

“A Solid Foundation”

Matthew 7:24-29

Dr. Randy Working
Christ Presbyterian Church
May 24, 2009

I lived in Seattle for a lot of years. The newspapers there reported that over 68,000 millionaires live in King County, which encompasses the Seattle metro area, and those wealthy people have built a lot of mansions. At the same time, it rains most of the time in Seattle. It seemed like every year, there would be stories of hills turning to mud and big houses sliding down into the abyss. No matter how great the house, in the end it amounted to nothing if it wasn't solidly anchored. That's the principle Jesus points to in our passage for this morning.

Today we reach the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount that started in chapter 5 of Matthew. He's taught us about the blessings, or the Beatitudes; he's given us our vocation as followers of Christ, to be salt and light in the world. He told us to pray and to take Scripture seriously, to control anger and lust, to keep our marriages faithful. He told us not to take oaths, seek revenge, or to hate. He taught us how to pray and how *not* to pray; he taught us the goal of spiritual life, to invest in heaven, and he taught us to judge right and wrong, true and false, without being *judgmental* of other people.

And he wraps up the sermon with warnings. He said, look out, because there's a wide gate and a narrow one, there's false prophets and true ones, and now he says there are two kinds of people who hear Jesus' teaching. At the end of the sermon, Jesus wants to drive home an important point: in order to benefit from his wisdom, we must be like the man who built his house on the rock and not like the one who built his house on the sand.

So, Jesus says it all comes down to what we do with Jesus. He says, “Therefore everyone who hears these words of *mine*.” There are many voices out there that are false. But in the end, Jesus says, there's only one choice that matters: whether we build on his words or not.

It's like that when Jesus took Peter, James and John and went up to the top of a mountain. All of a sudden, Jesus' followers saw his glory shining, and then they saw Moses and Elijah, the great lawgiver and the greatest prophet from the Old Testament, both appeared from heaven and were talking with Jesus. Peter said, "Let's build three shrines here, and preserve the moment." And God's voice from heaven said, “This is my Son, whom I love, and I'm well pleased with him. Listen to him!” (Matthew 17:5b) After that, Moses and Elijah disappeared, and Jesus was there alone with his followers.

There's no voice like Jesus' voice. He stands alone. Sometimes someone says something like, “All religions are basically the same.” They're not, because no one makes claims like Jesus did, that it all comes down to your response to him. They're not, because you can try to make it to heaven based on your own goodness, and God says, it's never enough, or you can bank on Jesus. There's no one like him.

And so throughout Matthew's Gospel, he underlines the mega-themes of surprise, and authority. And we see both of those in the text for this morning. Matthew wraps up by

pointing out the amazement of the crowd—amazed, because Jesus wasn't what they expected. He spoke with authority.

The question is: "Is Jesus your authority, or are you listening to someone else?"

So, what does he tell us?

The key to understanding this parable is to look closely for the parts that are the same, and the parts that are different. See, in this little story, there are three pairs of constants and three variables that have to do with hearing versus doing, with building and foundations, and with the storm and its results.

What do those contrasts tell us?

First, everyone is building a house.

Everyone is filling their days with the stuff that makes up a life. We all have the basic resources of whatever time, talents, looks, resources, money, or connections the Lord has given us. Jesus makes that clear in his parable of the talents. We all have some basic set of tools, and it's what we're using to build a house. So the stuff I do shapes the space of my life. It's what we dedicate our lives to. You can be rich or poor, wise or foolish, but we're all building a house.

Now, there are all kinds of things we can give our lives to, and those things are the different kinds of houses we can build. For some of us maybe it's a family. For others, it's a business. Or soccer. Or painting, or a hobby, or some great love. Maybe it's the Cleveland Cavaliers! There are all kinds of houses. Do you know what all these have in common? They make great houses—but lousy foundations!

Take your family. It's a wonderful gift from God, so make it your house. But if you make it your foundation, it can't take the pressure when the storms come. You try to put on your kids or your grandkids that kind of importance, to make them the most important thing in your life, because they can't handle the pressure. That's making them the foundation, and they can't sustain the rest of your life.

That leads to the next thing. We're all building a house, and:

Second, every house needs a foundation.

Just like everyone is building a house, a life, a career, a family, everyone is building on a foundation. We're building on what we believe to be true and stable.

The crucial thing isn't the shape of our houses or the color of the walls or the number of bedrooms. It's the foundation we build on. Not far from where we lived in Southern California was a place called the Ventura Keys. There were a lot of nice beach houses, great places to live or spend a vacation. You could walk right out your front door, and you were on the beach. But of course, they were built on concrete slabs. Only an idiot would build a house on sand, and a house like that would only last until the next storm or the next high tide.

There's a major earthquake fault line, the San Andreas Fault, which runs in the Pacific Ocean right off San Francisco. In 1989 there was a huge earthquake there. You may remember it, because it occurred right before the first game of the World Series between the San Francisco Giants and the Oakland Athletics in Candlestick Park. Now, there were over 60 deaths in the earthquake. There was major damage like the Embarcadero Freeway that collapsed, and apartments that crumbled in the Marina district, because it was built on infill in the bay.

Contrast that with the Golden Gate Bridge. It sits almost on top of the fault line. But it didn't suffer any damage because the weight of the bridge rests on two towers that go deep into the bedrock under the San Francisco Bay.

Architects and engineers know the importance of foundations, of course. These days, there buildings designed in a postmodern style, even ones called "deconstructionist." They're based on the philosophy that life is random and senseless. They have design features like gaps or holes in their buildings, or air conditioning and plumbing pipes on the outside not the inside, of buildings with no patterns, of staircases going nowhere, of pillars supporting nothing, of dead ends and confusion. But notice that buildings don't do the same thing with the foundation. That's because you can't get away with messing with the infrastructure. If you do, the foundation can't sustain the building any more.

There are only two choices: you either build on a solid and deep foundation or you build on a shallow and weak foundation. One will hold up, and one won't. You can either live God's plan for your life—or have his strength even in tough times—or you can live your plan for your life. If you don't build on God's foundation, then you're at risk and nothing you build will have lasting value. The storms of life can take it away.

That foundation needs to be Jesus and his teaching. You can't just hear his words, you have to *do* them. That's why he says, "everyone who hears these words of mine and does them." Hearing is indispensable. How can we do words we haven't heard? But, as crucial as hearing the Word is, hearing good teaching or studying the Bible by itself isn't doing the will of the Father. The Word has to reach the level of our hearts, our heads, our hands, our habits.

That's why James writes,

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:22-25)

Good intentions are great, but only if they get translated into action. Building the house of our lives is great, but we need the foundation to be secure.

Third, everyone has to face the storms.

Jesus' teaching isn't a good luck charm against wind and rain. The same storms hit faithful disciples as the faithless ones. When you do what Jesus says, it doesn't protect

you *from* trouble, it protects you *in* trouble, just like rock under your house doesn't shield you from storms. It supports you *during* storms.

Before the storm, the houses Jesus talks about look the same. They both might be attractive, spacious, and comfortable. Maybe they're both designer homes. On the surface you can't tell which house is built on the sand and which is anchored deep to the rock. It was only when the storms hit that you could see the difference in the homes.

Jesus doesn't tell us to build our houses in protected biospheres. There are no storm-free zones. This is a parable about foundations, not avoiding the weather. The critical thing is the foundation we're sitting on. So when the storms come, whether in the form of financial problems, stress in your marriage, a health crisis, a conflict, or an addiction. Jesus is saying we can be secure even in the face of the storms. We do it by building on the rock. But how do we do that?

First, we have to know the truth.

Jesus said anyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like the wise man. The first step is to hear. Practically, I think this means several things.

It means we have to expose ourselves to the truth. We read the Bible, read Christian books, attend worship, get involved in classes and Bible Studies, we meet with Christian friends who can teach and instruct us.

It also means to listen. It is not enough to just hear. It's why when Jesus told a parable, he often said, "Anyone who has ears to hear, let him hear." We have to listen. Anyone who's married knows the difference between hearing and really listening. Anyone who has a teenager knows the difference between hearing and listening. The best listeners I know ask clarifying questions, like, "What do you mean?" "Are you saying..." We should do the same when we read the Bible. We should ask, "Is there a promise that I can claim?" "Is there a command I need to obey?" "What kind of response does this demand?"

You have to expose yourself to the truth if you want to grow.

Second, we have to act on the truth.

It isn't enough to about God. It is not enough to know what God wants you to do. That's why Job said,

My ears had heard of you
but now my eyes have seen you.

Therefore I despise myself
and repent in dust and ashes. (Job 42:5,6)

It's the same with building. You can have all the theory, know how far apart all the studs and supports should go, but it's not worth anything if you don't act on what you know.

I talked to someone this week who told me, "I'm just not into religion." You know what? It's not about religion, it's about relationship, and it's about getting your foundation right.

Maybe you're in a storm right now. Maybe you're discovering that your foundation is shaky. I invite you to turn to the Lord. To go deep into God's Word. You need Christian friends who can give you guidance. You need to put your confidence in his love for you and his work for you. That's the great thing. It's all about God's undeserved love, and it's not what we do that saves us, it's Jesus' word that saves us, not our work. The rock is there. We just have to build on it.

Jesus is the rock. He's the foundation. Paul says,

But each one should be careful how he builds. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. (1 Corinthians 3:12)

And Peter says,

For in Scripture it says,
"See, I lay a stone in Zion,
a chosen and precious cornerstone,
and the one who trusts in him
will never be put to shame." (1 Peter 2:6)

That cornerstone is Jesus. Build your life on him, and you'll have a solid foundation.