

Victory Lutheran Church- Jacksonville, FL
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Worship Series: Victory Vision: Why Are We Here?
Service Theme: Coaching Christians for Life

Sermon Theme: What Foundation Are You Building On?
(November 20, 2022) Matthew 7:24-27

So, now what? Last Sunday, when we started our Victory Vision series, we discussed the first part of our purpose as a Christian congregation, and as individual Christians—**Winning Souls for Christ**, and how we need to intentionally do whatever we can to go and take the good news of Jesus to the world, seeking to lead every soul to faith in Jesus. But there's more to our purpose.

Because before Jesus ascended into Heaven, he didn't instruct his church, ***"Go and make disciples of all nations,"***...***"but once they're in, they're on their own."*** No, along with "making disciples of all nations," Jesus' marching orders for his church included, ***"Teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you."***

Our mission statement at Victory reflects that. Along with **Winning Souls for Christ**, our purpose includes **Coaching Christians for Life**. Not just helping bring people to faith, but helping people stay in the faith, by strengthening their faith through Word and Sacrament! This morning, Jesus tells us why that's such an important part of our purpose as he drives us to ask ourselves, **What Foundation Are You Building On?**

Jesus challenges us to do that introspection through a familiar, easily grasped parable. Jesus teaches, ***"Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and***

the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

If you saw some of the dramatic pictures or videos of beach houses worth millions helplessly collapsing into the ocean during Hurricanes Ian or Nicole, Jesus' imagery resonates. The foundation is incredibly important! There's a reason homeowners' insurance for beachfront property is astronomically higher than for a safe inland home. Because wind, waves, and erosion put a house "built on sand" at high risk of destruction. As fun as stepping out your back door onto sand and surf might be, easily shifting, easily washed away sand is an unstable foundation to build on.

But if you build on a foundation of solid rock, if the wind and the waves beat against your house, you might lose some shingles, but your house won't collapse, because it's standing on something solid, unshifting, and immovable.

That's true about home construction, but it's also true about spiritual construction. If we want to withstand the storms of life, we have to build our lives on a solid foundation! But what exactly is that? Jesus explains, ***"Therefore, anyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock."*** Faith that trusts in Jesus and lives according to God's Word, is the rock-solid foundation for life and eternity! That's why part of our mission is ***"Coaching Christians for Life."***

That's interesting terminology, isn't it? Coaching? When we think of coaches, we probably picture gym class, whistles, and bleachers more than Bible study, crosses, and pews. But the purpose of a coach is to impart knowledge and wisdom, teaching and training their team and players to grow-- getting better, stronger, and smarter to understand and perform what's necessary for victory.

That's why it's fitting to say that one of the purposes of our church is "coaching" Christians. God's church functions to impart spiritual knowledge and wisdom, teaching and training Christians in the pursuit of spiritual growth! Not with sprints, playbooks, or dumbbells, but

with God's Word and Sacraments! The church coaches Christians through corporate Bible Study and Sunday School; by encouraging personal and family devotion time; and through Word and Sacraments proclaimed and administered in public worship!

As our mission statement conveys, this Christian coaching is ***“for life.”*** That's true in two ways. First, the church teaches and trains God's people to equip them with spiritual wisdom for life in this world. As Paul wrote to Timothy, ***“All Scripture is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”***

And our purpose as a church is to coach Christians “for life,” as in, throughout the Christian's whole life—from hospital-bed baptisms of newborns, to death-bed devotions with octogenarians, and everything in between. Spiritual growth is a lifelong process! Not something you did when you were a kid in Catechism class, but no longer. Nor something you'll do later in life once you retire, but not right now. Spiritual growth is for life.

Time to analyze. How are we carrying out our purpose at Victory? Every week, we gather around Word, Sacrament, and song in worship, focusing and grounding our hearts on the Gospel and the rock-solid foundation of God's Word, and equipping us to live our lives on that foundation during the week. We lead an expanding preschool through which we teach little souls to grow mentally, but especially spiritually. Every week, we offer multiple group Bible study opportunities for Christians of all ages—from Sunday School, to Catechism instruction, to adult Bible studies at church, or small group studies in people's homes. We just finished a 90-day Bible reading plan to get us into the habit of reading our Bibles every day.

And we're calling for a staff minister so we can carry out that purpose even better! Looking to expand into more youth, teen, and college campus ministry, so we can better coach these young Christians during really pivotal points of their spiritual lives. We're looking to offer even more Bible study options—men's studies, women's studies, and to

start more Life Groups! All so we can better coach Christians for life from the playbook of God's Word!

But are you un-coachable? Occasionally, sports teams will trade their best player, because he'd become “un-coachable.” That means he no longer listened to the coach's advice or followed the plays he called. Usually because the player thinks they're good enough on their own, and don't need the coaching.

So I ask again, are you spiritually un-coachable? Do you feel like you need really need Christian coaching for life through Word and Sacrament? In my three and a half years as pastor at Victory, I've noticed that Bible Study doesn't seem to be a big part of our church's culture. Some very faithfully attend every opportunity for Bible study, but the typical percentage of our membership that attends at least one Bible Study opportunity per week is only between 10-15%. Back in September, we met our challenge goal of over 100 people in Bible study and Sunday School, which was great. But why does it have to be a special challenge to get that many here? And the following Sundays, it went down to 80, 60, 40, and 20 once again.

Why is that? Why don't we take better advantage of these spiritual growth opportunities? We've all got reasons. Too busy. Stuff to get to. Hard to wake up the kids...or yourself, in time. But if we're honest, doesn't a lack of participation in Bible Study ultimately stem from thinking: “I don't need this”?

Some say they don't need to come to Bible study or Sunday School because they come to church regularly. And don't get me wrong, public worship is a critical opportunity for spiritual growth! But if you think coming to worship makes Bible study obsolete, consider this: If you attended every single worship service during the year and listened to the three appointed Bible readings, you'd hear portions of 154 chapters of the Bible. That sounds pretty good, right? But there are 1,189 total chapters in the Bible. Which means, even if you came to every single worship service this year, you'd hear less than 13% of the Bible. Even if you extrapolate that number over the 3-year cycle, and attended every service for three years, you'd still only hear about 40%

of the Bible. And let's be real, I'm not even here for every service of the year!

The point being, if we're serious about spiritual growth, and that ***"All of Scripture is God-breathed and useful,"*** then to fully grasp everything God tells us, just coming to church isn't enough. If we really want to grow in all of God's Word, we also have to spend time in Bible study, family devotion time, and reading our Bibles personally.

This isn't a "Woe is me, I work hard and not everyone comes" thing. I say this because if you're not receiving the coaching God has commanded his church to give, you're not growing. At least, not the transformational growth God desires for you. In fact, if you're not growing spiritually, you're atrophying.

If you go to the gym once a week, but stuff your face with junk food and sit on your couch the rest of the week, is that one workout really helping? If you only come to church and Bible study a few times a year, and spend the rest of it being surrounded by the sinful garbage and spiritual junk food of this sinful world, how firmly grounded on the rock-solid foundation are you really?

That's a problem, because it's not a question of "if" storms will come in your life, but when. Jesus himself warns us, ***"In this world you will have trouble."*** And who knows what they might be. Health struggles. Family strife. Work issues. The death of a loved one. A mental health problem. A relentless temptation you can't shake. Whatever the storms might be—they'll come.

And they will test how secure we really are. When life feels calm, serene, and peaceful, it's easy to think you're standing strong. But if you're not building your house on the rock of faith in Jesus, and the Word of God, then you're building on some other foundation. And every other foundation is a sandy, shifting foundation that won't keep you upright. When the wind and the waves of fear, uncertainty, anger, or pain start crashing, if you're not firmly grounded on the solid foundation, your spiritual house can come crashing down.

So are we hopeless then? Inevitably doomed to be like one of those houses crashing into the sea as soon as the wind and waves of life's storms push against us?

That's why it's important to understand the true purpose of Christian "coaching." In athletics, coaches teach and train so their players will be big, fast, strong, and smart enough to win the game through their performance. But Christian coaching isn't so much about making Christians better, holier, and smarter so they can win spiritual victory through their performance. It's to help Christians stand more securely on their foundation!

Remember the point of Jesus' parable--the foundation is most important. Those beach houses that we saw collapsing into the ocean were big; beautiful; expensive; impressive; desirable! But it doesn't matter how much you reinforce the outside of the house, or how many expensive items are inside, if that house is built on a sandy, shifting foundation, the storms will bring it crashing down.

That's why Christian coaching through Word and Sacrament are intended to help Christians understand just how dependent and reliant they are on their firm foundation of Jesus Christ and his Word! Real spiritual growth isn't about growing to trust in ourselves, but to be more firmly grounded, established, and reliant on the solid foundation of the Gospel!

After Hurricane Nicole, I saw a news report about "The Blue House" in Vilano Beach. This stilt house, built very close to the ocean, has become a local phenomenon because it has repeatedly withstood destructive hurricanes, while its neighbors have come crashing down. And so the news asked the architect who built the house to reveal its secret. The architect explained that when he built the house over 20 years ago, it wasn't even in a zone that required flood insurance. But anticipating the coastal erosion, he drilled the house's pilings to go down 15 feet below the surface of the ocean. The house stands while others fall, because it's firmly grounded in a solid foundation!

If we're honest, we have to admit that we're spiritually weak, so often knocked down by the wind and waves of life. So often uncoachable, thinking or acting like we don't need the spiritual coaching God gives through his Word and his church. So often, we stand on sand and think we're secure. And on our own, yes. We'd be doomed to go helplessly crashing into Hell.

But once again, spiritual growth isn't about making you strong enough. It's about helping you stand more securely on the foundation. The foundation makes you strong, not you. And thanks be to God, we have a foundation who not only keeps us upright, but clings tightly to us. It's not that we've driven our pilings 15 feet deep into Jesus. It's that he willingly had nails driven deep into his hands and feet, a spear driven deep into his side, so that he could pull us out of the deepest depths of hell, and drive his love deeply into our hearts by faith.

So come and be joyfully fed and coached with the words given to us by one who loves us like that! Learn more each day about just how much your Savior Jesus loves you. Because when he's your foundation, you'll stand firm in every storm!

To watch this sermon on YouTube, go to:

tinyurl.com/mvyztyfc