

LIFE'S RELIABLE FOUNDATION

Matthew 7:24-29

These startling and heart-searching words constitute the conclusions of Christ's great Sermon on the Mount. The people had listened to His marvelous sermon 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. He neither said too much nor too little but just what the occasion required.

Those who heard Christ 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 hearts. Second, it should stimulate our thinking. Third, it should inspire us to some action. It is not enough for a sermon just to make us feel good or to make us think.

In these closing verses of the Sermon on the Mount our Lord enforced His teaching and brought it home to the conscience of each individual who listened. He implied that all His "sayings" were meant to be translated into "doings." Philosophers frequently teach in the optative mood, thereby expressing a wish or desire. Christ taught in the imperative mood, which is the prerogative of the Commander of the faithful.

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 said that building your life is like building a house. Either can be built on a solid foundation or on a shaky one.

Christ dared to say to all men: "If you will build your life on My teaching, you will build on a rock. Do as I tell you and your life will be stable and eternal."

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.

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!

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."

This man was very shortsighted. He did not exercise any forethought or 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.

Note that Christ did not censure him for his inactivity, but for his stupidity. He did not lack ambition, but discretion and good judgment. He apparently thought that one foundation was as good as another. He built his house on the wrong 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.

Each of us is engaged in building the house of life. This is not a matter of choice but of necessity. All of the inclinations of the heart, the impulses on which we proceed, the thoughts of the mind, the decisions that we make, the words of the lips, and the acts of the life are all adding their quota to the structure of character. We may make inferior choices, act on evil impulses, and pursue dubious courses, but they all go to make us what we are. On the other hand, we may build well, and produce a good character and 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.

No man ever built a house in the air. He must have ground on which to erect it. The selection of the site is a matter of great importance.

The two men in this parable represent and typify the human race. The one built on rock, the other on sand. By these metaphors Christ wants us to understand that there are two contrasted ways of setting about the high enterprise of character-building. The first man looked ahead, and dug until he struck the rock, whereas the other neither looked ahead nor anticipated any trouble. The verdict of Christ was, not that one man was good and the other bad, but that one was profoundly wise and the other was inconceivably stupid.

On what are you building — rock or sand? What you are today was determined by how you built yesterday. What you shall be tomorrow depends on how well you build today. What you are is of vast importance, but what you shall become is still more important.

The rock foundation on which to build your character and life is prompt and implicit obedience to the teachings of Christ. Christ says, "Obey My teachings, practice what I have preached, and you will build on solid rock."

3. All foundations will be tested.

Foundations are vital in view of the inevitable tensions to which the houses of life must sooner or later be subjected. Sooner or later the winds of adversity batter us. The dreary, drenching rain of sickness, suffering and depression gets us down. The floods of disaster, calamity or bereavement overwhelm us. If we are to survive these ordeals successfully, we must have solid and deep foundations on which to rest. If we are to be rooted and grounded in Christ, the Rock of ages, we should practice the precepts of Christ, and render implicit obedience to His revealed will.

Into the life of everyone disappointment and sickness come. 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.

There are all kinds of winds that blow and beat — sharp winds of criticism, unkind winds of adversity, bitter winds of defeat, cruel winds of grief, and cold winds of death. Storms reveal the quality of one's life. One stands firm under the strain, while another collapses.

In the floodtide of General William Booth's work, his eyesight began to fail rapidly. The day soon came when the physicians were not able to do anything for the improvement of his sight. His son, Bramwell, was given the unpleasant task of informing the General that all hope of regaining his vision was gone. When he heard the bad news, he was silent for a time, like one recovering from a physical blow on the head; then he said: "You mean that I am permanently blind?" Bramwell replied, "I fear we must contemplate that." "You mean I shall never see your face again?" asked the General. "No, probably not in this world," said Bramwell. The General's hand moved slowly across the counterpane, until it grasped his son's hand. Then he said, "God must know best. I have done what I could for God and the people with my eyes. Now I shall do what I can for God and for the people without my eyes." The aged man of God had built well on the foundation of Christ's teachings.

When the cold winds of death blew over the wife of Edgar Allen Poe, and removed her from the scene of action, Poe, the master of the English language, took to heavy drinking and committed suicide. Poe's House of life was built on the sand and it fell, and great was the fall of it.

Foolish indeed is any man who builds his house in summer suns on the smooth sands of indulgence and pleasure; of selfishness and ease; and takes no account of winter's storms. One foundation seems as good as another in fair weather, but in the lashing of the storm the difference is revealed — the house on the rock stands, but the house on the sand falls.

4. All results will not be the same.

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 more grand than to see one stand up when the crises of life come. At such times, many go to pieces, many break down, some try to run away, but others whose foundation is Christ have built their lives out of the stuff which can stand up and take it. Only those who build on the solid foundation are prepared to meet whatever life brings. In the day of testing, the important thing will be what fruits you have borne in your daily life in obedience to the expressed will of your Lord and Master, Jesus Christ.