

“The Firmer the Foundation, the Better the Building”

The Gospel According to Matthew 7:24-27

Sunday, June 11th, 2017

The Gospel According to Matthew 7:24-27:

24 “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: 25 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. 26 “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: 27 and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

In the fall of 1993, I stood on the observatory deck of the *World Trade Center* - it was actually on the roof of the South Tower (the second one hit by aircraft in the 9/11 bombings) - and the thrilling view of New York City, so close to so many other massive buildings! The world famous Empire State Building was even more incredible to me.

The Empire State Building stands at what has been called “the world’s most crowded crossroads” Fifth Avenue and 34th Street in downtown Manhattan. Simple and majestic, the skyscraper rises 103 stories - 1,250 feet - nearly a quarter of a mile - straight up from the street.

The building has 6,000 windows, 75 miles of main water pipes, 50 miles of radiator pipe, 700 tons of aluminum and stainless steel walls. There are 2 million feet of electric wires and 350,000 electric light sockets.

The Empire State Building’s enormous weight - 303,000 tons of steel, stone and other materials - demands a sure foundation, and that it has.

The foundation reaches down 33 feet below the sidewalk, and rests on stratum granite, the firmest foundation in this world, for it is the basic rock which is the earth itself. Geologists assure us that this bedrock will never slip or give.

If you’ve ever watched the progress of a skyscraper under construction, you’ll know that for the first several weeks - perhaps months even, construction workers make a great hole in the ground. That is absolutely vital in building tall buildings.

A doghouse needs no foundation, and an ordinary house can be built on a concrete slab. But a skyscraper...that’s different. It requires a deep and solid foundation. So it is with the Christian life. Our upward potential is totally dependent on the foundation underneath it.

In this familiar portion of Holy Scripture, Jesus is not speaking about literal houses. He is speaking about people. And, as He has with every other illustration in this 7th chapter of Matthew, He separates the houses (people) into two categories - a house built on a rock, and a house built on sand.

The implication is well-known because Jesus is so clear here. Every person who hears what Jesus says and puts it into practice is numbered among His children. They are the few -

- * Who've entered the narrow gate (verse 13);
- * Who've traveled the difficult way that leads to eternal life (verse 14);
- * Who are the good trees that bear good fruit (verse 17);
- * Who have done the will of God the Father (verse 21).

On the other hand, there are people who hear Jesus' words, but do not put them into practice. They are not numbered among His children. They are among the many -

- * Who've gone in by the broad gate (verse 13);
- * Who've traveled the broad way that leads to destruction (verse 13);
- * Who are the bad trees that bear bad fruit and are cut down and thrown into the fire (verses 17 & 19);
- * Who Jesus does not know savingly, and have practiced lawlessness (verse 23).

We go back to these because verse 24 begins with the word, "Therefore." What Jesus teaches in the sentences that we examine today builds off of what He has said before in previous verses.

Notice next the words, "whoever hears these sayings of Mine and does them." This refers to the whole of the Sermon on the Mount - from chapter 5-7. If you haven't done so already, you must begin doing these sayings of Jesus - if you wish to be likened to the wise man Jesus speaks of in verses 24b & 25:

" . . . a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.."

Jesus calls this man "wise." "Wise" here means prudent, sensible, practical. The sensible, rational, intelligent person listens to Jesus and does what He says. Jesus, then, gives an unforgettable illustration of His teaching by referring to a house built on a foundation of rock.

The life we live and the life we build is what He refers to. One commentator notes, "Every ambition a man cherishes, every thought he conceives, every word he speaks, and every deed he performs is, as it were, a building block" (Hendriksen, 379)

In light of everything Jesus teaches in the three chapters of the Sermon on the Mount, we realize that the wise man is one:

- * Who actually repents of his sin (turns away from it - ceases to delight in it);
- * He actually believes God's Word;
- * He actually ceases to do evil;
- * He learns to do well;
- * He steers clear of that which is sinful;
- * He cleaves to that which is good;
- * He does what He hears Jesus tell Him, or as James puts it in the New Testament book bearing his name, chapter 1, verse 22, "But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves."

Bishop J. C. Ryle calls this the true religion. He notes, "The religion that can stand trial is the true religion." (Ryle, 71)

On the other hand, Jesus speaks of the rest of humanity in verses 26 & 27, when He says,

“But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

Don't miss what Jesus calls the person who hears Him, but doesn't do what He says. He calls him a “foolish man.” The Greek term used there for “foolish” is also in English the word “moron.” The moron is the person who *knows* what the Bible says, and then doesn't *do* what the Bible says.

Sometime ago, an interesting story was reported. Evidently, in the Philippines, a World War II bomb was used for 10 years in a blacksmith's shop as an anvil. (The foundation for all of his hammering was an explosive device!) One day as the “anvil” was moved, it exploded suddenly. A welder was killed and three other men were seriously injured. The bomb had been used for 10 years as an anvil before being sold to a welding shop.

Foolishness is using a bomb to stop your hammer blows!

“Mere profession of faith without practical obedience to Christ's teaching is useless and hopeless, a building without a good foundation.” (Legg, 137) Again, the words of Bishop Ryle, “What costs little is worth little! A religion which costs us nothing, and consists in nothing but hearing sermons, will always prove at last to be a useless thing.” (Ryle, 72)

Check point: *Friend, to which of these two categories of building do you belong? Are you a wise builder or a moronic one? Is your house - your life - being built on rock - or are you building it on shifting sand?*

One more thing about this house - this life. Jesus teaches that the person building His life on shifting sand is not only foolish, but headed for a fall. A “great” fall, as verse 27 concludes.

Jesus is not saying that we are saved by works. He is stressing that all those who truly hear the gospel, and who truly profess faith in Him, will always express that faith in their obedience, in their works, and in their lives. *We are all building a house.*

The question is - *what is the foundation we are building on? Is our house a house simply for the here and now? Or, is our house a house for the then and there? Are we living our lives in light of eternity, or just for the next thing that we can collect for ourselves? Whether it be material possessions, money influence, power, or popularity or whatever else. What is important in our lives? What is the priority of our lives?*

If your priority is selfish, you will fall hard on the last day. Your judgment will be great, final, and total. An eternity in the darkness of hell, the unrelenting torture of resurrected body and soul, and the loneliness of eternity lived in God's wrath is a huge trade-off for living for self this side of eternity.

What are specific examples of rain, floods, and wind in the lives of Christians? They come in various kinds of tests that affect each and every one of us. These include -

* **Trials.** The example of God testing Abraham by commanding him to take his only son, Isaac, and offer him as a sacrifice to God is one of these (**Genesis 22:1**). Abraham passed this trial. Despite his deep love for his long-awaited son, Abraham loved God even more. Consider how verses 9-12 of Genesis 22 record the events:

“Then they came to the place of which God had told him. And Abraham built an altar there and placed the wood in order; and he bound Isaac his son and laid him on the altar, upon the wood. And Abraham stretched out his hand and took the knife to slay his son. But the Angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” So he said, “Here I am.” And He said, “Do not lay your hand on the lad, or do anything to him; for now I know that you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only *son*, from Me.”

The result of Abraham’s steadfast faith is found in verses 15-18:

“Then the Angel of the LORD called to Abraham a second time out of heaven, and said: “By Myself I have sworn, says the LORD, because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son, your only *son*— blessing I will bless you, and multiplying I will multiply your descendants as the stars of the heaven and as the sand which *is* on the seashore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies. In your seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed, because you have obeyed My voice.”

Whatever the suffering or trial, if you’re building on Jesus, you will persevere!

* **Temptations** are another form of storm. The example of Potiphar’s wife and Joseph in the 39th chapter of Genesis is one of many examples found in Holy Scripture. You’ll remember that Joseph’s brothers had sold him into slavery. He was serving in the house of one of Pharaoh’s officers - Potiphar. One day she made an advance toward Joseph. **Genesis 39** tells us,

“But he refused and said to his master’s wife, “Look, my master does not know what *is* with me in the house, and he has committed all that he has to my hand. *There is* no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you *are* his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” So it was, as she spoke to Joseph day by day, that he did not heed her, to lie with her *or* to be with her.”

As the events unfold, we learn that Joseph maintains his integrity despite the repeated advances of Potiphar’s wife, and eventually is imprisoned under false accusations from her that he tried to molest her.

If you’re building on the firm foundation of Jesus, you will resist temptation, even to blood!

* Another storm is **Bereavement**. Grief and sadness are a regular part of life in a world that has been radically affected by sin and misery. Job knew something of God’s tough providence unlike any of us, and perhaps any person to ever have walked the earth.

The first chapter of the book of Job reveals that Job had 7 sons and 3 daughters. Further, he owned 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 oxen, 500 female donkeys, and a very large household.

He was the greatest of all the people of the East - a man who was blameless and upright, who feared God and shunned evil.

He would lose everything - every one of his 10 children even! **Job 1:18-22** reveal the depth of his bereavement:

“While he *was* still speaking, another also came and said, “Your sons and daughters *were* eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother’s house, and suddenly a great wind came from across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell on the young people, and they are dead; and I alone have escaped to tell you!” Then Job arose, tore his robe, and shaved his head; and he fell to the ground and worshiped. And he said:

“Naked I came from my mother’s womb,
And naked shall I return there.
The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away;
Blessed be the name of the LORD.” In all this Job did not sin nor charge God with wrong.”

With your foundation on Christ, you will find joy in the Lord, which is your strength, especially when grieving loss!

Application questions:

- * *Do you know Christ, or do you just know the vocabulary?*
- * *Do you have a relationship with Jesus Christ, or are you riding on your heritage?*
- * *Is the fruit of the Spirit evident in your life?*
- * *Is Jesus alive in your life?*
- * *Do you love Him?*

Picture a huge old house high up on a hill. The house is abandoned. Vegetation has grown up all around; the windows are broken. A big door on the first floor is open, practically falling off its hinges.

Inside is a main hall with a large horseshoe-shaped second-story balcony with no staircase leading up to it - evidently fallen through long ago.

In the basement, livestock have been allowed to take shelter.

How could such a place, surely once so lovely, have been neglected and consigned to decay?

The original owner, impoverished before his death, sought permission from the authorities to raffle off his home. It, and everything in it, went for a song, and eventually the big, old house was abandoned.

In 1879, the old house on the hill looked precisely like this. Grain was sometimes milled and stored on the parquet floors of the drawing room. The basement had become a cattle barn.

For 20 years the home declined toward total collapse even though its designer, its builder, its original owner - was also the designer and author of our Declaration of Independence.

The old house on the hill, restored at last from ruin and with us still - the same house on the tail of the nickel in your pocket or purse - was the home of Thomas Jefferson - Monticello.