

6/15/08

Building Your House

At the end of the greatest sermon that was ever preached, Jesus tells a story about houses and storms and rock and sand, and we're going to look at that for a few moments this morning. Let's begin our reading in Matthew 7:13:

Matthew 7:13-29

¹³"Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. ¹⁴But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.

¹⁵"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

²¹"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' ²³Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

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. ²⁵The 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. ²⁶But 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. ²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

²⁸When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at His teaching, ²⁹because He taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

Well I want to begin this morning by testing your knowledge of American literature for a moment. Some of you may remember a story in American lit that is quiet similar to this story that Jesus tells in Matthew 7. In this other story all the characters are builders, and they each construct a house. There is an obvious contrast between wised and foolish building. Every house faces a potential test and threat. The other story has a similar story line—if a house is built foolishly, it falls. If it is built wisely, it stands. Anybody recognized what this other story is? Yes, The Three Little Pigs. What a literate congregation you are! Every little pig builds a house, and every house faces the big bad wolf. One day the big bad wolf comes, and says, “Little pig, little pig, let me come in.” And the little pig says, Not by the—? (hair on my chinny-chin-chin.)

You remember that two of the pigs build their houses out junk, maybe because it is easier of cheaper, or they just didn’t take the time to ask hard questions like, “Will it stand up to the wolf test?”
The third little pig builds his house wisely, and it passes the wolf test.

There is something about house-building that serves as a metaphor for our lives, so Jesus tells us this story about house-building. It is one of those stories where it is really two stories side by side. And when you get a parable like that in one of Jesus’ teachings, the best way to understand it is to look at, where do those two stories have similarities, and then what’s the variable between the two stories? Because when you find the variable, that’s the hinge upon which the whole story turns. Then you find what Jesus is really after. So let’s look at this a little closer.

The first detail in each of Jesus’ stories, is that each person builds a house. This detail does not vary between the two stories.. It is not optional. As a matter of fact to better understand this detail, you can replace the word house with the word “character” or “soul” or “life” because Jesus is wanting us to understand that we are all constructing an eternal life, an eternal soul. And the materials we construct our eternal souls out of are the choices that we make. We tend to get distracted from that because we think to get focused on circumstantial stuff. But what really matters about you is your soul. And you’re constructing it every day, good, bad, deliberately or

casually, with wise choices or foolish choices. And every time you choose, you're in the process of building an eternal house that will last forever. So...

- We are all home builders

And the problem we little piggies have is that we make foolish choices. Anybody here ever make a foolish choice? Let's do some mass confession today. If you ever made a foolish choice, in a moment I'm going to ask you to raise your hand but let me run through a few categories first just to jog your memory.

Have you ever made a commitment that you wish you hadn't made? Ever said something you later regret? Ever date someone who was a psycho? Ever make an impulsive buy that you later wish you had taken more time?

Okay, back to choices. If you have ever made a foolish choice about time, money, behavior, vocation, parenting, friendship, the stock market, your spiritual life—raise your hand right now? Now turn to the person next to you and say, **“I am one foolish little piggy!”**

I want you to know that God is very interested in the house you are building. This metaphor of house building is used quite often in Scripture. Paul writes to the church at Corinth and he says,

I Corinthians 3:10-15

Each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹²If any man builds on this using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw,

Do you get the impression that you and I are going to be responsible for what kind of lives we build?

I recently read about a house San Jose called the Winchester Mystery House. The woman who built it was married to the Winchester rifle guy. When he died she became heir to all that money. Then her child died, and she turned to the occult. Mrs. Winchester developed this kind of odd belief that as long as she kept building that house, death would be confused. It would not come for her. She'd be safe. So she builds this enormous house.

People do that sometimes. People get all wrapped up in their physical house. Sixteen carpenters worked every day for 38 years to build this house. It contains 2,000 doors in one house, 160,000 windows—more windows than in the Empire State Building—in Mrs. Winchester’s house. The front doors of this house cost \$3,000. In that day you could build a great house for \$3,000. She spent that on the front doors, and they were used one time. The workmen who installed them walked out of them after they put them in. That’s the only time those doors were ever used. You can go upstairs and they lead to a ceiling. You can open doors that open to brick walls. Because apparently part of the deal in building this house was, she was hoping that it would confuse death.

She was still building her house when death came, and death was not confused. It took eight trucks working seven days a week for six and a half weeks to haul away all the extra stuff that she had compiled there. And then the trucks made one more trip and this trip was for her. Because no matter what kind of house you build, and there are some very impressive houses in the part of the world where we live, one day the truck’s going to come for you and me.

So we are all building a house whether we want to or not—some good, some bad, but we are all home builders.

- **Every house faces a storm.**

The wolf comes to the house of every little pig. Did you notice Jesus’ description of the two storms that came to the house of the rock and the one that comes to the house on the sand? They are absolutely identical, word for word,

Matthew 7:25 & 27

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house....

because He wants to make it clear, this is not a story about how to build a house where there will be no storms.

We West Texans know something about storms that huff and puff and blow your house down don’t we? When Marsha and I were building our home a

few years ago we decided against a basement because we didn't want any stairs to navigate during our golden years. So we built what's referred to as a Safe Room. The walls were built with Haydite blocks and rebar and then filled with cement. The room is 4x8x8 which would be enough room for a couple of chairs, a TV set and a George Foreman grill. But with the passing of time two filing cabinets have been moved to the back of the Safe Room. There's a couple of portable tables in there now and a vast of array of blankets and comforters, but we still have this one little area notched out for us in case of storm. So the Safe Room has become the Standing Room Only Safe Room, but we're ready!

And we're ready because storms have a way coming. And it'll huff and puff and blow your house away. So Jesus' story isn't a story about how to find a place where the storm will never come. But I'll bet there are some folks in the room this morning who are saying, "Yeah, Gary, but you know, I'm smart enough; I'm rich enough; I've got enough resources, I'm successful enough to engineer a storm-free life.

Jesus says "No you can't." In fact this is His prediction in Matthew 6. Okay this is multiple choice. Find the right statement for Matthew 6:34.

Multiple Choicing Matthew 6:34

- A. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow because something good is going to happen to you."**
- B. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow because *blue skies looking at me, nothing but blue skies do I see.*"**
- C. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow because the good ferry will come and blow sunshine up your nose."**
- D. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow; there's always the lotto."**
- E. "Therefore do not worry about tomorrow; it may be the Rapture."**
- F. "Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring worries enough of its own. Each day has enough trouble of its own."**

Trouble today. Trouble tomorrow. And that's the world we live in.

Some of you are facing a vocational storm. Some of you may be facing a vocational storm. Someone may walk into work this week and here that the company is downsizing and suddenly you are without a job. How many of you know that's storm.

Some of you may get the report back tomorrow and along with the shocking news "It is cancer." That's a storm. It changes everything.

Icon Tim Russert, host of NBC's Meet the Press for 16 years, respected, tough reporter, honorable husband and father, author of the books on fathering, *Wisdom of Our Fathers: Lessons and Letters*, and *Big Russ and Me, Father and Son*: last Friday a miniscule piece of plaque broke away from his coronary artery, hit the heart and he was dead instantly. He was 58. I'm 58.

And Tim Russert was unable to engineer a storm-free life. Neither can you. Neither can I.

So I'm not going to let somebody in Italian suit do a spiritual tap dance and tell me that if I will just get right with God, I will receive the triple fold anointing, money will fall out of heaven, I won't have any more problems, my children will behave, arise and called my blessed, my marriage will be like Father Knows Best, my physical pleasures will multiply and life will become like Baywatch, Spring Break, and Girls Gone Wild all rolled into one.

In the meantime (and sometimes those times are really mean) everybody is building a house. You're building an eternal soul. Everybody faces a storm. It is coming your way. Maybe you're in the midst of one right now. And storms have a way of revealing to us what really matters. Because what really matters in Jesus' story, the variable, the hinge point, the whole deal comes down to this,

What are you building your house on?

What are you constructing your life on?

Life is not about storm avoidance. It is not about trying to make sure that the circumstances are all smooth and pleasant. And that's exactly why there's rock and sand in this story. Jesus says,

Matthew 7:24

Anybody who builds their life on what I say, whoever hears these words of mine and puts them into practice, is like the wise man who builds his house on the rock.

In Jesus' day the old way to God, the old system, was symbolized primarily by the temple. Some of you that know about Jerusalem know that it was built on what was called the Temple Mount or the Temple Rock, this huge rocky outcropping. It was, among other things, known as the House on the Rock. So when Jesus says no, the house on the rock is going to be this new community of people who build their lives on my words, that's a staggering, audacious claim.

The pride and joy of every Jew was the temple. It was a place of security for them. As Jesus was speaking sometime around 30 A. D., the temple was standing in all its glory in Jerusalem. But within in forty years, just one generation, it would be leveled and desecrated. My personal theology doesn't believe that temple will ever be rebuilt. Don't send you donations to the latest Rebuild the Temple Fund. Do you really think Jesus is going to come back and occupy the throne of a temple that was emblematic of the old covenant sacrificial system when He ended with His sacrificial death on the cross? No. God is not interested in rebuilding a temple made by the hands of men.

John 2:14-22

¹⁴ In the temple courts He found men selling cattle, sheep and doves, and others sitting at tables exchanging money. ¹⁵ So He made a whip out of cords, and drove all from the temple area, both sheep and cattle; He scattered the coins of the money changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ To those who sold doves He said, "Get these out of here! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!" ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it is written: "Zeal for your house will consume me." ¹⁸ Then the Jews demanded of Him, "What miraculous sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." ²⁰ The Jews replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to

raise it in three days?"²¹ But the temple He had spoken of was His body.²² After He was raised from the dead, His disciples recalled what He had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

¹⁶ Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple.

I Corinthians 6:19-20

¹⁹ Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; ²⁰ you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.

2 Corinthians 6:16

We are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people."

Revelation 21:22

I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple.

And between now and the time of Jesus' return He and His father is on the temple reclamation business, and He wants to rebuild your life; not through storm avoidance but through storming proofing. And you storm proof your life by building your house, your soul, your life on the rock. "Now, wait a minute, Gary. That's too ethereal. What do you mean "Build your life on the rock. I can't get a hold of that. What does that mean?"

Matthew 7:24

Anybody who builds their life on what I say, whoever hears these words of mine and puts them into practice, is like the wise man who builds his house on the rock.

So it is "*Jesus whatever you say I will seek to understand it. Whatever you command, I will seek do it.*" That's temple building, that's house building, that's soul building, that's life building.

Now when you hear about the guy who built his life on the sand maybe you asked like I did, “How did he get into this mess? Why would somebody do something like that?” Now I don’t think he was an evil man. Jesus says nothing about the man being selfish or resentful or revengeful. What the adjective that Jesus uses to describe him? Foolish. How many of you know that’s the human condition?

When kids do something foolish, parents always ask the same question. Parents have done that for centuries. It is a question that is design to make sense out the mess. It is a question that’s intended bring meaning and rationality out of the inexplicable. What’s the question? One word—Why? “Why did you do this?” “Why did you stick a spaghetti noodle up your brother’s nose?” “Why did you leave a bicycle where the car would have to run over it? “Why did you do this?”

Parents always ask the same question. And kids always give the same answer. Three words—“I don’t know.” Seems pretty obvious to the kids—if they knew what they were doing, they wouldn’t have done such a stupid thing in the first place.

“Why?” “I don’t know.”

If you were to say this man, “Hey, Foolish Man, you who have only one life to live, you who know you’re going to die, you who knew that the storms would come, Why in the world would you build your one and only life on the sand? What do you think he’d say? “I don’t know—seemed like a good idea at the time.”

This is life. Unless you choose; no one plans to lead a mediocre life. No couple getting married sits down and says: let’s plan on ending up in a court. No human being walks into a bar and says: I think I’ll become an alcoholic. No man ever has a child and then says: I think I’m going to get so busy and so wrapped up in my career and be gone so much that my children won’t know me, and will carry a hole in their hearts as long as they live. Nobody nurses a grudge, and says to himself: I think I’m going to shoot for becoming a bitter, angry, resentful old person before I die. Nobody sits down and plans on going to hell. Stuff happens. *I DON’T KNOW.*

Jesus says, “We are all storm-facers.” And He asked the same question, “Will you build your life on the rock or on the sand?” And many of us keep giving the same answer, *I don't know*. Hey, it is time to know!

“Well, yeah, Gary, I’m going to do that but I’ve had so many storms, I haven’t had time to build.” My friend, you and I had better make building the number one priority.

And I know there a lot of storms out there.

Maybe it is a job crisis.

Maybe it is a struggle in a marriage.

Maybe it is a divorce you’ve been through.

Maybe you’re wrestling with emotions.

Maybe you have a child that you love so much who’s going in the wrong direction and you wish you could fix it, but you can’t.

Maybe you’ve lost somebody you love.

Maybe somebody rejected you and your heart is hurting.

But those storms are going to keep coming. That’s not the variable in your story. The variable is “What are you and I building our house on?”

You see you can’t for the storm to decide rock or sand, rock or sand, rock or sand. The variable in your story is will you decide. It is your choice.