

### **The Wise and Foolish Builder (Matthew 7: 24-27)**

Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount with warnings directed to three groups of people. He warns his disciples to examine themselves to be sure that they are truly members of the Kingdom of Heaven, not simply those who profess allegiance. He warns the crowds to consider carefully the alternative of following him or following popular religious leadership. Finally, he warns the religious establishment about their culpability for leading people in the wrong direction. There is no middle ground, no other choice and a decision must be made - a decision with eternal consequences.

In our parable, Jesus demonstrates familiarity with current building techniques. Perhaps a reflection of his own training as a carpenter. A wise builder in the time of Jesus knew the dangers of bad building techniques. A builder would dig down sometimes ten feet below the surface sand to the bedrock and there establish the foundation for his house.

When the winter rains came the Jordan river would overflow and houses built on sand would have an unstable foundation. However, houses built on bedrock would be able to withstand the floods. Evacuations in the late 1970s in this region uncovered basalt stone bedrock that was apparently used for the foundation of building in antiquity. The audience would have known the surface meaning in the parable because they would know how foolish a person was who would choose the easy way and did not build on bedrock.

The question is, would those listening see beyond the parable to Jesus' point? Would they reject the leadership of the Pharisees and scribes and choose Jesus' words as the foundation of their lives? The wise person understands that Jesus is the only secure truth of life (1 Corinthians 3: 10-11). The wise person thinks ahead to when there will be storms and sacrifices and builds their life on the rock of Jesus' words.

In verse 28 Matthew applauds the crowds who have exalted Jesus and recognised his authority. On the other hand, Jesus does not want people to simply listen to him and go away amazed. He wants them to listen and to make a decision for him. To come out of the crowd and become a committed disciple.

The question that Jesus asks is clear. Will you build your life on me as your solid rock or will you build your life on sand and be unprepared for the storms that will come in this life and will ultimately separate you from Christ in the afterlife?

Putting the teaching of Jesus into practice simply refers to living out a life of discipleship for those who have already trusted Christ and received his forgiveness. Remembering, of course, that Jesus has provided stability, security and hope throughout church history.

Jesus is also alluding to how Christians can face the storms that come our way. Life will always bring various challenges and moments of crisis, whether it's the loss of a loved one, injury, joblessness, trauma and ill health. However, if we do as Jesus says, that is; build our relationship with him on strong and deep foundations, we can overcome whatever comes our way. This is especially true if we have to face issues that become a daily struggle with little hope of respite.

Our good works will always flow from our relationship with Jesus. They are not a means to salvation. That is a free gift given by God through accepting Jesus as Lord and saviour. Our faith will be proven over time and all of the varied fruit that our lives produce will be seen. Our faith cannot merely be demonstrated by what's visible but by what's invisible, our heart attitudes, our spirits, our beliefs and our trust.

**Jesus knows that each person needs to build a house.** To really understand this, we could replace the word "house" with "character" or "soul". Yes, Jesus is reminding us that we are all house builders. Someone put it like this; Every commitment I make, every friendship I enter, every skill I cultivate or neglect, every promise I honour or break becomes part of my house. The quality of our choices will determine the quality of our character and our soul. This is each our own responsibility to build our own house.

**Sooner or later each one of us will face our own storms.** In Fact, Jesus is quite explicit about this part of the story. His description of the storms that came to the two men is identical, word for word, "The rain came down, the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against that house".

Jesus wants to make this very clear: this is not a story about storm avoidance. You cannot build a house where there will be no storms. My father was a real jack of all trades. He built a room onto our house and dismantled an entire car engine, replaced some of the parts and put it all together again. I must admit it's one of the only times I saw him nervous as he turned the key to see if the engine would start. I am not sure which he feared the most his reputation as a, "I can fix anything" type of guy or my mother's wrath at having no working car. She did not encourage this gifting of my father in any way.

This gave me a false assumption about life. If anything bad happened to me it could always be fixed. I have faced a few storms since then. I have learned that I was badly mistaken about this illusion of getting through life untouched. Jesus knew this to be true for all of us. *Matthew 6:34: <sup>34</sup> Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own.*

**Storms test the house.** It is in the storm that the soundness of the house is revealed. A foundation is not a glamorous thing. No one visits a house and says, "Wow, what a great foundation you have there!". No one even knows. Until the storm. The ultimate storm that Jesus referred to is the last judgement. One day our lives will be scrutinized by God. Every beam and timber, every word and deed will face scrupulous examination. One day the truth of our houses will be revealed.

To every student comes examination day. A loving teacher does not try to spare the student from this, but rather prepares the student for it. Examination simply makes plain to all what is already reality. No matter how painful it is to face reality, nothing is gained from hiding from it.

This brings us to the turning point in the story. Everybody builds a house - both the wise man and the fool. The question Jesus poses is this. What are you going to build your life on? Rock

or Sand? What's your foundation? In what are you placing your ultimate trust? Jesus says that the foolish choice is to build a house on sand. It is placing your ultimate trust in that which cannot sustain you through the storms of life.

One of the foundations for us as Christians is the Bible. The English word Bible comes from the name of papyrus or the "Byblos" reed, that was used for making scrolls and books. Hence the name Bible. But the writings of the Old Testament and the New Testament were so sacred, so special, so revered that they came to be known simply as the book.

Why is the Bible considered sacred? Why is the Bible considered the word of God? As Christians we take the writings of Bible as the word of God for our lives for one reason, Jesus. The Old Testament was sacred before Jesus. But Jesus is the one who confirmed the Old Testament Scriptures as sacred.

He made reference to them in such a way that he thought that the Old Testament was not just a book of historical texts. For, Jesus the writers of the Old Testament were inspired by the Holy Spirit giving us the word of God.

Jesus gave the New Testament authority because much of it records the life and teaching of Jesus. If he was God in human form and taught, it's safe to say that capturing what he taught falls under the category of sacred writings. He also laid the foundation for the writings of the rest of the New Testament to be accepted as Scripture through the Apostles.

While all Christians have the Holy Spirit within them from the moment of conversion, Jesus promised the Apostles a special ministry of the Holy Spirit in regard to their teaching and writing. The Bible is for us. It is God's living word for his people. Crafted by both human hands and divine inspiration. It is God's, mercy, compassion, truth, grace, direction, correction, and most of all his heart and love towards us.

So, the first strong foundation for our Christian lives is the Bible. The second is prayer. Jesus shows us that when we talk to God in prayer, we should be intimate. How do we know that? Well, Jesus started his example of prayer like this; "Our Father..." (Matt 6: 7-15). He uses the Aramaic word for father *Abba*. This was the most intimate family term there was, used between a very small child and their parent. I often think about how my granddaughter comes to me. She is nearly three years old now. She has my full attention. There is boundless affection and love, she knows she is loved by her grandparents. In other words, true intimacy. That is exactly what God wants from us.

We should also be expectant. We should pray as if we expect it to matter. This raises a question about prayer. Why should I pray when God already knows what I am thankful for and what I need? The answer is that prayer is not just communication, it's a relational event. The Bible clearly teaches that God has chosen to act in response to our prayers. Prayer does not control God but he has said he will take our prayers into account. God will listen to you. Just as he listened to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, Joshua, Elijah, and Jesus! Why would you not offer your prayers to God.

I know some may be thinking, “well Grahame why is my life full of unanswered prayer? I’ve prayed for a job- and I’m still unemployed! I’ve prayed for a husband – and I’m still single. I’ve prayed for healing – and I’m still sick!” At one time or another we have all felt that God is not answering our prayers. Yet, the Bible is clear, God answers prayer. The truth is that God promises to answer every prayer. How and when he chooses to answer is another matter.

The third foundation is Christian community. This community called together by Christ for Christ, is better known as the church. No better snap shot of this new community can be found than in the book of Acts (Acts 2: 42-27). Further, there are so many, “one another’s” that lie at the heart of being in the church. Here are some; Be devoted to one another (Rom 12:10), Live in harmony with one another (Rom 12:16), Be patient, bearing with one another in love (Eph 4:2), Spur one another on toward love and good deeds (Heb 10:24), Accept one another (Rom 15:7), Stop passing judgement one another (Rom 14:13), Be kind and compassionate to one another (Eph 4: 32), Therefore encourage one another (1 Thess 5:11), Forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone (Col 3:13), Offer hospitality to one another (1 Peter 4: 9), love one another (John 13:34).

The last foundation which flows nicely from the Bible, prayer and the church is service. The heart of the Gospel is giving yourself away. <sup>5</sup> For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve others and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45). We to are called to be servants and serving others should be a foundational part of your Christian Life.

The French have a saying: “To suffer passes; to have suffered never passes.” To often we think that ministry to others is a one-way street where I, the healthy person, reach out in compassion to assist the wounded. But people who have suffered are the very best equipped to help, and a person crosses the final barrier of helplessness when he or she learns to draw on their own experience of suffering as a means to reach out to others.

There is an old Chinese tale about a women overwhelmed by grief after the death of her son. When she goes to the pastor for advice, he tells her, “Fetch me a mustard seed from a home that has never known sorrow. We will use it to drive out the sorrow in your life. The tale recounts how the woman goes from house to house, asking if the home has known sorrow. Each has, of course and the women lingers to comfort her hosts until at last the act of ministering to others drives sorrow from her life.

So, this is a challenge for us all this morning, including me. What are you building your Christian house on, sand or rock. How will you handle the enviable spiritual storms that come your way. With the Bible in your hand, prayers coming out of your mouth, feet firmly planted in the church and ready to serve wherever God leads you. Now, that’s a strong spiritual house.