

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 14, 2010

Sunday, February 14, 2010: Foundation on the Rock

Foundation on the Rock
Matthew 7: 24 – 29.

I. Introduction.

What do you do when you visit a friend's house for the first time? Often, I find myself going on a tour of the house. This is especially true if our friends have moved into a new house...or even a new-to-you house. If Shauna is with me, we usually split into two groups. The men go in one direction, and the women go in the opposite direction.

The reason the men and women split up for the tour, is so the hosts can point out the aspects of their new home they are most proud of. That is usually different for the woman and the man. The woman is usually most proud of her closets and the decorative features of the house. The man is most proud of manly things like ...

I've had men show me their fireplaces. My brother likes to build a screened-in back porch with a porch swing facing a rustic-looking fireplace. It's a pretty neat place to gather and swing and burn the wrapping papers from Christmas gifts.

One time, my friend Steve took me outside to look at his manly gas grill. He got tired of replacing the gas bottles on his grill. So, when they moved into a new house, he had them connect his grill to the main gas line of the house. No more changing bottles, and no more running out of gas.

And then there is the story of a man in our church... I'm not going to tell you who it was, but you know who you are. We split up into men and women. The man told me he wanted to show me the thing he was most proud of in his new house. I had no idea what he was going to show me, but I knew it was going to be something manly. We walked outside the house. Then, we walked around to the side of the house...And there it was. The air conditioning unit. It was brand new, and it was HUGE. It was probably the biggest air conditioner I had ever seen that was not attached to the roof of a church. It brings a tear to my eyes just remembering it.

I have had men show me almost every part of their houses. I say almost every part of their houses, because there is one part no one has ever shown me. No one has ever shown me their foundation.

On one hand, that might be unusual since the foundation is one of the most important parts of the house. On the other hand, it's probably not unusual since the foundation is not something that is visible. Once the house is completed, the foundation is out of sight and out of mind. We take it for granted, as long as the foundation is doing its job.

The last house we lived in in Mississippi had some foundation problems. It was the church parsonage. We had several doors that wouldn't close properly, and there was a crack beginning to form in the wall of our dining room. That was a fairly common occurrence for people in our area. The dirt in that area was known as Yazoo clay. It absorbed a lot of water then became very hard when it was dry. Over time, foundations would shift and move. And, sometimes people had very big problems.

As Jesus closed out his Sermon of the Mount, he told a parable about the importance of a good foundation...

Read Matthew 7: 24 – 29.

The parable is about two men who built two houses. However, this story has a deeper meaning. The primary story teaches a secondary lesson. The secondary lesson is actually the point Jesus wants us to understand. This is ultimately not an example about how to build a strong house. It's a story about how to build a strong life.

The first builder is a wise man. He thought long and hard about where he would build his house. He didn't build a house on the Yazoo clay of Mississippi, and he didn't build on the dry sand of the desert. This man built his house on a rock.

Rock was the best choice for a foundation in ancient Palestine. They didn't have concrete or reinforced steel. Rock was the way to go in the ancient world.

The second builder was not wise. In fact, Jesus tells us he was a foolish man. He did not build a house that would stand the test of time. Instead of building on a rock, he chose to build directly on the dry sand.

More than likely these two houses had a lot in common. For example, it seems that the two houses probably looked a lot alike. Jesus never mentioned whether or not one house was bigger or fancier than the other. They were ordinary houses.

It also seems that the houses were built in the same neighborhood. The same storm affected both houses. There was rain...There was a flood...There was a strong wind. Both houses faced the same storm.

However, the storm revealed something different about the two houses. The house built on the rock was strong enough to weather the storm. The house built on the sand collapsed with a great fall.

Remember, this is not a story about how to build a house. It's possible that Jesus knew something about building houses. After all, he grew up in the home of a carpenter and probably learned how to build things with his hands. But, it's not a story about building houses. Instead, it is a story about building your life.

Your life might not look much different from my life or from your neighbors' lives. We all live in the same neighborhoods, and we all face the same "storms of life." However, the storms of life reveal the strength of your life.

The storms of life are the same for everyone. It makes no difference whether you are a Christian or a non-Christian. There will be storms in your life. There will be rain for the righteous and the unrighteous. There will be cancer and heart attacks and hurricanes and earthquakes for Christians and non-Christians. Economic recession, divorce and death are no respecters of person. Jesus makes no promises that Christians will live a storm-free life.

The difference is not in the storm. The difference is in something unseen that helps us weather the storm. The foundation. Your life is not much different from the rest of the world. Your problems are no different. But your problems will reveal the unseen foundation of your life.

It is possible that Jesus is here referring to a common Old Testament theme. For example, **Psalm 18** says: **“I love you, O LORD, my strength. The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge. He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold (vv. 1 – 2)...As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him. For who is God besides the LORD? And who is the Rock except our God (vv. 30 – 31)?”**

Then, we read in **Psalm 46: 1 – 3**, **“God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging. Selah.”**

In the Old Testament, God is the Rock. God is the only sure foundation to help us weather the storms of life. But, is this what Jesus is saying in Matthew 7?

Notice what Jesus said in **verse 24... “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 (Matthew 7: 24).”**

The rock Jesus is talking about is hearing and obeying the words of Jesus. The wise man hears and obeys. The foolish man hears and does not obey.

As I read Jesus’ conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount, I find two key concepts: hearing and authority.

II. Hearing.

There are several ways we can hear the words of Jesus. Jesus simplifies it for us and separates it into two categories. I see multiple options, but ultimately Jesus is right. There are only two ways.

For example, it is possible for us to hear the words of Jesus and obey. It is possible to hear Jesus’ words and not obey. But, is it possible to hear Jesus words and select the words we want to obey?

A lot of Jesus’ message in the Sermon on the Mount is hard. Some of us would prefer to select about 85% of Jesus’ words and discard the 15% we don’t want to follow.

Like Jesus’ words in **Matthew 5: 43 – 45... “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.”**

That is a hard commandment. I will stick with his teachings about murder and hate; adultery, lust and divorce; telling the truth; and revenge. But, I think I will skip over the part about loving my

enemies and praying for people who don't like me.

Or, perhaps we can drop what Jesus said in **Matthew 6: 14 – 15...** **“For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins.”**

Forgiving other people the way God has forgiven me is really hard. I don't mind following Jesus' instructions on giving money, praying, fasting storing up treasures in heaven, worrying and judging other people. But, come on. Can I really be expected to forgive other people? I don't plan on taking revenge on them for what they have done to me, but I will be happier if I can be miserable. Carrying a grudge is what makes me miserable and happy at the same time.

In this final parable, Jesus only gives us two choices. When we hear the words of Jesus, we will either obey them or reject them. There is no in between. There is no 85%. There is no such thing as a “B” in the Kingdom of God.

You could quickly dismiss what I'm saying today by claiming it is either an impossible standard of perfection or that it is legalism. Before you dismiss me, let me assure you it is neither an impossible standard nor a salvation based on works. Rather, this is obedience to Jesus.

There is no such thing as accepting Jesus as your Savior without following him as your Lord. Jesus is Lord, or he is not Savior.

Of course, none of us is capable of getting things right all of the time. We are still humans...We are still sinners...We are still imperfect. BUT...Christians are a work in progress. When we stumble and fall, we know it. God is at work in our lives to shape us and change us into the men and women he wants us to be. We may not get it right all of the time, but we are growing. We are becoming more and more like Jesus everyday.

III. Authority.

The second key concept is Jesus' authority. It is very closely connected to the concept of hearing, because authority determines how we will hear Jesus.

When Jesus spoke, the crowds noticed something different about him. They compared him to the Scribes and Pharisees. Whenever the Scribes and Pharisees taught, they quoted from other sources. They quoted from the Old Testament, and the quoted from the teachings of famous Rabbis of the past.

It's the same thing I do when I preach on Sunday mornings, Sunday evenings and Wednesday evenings. I do not come to you claiming any authority. I can't tell you how to live your life. I have no right to make claims about your ethics and morality. However, I can read and interpret the Bible. That is what the Scribes and Pharisees did. That is NOT what Jesus did.

The only times Jesus quoted from the Old Testament, he did so to re-interpret it perfectly and finally. In Matthew 5, Jesus used six Old Testament quotations. All six follow this format, **“You have heard that it was said...But, I say to you.”** In other words, Jesus placed himself ABOVE the Old Testament. Jesus claimed to understand the intent of the Bible.

Also, throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus claimed to know who would be blessed (The Beatitudes) and who was truly going to enter the Kingdom of God. In fact, Jesus told us in Matthew 7: 21 – 23, that Jesus himself will be the final judge on who enters into Heaven and who does not.

The Sermon on the Mount describes a new way of life for the followers of Jesus. However, it is much more than that. Jesus did not speak these words as just another human Rabbi. Jesus spoke the Words of God himself.

Now, what are you going to do with the Words of Jesus?

IV. Conclusion.

Imagine that your doctor tells you that you have cancer. However, the type of cancer you have has a high rate of recovery for people who follow three courses of action: surgery, chemotherapy and radiation. It is possible for you to hear the words of your doctor and then do nothing. But it is unlikely. You trust your doctor as an authority, so you follow the doctor's advice.

Imagine that you have trouble with your back. You meet with a physical therapist who instructs you to follow a set of exercises three times a week. These exercises have relieved back pain for hundreds of people in the past. Again, it is possible for you to hear what the therapist says and think you are too busy to exercise. But it is unlikely.

Imagine that you are building a house by the ocean. Your first thought is to build the house on the sandy beach, but your expert builder counsels you to build it farther back...on the rock. He tells you that a house on the sand will never withstand the wind and rain and the tides. It's possible that you will ignore the expert builder and do what you want. But it is unlikely. He is the expert. He is the authority. You trust him.

Now, what will you do with the Words of Jesus?