

Matthew 7:21-29
March 6, '11

“BUILT TO LAST”

I KNOW THAT MANY OF YOU CAN IDENTIFY VARIOUS ADVERTISING SLOGANS.

IF I SAY, “*COME HUNGRY, LEAVE HAPPY,*” YOU’D SAY IHOP.

“*WE TREAT YOU RIGHT*” IS THE CLAIM OF DAIRY QUEEN.

“*THE HAPPIEST PLACE ON EARTH*” IS DISNEYLAND.

I ALSO KNOW THAT MANY OF YOU ARE OLD ENOUGH TO BE ABLE TO COMPLETE SOME VINTAGE ADVERTISING JINGLES.

IF I START YOU OFF WITH – “*YOU’LL WONDER WHERE THE YELLOW WENT....,*” YOU’D COMPLETE THE JINGLE WITH “*...IF YOU BRUSH YOUR TEETH WITH PEPSODENT.*”

“*PLOP, PLOP, FIZZ, FIZZ,*” WOULD EVOKE “*OH, WHAT A RELIEF IT IS*” FROM THOSE OF YOU WHO REMEMBER SPEEDY, WHO IT’S NICE TO SEE, HAS APPARENTLY COME OUT OF RETIREMENT FOR ALKA-SELTZER.

SOME ADVERTISING SLOGANS JINGLES ARE EASY TO REMEMBER & CONNECT TO THE PRODUCT THEY’RE PROMOTING.

OTHERS, THOUGH, ARE A BIT MORE DIFFICULT.

IN READING THIS PASSAGE AT THE END OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, I KEPT THINKING OF THE PHRASE “BUILT TO LAST.”

I KNEW IT WAS A PROMOTIONAL SLOGAN FOR A VEHICLE, AND THAT VEHICLE WAS MOST LIKELY A TRUCK, BUT I DIDN’T HAVE ANY IDEA WHAT THAT TRUCK WAS.

DO YOU REMEMBER IT?

IT WASN’T FORD – THEY’RE “BUILT FORD TOUGH.”

IT WASN’T CHEVY – THEY MADE BOB SEGER MILLIONS WITH THEIR “LIKE A ROCK” THEME.

IT WAS GMC – “BUILT TO LAST.”

THAT’S REALLY THE THEME OF THIS PARABLE JESUS TELLS IN THE MIDDLE OF THIS PASSAGE.

IT’S SO APPROPRIATE TO FIND THIS PARABLE LOCATED *HERE* IN MATTHEW’S GOSPEL.

IT’S APPROPRIATE BECAUSE JESUS HAS COME TO THE END OF THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT – THE GREATEST SERMON EVER PREACHED – THE LONGEST EXTENDED, UNBROKEN SET OF STATEMENTS OF JESUS IN ALL THE GOSPELS.

HE SAYS, “*SO THERE YOU HAVE IT. THESE ARE THE WORDS OF LIFE. BUILD YOUR LIFE UPON THESE WORDS.*”

THERE ARE REALLY 3 DIFFERENT PARTS TO THIS PASSAGE, WITH THE PARABLE BEING FOUND IN THE MIDDLE.

IT OPENS WITH A VERY SEVERE & EVEN FRIGHTENING WARNING FROM JESUS & ENDS WITH THE RESPONSE OF THE CROWD TO THE SERMON THEY’D JUST EXPERIENCED.

IN THE MIDDLE IS THE PARABLE.

I THINK THERE ARE SEVERAL ASPECTS TO THIS PARABLE THAT ARE OF EXTREME IMPORTANCE.

FIRST OF ALL, NOTICE THAT THE HOUSES BUILT BY THE TWO MEN AREN'T REALLY ANY DIFFERENT FROM ONE ANOTHER.

JESUS DOESN'T SAY ONE OF THE MEN BUILT A HOUSE OF A SPECIFIC SIZE, HAD A CERTAIN KIND OF ROOF, A PARTICULAR SET OF WINDOWS & A DISTINCTIVE TYPE OF FLOORING.

HE SIMPLY SAYS THEY EACH BUILT A HOUSE.

AT FIRST GLANCE, AS YOU WOULD WALK PAST THE TWO HOUSES, THEY MIGHT LOOK EXACTLY THE SAME.

THERE IS NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN THE TWO.

THEY'RE SIMPLY TWO HOUSES.

IT'S NOT WHAT YOU SEE ABOVE GROUND THAT MATTERS.

IT'S WHAT LIES BENEATH.

IT'S WHAT'S BURIED DEEP INSIDE THE GROUND.

IT'S THE FOUNDATIONS OF THE STRUCTURES THAT DISTINGUISHES ONE FROM THE OTHER.

I THINK JESUS IS TELLING US THAT IT'S THE SAME IN LIFE.

IT'S NOT WHAT WE SEE ON THE SURFACE.

IT'S NOT THE FAÇADE THAT MATTERS.

IT'S WHAT'S BURIED BENEATH.

IT'S WHAT INSIDE THAT MATTERS.

IT'S THE FOUNDATION ON WHICH YOUR LIFE IS BUILT THAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE.

BUT NOTICE SOMETHING ELSE JESUS SAYS.

HE COMPARES THESE 2 HOUSEBUILDERS TO PEOPLE OF FAITH.

ABOUT ONE, HE SAYS *"EVERYONE WHO HEARS THESE WORDS OF MINE & DOES THEM..."*

ABOUT THE OTHER, HE SAYS, *"EVERYONE WHO HEARS THESE WORDS OF MINE & DOESN'T DO THEM..."*

DID YOU NOTICE THE DIFFERENCE?

IT'S NOT A MATTER OF HEARING WHAT JESUS HAS SAID.

IT DOESN'T MATTER IF WE KNOW THE WORDS OF JESUS.

IT'S NOT AN ISSUE OF INTELLECTUAL ASCENT TO A SERIES OF TEACHINGS OR ETHICAL PRINCIPLES.

IT'S NOT ENOUGH TO HAVE HEAD KNOWLEDGE OR EVEN HEART ACCEPTANCE OF WHAT JESUS TELLS US.

THE ONE SINGLE WORD THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE IS THE WORD TRANSLATED HERE AS "DOES."

IT'S A WORD OF ACTION – A WORD THAT MEANS SOMETHING DONE NOW – IN THE PRESENT MOMENT.

IT MEANS SOMETHING THAT IS ONGOING AS IN "A WAY OF LIFE."

YOU SEE, WHAT JESUS IS TELLING US ABOUT THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN BEING WISE & FOOLISH IS IN ACTING OR NOT ACTING.

IT HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH KNOWLEDGE OR PERSPECTIVE OR INSIGHT OR INTELLIGENCE.

IT'S NOT ENOUGH FOR US TO HEAR THESE WORDS OF JESUS – TO STUDY THEM, TO BE INSPIRED BY THEM, TO HAVE HOPES, ASPIRATIONS & DREAMS BASED UPON HIS TEACHINGS.

WE ARE CALLED TO ACT ON THEM, TO DO THEM, TO PRACTICE THEM, TO LIVE THEM DAY IN AND DAY OUT.

IT REMINDS US OF THE LETTER OF JAMES, WHERE THE BROTHER OF JESUS SAYS, “*BUT BE DOERS OF THE WORD & NOT HEARERS ONLY.*”

NOW THIS MAY SEEM TO BE A PRETTY HEAVY DEMAND THAT JESUS LAYS UPON US.

BUT YOU KNOW WHAT?

IT'S NOT ROCKET SCIENCE!

IT'S REALLY QUITE SIMPLE.

I WOULD SUGGEST THAT WE ALL KNOW WHAT JESUS MEANS BY THIS.

WE ALL KNOW WHAT IT IS WE'RE SUPPOSED TO *DO* IN ANY GIVEN SITUATION – NOT WHAT WE'RE SUPPOSED TO FEEL OR WHAT WE'RE SUPPOSED TO BELIEVE.

WE KNOW WHAT JESUS CALLS US TO *DO*.

THAT'S WHAT MAKES THE DIFFERENCE IN THESE TWO MEN – IT'S ALL IN THE *DOING* OF WHAT THEY'VE HEARD.

BUT I WANT YOU TO NOTICE ONE MORE THING AS WELL – SOMETHING EXTREMELY IMPORTANT TO HELP US UNDERSTAND WHAT THE LIFE OF FAITH ENTAILS – AND ALSO SOMETHING IT *DOESN'T* ENTAIL.

NOTICE THAT JESUS SAYS THERE IS SOMETHING ELSE THAT IS PRECISELY THE SAME ABOUT THESE MEN.

HE SAYS, “*THE RAIN FELL, THE FLOODS CAME, AND THE WINDS BLEW & BEAT ON THAT HOUSE...*”

EXACTLY THE SAME WORDS ARE USED ABOUT BOTH MEN & BOTH HOUSES.

THE MAN WITH THE FLIMSY HOUSE ENDURED HEAVY RAIN, TORRENTIAL FLOODS & POWERFUL WINDS.

IT WAS PRECISELY THE SAME WITH THE MAN WHOSE HOUSE WAS BUILT ON A FIRM FOUNDATION.

HE DIDN'T ESCAPE THE RAINS.

HE WASN'T SPARED THE FLOODS.

HE COULDN'T AVOID THE WINDS.

LIFE DEALT BOTH OF THEM THE SAME PAINFUL BLOWS.

I THINK IT'S IMPORTANT TO REALIZE THAT.

IT'S IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND THAT A LIFE COMMITTED TO CHRIST DOESN'T MEAN WE WON'T GO THROUGH TOUGH TIMES.

WE WILL – ALL OF US WILL.

THERE WILL BE PERIODS OF RAIN LIKE YESTERDAY – TIMES WHEN IT FEELS LIKE THE RAIN WILL NEVER STOP & THE SUN WILL NEVER SHINE AGAIN.

WE'LL BE OVERWHELMED BY THE FLOODS OF PAIN & SADNESS THAT THREATEN TO WASH US AWAY.

WE'LL BE BLOWN ABOUT BY THE WINDS OF TRAUMA & SORROW THAT SEND US SWIRLING IN DESPAIR.

JESUS ASSURES US THAT THE RAIN, THE FLOODS & THE WIND WILL COME.

IT'S NOT A MATTER OF "IF" BUT "WHEN."

BUT HE'S ALSO ASSURING US THAT WHEN OUR LIFE IS BUILT ON THE FOUNDATION HE HAS LAID FOR US IN HIS TEACHINGS, WE'LL BE ABLE TO WITHSTAND THEM ALL.

THE IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER, THOUGH, IS TO BUILD THE FOUNDATION *BEFORE* THE STORM HITS.

IF YOU WAIT UNTIL IT COMES, IT MIGHT BE TOO LATE.

I EXPERIENCED THIS A FEW WEEKS AGO DURING ONE OF OUR SNOWFALLS.

I WENT OUTSIDE EARLY IN THE MORNING & SWEPT OFF OUR DRIVEWAY.

NOTICE THAT I SAID "SWEPT" NOT "SHOVELLED."

I DIDN'T WANT TO HAVE TO SHOVEL LATER SO I SWEPT NOW.

I WENT OUT A COUPLE HOURS LATER & SWEPT IT AGAIN.

ONCE I DID IT THE SECOND TIME, I PUT ICEMELT DOWN & OUR DRIVEWAY STAYED PRETTY WELL CLEARED OFF THROUGH THE WHOLE SNOWSTORM.

A COUPLE DAYS LATER, I GOT A CALL FROM A FAMILY MEMBER – SOMEONE WHO LIVES NORTH OF US WHERE THEY'D GOTTEN EVEN MORE SNOW THAN WE HAD.

HE WAS WONDERING HOW HE COULD GET THE SNOW & ICE OFF HIS DRIVEWAY BECAUSE IT WAS PRETTY WELL COVERED, FROZEN & SOLID.

HE HADN'T DONE ANYTHING UNTIL THE DAY HE CALLED.

HE'D JUST COME INSIDE FROM TRYING TO SHOVEL & GOT NOWHERE.

HE WONDERED IF IT WAS TOO LATE TO COVER HIS DRIVEWAY WITH SAND OR SALT TO GET RID OF IT.

I HAD TO TELL HIM HE WAS PROBABLY GOING TO HAVE TO EITHER SPEND HOURS ON THE DRIVEWAY WITH A SHOVEL, TRYING TO BREAK UP THE ICE & THEN SHOVEL IT AWAY OR JUST WAIT FOR A THAW.

SO IT IS WITH THE SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION OF OUR LIVES.

DON'T WAIT UNTIL THE CRISIS HITS.

DON'T WAIT FOR THE RAINS, FLOODS & WINDS TO COME BEFORE THAT FOUNDATION IS ESTABLISHED.

DO IT TODAY SO YOU'LL BE PREPARED FOR TOMORROW.

A LIFE THAT IS "BUILT TO LAST" IS A LIFE THAT HAS BEEN BUILT ON THE FOUNDATION OF THE TEACHINGS OF JESUS CHRIST.

IT'S A LIFE THAT GOES BEYOND KNOWING WITH THE HEAD & FEELING WITH THE HEART.

IT'S A LIFE THAT "DOES" WHAT THOSE TEACHINGS OF JESUS IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT CALL US TO DO.

IT'S A LIFE OF ACTION, A LIFE OF SERVICE, A LIFE OF LOVE.

I THINK IT'S INTERESTING THAT AS JESUS CONCLUDES THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT, MATTHEW TELLS US "THE CROWDS WERE ASTOUNDED AT HIS TEACHING..."

I THINK WHAT'S MORE INTERESTING, THOUGH, IS THAT IN THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT – CHAPTERS 5-7 – WE ARE GIVEN AN ACCOUNT OF THE WORDS OF JESUS.

AS WE MOVE INTO CHAPTER 8, WE ARE GIVEN AN ACCOUNT OF THE DEEDS OF JESUS.

CHAPTERS 5,6 & 7 SHOW US THE DIVINE WISDOM IN WORDS – CHAPTER 8 SHOWS US THE DIVINE LOVE IN ACTION.

CHAPTER 8 IS A CHAPTER OF MIRACLES.

IT'S AS IF JESUS HAS SAID, “DON'T JUST LISTEN TO WHAT I SAY – WATCH WHAT I DO.”

IF YOUR LIFE IS “BUILT TO LAST,” IT WILL BE BUILT ON THE FOUNDATION OF JESUS CHRIST & IT WILL BE A LIFE COMMITTED TO MORE THAN WORDS, MORE THAN A THOUGHT IN YOUR HEAD & MORE THAN A FEELING IN YOUR HEART.

THE LIFE WITH ITS FOUNDATION BUILT ON JESUS CHRIST IS A LIFE OF ACTION, A LIFE OF DOING, A LIFE OF ONGOING SERVICE TO OTHERS IN HIS NAME. AMEN.

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