

ON WHAT ARE YOU BUILDING?

Matthew 7:24-27

These are the concluding words of Christ's great Sermon on the Mount, and startling and heart-searching words they are. The people had listened to Him with peculiar interest and, when He had finished, were amazed at both what He had said and the spirit in which He had said it.

This sermon was the longest of our Lord's recorded messages. His discourses were generally very short, but they contained great truths. He neither said too much nor too little but just what the occasion required. There were no quibblings, no useless disputations, nor any metaphysical refinements in His sermons. They were serious, plain, vastly important and calculated to do great good.

Nobody ever listened to Christ without hearing the truth. Those who heard Him proclaim the truth were highly favored. However, it is not enough just to hear the truth. The hearing of the truth ought to do three things for us. First, it should stir our feelings. Some people say that emotion should be left out of religion, but a person without feelings is dead. When you see and understand one of God's truths, it should stir your heart. Second, the hearing should stimulate your thinking. God's Word says, "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 1:18). Without reason and intelligent thinking our emotions get out of hand. Third, the sermon should inspire us to some action. It is not enough for a sermon just to make us feel good or to make us think. Discussions of religion may be enjoyable, but we need to remember that Christ said, "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock" (Matthew 7:24).

One of the amazing things about the preaching of Christ was how He could make so clear the eternal truths of God with such commonplace illustrations. For example, He showed that building your life is like building a house. Either can be built on the rock or on the sand.

I. The Parable.

1. Two builders.

Two men were impressed equally with the need of building a house. They perceived the necessity of shelter from the rains. They were alike in their desire of being shielded from floods and protected from the winds. The advantage of a house in which to dwell was evident to both.

These men were alike in that they resolved to obtain what they needed--a house. Their determination was not in words only, but in deeds, for they both resolutely set to work to build. Not only did both of them undertake to build a house, but each persevered until he finished his structure.

2. Two foundations.

Naturally the first consideration in the erection of each house was that of the foundation. The character of a foundation is determined by the importance of the structure that is to rest on it. In all buildings great care should be taken to lay a good foundation; for if that be defective, the superstructure, however beautiful, is a piece of folly. The foundation imparts strength to the superstructure; therefore, it is of the utmost importance. Any wise builder will be careful about his foundation.

3. Two houses.

The sensible man built his house upon the rock, but the foolish man built his house upon the sand. Externally both houses appeared to be well built and comfortable. There was a great difference between them in a most essential point, and that was in their foundations. It is not without significance that the main difference in these two buildings laid out of sight, underground. How many there are who seem to think that if a thing is out of sight it may as well be out of mind!

One house was built on solid rock and the other on sinking sand. The stability of any house depends ultimately on the strength of its foundation. If that be faulty, no matter how good the materials of which it is composed or how reliable the workmanship of those engaged in its construction, it will not stand the test of time.

4. Two results.

It is thrilling to hear Christ describe the testing of the house which was built upon the rock. He said, "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not." There you have a picture of strength and stability. The rain descended very heavily and threatened to wash the house away, but it was built upon a rock, and not only did the house stand, but the man inside found great comfort in it. When the pelting torrent beat on the roof and the gusts of wind thrust the rain against the windows he was indeed happy that he had such a shelter. Then came the floods. They would have undermined the foundations, if possible, but they did not have any effect on the solid rock. The man was safe, happy and grateful that he had built on such a foundation.

Our Lord also said that a foolish man built a house on the sand, "And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." He was very shortsighted. He did not exercise any forethought. He did not reckon with the future. To this thoughtless and careless fellow, the sand looked like a good and easy place to build a house without going to the trouble and expense of having a solid foundation.

II. The Application.

1. All of us are builders.

When our Lord spoke of building He did so with special authority, because that was in the realm of activity in which He had considerable experience. As a carpenter, He doubtless did more than make chairs, tables and farm implements. In all probability, He worked at the task of erecting houses.

"Isn't it strange
That princes and kings
And clowns that caper
In sawdust rings,
And common people
Like you and me
Are builders for eternity?"

By the house one builds we are to understand the life he lives with all that it entails. It includes the inclinations of his heart, the thoughts of his mind, the words of his lips and the

acts of his life. These are the materials which are making up the structure of your life. You are certainly building a character and a life.

2. All of us have a choice of foundations.

In business we take stock now and then to see where we stand, and wisely so. It is just as important to do so with our lives. The very first thing to examine is the foundation on which you are building. Only the person who builds on the right foundation is equipped to meet whatever life may bring.

While all of us are builders, we do not all build in the same fashion. There are those who build wisely. There are others who build foolishly. It is not their wickedness that is emphasized, but their silliness. But, whether wisely or foolishly, all of us are building. On what are you building--rock or sand? What we are today depends on how well we built yesterday. What we shall be tomorrow will depend on how well we build today. While what we are is of vast importance, what we are becoming is still more important.

3. All foundations will be tested.

The rain typifies afflictions from heaven. The floods typify the trials that arise from earth. In former days the floods of persecution were more terrible than now, but persecution is still felt; and, if you are a Christian, you will have to bear a measure of it. Cruel mockings are still used against the children of God. Can you bear slander and reproach for Christ's sake? Not unless you are firmly rooted and grounded.

The rain will descend upon every life. The rain of discouragement will certainly come. Frequently somebody plans wisely and well, works hard, achieves a measure of success, has every reason to expect greater prosperity, and then from some unforeseen source the crash comes. The rain of discouragement is often followed by that of perplexity and bewilderment. What shall we do? What can we do?

Into the life of everyone there comes disappointment, sickness and death. Grief of one sort or another drives its plowshare deep into the human heart. As an old proverb in the East has it, "Every man has a date with adversity and it is a date which adversity never forgets to meet." Hastings said, "The difference between men and women is not the measure of adversity which comes to them (though some do experience more adversity than others), but what they do with adversity when it appears." In every life, sooner or later, the rains descend, the winds beat, the floods rise, but for one man the house of life falls in ruins, while for another it stands secure; and the difference lies not in the intensity of the storm, but in the power to withstand.

Storms reveal the quality of one's life. One stands firm under the strain, while another collapses. One day Bramwell Booth went to his father, the general, to explain to him that the physicians could not do anything more for his eyes. Bramwell broke the news as gently as he could. The old man said, "You mean that I am blind." "I fear we must contemplate that," said Bramwell. "I shall never see your face again?" asked the general. "No, probably not in this world," said the son. The general's hand moved slowly across the counterpane, until it grasped his son's hand. Then he said, "God must know best, Bramwell. I have done what I could for God and

for the people with my eyes. Now I shall do what I can for God and for the people without my eyes."

4. All results will not be the same. Regardless of how sheltered your house may be, the tempest is sure to break sooner or later. Whether you build wisely or foolishly, your building will be tested.

Moreover, let us never forget that we must live in the house we have built. Therefore, it behooves us to consider seriously what kind of house we are building. What are you building? A shop? Do you live only to make money? Are you solely materialistic? Are you building a pleasure house? Do you live only to amuse or to be amused? Then do not forget that God said, "She that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth" (I Timothy 5:6). You may, however, build a temple--a temple of the Holy Spirit, where God has the right of way; where He is worshipped and all is made beautiful because of His indwelling presence.

In building Christian character there is only one foundation, and that is "The Rock of Ages." "For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Corinthians 3:11). If we build on the shifting sands of the opinions and philosophies of men, we shall certainly crash when the raging storms of care, temptation and sorrow surge around us. Nothing is grander than to see a life stand up when the crises come. At such times, many go to pieces, many break down, some try to run away, but others have built their lives out of the stuff which can stand up and take it. Only those who have built on the solid foundation are prepared to meet whatever life brings.

Think of the two endings--"It stood" and "It fell." Nothing lasts except that which is done according to the will of God. Every life which is not built on Christ is one of folly. "In His favour is life and in that pathway there is no death" (Proverbs 12:28). In the day of testing, the important thing will not be merely what you have said, but what fruits you have borne in your daily life in obedience to the expressed will of your Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.