

“The FOUNDATION to BUILD ON”

Matthew 7: 24-27

Jesus told a story about the importance of having Himself as the strong foundation in your life. It's one of his most famous stories. It's about a building project. Two men build houses, one builds on sand, and the other on rock.

“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.”

There is something appealing about this story that causes it to keep popping up in various forms. One version is a well known children's story. Let's see if you can guess what it is:

- In this story the characters are builders. They each build a house.
- Not all the houses are created equal – there are wise and foolish builders.
- Each house faces a test. If the house was built wisely, it stands; if it was built foolishly, it falls.

Sound familiar? It's the story of ... *The Three Little Pigs*.

Each piggy built a house. One built with hay and straw. One built with sticks. And one built with bricks. All 3 pigs built a house.

Each faced the big bad wolf. Each one heard the same polite plea for entrance (-- remember? *“Little pig, little pig, let me come in!”*) Each little pig made the same defiant response (-- *“Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin”*) And each piggy faced the same

threat from their breath-enhanced enemy (-- *“I’ll huff and I’ll puff and I’ll blow your house down.”*)

Two of the pigs built their houses out of junk. They never stopped to ask the question, “Will it stand up to the wolf?” Only the house that was built will endure.

As we hear Jesus’ story about the houses built on rock and sand, I want to share with you today several points that flow right out of Jesus’ story. And the first one is **EACH PERSON BUILDS A HOUSE**. This detail doesn’t change. This is not optional.

Replace the word “house” with “life” or “character” or “soul.” We are all of us day-by-day building our character or soul. We do this by the choices we make. The quality of the choices you make will determine the quality of your character, of your soul.

WE ARE EACH ONE OF US RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR OWN HOUSE. No one else’s. You are RESPONSIBLE for your life. What your house – your soul, your faith – becomes will be judged by Almighty God.

A 3rd point from this story is **EACH HOUSE FACES THE STORM**. The wolf comes to the door of every little pig.

In fact, Jesus is quite clear about his part of the story. His description of the storms that came to the two men is identical, word for word: *“The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house.”*

Jesus wants to make it clear: You cannot build a life where there will be no storms. Oh, we’d like a life without any storms. We’d like to find a neighborhood where the big bad wolf would never knock at the door. But that’s not going to happen.

Each person builds a house. We are each responsible for our own house. Each person faces the storm, and 4th **STORMS TEST THE HOUSE**. It is in the storm that the soundness of the house is revealed. And the ultimate storm that Jesus referred to is the last judgement. One day our lives will be scrutinized by God. Every beam and timber, every word, thought and action will face God’s examination. One day the truth of our souls will be revealed.

So the really big question is: **What Foundation are You Building On?** What foundation are you constructing your life, your heart, your soul, your faith on?

Because Jesus loves us, He came to offer foolish builders a sure foundation. He offers careless little pigs a safe place to live. And that sure foundation is Himself – it's Jesus Christ.

Now, you can choose to face the final test, face the storm, face the final judgement with a foundation – with a life -- riddled with your faults and errors and sins. You can hope that God will just wink at all your wrongs. You can choose as your foundation to gamble that there is no God, and that there is no purpose and sense and meaning for this life.

OR ... OR.... You can choose as your foundation something solid and unshakable.

See, Jesus PAID for all wrongs. He was the only person who ever lived an innocent, perfect, sinless life, and still He died. He gave up His life – the only innocent life -- on a cross as the payment for all the wrongs and the hatred and the injustice and the sin that you and I and ALL people have done. He died, to take God's justice on Himself. So that now Jesus offers to you Himself as the payment you need. This is His free gift to you. This is the foundation. Jesus Christ is the foundation. His Word, Jesus said, His truth is what Jesus taught and what Jesus did. He is the only worthy foundation for your life, for your soul.

Jesus is the sure foundation because history documents Jesus' death on the cross. This really happened. Eyewitnesses saw and gave testimony about this. Jesus' death on the cross is a fact. It's unchangeable. It's solid.

Jesus is the sure foundation because His resurrection means that God guarantees that His payment was enough. There's nothing left that you've got to cover on your own. He offers you forgiveness for ALL your wrongs.

So will Jesus' payment be yours? Is He or will He be the sure foundation you build your life, your soul, your faith on? Or, will you reject Jesus' gift? And by building your soul and character without

Jesus, you need to know, you are choosing to face God without Christ – that is face God with just your own life, and that’s a foundation riddled with sins and faults and errors. That’s facing the storm with a house built on sand. OR, OR ... will you accept a sure gift of forgiveness and heaven? Will Christ to be your foundation on rock?

For a year Sue and I lived in downtown Rochester Minnesota, where the Mayo Clinic was building several large buildings at the same time. These were 30, 40, 50 story buildings. Do you know how you build a building that tall? They start by digging a big, deep pit. It would go way down. I would be standing on street level and look over the fence, and the trucks and men down there looked like ants. They had to lay a deep foundation to build a tall building.

Friends, **THE FOUNDATION SHAPES THE HOUSE**. You can’t build a wide house on a narrow foundation, or a square house on a round foundation. What foundation a house has changes how tall the house can be, and how wide and long it can be.

When Jesus is your foundation, when you trust in Him – He will shape your life. His love, His grace, His forgiveness, will all change how you live. Jesus will change how you think and feel and act.

BUILDING YOUR SOUL IS A PROCESS. One more very significant truth Jesus teaches you is this. Building a house is a significant project. It takes planning and designing. It takes clearing the ground, digging, laying the foundation, building the walls, putting on a roof, then windows and doors. Then all the work inside with plumbing, and electrical, and insulating, and putting in the walls, then cupboards and sinks and flooring and painting and light fixtures – not to mention everything outdoors. It’s a complicated PROCESS.

In our community, there are several areas where houses are going up. A house can go up relatively fast – in about 6 months or so. House construction is a process, but also has a relatively short time span. There will come a day when the workers will go away and a family will move in. The building activity will end.

Your soul, friends, is unlike a house. Houses are built in a few months. Your soul is eternal. Your character, your faith will go on, God tells us, throughout eternity. In eternity your soul will be complete – either for good or for bad. Heaven and Hell last forever and there the condition of the soul will not change. Now, in this lifetime, you build your faith, your character, to have an eternal destiny in either heaven or hell. Now, while you live, you can build on rock or sand. And this building process lasts as long as this lifetime. But who knows how long your life on earth will last?

Building your soul is not a six-month long process and then you are done. Each and every day you are making improvements on soul, or every day your soul, your faith is being destroyed. The choices you make every day will either draw you closer to Jesus or farther from Him. The choices you make every day will turn your soul either more and more into a creature headed towards heaven or headed towards hell. There is no in-between. There is no standing still. Your soul is either growing closer each day to Jesus and heaven, or being shaped more into one fit for an eternity without Christ. The key, you see, is will you build continually on Christ Jesus, on what He has done for you, and trust in Him with all your heart?

I believe that one of the biggest misunderstandings among people like us is that we tend to think that building a life on Christ is a short-term deal. People who have been in the Lutheran tribe of Christian churches are particularly vulnerable to a false belief.

The false belief is we tend to emphasize knowing the right teachings about Jesus and then completely leave off the importance of living in a continually growing relationship with Jesus. Lutherans do indeed believe and teach and proclaim that a person is forgiven and saved 100% by what Jesus has done for us. This is indeed a free gift. There were centuries in the past when this central truth was lost and we don't ever want to lose this wonderful truth of God's grace.

But, we also tend to teach that once a person knows this fact, then a life-long process of building a loving, close relationship with

God is not needed. We tend to teach that once a person knows the fact, then they're IN. Heaven is sure. Once a person got confirmed with a white robe and a red carnation when they were 13, then you're IN no matter whether still trust in Jesus or live your life close to Jesus, nor have fallen away from faith in Jesus and are being shaped for hell. Its like we believe the house of our soul is built instantaneously, in a flash, instead of over a life-time of constantly being with Jesus.

So, we have adults who never read the Bible or participate in a Bible study group. Adults who don't give priority in their lives to prayer. And we have lots of adults who never choose to worship, or only worship Jesus on holidays. The result is a spiritually weak soul. The result is a weak church. The result is we have given some people a false assurance when in reality their heart is far from God.

This is no secret. We see this happening. In our families children, grandchildren, often spouses do not build their lives on Christ. They don't see the need to keep building their hearts and souls on Jesus' foundation. They don't see the need often because they believe they've got eternity covered. They know as a fact in their mind that Jesus is the answer, but they don't know Jesus in their heart or live everyday growing closer to Him.

In Jesus' own day, He had very sharp, condemning words to the Pharisees. These were people who knew all the right religious answers, but their hearts were far from God. They figured they didn't need forgiveness or grace, or heaven as a gift of God's love.

And in Jesus' day, there were sinners and religious outcasts. Their lives looked like a mess. They didn't know the correct religious answers, but they knew Jesus' words were true, and they sought His forgiving love. These people were in the process of building their hearts and lives to grow closer to God. And Jesus blessed them. Friends, today is no different.

Someone once asked cellist Pablo Casals—since he was in his eighties and was the best cellist in the world—why he kept practicing for hours every day. He responded, “Because I think I’m getting better.” Each day he was growing in his skills.

Jesus said, ***“Everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”***

Look at those words of Jesus closely. Notice that building your life on the rock-solid foundation of Jesus takes more than just coasting along. Jesus said it takes (1) hearing His Word, and (2) putting them into practice. THEN you’ll actually be building your life on Jesus.

Paul in the Bible, had this same approach. He described his life as constantly growing closer to Christ. He said: ***“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect...But one thing I do: ... I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus”*** (Philippians 3:12-14). Paul sure had all the signs of being already being complete, so why does he need to keep pressing on? Because, Paul would say in the words of Pablo Casals, “I think I’m getting better.” I’m learning to live in God’s grace, to love Jesus more, and to love others more genuinely and joyfully.

I trust you’re asking yourself HOW? HOW do I build my life on Christ? How can I love the God who loves me first, best and only? HOW does this happen?

A couple – a woman and a man – are attracted to each other and want to be together. Why? Partly to ease their loneliness. Partly for the help they give each other – they make a good team. Of course there’s physical attraction and love. It’s that crazy, unexplainable thing that she is the most beautiful thing he has ever seen, and he makes her heart go “pitter-pat.”

Now, because he wants to be with her and she with him, when they are in their 20’s they may go to Cedar Pointe together, run marathons together, or go white water rafting together. In their 30’s they spend time together getting the kids in and out of the bath tub, into pj’s, in bed, then they have a quiet hour to relax together while the kids sleep. In their 40’s a man and a woman choose to be together by walking the dog as they talk, or go to the kids’ sports games. In their 50’s they go antique shopping together, every Saturday eat breakfast at a local café. In their 60’s together they

drive through country. In their 70's and 80's the same couple chooses to be together by doing the crossword together, and going out to supper together before 5 in the evening.

The specific activities are not the most important. The activities are vehicles to being together. The activities they do are the vehicles to receiving love and loving back. The activities are the vehicles that allow the love to happen.

How Do I Build My Life On Christ? By Committing Myself To The Same Habits That Jesus Used To Continually Build His Relationship With His Father.

This week in the BEING Challenge we simply introduce these habits. We are going over the next 5 weeks to discover and go deeper in 5 keystone habits of Jesus Christ. Again, it not the activities in an of themselves that are important. These are not works we do to earn forgiveness and favor with God. Instead, these are vehicles. They are way we can build our hearts on the foundation of Jesus Christ, our Savior.

These are the 5 keystone habits in Jesus' life that can make a life-changing difference in ours:

- 1) Committing to Community
- 2) Study Scripture
- 3) Prioritize Prayer
- 4) Seek Solitude
- 5) Choose Church

As we practice these 5 habits, if we could get these right, I guarantee you, not only will we grow in our relationship with God, but we will also be more like Jesus. So over the next 40 days, in the Sunday worship experience, in your daily reading, in your weekly small groups, we're going to be challenged each day to do learn the process of building each day of our lives on the sure foundation.

Jesus said, ***"Everyone who hears these words of Mine"*** -- that's encountering Jesus. That's growing deeper in Him, experiencing His love. It's meeting God in these habits and letting Him touch and heal and move you. It's God the Holy Spirit living and at work in you.

And these habits are about (2) putting your faith into practice. Jesus said, ***“Everyone who hears these words of Mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”***

We use them to know Christ. He is behind every one of these practices. When we do them we get connected with Christ, and when we're connected with Christ, we are building our lives on Him as the foundation – a foundation that is on the rock. AMEN.