instead of lean; count kind deeds instead of mean.  
Count your health instead of wealth; love your neighbor--that's God's will.

Remember: God's ways are not our ways. "This culture--the issues on tonight's news will pass. Hallelujah! Just as old Babylon and Rome and Nazi Germany passed off the stage of world history; so will pandemics, Hamas, Hezbollah, and global conflict. Some time, some day in the sweet by and by, the kingdoms of this world will become the kingdom of our Lord.

And **HE shall** reign forever and ever and every and ever as king of kings and Lord of lords, hallelujah, hallelujah, hallelujah. Amen.

*dhaynes11@triad.rr.com)*