

Matthew 7:24-27
...Rooted and Built Up
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11-16-14

In college or high school, did you ever have a particularly difficult class – maybe it was a math or science, or maybe a foreign language – and have that pre-exam anxiety before a really big test? In seminary, I was studying for a Hebrew midterm and was on about my 13th or 14th hour in the library, and I remember asking one of my classmates at dinner whether he was nervous about the test, and he said, “No, I’m just auditing the class. I get to listen, but don’t have to actually participate.”

There are no auditors in Professor Jesus’ classes. Everything you hear is on the test of life. And no other message cuts quite as sharply as the message of money. Did you know that Jesus says more about money than he does about just about any other subject, including heaven? Nothing blinds us more, nothing keeps us from that heavenly peace and deep down joy more than money.

Once when 20th century oil tycoon John D Rockefeller was interviewed, the reporter asked him, “Are you happy?” To his surprise, he said “No.” The interviewer then responded, “What would make you happy?” His response? “Just a little more.”

But as we have seen in the last decade, not even money can protect us from the storms of life. Which is why it is not a trustworthy god.

This morning as we place our lives before God’s Word, I want to invite you to consider what is the foundation on which you are building your life? Because how we answer will impact where we place our treasure.

I invite you to reach for your Bibles, either the one in the rack in front of you or the one you brought with you or the one on the screen to my left and right, and turn with me to Matthew 7:24-27. And as a sign of our reverence and respect for the Word of God, as you are able, I invite you to stand with me as we listen to God’s Word to us this morning.

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on 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.”

Almighty God, Give us grace to be not only hearers, but doers of thy holy word, not only to admire, but to obey thy doctrine, not only to profess, but to practice thy religion, not only to love, but to live thy gospel. So grant that what we learn of thy glory we may

receive into our hearts, and show forth in our lives: through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

I wonder how many of you saw this week that the European Space Program just landed the Rosetta Space craft on the surface of a comet 4 km in diameter 300 million miles away traveling at 135,000 kph. *300 million, 135,000 kph.* Not sure this is what Jesus had in mind when he talked about building your house on a rock.

Building our lives on the right foundation, putting down good roots, will be the deciding indicator as to whether our lives last forever or whether they will be swept away by the rising and shifting tides.

Just as Jesus was coming to the close of this most important and influential of all his teaching, he looks over his shoulder and says, *“Oh, and by the way, if you hear what I just said, and don’t do it, you are toast. At some point your life will collapse. You’re not going to make it unless you hear and put into practice what I say.”*

I don’t know about you, but if this is how Jesus ends, I’m probably going to think long and hard about the words I am listening to.

In our text this morning, there are two men, each of them are building a home for their family. As a minister, I have had the unique privilege to be invited into quite a few homes. All of them have been exceedingly generous and hospitable, but one thing I find unique is to see where people focus their energy and resource in creating their homes. Some are tastefully decorated with lots of fine appointments, others were more modest but spotlighted one part or another like the backyard, others have been a tribute to memories and family members with pictures and memorabilia from family experiences.

In this morning’s story, both men are the same in the sense that both are building a home for their family to move into and live in together.

They are also alike in the sense that both men attend the same church and hear the same preacher. Notice that in verse 24 it says **hears these words of mine**. It’s not as if one of these men is going to church and hears the word and loves God and the other man avoids church, rejects the word, and dislikes God. No, each man puts himself in the position of hearing and listening and being shaped by God’s Word.

Both men have the same dream, the same project, attend the same church, and thirdly, it’s apparent that both men live in the same neighborhood, because both men’s homes are smacked by the same storm. Jesus uses the exact same phrase in verses 25 & 27 to describe the environmental onslaught they both faced. **The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on the house.**

When wicked weather rains down on Wabash, when tornado winds blow, when floodwaters rise, when polar vortexes unleash mounds of snow, we all face them the same. Storms – whether they are weather systems or the other kind of storms of life,

familial, physical, relational, vocational – storms are equal opportunity misery spreaders. The storms that hit the doctors and the lawyers are the same that strike the rundown houses along the river. Methodists get hit, Presbyterians get hit, black, white, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Catholic...

Deitrich Bonhoeffer has a wonderful quote. He says, I can tell you two things that are true about every person I meet even before I meet them. There is some crisis in their life that is threatening them perhaps at this very minute. And the second is that there is a Savior wanting to rescue them.

The big difference between these two men who each have built homes for their families to live in: their foundation. Jesus says one man is a wise man, building his house on a strong foundation, and the other man is a fool, the Greek word here is *moros* – he's a moron, for building his house on the sand.

Rooted

Foundations are everything.

Back in my first call in Youth Ministry, there was a guy named Greg whose stepson was a member of my youth group. And for whatever reason, instead of going to the Senior Pastor, Greg decided he wanted to confide in me. Sitting at a Starbucks one Saturday morning, Greg went on to tell me about how tremendously successful he had been in business, starting and growing multiple businesses that over the years had made him very wealthy. He went on to say that in the course of his working life, his marriage had disintegrated and the businesses he had worked so hard to build had vanished in the 2008 market crash—almost instantaneously.

Greg went from the penthouse to the poorhouse almost overnight. And now he was remarried, jobless, his wife supporting him as he started back from scratch. He told me this:

“My first go round I was invincible, I could do anything. I thought to myself: God, I’m glad to have you along for the ride, but I can do this alone, and I’ll prove it to you, watch me.

When this tidal wave destroyed me, starting me back from scratch, I realized something, I’m not invincible. As I start to build back up, I realize it has to be different, my faith has to shape this, my family has to take priority, my business dealings have to be in line with what Jesus is teaching me.”

In our verses from Colossians, Paul is again reminding the followers of Christ that as they have received Christ Jesus, so walk in him, rooted and built up in faith. Jesus says, just a few verses before ours today, in chapter 6 that no one can serve two masters (not “it’s really hard to serve two masters”, but “no one” can do it). We can either have God or Mammon (money), but we have to choose.

This verb Paul uses here, to be rooted, is in the perfect tense, meaning that it was a once and for all action that took place in the past. When our lives are once and for all planted in Christ, and not our abilities, our finances, even our family, that foundation is secure. But like a tree that is strong in its growth, unless that taproot continues to sink deeper, in search of sustainable reservoirs of nourishment, all the growth that happens above the surface can easily be toppled because the foundation is not secure.

Built Up

When the Apostle Paul follows being rooted with his next exhortation, be built up, he writes in a different form. The verb for build up is in the present tense. What we choose to invest our thoughts, our energies, our resources in is literally building a life around us. If we are building, this phrase takes a different form. And the question he asks us, as his apprentices, is this: what kind of structure, what kind of life are we building?

Doctors and researchers have come up with a new functional MRI machine that can measure brain activity while you are doing certain things. Certain areas of the brain literally light up when you do things like pray, worship God, think about God, are showed pictures of the cross. And they know what parts of our brains light up when you think and do those things.

But the same kinds of experiments reveal that when people see some of the world's most popular brand names – Apple, Nike, Starbucks, Coca-Cola – the same thing happens in your brain. The same parts light up when you see the Apple logo as when you pray to almighty God. From a bodily standpoint, it is occupying the same real estate. I guess there's a reason why they call it brand loyalty, because in the end that's what they're really after, that's what they really want. They don't just want you to buy it, they want to own you. This is one of the chief rivals for God in our age.

Jamie Smith says that places like Keystone Crossing and Jefferson Point are the cathedrals of our day. That there are a set of values, assumptions, disciplines, promises, and practices and liturgies that happen in places like this. This is a place for worship. And it lights up some of the same places in our brains that light up when you come here.

Again, what are we building on? And what are we being built up in?

Jesus says no one can serve two masters. You can't have a divided home. Doesn't mean you can't have material things, it just means that if you try to build your life on things like financial security, material status, or even just the desire for comfort, Jesus says you are building on unstable ground. Watch out.

Jesus at the cross and at the table engages in the supreme gesture of generosity, and invites us to see the truth about what is truly valuable in this life. Building a portfolio will not last; building a community that trusts, loves, laughs, and lives together centered around the Lord's table is forever. And the God's wink in all of this is this doesn't go

away. In fact, in our greatest moments of compassion and community we are getting a taste of what God has to come: kingdom building.