

Built On The Rock

Turn with me to Matthew 7 as we examine one of the parables of Jesus. Jesus said, **“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. 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. 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. The rain came down, the streams rose and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” Matthew 7:24-27**

A couple of quick observations. First of all, everyone is a builder, building on some kind of foundation. He is talking about us. We are all building a life of some kind. It matters what kind of foundation we build on. It matters what material we use. Are you building with integrity, honesty, or are you building with material that won't hold up under pressure.

Secondly, everyone is going to encounter a storm of some kind. It is an inescapable part of life. We are all builders, all of us will encounter storms, but this is where we part company. Jesus says there are two kinds of builders, one wise and one foolish. The wise are those who hear the words of Jesus and obey them, putting them into practice. The foolish are those who hear his word but choose not to obey them, not to put them into practice. Whether we are a wise or foolish builder will determine what kind of foundation we build on (rock or sand) and that will also determine what happens to us when the storms come (stand or fall).

The difference in builders is the foundation and the foundation he is talking about is his word. For us, that means this word, the bible. The word of God is the foundation, the bed rock of our faith and it is to be upon this rock, this foundation, that we build and base our lives. The word of God doesn't change with the times, it doesn't adapt its' values to the surrounding culture. The word of God is truth and we are to hear it, learn it, practice it, apply it, live it, build our life upon it. Without this foundation, we won't survive the storms that are sure to come!

A few days ago at our District Campmeeting I heard Rick Dubose speak. He is the General Treasurer of the Assemblies of God and was formerly the District Superintendent of North Texas. He talked about the importance of the word of God in his message. As he spoke, I told Paula he was saying things Pastor Brian and I had been discussing earlier that week in

regard to our Sunday School classes and the importance of teaching the word of God. So let me give credit to Rick Dubose for a couple of things I want to share with you this morning.

He mentioned the pre-eminence given to the Word of God at the beginning of the A/G. At the turn of the last century, in 1900, there was an extraordinary outpouring of the Holy Spirit that led to the Azusa revival in California and eventually lead to the birth of the Assemblies of God and dozens of other Pentecostal fellowships and denominations. Our churches were born out of a revival movement with signs and wonders and the baptism in the Holy Spirit with the initial physical evidence of speaking in other tongues. The danger existed that churches would be built on emotionalism or signs and wonders and not built on the word of God. When leaders from this new movement of the Spirit came together in Hot Springs, Arkansas in April of 1914, it was with the goal of promoting unity and doctrinal stability. That led to the founding of the Assemblies of God and in 1916 the approval of our Statement of Fundamental Truths. The first fundamental truth is this, **“The Scriptures, both the Old and New Testaments are verbally inspired of God and are the revelation of God to man, the infallible, authoritative rule of faith and conduct.”**

All the rest of our doctrinal truths follow from this one. If the Scriptures aren't the source of authority for us, then we are apt to be driven by every wind and fad and opinion that comes by. We start here with the word of God as our foundation. This is the bedrock of our faith. Not miracles, not healings, not signs and wonders, not the baptism in the Holy Spirit, but the word of God. If it's in here, we can believe it and put it into practice. This is our guide, the authoritative rule of faith and conduct.

Over time the word of God seemed to lose its pre-eminence in the life of our churches and our church programs. The emphasis used to be on Sunday School. We all studied the quarterly, material published by the A/G. It was written so that every 7 years you studied through the entire bible. We worked at growing our Sunday School. Dubose reminded us of how we used to have the Sunday School Board up on the wall at the front of the church. How many in attendance. Record attendance. Offering. People used to never miss Sunday School. But then, things changed...

Dubose suggested that emphasis began to be placed on church growth. The entire church growth movement was birthed and it worked. We grew our Sunday morning worship attendance and many of us had to go to two or more Sunday morning services. The result was that Sunday

School got squeezed out. The worship service became the main event. Worship itself became more important than the preaching in some places. Don't get me wrong. I love worship and we are supposed to worship the Lord. I love music and lifting our voices together in praise. That is biblical. I'm grateful we need two services to handle the crowd, but we mustn't neglect the teaching and preaching of the word of God. It's the bed rock remember.

Someone realized we were missing something that Sunday School classes used to provide so they decided we should meet in small groups to study and provide fellowship. That took the place of Sunday School in many of our evangelical and Pentecostal churches. Nothing wrong with that. We have life groups and they are valuable. They too are biblical, meeting together to study the bible and encourage one another. It's a very early church, book of Acts kind of thing, but it still didn't take the place of systematic, weekly study of God's word. If we don't know God's word, if we don't study it and put it into practice as Jesus said, then when the storms come, when temptation comes, when trouble comes, we won't be able to survive.

How many of you have run into a storm? Did you stand or fall? How did you make it through? I've made it through some storms because I knew what the word of God said about heaven, about God's faithfulness, about his love for us, about his promises, his warnings. I've been determined to build my life on the right foundation, to build on the rock, on the firm and solid foundation of God's word. I'm telling you, storms are coming. Build on the rock!!

Jesus said, **“Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?” Luke 18:8** Will he find faith, will he find “the faith” on the earth when he returns? Or when he returns will he find that his church abandoned the faith, stopped reading and obeying his word and just did what we thought best. We talked about how much we loved Jesus but we never bothered to find out what he required of us by reading and studying his word. We heard his word but never took it seriously enough to put it into practice and when the storms came, our lives crashed and we never seemed to recover. We gave up because we didn't know what the word of God said! Or perhaps the storm came in the form of a deceiver with smooth sounding words and easy ideas and since we didn't know God's word, we fell for the deception and were led astray into Satan's trap. Trust me, deception is everywhere. If we don't know God's word, we can be deceived and led away from Jesus and from the truth. We must know the word.

It has been a concern of mine for a long time that the church of Jesus Christ has become biblically illiterate. Sadly, some denominations have minimized the importance and value of the

bible. "It's a guideline but we don't need to take it too seriously." The bible is more than a guideline, it is the foundation upon which we build our lives. Wise or foolish. Which will we be? I take seriously the responsibility we have to communicate biblical truth to you!

I've preached about this and talked about this with our pastoral staff. That led to discussions with Mike Atkinson who has served as our Sunday School Director and Pastor Brian and Pastor Sarah. What can we do to enhance our biblical knowledge as a church? I asked Brian and Mike to come up with a plan and that led to the new core classes that are being offered in our Sunday school. We didn't do this to confuse or irritate you, although you may be. They designed this so that over a three year period, if you take these six core classes, you will get a good overview of the bible and what it means to follow Christ. I want Mike and Brian to join me to talk about this for a moment.

What's the goal of the classes?

What are the things I will learn if I attend?

Why do I need to go to Sunday School when I'm already part of a Lifegroup?

What about the other classes at 10:45? What are they offering?

Why is this important?

"Everybody ought to go to Sunday School!" "But it's boring." It's the life giving word of God! Maybe you think it's boring because you've never really studied it. You are learning so you can practice it and become the person God intends you to be. That's not boring.

You can give me all kinds of reasons why you don't attend a class or excuses why you don't study the bible. Let me give you the reason you should: **It's what a wise builder will do.** If you are a parent, your children need Sunday School and children's church. The time spent studying the bible in that class is time well spent! It is part of the spiritual discipline necessary to build on the rock so you (and your family) can withstand the storm! "My friends aren't going." Well, meet them for lunch. This isn't about fellowship, this is about studying the word of God! Join them in a life group. "I don't like the teacher." It's one semester! You'll get over it and besides, you are going to get out of any class what you put into it. They can't force you to learn, but if you listen, you will benefit.

We're offering you a bargain this first semester. If you decided to go to ORU and take a New Testament survey class like what we are offering, it would likely be taught by someone with a DMin and would cost you around \$900-\$1,000 dollars for the class. Dr. Bill Muilenberg

is teaching this class. He has a DMin and yet, you can attend this class for free! Of course, if you want to make a \$1,000 donation to the church, we would be happy to receive it. There is value in the classes being offered. More importantly, you are going to be taught the life changing word of God and you will learn how to put it into practice and if you do that, when the storms come, you will have a foundation that will hold you. It will keep you in a storm!

It matters what you know. It matters what you believe. What kind of foundation are you building on? Your opinion? Someone else's opinion? Or are you building on the word of God? "It's just a book. It's just men that wrote it." Is it? This book is like no other. This book was written as the Holy Spirit of God moved upon men to write. Read it and you'll discover what I'm talking about. This book is alive. Read it and study it and you'll discover something rich and new and fresh and life changing. Read it and discover God's truth and wisdom that will direct your steps day by day. It will illuminate your path and keep you from evil. It will encourage you when you feel all hope is gone.

Let me bring this to a close with an illustration of why it is so important for us to know the word of God and apply it to our lives. I know what I'm about to share is an extreme example of what happens when we stop reading and obeying the word of God, but it is an example of the deception that can happen.

How many of you remember the tragedy that happened with Jim Jones and his followers at Jonestown in Guyana in 1978? It will be 40 years this coming November. He led a cult and after an investigation by US Congressman Leo Ryan, his people killed Ryan along with an NBC reporter and cameraman and others. He then led his people in a mass suicide. More than 900 people died. 304 were children. They drank cyanide laced kool-aid which is where the phrase, "drinking the kool-aid" originated.

James Jones started out as a preacher in Indiana. In the early 1950's he was preaching around Indianapolis in various churches and gained quite a following as miracles were supposedly happening. He seemed to genuinely care about the poor and needy. Things seemed to be going well. People were being saved.

For a brief amount of time he held regular services at Laurel Street Tabernacle, an A/G church in Indianapolis. This happened to be the church where my mom's family attended. My aunt Cledith as you know was an A/G missionary in Africa. In November of 1954, some of the people from the church wrote a letter to my aunt and enclosed an offering they had received as a

Christmas present. One of them wrote, "Since Bro. Jones has come in with us with his marvelous healing ministry we have crowds...many miracles wrought each service, also we have been having 20 to 40 saved each service. It is wonderful and we do thank our God." Many of them mention the move of God they were having with people being saved and miracles happening. Among the words of greeting included in the letter was this, "Dear Sis. Cox: Although I have never had the pleasure of meeting you personally, I have learned to appreciate your ministry greatly through the numerous reports of your good work from the many that love you. May God make this a tremendous year in every way for you. Sincerely Rev. James Jones."

Somewhere in this time, in spite of what they were seeing happening, the pastor of the church, Rev. J. L. Price, sensed in his spirit something wasn't right. He ended the meetings and a year or so after that, Jim Jones started his own church in Indianapolis, The People's Temple Christian Church. One article from an Indiana news source stated,

"As the People's Temple grew, Jones' preaching style became more messianic and more based on his own word than Biblical scriptures. Some members began to leave the church while others became more fervently devoted to Jones...Whatever may have been in Jones' heart at the beginning of his ministry had been replaced by something that he knew was a lie."

Eventually, around 1967, Jones relocated to California taking followers from Indiana with him. His preaching attracted crowds, yet his preaching also strayed farther and farther from God's word. He was quoted as referring to the bible and saying, "I've got to destroy this paper idol." He was quoted as saying, "You're gonna help yourself or you'll get no help. There's only one hope of glory and that's within you. Nobody's gonna come out of the sky. There is no heaven up there. We'll have to make heaven down here." "What you need to believe in is what you can see. If you see me as your friend, I'll be your friend. If you see me as your father, I'll be your father. See me as your Savior, I'll be your Savior. If you see me as your God, I'll be your God."

Why would people stay? They stopped building on the rock, stopped hearing and practicing God's word. They stopped measuring what they were being told was truth against the truth of God's word. If it isn't according to God's word, run! But if you don't know what God's word says you are going to be deceived and when the storm comes, you have no foundation, nothing to hold you. These folks were deceived and followed Jones all the way to Guyana where

he was going to establish this heaven on earth. Among those who followed him to Guyana was this man, Jack Beam. In the letter to my aunt, Beam wrote, "My Dear Sister in Christ. Praise the Lord for his boundless grace. The Lord bless you and keep you. Bro. Jack Beam." When my aunt gave me this letter, she said, this man, with his wife and daughter, died with Jim Jones in Guyana. (Jack Beam, his wife Rheaviana and their 17 year old daughter Eleanor.) How do you get there? Good people but if you stop reading and practicing and obeying God's word...if you stop comparing your truth to the truth of God's word, you'll be deceived and the result is destruction.

I'm not saying if you don't come to Sunday School you'll end up in a cult and drink their Kool Aid. I'm telling you that if you don't study the word of God and hide it in your heart, you likely won't stand up against the storm, against the lies, against the lure and pressure of the culture. You won't and your children won't. We need to pledge ourselves to read and study and memorize and learn and practice and obey the word of God. Now more than ever.

We are without excuse. We are offering classes to help you. Most of you have a smart phone with a hundred bible translations or more on it. There are so many tools available to help us read and study God's word. Will you do it? Will you pledge to read God's word every day? Say five days a week? Why not attend one of these classes? How about commit to bringing your children to Sunday School and children's church? It's what wise builders do! Neglecting the word of God, failing to hear it and put it into practice in your life may not land you in a cult drinking Kool aid, but it may result in you and your family and the next generation of your family knowing nothing about God and being eternally lost. When the son of man returns, will he find faith on the earth? He will if we keep reading and obeying the word of God!