

INTRODUCTION

A number of years ago, a developer in Canada built a subdivision in the Toronto suburbs. The houses were expensive, beginning in the \$200,000 range. The lots sold quickly and many beautiful houses were finished by summer. When winter arrived, there was a great deal of rain, ice and snow. One of the homes collapsed into a sinkhole ... then another and another. Under pressure, the developer confessed the subdivision had been built over a landfill. And instead of taking the time to bring in good fill dirt and prepare good foundations, he simply built on top of the garbage. According to Jesus, there are a lot of people who have foundation problems.

Today we come to the conclusion of Jesus' "Sermon on the Plain," a shortened version of the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew. Most preachers understand a good sermon must have a really good conclusion; sometimes it is the only part the audience will remember. We've all heard preachers who didn't know how to finish. Like the Eveready bunny, they go "on and on and on and on." After Cindy hears a preacher who has a hard time coming to a conclusion she usually comments, "You know, that preacher sure missed a lot of good stopping points!" One lady told her pastor his sermon reminded her of the peace of God and the mercy of God. He was about to say, "Thanks." But then she continued, "Like the peace of God it passed all understanding, and like the mercy of God, it was everlasting."

In contrast to many of our long sermons, the entire Sermon on the Plain covers only 29 verses and can be read aloud in less than five minutes. Jesus used the exact conclusion for the Sermon on the Plain He used for the Sermon on the Mount. It's a short parable about two men building houses. He saved the best for last, so let's examine His conclusion beginning in Luke 6:46.

Why do you call me "Lord, Lord," and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well build. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.

Jesus not only gave brilliant answers, He asked brilliant questions. Jesus begins His conclusion by asking a question He is still asking each of us who claim to be a Christian. Try to imagine Jesus looking into your eyes today asking this question, "Why do you call me 'lord, lord,' and don't do what I say?" That's a complete contradiction. The title Lord means "master, ruler, or boss." If you claim someone is your boss but you don't follow their instructions then your walk doesn't match your talk. Let's look at the different levels of this parable.

I. THE PARABLE: JESUS' RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION SEMINAR

On the surface, Jesus is simply giving wise construction advice. As a good carpenter, (actually better translated "builder"), Jesus knew how to build houses, which were all made of stone. He knew a good, stable house had to be built upon rock. There is no shortage of rocks in Israel. In fact, almost the entire country is a thin layer of topsoil covering rock. In describing this scene

Jesus talked about the folly of building a house on sand. This actually happened at times. People tried to get as close to water as possible, so they sometimes built stone houses near a river on the land formerly a riverbed. Parts of these riverbeds consisted of sand washed down years before. If someone built upon this sand, the home was fine until an unusually large amount of stormy weather and rain occurred. As the children's song says, "That's when the rains came down and the floods came up." As the water in the river rose, it reached the sandy soil beneath the house and the sand shifted beneath the stone walls, and "splat!" The water didn't have to get very high—it wouldn't need to get deeper than the sand itself. When the water reached the sand, the house wouldn't just shift, lean, or tilt, it totally collapsed. That's why Jesus said in verse 49, "The moment the torrent struck the house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."

Smart builders could still build on the old riverbed very close to the house on the sand. But the wise builder simply continued to probe the sand until he found solid rock. Then, he would dig down into the sand and build his walls in the rocks. Same location, same storm, same high water. The difference? There was no sand to move. The water could even rise up to the windows, but the house would stand firm. Before the storm, both houses looked identical; the difference wasn't seen until the storm came.

Jesus is confirming what wise builders know today: You must have a good foundation or your building will be in trouble.

Many of you have seen the amazing Leaning Tower of Pisa, Italy. Work on this beautiful bell tower began in 1173 and continued for 200 years. One reason it took so long was it was not built on a solid foundation so it began to lean. The builders tried unsuccessfully to correct the problem. They continued to build it to its full height of 185 feet, with the top 18 feet off-center. The tower has remained standing for over 800 years, but unless modern efforts are successful to prevent further deterioration of the foundation, it will eventually fall. Don't ever forget the importance of a good foundation.

II. THE SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE:

Since this is a parable, we know Jesus wasn't primarily talking about houses. He was talking about people, people just like us. Like the parable about fruit trees, Jesus explains His parable. Jesus is describing two types of people. Which group are you in?

1. A wise man comes to Jesus, hears His words, and obeys them

Notice the three stages of relating to Jesus in verse 47. Step one: This person is someone who has come to Jesus. Jesus said, "Come unto me all you who labor and are heavy laden." Have you done that? Most of you reading this have done that—good for you! Step two: This person has heard the words of Jesus. Jesus also said, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." That means, "Are you really listening?" Again, almost everyone reading this had heard the words of Jesus. You have read them, or heard them taught to you. Notice step three: This person "put them into practice." That's a verb in the Greek language that doesn't mean once-and-for-all action. It means continual action. The third step is to continually be willing to obey and put into practice the words of Jesus.

2. A fool comes to Jesus, hears His words, and doesn't obey them

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus warns it is a dangerous thing to call a man a "fool." But then a few minutes later, He calls the man foolish who builds on the sand. Who is He talking about? For many years, I read this parable and thought Jesus was talking about the difference between a Christian and an unbeliever. I thought the Christian was the one whose life was built on the Rock and the collapsed house pictured a pagan reprobate who had no interest in God. But one day I read it again. As I read it, the foolish man had taken two of the three steps the wise man took. Jesus says in verse 49 this man "hears my words." I believe this pictures a person who approaches Jesus in faith and he is aware of the Words of Jesus. It sounds to me like a person who attends church, hears the Bible taught, and even reads the Bible himself. So, do you see the only difference between the two? The foolish man chooses *not* to obey Jesus. I don't think Jesus is talking about a person who has no knowledge of God and is clueless about what the Bible says. This man has heard the Word of God! It could be a counterfeit Christian or it could be like thousands of people who are in church every Sunday. You know what much of the Bible says but you treat it like a good novel, a tear-jerking movie, or a wonderful song you hear. It's nice, and you enjoy it, but you sure aren't going to make it the entire focus of your life! So, you ask, "What's the big deal?" Here's the big deal: When storms come into your life—and they will—your life will fall apart. Let's examine more closely the difference between these two kinds of people.

III. THE PERSONAL APPLICATION

There are six important points I want you to consider as we listen to the Words of Jesus.

1. Storms will come into your life

For both the wise and the foolish builders, the storm came and the waters rose. Nobody is immune to the storms of life. You'd better be prepared because you *will* face storms. Jesus said, "In this world you will face trouble, but take heart! I have overcome the world." (John 16:33) Jesus faced storms, too and He overcame them. In the Garden of Gethsemane, He was under such pressure and stress drops of blood appeared like sweat drops on His forehead—everyone has to face the storms.

You will encounter storms from the outside and like the weather, you have no control over them. It may be a family crisis, a financial crisis or a relationship problem. Or your storm may be stress on the inside. That's when you struggle with discouragement and you want to quit. Or it may be the depression you battle when life doesn't happen the way you planned. It's the pressure building up on the inside from all the junk life throws your way. Don't think you can live a storm-free life.

Bad things *do* happen to good people (and good things happen to bad people). Jesus said, "God makes it to rain on the just and the unjust." God is not singling out people because they deserve storms; all of us face them at many times in life. Just expect them.

I heard a story about a pastor who was out of town for a week. During his absence, a tornado swept through his little city. A man from his church met him at the city limits. The man said, "Pastor, please pray for me, that tornado destroyed my house. All I have left are the clothes on my back." The pastor decided to use the tragedy to teach the man a lesson. The pastor said, "Well, because of the sin and disobedience in your life, I'm not surprised your house was destroyed. I believe God was punishing you. I hope you take this as a warning from God." The man said, "Certainly, pastor. And by the way, your house was demolished also." Ouch.

Floods usually follow the storms. Storms happen when there are clouds, thunder and lightning but floods from the storms sometimes happen in the sunshine. Sometimes, we survive the storm. It's the flood, the aftermath, which sinks us. Most of us have an "emergency mode" so when an emotional storm strikes suddenly; we react with strength in the face of the immediate threat. But when the adrenaline wears off, it's the slow rising tide of despair that often produces our emotional collapse. Remember storms come to everyone of us, and dangerous floods usually follow them.

For every one of you reading this, I can assure you are either (1) in the midst of a storm right now, or (2) simply abiding in the calm before the next storm. What are you doing now?

2. You are building a shelter (life) against the storms

Today, meteorologists have technological tools like Doppler radar to warn us when a severe storm is approaching. They issue watches and even warn us to take shelter. Unfortunately, it's harder to predict the onset of the storms of life. Most often, they strike suddenly with little or no warning. The time to prepare for a storm is *before* it hits, not when you are in it. Whether or not you admit it, you are building a shelter against the storm. Your belief system or your personal philosophy—the rules you live by—become the shelter you occupy when the storms come.

Once there was a wealthy businessman who developed subdivisions and built houses. His right-hand man was his construction foreman. For over thirty years they operated a profitable business of building houses. One day the owner said to his foreman. I'm going to retire but I want to build one more house. I want it to be the most expensive, luxurious house we've ever built. I'm going to Europe for a year, when I get back I want to tour the house before we sell it. Use the finest materials, install the finest equipment, and let's even furnish it with the nicest furniture and accessories. This is our last house before we dissolve the business, so spare no expense."

After the owner left, the foreman thought, "This is my last house for him, so here's my chance to make a fortune." He built a massive house but used cheap materials, inferior equipment and inexpensive furnishings. He pocketed the difference in the price.

When the owner returned a year later, he and the foreman surveyed house. On the outside it was beautiful, but the foreman knew below the surface it was inferior. The owner asked the foreman, "Do you like the house?" The foreman said, "Yes, sir it is a fine house." Then the owner handed the keys to the foreman and said, "Surprise. I want to give you this house for you and your family to live in."

Each of us is building a personal house we will occupy when we need shelter from life’s storms. It’s your house—so you’d better be careful how you build it. That’s why Jesus warned us the location in which we build our shelter in is extremely important. He was trying to warn us that:

3. It’s dangerous to build upon the:

a. Shifting sands of popular culture

As I have often said, the movies, television shows and music of our generation have been the source of a belief system for many people. We tend to worship the celebrities and hang on their words as they are quoted in magazines and newspapers. Everybody wants to be cool and “accepted” and the easiest way to do this is to be like everyone else. We can’t escape it. Every book ever written, every movie and television show ever produced and every song ever sung are communicating a type of truth. It may be harmless truth or it may be harmful. Sadly, millions of people have built their lives on the shifting sands of our pop culture.

What used to be considered behavior that would make a person ashamed is now behavior that will almost guarantee a book, movie, or record contract! There aren’t many icons in our pop culture who are putting the words of Jesus into practice.

Several years ago, when Madonna became the proud single mother of her daughter, she was asked by one of the magazines what kind of spiritual training she would give her daughter, she answered, “I will teach her about Catholicism but also about all religions; especially Buddhism, Judaism, Kabbalah ... My own religion combines all of those things. I would rather present the Bible to my daughter as some very interesting stories you could learn from, rather than this is the rule you must live by.” Compare that with what Jesus said.

It’s dangerous to build upon the

b. Shallow sand of personal opinion

Some people take the opposite, independent approach. They claim they are not influenced by anybody, neither Madonna nor the Bible. They claim everyone should just “believe whatever they like.” The danger of that is you are elevating your mind to the status of God. I’m not nearly smart enough to bow down before the altar of my intelligence! That’s the basic tenet of New Age philosophy. God is simply everyone’s “life force” therefore, each of us is our own “God” – we don’t need anybody else’s belief system. That sounds nice, but what happens when the storm comes?

It’s dangerous to build upon the

c. Quicksand of easy believism

That’s one of the dangers of “religious people” who have only embraced a portion of the truth about Jesus. They want to get their ticket to heaven punched, but they really don’t want their belief to intrude on their real life. They practice a kind of easy believism that may get them to

church often and makes them feel respectable. However, they seldom ever consider, much less obey, the true words of Jesus. They have reduced Christian belief into a simple set of religious activities and language. But when the storms come, this belief system doesn't stand.

4. In the storms you discover the stability of your foundation

Look again at those two houses Jesus described. From the outside they look identical. You can't tell which one has a strong foundation and which one has the weak foundation. Foundations can't be seen on the outside. Only when the storms come will the stability of the house be known.

Look around you at the houses you see in this room. There are all kinds of houses here; some are old houses, some are young, some are large and some are small—but we all pretty much look the same. But when the storms of life rage against us, that's when we discover how stable our shelter really is. I really think God allows storms to come into our lives to test us. He wants us to see for ourselves the quality of our foundation.

A mother noticed it was about time for school to dismiss and since it looked like rain, she drove toward the school to pick up her eight-year-old daughter. She turned down the street to see her daughter running towards her down the sidewalk. A lightning bolt flashed and the little girl stopped in her tracks and looked up towards the sky, smiled and again began running towards her mother's car. Another lightning bolt flashed and again the little girl stopped, looked toward the sky, smiled and resumed running. When the little girl finally arrived where her mother was parked, her mom asked her about her strange behavior. "Why did you keep stopping and smiling at the sky every time there was lightening?" she asked her daughter. "I had to, mommy. God was taking my picture." Indeed, it is during the storms of life God is taking our picture to show us how sturdy our foundation is.

God is not taking your picture to accuse you. I've said before God loves you so much if He had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. But He wants you to see yourself whether or not your foundation is good. I think most of us have had times in our lives when we fell apart under the storms from without and the stress from within. But Jesus isn't just talking about one storm and one house you build. Just as there are multiple storms in life, we are always enabled to rebuild our shelters against the storm. The really foolish man is the one who rebuilds his life upon the same sand that failed him before! So, if you have found your belief system is on the unstable sand, that's a valuable discovery! You won't rebuild until you are aware you need to.

Sometimes a terrible storm can be your best friend when it reveals a faulty foundation. It can serve as a wake-up call to show you have to rebuild. Remember, our God is the God of the second chance—and the third, fourth, and ten-thousandth chance! Remember you can't avoid the storms and floods—they are to be expected. The positive point of Jesus' parable is there is something we can do to maintain our stability and security when the storms fall and the floods rise.

5. Storm-proof your life: Dig deep and get rid of the dirt! Build upon the rock of total obedience

Look again at what the wise man did. Verse 48 tells us "he dug down deep." Shallow belief and shallow living won't find the rock. It's quicker and easier to build your life upon the shallow sand.

Go back with me in time and visit those two guys building their homes side by side. We'll call one of them Sandy and one of them Rocky. Sandy completed his house in a few days. While he was moving in, Rocky was still digging away. Monday night rolled around and Sandy was out back barbecuing lamb chops. He looked over at Rocky, still digging away. "Hey Rocky, why are you working so hard? Come on over and join us. I've got tickets to the gladiator games tonight, you wanna go?" Rocky said, "No thanks, Sandy, I've got to keep digging 'till I reach the rock. There's a lot of dirt in my life I've got to remove. I'm afraid there's a storm coming and I want to be prepared." Sandy looked at the sky and said, "Storm? It's beautiful weather man!" Finally, Rocky finished and from the outside, both houses looked the same. Only the storm will reveal the difference.

Spiritually speaking, what goes up fast will come down fast. Beware of instant Christianity or microwave faith. Keep digging until you reach the rock. The rock is obedience to the Word of Jesus. If you build your life upon that, He promises the storms will still come and the floods will still rise, but you will find stability in the storm.

Don't despair and say, "That's impossible, nobody is perfect! Besides, Jesus gave so many 'words,' who can obey them all?" Jesus doesn't expect perfection. All He asks for is a willingness to obey Him and a desire to put His words into practice. Don't worry about all the words of Jesus to begin with. Start with the five minutes it takes you to read the words preceding this parable. Focus on kindness as described in verse 31, "Do to others as you would have them do to you." That's not all the words of Jesus, but it's a good start. Focus on the only two commands He gave us: Love God with all your personality; and Love your neighbor as you love yourself. Put pleasing and honoring God as your top priority. Accept the truth that God loves you and then love yourself so you can love others. Those are simple places to start to rebuild the foundation of your life!

I agree with David Gooding who writes:

There is only one way to build a house secure against a storm and that is to dig deep and lay its foundations on the rock. But digging deep can be troublesome. It is all too easy to be content with a superficial knowledge of Christianity and a superficial, normal profession of faith without real obedience to Christ. But just as there is only one foundation, so only those who by personal contact with him build directly and squarely on the foundation of His Word, believed, applied and performed, will survive the storms here and hereafter.

6. You haven't faced your biggest storm yet

I would not be an obedient disciple myself if I neglected to tell you Jesus is telling us all of the storms of this life are but warnings to the biggest storm we'll ever face. Just before He gives this parable in the Sermon on the Mount, He makes this powerful point.

Not everyone who says to me, "Lord, Lord" (the same point He makes in Luke 6:46 - why do you call me "Lord, Lord?") will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will sit to me on that day (Judgement Day), "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matthew 7:21-23).

The biggest storm is facing the God's Judgement. The same foundation that provides stability against the storms of life will survive the storm of judgement. That's why it is so important to build your life upon the Rock of faith and obedience to Jesus. Could it be God allows some of life's storms to come our way so we will see our current foundation is faulty and we need to rebuild it? If so, then the storms we endure in this life are but loving reminders from God about the quality of our foundation. If you have already built on the rock of obedience, you have nothing to fear—this final storm won't touch you. Are you certain your foundation is secure?

CONCLUSION

On September 8, 1900 a great hurricane came barreling out of the Gulf of Mexico toward the Texas coast. With no warning, Galveston Island absorbed the brunt of this storm. The raging winds and the flood tide devastated the city of Galveston. It still ranks today as the most deadly natural disaster in American history with over 6,000 deaths. It was Galveston's worst hour but every writer since agrees the storm also became Galveston's finest hour. Rather than deserting the island as many suggested, the survivors decided to rebuild. But they knew they couldn't rebuild as before. Three civil engineers were hired to raise the entire level of the island by 12 feet. 16 million cubic yards of dirt and sand were pumped in from the sea bottom. Before any structure was rebuilt, they dug down deeply to make a firm foundation. They built a large seawall along the south coast of the island. It actually took 60 years to complete the current seawall. Did it work? In 1915 another hurricane of the same severity socked Galveston. Everyone held their collective breaths and when the sky cleared, the island was flooded but almost all the structures survived and there was little loss of life.

I have seen it happen hundreds of times. People can be going along fine in life until adversity suddenly strikes—and they find they are knocked off their feet and their foundation crumbles. This just serves to show them "something is missing." Forget the popular TV show—we are *all* survivors! You are wise if you will allow that collapse to motivate you to rebuild your life upon the foundation of the rock of Jesus, because there will be more storms. What might have been the worst experience of your life actually becomes the experience leading to a new and better life for you.

Is God using this text and this message to tell you that you need to rebuild your life?

To me, it is more than just a song. Can you join me saying truly, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and (His) righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus’ name. On Christ the solid rock I stand all other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand.”

It’s time to start rebuilding!

OUTLINE

I. THE PARABLE: JESUS' RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION SEMINAR

II. THE SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE:

1. A wise man comes to Jesus, hears His words, and OBEYS them
2. A fool comes to Jesus, hears His words, and DOESN'T obey them

III. THE PERSONAL APPLICATION:

1. Storms will come into your life
2. You are building a shelter (life) against the storms
3. It's dangerous to build upon the:
 - a. shifting sands of popular culture
 - b. shallow sand of personal opinion
 - c. quicksand of easy believism
4. In the storms you discover the nature of your foundation
5. Storm-proof your life: Dig deep and get rid of the dirt! Build upon the rock of total obedience
6. You haven't faced your biggest storm yet

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" *Matthew 7:21-23*



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To put it in Texas terms, “You’re mighty welcome to use any and all of my ingredients; just make your own chili!”

For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes