

The Wise and Foolish Builders

Matthew 7:24-29

August 13, 2017

Ever been in a big storm? Three summers ago we had all the family down for a week of vacation at our favorite beach; Emerald Isle, N.C. For the first part of the week we had some of the most beautiful weather ever. But by Wednesday it was becoming obvious that we were in for a big storm that was to hit sometime late Thursday or early Friday. We talked to our neighbors in the pink house and they were staying and to our neighbors to the left whose father owned the duplex where we were staying and they were going to ride it out too.

Thursday was another beautiful day but as the day progressed the ocean was getting angrier and the sky darker. As I

came off the beach around three o'clock my neighbors in the pink house were packing the car.

"I got outvoted" said Bill, the patriarch of the family. "We're leaving." The cars of our neighbors to the left were also gone. I went inside and turned on the news. A satellite picture of hurricane Arthur could be seen heading right for us. Our island was to be the hardest hit. They were predicting flooding, loss of power, wind and hail damage. The bridge to the mainland was soon to be closed.

I began to panic. It seemed risky to stay. And if we did ride out the storm safely, what would it be like to live without water and power? My two sons-in law were gone but I told Melinda and my daughters to start packing and when Scott and Drew arrived home we would make a family decision whether to ride it out or to leave.

When they arrived, we tried to make a decision but the discussion went around

in circles. When I make a big decision I need to “mull” it over so I called a time out and decided we needed to talk to people who had gone through a hurricane. So I went out to talk to more neighbors and Melinda called the city to find out the facts. A calm city official gave Melinda the facts rather than the hype the TV provided.

I found our landlord, Travis and shared our fear with him. “Mark, you don’t understand. You have nothing to worry about. This house has gone through a category 5 hurricane with no problem. This house is equipped with steel shields that come down over all the windows and doors with a press of a button.”

When we re-gathered as a family, grandkids and all, we decided to stay. We begin to prepare for the storm; putting the cars under the house, putting outdoor furniture away, and buying flashlights, food and water. Everyone was

actually excited to experience their first hurricane. By 8:00pm the thunderstorms began to arrive. We put the shields down and went to bed. Soon the house began to rattle and shake as outside the winds and rain beat the house. But after having a prayer for safety we all fell asleep.

In the morning I awoke to find the power out but the sun shining. I went outside to see the damage and by the time I got back inside the power was back on. Friday was another gorgeous day and we had built some fun memories of Hurricane Arthur.

This house was built to stand. This house was built for the storm.

The impossibility of the Sermon on the Mount

In this parable found in Matthew chapter 7, Jesus talks about two houses; one that was built for a storm, the other was not.

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into

practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ 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.²⁶ 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. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

²⁸ When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹ because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

These words of Jesus conclude a large body of his teaching called the Sermon on the Mount. It's called that because Matthew has the context of this teaching material taking place on a mountain.

The sermon covers Christian ethics; how we are to behave, how we are to treat

each other. Some of the topics Jesus covers are anger, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, how to treat enemies, money, judging others, and then climaxes in the Golden Rule.

If I had heard this sermon from Jesus, I might have thought, “This is too hard.” I might have gotten up and left.

When you finish reading the Sermon on the Mount, you are going to feel like a failure as a Christian. When Jesus speaks of murder, we think, “At least I'm not a murderer”. But then Jesus says “But I say to you that if you are angry with a brother or sister, you will be liable to judgment”. We think, “Oh my goodness, I've been angry lots of times.”

As you read through it, you can't help but be overwhelmed by the demands of it. This has caused scholars to take a variety of views on the sermon's message. Martin Luther felt the sermon made impossible demands. A more contemporary scholar

C.L. Blomberg, believed the sermon's ethic is the ideal or goal of the Christian life.

But it seems pretty obvious that Jesus meant for his followers to abide by his teachings. And they were as radical and unnerving for his original followers as they are for us today.

And just to be sure we understand that they are for us, he finished his sermon with this little parable that is the focus for us today.

Two people build a house

It's about two people who each build a house. One was a wise person who built his home upon a rock and when the rain fell and the floods came and the wind blew and beat upon the house, it did not fall because it had been built on rock.

But there was also a foolish person who built his house upon the sand and the rain fell and the floods came and the

winds blew and beat against the house and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

In this story, each person builds a house. And that is true for all of us. We are all house builders. We cannot escape that fact. We make decisions about careers, relationships, value systems, lifestyles; how we are going to live our life. That's the house we build.

And in this story each house faces a storm. Let's face it; we all have storms. This is not about how to *avoid* storms; it's a story about building lives that can *face* storms. There is a big difference. I wish Jesus *had* taught about how to avoid storms. I suppose some storms we face are brought upon by our own doing. And I suppose that the storm Jesus referred to could represent any test of life that we may encounter in our time here on earth. But in this context, Jesus is surely pointing to the final test, the Day of

Judgment when we will stand before God and give account.

One house survives the storm and the other does not and the difference is what they are built on; their foundation. The house that survives does so because it is built on rock and the other house does not survive because it is built on sand.

Clearly, Jesus is teaching us about himself. The rock is Jesus. He says the wise man is the one who hears my words and does them. So a solid foundation to build a life upon is one that is built on the teachings of Christ.

What is your house built on?

So what is your house built on? Is it built on the rock of God's word, or is it built on the shifting sand of pop culture and morality.

The first thing we have to do is spend time in God's word. We know that an encounter with Scripture can change

lives. We know that the number one way for people to experience spiritual growth is to study and reflect upon the scriptures.

In our survey this past spring, 21% of you indicated you spend time reflecting on scripture daily. What if we were to increase that to 81%? A great way to start if you have never read the Bible is Disciple Bible study. It provides an introduction to the entire Bible and it doesn't matter how much you know. We have three of them starting up in September; Chip Mahaney on Sunday morning, Sharon Guard on Tuesday morning, and Mark Putman on Wednesday night. If you are a woman and you want to go deeper, Martha Dornette is teaching Precept on Tuesday mornings. We have almost 20 other Bible studies that meet throughout the week on various days and times to help get you started. Most of our Life Groups study

the Bible as well so find one and get started.

Then once you have got a good foundation built, make reading and reflecting on scripture a daily habit. It's critical that we go from knowing the Bible to reflecting upon its impact on our lives. When you get to heaven, Christ is not going to ask you how well you memorized the Bible. He will want to know how you lived it. Sit at Jesus feet; spend time with God daily before you do anything else. The Lord of the universe enjoys your company. He wants you to spend time with him daily.

The hardest part is finding a time to do it. Once you got that the rest is pretty easy. I like to do it in the morning first thing when I wake up. I put on a pot of coffee, sit in my favorite chair, turn on my Bible App on my smart phone to my daily Bible reading plan and start reading.

I let God speak to me through his word. And after God has spoken to me, I speak to him. Almost always the scriptures I just read shape my prayers. It might be confession and repentance for something I read that is convicting, something I need to start doing or something I need to stop doing. Or I might find myself lost in gratitude and praise.

Journaling is a great exercise too. I write down my prayers, answer to prayers, questions I have, things that I hear God telling me.

Why is this so important? It will change your life.

You may not see immediate change, or spiritual growth. But it will come.

Now you may have noticed that both builders heard the words of Jesus. The difference is that one heard the words of Jesus and put them into practice and the other heard and ignored them.

Why would we ignore Jesus' words? Part of the reason is we don't believe in the authority of scripture. What convinced Jesus listeners? Verse 29 says, "He taught as one who had authority." They recognized him as someone who was speaking truth in to their lives.

When we did the Reveal survey in 2013, only 33% of the congregation believed in the authority of scripture. We knew we had work to do. So we launched a church wide Bible reading program called E100. We preached on the great texts from Genesis through Revelation. And it worked. We increased 18 percentage points to 51%. So we are making progress.

What about you? Are you making progress?

Jesus certainly believed in the authority of scripture. Whenever Jesus is quoting the Bible, he equates it with God's word. For example in Matthew 15:4, Jesus

says, "*For God said, honor your father and mother.*" He didn't say Moses or someone else said it, but God. Jesus believed that God actually spoke to Moses and gave him the Ten Commandments. Jesus believed the words in the Old Testament were inspired, and he believed the words he spoke were God's words.

I have heard some well-meaning people say, "The New Testament writers didn't know they were writing scripture". But as you read these scriptures, it seems clear that they did in fact, know what they were writing.

The wise man does

The Bible is our source of authority in the Christian life. Experience, tradition, and reason are important. But Scripture is the ultimate authority for what we believe about the Christian life.

But what if it is a product of human wisdom? Then it is an interesting piece

of literature, worthy of reading, worthy of taking a place in the great classics of literature. Perhaps God's word may be found in its pages, but it is of human origin, so it can be wrong on some things. We may decide some of the things in there don't belong there. Since it was written thousands of years ago, what was right for that time may not be right for today and vice versa. Jesus may have been misquoted, or words added later by an editor. For me to tell you this is God's word and this is how God says to live your life would be an insult to your intelligence, because what I am telling you is simply my opinion.

The Bible is not just a book on the same level as other great literature such as the Homer's *Odyssey* or Plato's *Republic* or *The National Enquirer*. It is not a collection of human words about God. It is not a record of evolving human consciousness about God. The Bible is God's word about God. This has been the

belief of Christians down through the centuries: Roman Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestants have insisted that the Bible is God's word about himself spoken to people and through people.

If the Bible is God's word about God, then that changes everything. It should be read, studied, memorized, taught to your children...and obeyed.

In James' letter, chapter 1, he writes, "*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*"

Do what it says. If the Bible is God's word, then we need to do it. It needs to be the heart of the church. The church needs to read it, teach it and obey it. In other words, it becomes the final authority in the life of the church. It is our guide for how we do things. When we have a disagreement on faith issues, we consult its wisdom to try to discover the answer. Paul tells us the Scriptures are useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting,

and training in righteousness. In other words they are God's chosen way to help us grow spiritually and train you and me to be leaders in the church.

Conclusion

I began with a storm story so I am going to end with one. This storm took place in January 1738 in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. John Wesley, a young clergyman, was on a ship traveling from Savannah back to England. John had been raised by Christian parents, in fact his father was also a pastor in England. John was taught all about God and the rules and commandments. When he was 22 his father talked him into being ordained.

He decided to go to Georgia to serve as chaplain to the colonists but it did not go well and so he left.

On the way back the ship ran into a terrible storm and it looked like they

would all be lost at sea. Wesley was terrified. But he saw a group of Moravian Christians from Germany who were not scared of dying. In fact they were singing hymns. Wesley began to wonder why they were so courageous in the face of death and he was so frightened. The ship did not sink and arrived safely back in England but it started him on a spiritual journey.

Wesley began to realize that his faith was all external; trying to be a good person by going to church, taking the sacraments, hearing sermons, saying his prayers, saying the creeds, having right opinions, not hurting anyone, being honest and fair, doing no harm. He called it a verbal religion—lip service to God but his heart was not right with God. As he read through the Sermon on the Mount he saw that his faith was built on the sand of religiosity and obeying all the rules. He realized he was not a Christian

On May 28, 1738 he went to a Bible study on Aldersgate Street in London and heard someone reading Luther's preface to the Book of Romans. He writes, "I felt my heart strangely warmed and felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone for salvation and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."

That began the Methodist revival that spread throughout the British Isles, then America and then around the world.

What are you building your life on? Think what it would be like to know that your life is anchored in Christ. That that no matter what storms life throws at you, that when it is done, you will still be standing?

What would it take to start building a strong foundation? Not the exterior religious stuff, but a relationship with Christ. What he you decided to focus on developing a rich interior life of reading

and mediating on scripture on a daily basis. What if you decided today to get into a Bible study or Life group?

What if you decided to start trusting more in God's word?

Maybe it just seems too hard, too demanding to obey the words of Jesus. I get that. But here is what I've discovered; once I entrusted my life to following Jesus he gave me both the will and the power to build my life upon it. Maybe that's the first step you need to take today.

Let's pray.