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The Storyteller: Location, Location, Foundation

The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders

Matthew 7:24—29

By Dr. Matt Hook

Matthew 7:24 "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. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." 28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."

Even though the Michigan housing market is crazy right now, it's actually a good time to buy if you're buying your first home. And all the experts still say remember the 3 rules of real estate: location, location, location.

Like many of Jesus' parables, this one is very simple. That's part of the wonder of Jesus the Storyteller: Some of His stories are so simple we read right past them, or we say "Duh. Everybody knows that." But that's the problem: if we don't "know" the message well enough to live it out, then we *don't* really know it.

Jesus had just finished His famous Sermon on the Mount. This is His most famous and challenging teaching. He preached to a crowd that probably responded like we do today when someone challenges us with ideas that call us to change. They were suspicious. They were pretty cautious about buying it. Sure, Jesus is intriguing. But He was pretty radical. And if you really listened and applied it, it would mean stepping outside your comfort zone and outside the accepted norm.

So, at the end of His teaching, Jesus names this. He said some people would hear and act upon it, while at the same time, others would hear and do nothing. And Jesus uses some pretty strong language. Those who put it into action are wise, while the others are foolish, or stupid.

That's one of the things about this story: there really are only 2 choices. As with every encounter with Jesus, there's no in between. There's no talk of "now we all have a right to our own point of view." Jesus would say of course you have a right to your point of view, but He's pretty clear it may be wise or foolish.

If you're like me, already you're saying "Uh Oh." Do you hear how radical Jesus is? He's totally in the face of today's way of thinking. We say "We believe a little in this and a little in that." In our consumerist upbringing, we'll pick a little of Jesus, and then go shopping for the rest because it's too inconvenient. We never stop to think more foundationally: that if this way seems true, then that means that way can't be equally true. It has nothing to do with judgmentalism. It's like this parable. Jesus says "All points of view DON'T have the same value." And Jesus doesn't compliment the builder on sand for being "sincere" about what he believes, because he's sincerely wrong. He doesn't seem to say there are multiple ways to look at it. It's pretty straightforward: once you hear His words, you and I choose to act or we don't. There's a wise way and a foolish way, and that's it.

This really challenges me. I'm not such a black-and-white guy. But as I thought about it, especially in the really important things in life, there's two things a foundation can do: It can stay still, or it can move. ANY shifting in your foundation is a bad thing. The biggest issues in life are not like choosing between cereal brands in the grocery store; not even like choosing colleges. The biggest issues of life are so vast in their reach and consequences that those who choose rightly are wise and those who are wrong are fools. And what if this doesn't mean going back to some old judgmental way of doing things, but what if it means being a new kind of Christian today? It's like Jesus takes time to take time to spell it out for you and me today.

Look at the Storyteller's parable. It's clear. Two men are building. The homes are the same in every way. Both are well-built. Both builders care about the kind of house it is, because they're going to live there. The only difference—the ONLY difference, is the foundation. One house is built on rock and one on sand. A city boy like me might not notice the difference. If I were buying the house, I could be fooled. But not the people Jesus is talking to. These know land and property. The choice of the "sandy builder" is based on something besides reason. The difference between the wise and foolish is not a difference of ability, or knowledge, or opportunity. It's a difference of each person's choice.

At first there's no evidence of wisdom or stupidity. Both men are building sturdy, good houses. But one day there's a storm. This is the surest thing I can tell you about this parable. In life you can count on it. Throughout Scripture, in a world where accidents happen, marriages are broken, friendships are betrayed, economies shift, jobs and businesses come and go, you will deal with a storm. No one is exempt. James writes "*It rains on the just and the unjust.*" (Why do we always think we're in the "just" category?) We live on a planet with weather patterns and storms. They hit.

Storms can catch us by surprise. A phone call, A break up, it could be anything. And your life is totally changed. All of us are caught unawares by one kind of storm or another.

In the story of your life, it's when the storm hits that you find out something about your house. The way Jesus tells the story, the whole issue is the foundation. One man built on rock, the other on sand.

Why would a person deliberately build on sand? In some instances, I think it's because the person thinks "It couldn't happen to me." We know, statistically, a certain percentage of persons who start drinking will become alcoholics. "Somebody else", the woman says. Some of the choices you make "in the name of freedom and your ability to choose" are like Russian roulette. You ought to know the pistol is loaded. But most of us are optimists. We think we'll be the ones to beat the odds.

Other people are on sandy ground because, frankly, the land is cheap. You might be the person who always looks for a marginal deal. Some people cut their ethical decisions so close to the line they wind up on the other side of it. "Everybody does it" is one of our favorite reasons for what we do. But obviously, everybody doesn't do it. Maybe a lot of people do, but not everybody. And even if the majority do, your choices of what's right and what's wrong aren't based on majority. But if you're looking for a shortcut to happiness, you'll wind up in a lot of sandy places. It's like they know they can get their dream house faster if they don't have to spend so much in the land. (Like the 3 Little Pigs. The wolf always comes. But can he blow away your house when you take the time and the right materials?)

There are those who are just "into" the externals of life. They're more into impressing their friends than in foundations. More than one realtor has said "It's much easier to sell cute bathroom fixtures than to sell the pipes that deliver the water."

But how sad it is...when some people put their lives together, they spend more time, money, and character trying to impress other people and looking right than they do in choosing a good foundation.

If Christianity were like some kind of plastic surgery for the soul, there'd be a lot of takers, no matter how much we charged. There are no sudden deep Christ followers. While you can be born again in a moment, it takes time to grow up. (Isn't that the purpose of being born?) It's a long process.

A line from “The Twelve-Pound Look” says “One’s religion is whatever he or she is most interested in, and yours is Success.” Some people are so into success, with money, recognition, and accumulation of stuff and benefits that they don’t pay much attention to their life’s foundation.

So, for one reason or another, somehow, people choose to build their house on sand. That’s what really bugged Jesus. He finished another session of teaching, and in every lesson was a call to follow. Mostly, only a few people (the world calls “fools”) followed. The great majority wouldn’t.

But why does Jesus seem so harsh as to call them “fools?” Because of this: the foundation, or rather the land on which they were building was such an issue because of the value of the house they were building! If the men were building chicken coops, Jesus wouldn’t make such a big deal! A chicken coops doesn’t cost much, and doesn’t take long to build. But a house? That’s a whole other issue. A house is important. A house is extremely valuable. A house is a home for your family! Extreme living goes on there! We’ve just witnessed how fragile and how grieved with Dan and Anne because life is so precious! That’s why we feel a loss like this down to our core—our foundation.

Because you only get one house. You don’t get to build a subdivision of lives. Today, some adults think you’ll try one house and if it doesn’t “fit” you’ll move to another but life isn’t like that, because your choices *move* you. So many people are trying so many things today, thinking they’ll always have their ability to choose. If we could make all our deep life choices over and over, I don’t think Jesus would’ve gotten so worked up. But Jesus makes it so pointed because we get one extremely valuable house. So we’d better pay attention to location, location, location, build it on a foundation worthy of the house.

Take that part of the house we call your body. It’s a miracle of engineering, and it’s remarkably resilient. We can feed it all the wrong things, from food to smoke, deny it healthy sleep, and ignore its warnings, and still survive. But the stuff we put into the foundation of living—the choices we make—will put the whole house in danger.

Take that part of the house we call your mind. As amazing as even a Mac computer is, it can’t compare to the computer you carry on your shoulders called your brain. But I can mess it up. I can invest my mind in trash, or self-centered ambition. I can feed my mind on porn, on resentment and hate, on pettiness and meanness. And so misuse my mind that there’s nothing there for normal, good relationships, let alone a storm.

Take the part of the house we call your soul. This is the ultimate issue for the Storyteller. The choices we make regarding our bodies and minds shape our decisions about your soul. Eternal decisions.

If this house weren’t valuable—if our bodies, brains, will, and personalities were trivial things, to be thrown together one day and torn down the next, it wouldn’t be such a big deal what your foundation was that you chose. But hear this: you are priceless. The home you are building of your life is priceless. Think what value you would pay for your child, spouse, or friend. There is no other soul like yours or mine, and no other life that can replace it.

That may be why Jesus said some people are fools. They just don’t realize the value of the house that God has given them to build. Location, location, foundation. As we move into a time of prayer, invite the Storyteller to reveal to you this: Maybe you’ve built on sand. That means something got in the way of you building your life on Jesus Christ and His truth. Even some of us who have been here a long time, your life hasn’t been built on Jesus’ inside out transformation. You can build your home, your life, from this moment on, on the truth and message of Jesus Christ. Let Him be your Cornerstone. Let him be your foundation. Transfer the deed of your life over to Him. He is your Rock.

* I am indebted to Ellsworth Kalas’ book “Parables from the Backside” and his thoughts on the Value of the House.