

March 5, 2006



A Firm Foundation

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Matthew 7:24-27

[Jesus said] *Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And every one who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it.*

Several years ago, Sears - or as I remember it from my childhood, Sears-Roebuck - had a television commercial for paint. That commercial really impressed me. In the commercial, a man painted his house with Sears Best latex, exterior paint. When he finished, his house looked beautiful.

In quick succession, that beautifully painted house was hit by a series of storms.

The rains came, sleet came, snow came. Even during the summer, the hot, drying sun beat down mercilessly on that house; but whatever the season outside, the paint kept that house looking beautiful. The storms intensified.

Snows fell and piled up against the house,
all the way up to the roof;
and the message was given out:
the thing that saved the house from the snow,
was the paint!

The flood waters swirled around the house,
 right up to the window sills;
 and again, the message was given out:
 the thing that saved the house from the flood
 waters

was the paint!
 Hurricane winds blew in,
 uprooting the trees in the front yard;
 but you know what saved the house from the hurricane:
 it was the paint!

That commercial was so convincing, I almost rushed out and bought a gallon of Sears Best latex, exterior paint.

Then I remembered, the house I lived in back then had aluminum siding! And if I took some time to think about it, I would know that no amount of Sears best latex exterior paint - not even four coats of the stuff - is going to save my house if the wind blows the roof off, or the weight of a snow drift pushes the wall in, or the river rises and washes away the foundation.

You can do your best to paint a covering of protection all around your house, your home, your family, and your life - but you know that there are some storms out there that just might blow over, or through, or down that protective screen you've put up.

That's the kind of storm Jesus was talking about when he told this little story about two houses. One house was built on rock; it had a firm foundation. It stood up to any and every storm. The other house didn't have a firm foundation, and it fell apart as soon as the storm hit.

I reckon the advertising firm from Sears was a little disappointed that Jesus didn't mention the paint at all.

Then, again, I don't think Jesus was really talking about a house.

I know the words he used:

He talked about a house that stood up to a terrible battering,
 but I don't think he was talking about a building of
 brick and mortar.

He talked about a big wind that blew in off the water,
 but I don't think Jesus was talking about a hurricane, or
 a flood, or a blizzard.

I think Jesus was talking about people, not houses. I think he was talking about

emotional storms that take you by surprise,
 passionate tempests that trample your tranquillity,
 torrid squalls that blow in uninvited,
 and turn your world up-side-down.

I think you know all about the kind of storms he was talking about:

- the kind that come with the ringing telephone in the middle
 of the night,
 shattering the silence,
 surprising you to wakefulness from your
 sweet slumber;
 - the kind that creep into your consciousness through the
 quivering conviction that all is not correct;
 - that wrenching recognition of impending doom,
 - that screeching of the tires
 - and the crumpling crash that collides with your
 complacency.

You know all about some of the storms Jesus was talking about:

- the child who takes a tangled turn and trades in treasure for
 trouble,
 - the partner who walks through the wrong door and wastes a
 relationship,
 - the talk in some far off office tower that terminates your job,
 - the illness that invades your body and steals away your
 vitality.

You know more than you want to know about those kinds of storms. You can push them to the back of your thoughts, hoping they won't visit your house, but you know they come suddenly, unexpectedly, without warning. And in their wake, they leave behind devastation and confusion, fear and anxiety, guilt and regret. You know those kind of storms can tear your house down and rip your life apart.

You also know the antidote, the prescription, the treatment.

You know the insurance policy, the preventative measures, the right kind of paint that'll protect you and yours.

It's what Jesus said. You've got to build your house, build your home, build your relationships, build your life on a firm foundation. You know it's the only thing that'll get you through those storms.

But what about all those other kinds of storms? Storms you don't recognize? Storms that run under the radar? Storms that don't look foreboding, or forbidding, or foreshadowing?

They're the kind you encounter on a bright sun-shiny day,
a clear blue sky kind of day,
a flowers blooming and birdies singing kind of day.

They're deceptive and deceiving and dangerous. They can wiggle their way into your thoughts when life is sweet and good and beautiful.

Like when your often clueless husband looks at you and says, "Honey, you look beautiful today. I'm so lucky to have you in my life..."

When your sometimes critical wife says, "I've never been more proud of you..."

When your obstinate and willful child snuggles up close beside you on the couch and hugs you tight.

When you're smiling and happy and fulfilled,
when life is sweet and harmonious,
when everything seems good and just right.

Right then is when your foundation can be washed away, if you let yourself think you've earned it and deserve it; if you think you've worked for it and made it happen. When life is good, it's so easy to deceive yourself into thinking that you made it on your own. And when you do that, you become less thankful, less appreciative, less grateful. And that leads you down the path to forgetting.

And it's then that you really need that firm foundation Jesus was talking about.

I like to think that the people who first heard Jesus tell this story knew what he was talking about. I like to think they heard his warning and they got the message.

As far as I'm concerned, there are four little words tucked away in the middle of that story that says it all, four little words that carry a mighty message, four little words that can change your life, four little words: "It did not fall."

The rains poured down by the bucket-full; yes, they did. They beat on that house and drenched it, but the house:

it did not fall.

The floods came, swirling around the foundation walls and slapping up against the windows; but the house:

it did not fall.

The winds blew up, and pounded the house with all their destructive power; but the house:

it did not fall!

The house Jesus talked about took everything nature and circumstance had to throw at it, but the house:

it did not fall.

It did not fall, because it was built on a firm foundation.

I think that's exactly what Jesus wants to say about you, too.

Oh, the storms blew into her life. They beat on her and abused her and did their best to tear her down. Everyone thought she was going to crumble, but

she did not fall.

Yes, life smacked him down every time he tried to get up. Life wounded and hurt him, bruised and bloodied him, called him a failure and rejected him; everybody who knew him gave up on him. But

he did not fall.

Their relationship was torn apart. Actions and words, accusations and deeds, distrust and betrayal - they all did their share to rip their marriage asunder. Everyone said divorce court was the next stop. But together, he and she, they mended the tear. Their marriage:

it did not fall.

The teenager was utterly lost to drugs. She was a run-away, a cast-off, a lost child. Everyone said she was wasting her life. Everyone thought she was a lost cause. But somewhere, somehow she dug deep and discovered the inner strength she needed. She pulled herself together. She straightened herself out.

She did not fall.

Their life was affluent and blessed. Everything always seemed to go their way. They could have been selfish and snobbish. They could have been distant and entitled. They could have been demanding and

judgmental. But, instead, they were loving and kind, grateful and thankful, helpful and prayerful. Even with everything going their way...

they did not fall.

By telling this little story, Jesus made it clear: storms are going to come, flood waters are going to rise, winds are going to blow. They're going to beat against you, and pound on you, and try to break you down. Some of them are going to be obvious. Some of them are going to be dressed up in deceitful clothes. Jesus made it clear: you're not going to get any advanced warning. You won't know what kind of storm is on it's way. Even Don Paul won't be able to tell you when it'll hit. The only thing that's certain is that every life has it's share of storms.

And Jesus made it clear: you have the power to stand tall. You can survive. You can overcome. You decide whether you're going to stand or fall.

Jesus told a story about a house that stood tall. But right next door was another house that crumbled and fell.

Jesus made it clear: the difference between the two was the foundation.

What kind of foundation have you put under your house? What's the bedrock on which you stand? What's the underlying source of your stability?

Jesus made it clear: if you want to stand up to the storm, you better get yourself on solid rock.

If you want to bend instead of break,
- if you want to mend some relationship that's been ripped apart,

- if you want to heal some festering hurts,

- if you want to find your way back...

- if you want to face some fears,

- if you want to sweeten sorrows,

- if you want to turn bad news into good...

- Jesus says,

stand on solid rock!

If you're asking for a second chance,

- pleading for forgiveness,

- searching for enough courage to face tomorrow...

- if you need assurance in the midst of doubt,
- guidance when you're lost,
- and a friend when you're lonely...

Jesus says -

- you better find that solid rock!

If you're seeking shelter in the storm,

- a warm, dry place where you'll be safe,
- a protective bunker when the bombs explode around you...
- if you need a lifeboat when your ship's sinking,
- a parachute when you're free-falling,
- a safety net when your hand slips from the bar,
- a fire extinguisher when you're burning up...
- Jesus says -

- you better run to that solid rock!

I hope the people who first heard Jesus tell this story got the message. They heard Jesus say, "*Whoever hears these words of mine and does them, will be like the wise man who built his house upon the rock.*"

I hope they got the hidden message. I think Jesus was saying...

he is the solid rock,

he is the firm foundation,

he gives the power to stand the storm.

I hope you get the message, too. If you want Jesus to be your safe harbor in a every storm,

- if you're reaching out to grab on to his lifeline,
- if you want to build all the rest of your tomorrow's on solid

rock -

- then, listen to what Jesus has to say,
- and do what he tells you to do.

I think the people who first heard this message knew what Jesus was talking about. They took this story in context to everything else he had said that day.

You may not remember that this little story about the house that stood the storm comes at the end of his Sermon on the Mount. The people who first heard this story had heard all the rest of it, too.

But if you read this scripture story and it stands alone like it did today, you may not remember all the other things Jesus was talking about that day.

And so, I invite you to do something when you get home today. Pull out your Bible. Blow the dust off it if you need to. Turn to the Gospel of Matthew. Read all of chapters five, six, and seven in the Gospel of Matthew; read all of the Sermon on the Mount.

Read about the blessings that come when you're meek and merciful, pure in heart and a peacemaker.

Read about the salt of the earth - and a lamp set on a hill.

Read about keeping the commandments - and the desires of your heart.

Read about making your word your bond, and turning the other cheek, and loving the unlovable.

Learn about giving freely - and praying in private.

Learn about being humble - and finding real treasure.

Learn about bringing light into darkness - and trusting your heavenly Father.

Learn about getting what you give - and understanding with compassion.

Listen when Jesus tells you to ask, and it will be given; seek, and you will find; knock and it will be opened.

Listen when Jesus tells you to enter by the narrow gate - and to judge a man by the fruit of his labors.

There is so much in that Sermon on the Mount. And Jesus tells you listen to what he says, and then do it.

And when you do, you will be standing on solid rock.

This is the foundation for Christian living.

This is how you fashion your life.

This is how you treat other people.

This is how you act every day.

This is how you stand the storm.

With everything life throws at you -

- the sweet as well as the sour,

the joys as well as the heartbreaks,

the successes as well as the failures,

- the good as well as the bad,
the contentment as well as the agitation,
the sunny days as well as the stormy ones...
- Jesus wants you to stand on His firm foundation.

Your life depends on it.

Your family needs it.

Your church counts on it.

Jesus wants you. Come and be part of the firm foundation...
as we build our church,
as we build our fellowship,
as we build our future.

And when you're doing all of that, you're also building an assurance
of a blessed tomorrow...

a tomorrow that will stand every storm!