

THE ONLY AND TRUE FOUNDATION: THE STORY OF TWO HOUSES

Matthew 7:24-27

Lincoln Park Baptist Church, West Newton, Mass.-- August 11, 1963, 9:30 A.M.

Introduction:

A few days ago, one of our church members was telling me the story of how some mighty-looking oaks here in Newton were uprooted by a hurricane in 1938. Outwardly, the trees appeared to be strong and sturdy. However, their roots had not penetrated deeply into the soil to hold them upright against the impetus of a storm. They lacked the deep rootage required to withstand a hurricane, and they fell.

Two years later a storm of another kind hit the country of France. That nation had put its confidence in its leaders, the army and the Maginot line, the famous fortification facing the German border that was supposed to stop any attack from the side of the Germans. But when the German army attacked France in 1940, it took them only two months to overrun the proud nation of France. Why did France fall? Some say that it was not for lack of an army but for lack of moral resources. Both the army and the government had been undermined by the famous Nazi spies, called the fifth column. The French had lost the battle even before the war started. France could not withstand the onslaught of the German army and spy system. The nation lacked the material and moral resources for the engagement at hand. And having no foundation, she fell.

And what is true of nature and nations, is true also of individuals. During the stock-market crash of 1929, it was not uncommon to hear that a certain man, after losing his fortune in the market, had taken his life. What had happened to him? Why did he do it? The simple and perhaps the correct answer is that he had founded his life on money and now that his money was gone, there was no further reason for existing. The foundation of his life was gone and so he was felled.

Human life is indeed mysterious and complex. The springs of our conduct lie hidden in the depth of our being. Each one of us every day of his life, is developing his character on foundations which he thinks stable and secure.

What lies behind our behavior, behind our thoughts, behind our actions? On which foundation do we build our lives? When situations of crisis come, how do we react? Do we go to pieces or do we have the spiritual and moral resources to withstand the darts and arrows of outrageous fortune?

Perhaps one of the parables of our Lord might give us guidance as to the foundation on which we can securely build. I refer to the parable of the house builders which appears as a concluding statement for the whole Sermon on the Mount.

Let us further see what it says for us.

I. Both men built houses -- both the wise man and the foolish man.

- A. We cannot help but be builders. We are given a life to live and each one of us is responsible for his house, that is, his own thoughts, words and deeds -- in short, for his own character and manner of life.
- B. The metaphor is apt. A man's character is like a house:
 "Such a comparison must have been doubly appealing to Christ. He may have been a builder, as a carpenter he certainly worked on houses. Every thought is like a timber in the house of life, every habit like a beam, every imagination like a window, well or badly placed, and they all gather, in some kind of unity, seemly or grotesque. "Of the two builders, one is a thoughtful man who deliberately plans his house with an eye to the future; the other is not a bad man, but he is thoughtless, and casually begins to build in the easiest way. The one is earnest; the other is content with a careless and unexamined life."
 I.B. Vol. 7. p. 334.

The lesson is clear: all men are builders. They build their own character and manner of life. This applies to the wise and to the foolish, to the poor and to the rich, to the white and to the Negro -- to all mankind, indeed.

- II. Both houses were tested, that is: both the wise man and the foolish man were tested.
 - A. There is drama in the story, in the way it describes the coming of the storm. "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house." This happened to both houses. This is stark realism.
 - B. Every house is tested. "Summer does not stay; providence has different seasons." No man escapes temptation, not even Jesus. No man escapes trials and tribulations, not even the apostles and saints. No man escapes sorrows, not even the President of the U.S. No man escapes the claims of responsibility -- after "flash-storms" comes an automobile accident, a tornado that takes the life of many -- and so on and so forth.
 - C. The lesson is clear: to quote Shakespeare: "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" are no respecter of persons.
- III. Both men built their houses on different foundations. This is the only difference between the two builders, but as it turns out, it makes all the difference in the world.
 - A. The wise man builds upon the rock. The foolish man builds upon the sand. However, this is a parable and we must pay attention to the point that Jesus is driving at. The punch line of the parable is in verses 24 and 26.

"Every one who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man"

(24) "And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man." (26) In other words, to hear and do the words of Jesus is to build on solid foundation, and when judgment comes there is nothing to fear.

On the other hand, to hear and not to do the words of Jesus is to build on sandy foundations and invites destruction.

B. The words of Jesus are presented in the Sermon on the Mount. This is what the parable refers to. They can be summarized into sentences:

1. Jesus exemplifies in the sermon of the mount a radical obedience toward God. There is no consideration of consequences. What counts is total obedience.
"You, therefore, must be perfect as your heavenly father is perfect."
2. This radical obedience embraces an unswerving love towards men:
Read 5:38-47.
3. This double-pronged directive of the words of Jesus are very well represented by the beams of the cross.
4. Jesus intended his words to be obeyed.
 - a. The ideal Christian character -- 5:3-11
 - b. The ideal prayer -- 6:9-15
 - c. Seek first the Kingdom of God

Conclusion:

Obedience constitutes wisdom and in the end, salvation.
Disobedience constitutes foolishness and in the end, destruction.

Take heed, therefore, how you hear.

Everyone, then, who hears these words of mine and does them, will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock.

Read Mt. 25:31-46 if there is time.