

“Kingdom Foundation”

Introduction: As you heard a few minutes ago, our due diligence process on our steeple and its need for renovation continues. We’ve had two companies take a look and have seen them scramble up into the bell tower, pointing out along the way beams that need to be replaced, holes that need to be closed up, and sections of roof that need to be patched. What these folks haven’t done yet is to check the foundation underneath the steeple. Admittedly, that is not an easy process. It will involve going through a hole in the kitchen floor and doing an “army crawl” the length of the fellowship hall until they get to a place where they can see what is supporting the steeple. Although that will not be an easy journey, it’s a very important one. You can replace all the beams and fix all the holes and patch as much of the roof as you want, but if your structure is not resting on a firm, secure foundation, you will not be safe over the long term.

The kind of life that Jesus has been calling us to in his “sermon on the plain,” a life from which kingdom of God attitudes and values and actions flow, a life that uses our comfort to care for the afflicted, a life that loves our enemy and does good to those who hate us, a life that refrains from judgment and criticism and offers instead forgiveness and generosity, a life with a heart that bears the fruit of the Spirit, THAT kind of life, concludes Jesus as he winds his comments up, requires the foundation of his word. If we are to both live well, and stand firm amid the storms of life, we must build our life on the firm foundation of his word, not only by hearing his word, but putting it into practice.

Jesus illustrates this through a parable, known as the wise and foolish builders. It is a very practical and down to earth picture, given by one who had been trained, and made his living, as a carpenter.

I. The Wise and Foolish Builders

A. In this parable there are two builders who share three things in common. One, both men build a house. Both men build a structure that they believe will keep them safe and secure and comfortable. There is no such thing, no third option, according to Jesus, as not building. The house here represents a belief structure, a world-view, if you like, the answers to life’s pressing questions that the occupants of the house plan to live by and believe will help them live well: Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I here? What or who is going to rescue me when things don’t go the way I’ve planned? Where, ultimately, am I heading? This, actually, is one of my favorite passages to share at a wedding. How is this couple going to build their life together? How will they answer these questions of life? What will be their foundation as they head off into the future?

B. A second similarity is that on both houses the torrent struck. As Jesus told it on another occasion, “the rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house” (Ma. 7:25). In either telling, there is no place, Jesus infers, where we can build that will be storm free. All of us, sooner or later, will face the inevitable pressures of life in this uncertain, less than perfect world. Such include sickness, disappointment, misunderstandings, temptations, bereavement, the list goes on.

Illustration: Iela and four of her friends experienced the uncertainties of life last Tuesday when they were about to board their Norwegian Air, Boeing 737 Max 8 airplane to come home from Dublin. Without any warning, the flight was canceled without any promise or hope of being rebooked and they had to scramble. What were the chances of something like that happening? They all eventually got

themselves on an Aer Lingus flight, and made it home safely. But what had seemed like a good deal for a final spring break college fling turned out costing each of them several hundred dollars more than they had anticipated or could afford.

How do you respond when life throws you a curve like that? Or, when a doctor tells you news that isn't good? Or, when who you thought would be a partner for life walks out on you? Or, when a literal storm does blow in and flattens all that you own and have to the ground? Or, when you receive word that your loved one was actually on one of those planes that crashed? On what will you be standing then? And, to take it up a notch, as the image of torrents of rain, hailstones hurtling down, and violent winds bursting out are used by the prophet Ezekiel to picture the coming judgment day of God (13:10-16), perhaps Jesus is also hinting here that all of us will face that day on which we'll be called to stand before our Lord and Maker and need to give account. On what kind of foundation will we be standing then? Will that be a joyous occasion, or a fearful one?

C. A third similarity of the two builders is that they both had the opportunity to build their lives on the foundation of the words of Jesus. It's not that one spoke a language in which the Bible had not been yet translated, or that one's parents had never taken him to church, or that the Bible had been eliminated from the Great Books curriculum at college. Both builders had heard the words of Jesus and had, therefore, the opportunity to respond. Today, many people hear the words of Jesus when attending church. Millions of people have their own Bibles and have read his words. Countless others have been baptized and confirmed in which the words of our Savior have been pronounced over them. But hearing his words, Jesus wants to make clear, is not enough.

D. And that's where the main contrast is found in this parable. One builder, the wise one, put what he had heard from Jesus into practice. This builder represents, explains Jesus, the man who dug down deep until he found a foundation of rock on which to build. When the flood came and the torrent struck, the house was not shaken because it had been built on a firm foundation. As the old 19th c. English evangelist, D.L. Moody wrote in his Bible next to this verse, "Build on the rock and fear no shock." But the one who did not put the words of Jesus into practice is like one who chose to build on no foundation. When the torrent struck, there was nothing to hold his house; it collapsed and was destroyed.

II. How Firm is Your Foundation?

A. How firm, Jesus wants to ask us, is our foundation? How are you at putting what you've heard from Jesus into practice? This link between hearing and doing is so important that it is stressed by Jesus on several occasions.

- A couple of chapters later, when Jesus was asked about his family, he replied: "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice" (Lk. 8:21).

- And when someone in the crowd, after hearing Jesus speak, shouted out that his mother must have been a great woman and should be blessed for giving him birth and for nursing him, Jesus responded: "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it" (Lk. 11:28).

- And when Jesus' brother, James, wrote a letter that would become one of our NT books, one of the things he undoubtedly remembered about Jesus' teaching was this link between hearing and doing. As we heard James describe the foundation of the Christian life, earlier in our Epistle lesson, "Do not

merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. . . [for] whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it—not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it—they will be blessed in what they do.” This perfect law, these words of Jesus, give freedom and bring blessing because in doing them we can become all that we’ve been designed by God to be. We’re not enslaved by that which does not bring us, or lead to, life.

B. Importantly, putting the words of Jesus into practice is not salvation by works. It’s not having a list of accomplishments that we pull out at the end of our life and try to use as a ticket to heaven. We stand before a holy and a righteous God only on the solid rock that is Jesus. As we sang earlier, our hope is built on nothing less (and nothing more) than Jesus’ blood and righteousness, on what he has done for us. We seek to put his words into practice while we live on this earth as a way of working out our salvation, as a means to living well and securely in all sorts of situations, and as a way of expressing our love for what he has done for us.

C. Also, putting the words of Jesus into practice so that our foundation for living is secure does not just include making good, moral choices, as important as those are. On a more basic level, it has to do with answering those questions of life we referred to earlier so that we might live out those answers. Those questions mirror the four basic movements of the story of God, otherwise known as the good news or gospel. If it’s true, it’s what we need to ground our life on: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and New Creation. These movements cover our identity, who we think we are and what we think we’re here for (Creation). What we see as the major problem for why things are broken in our lives and world (Fall). What we’re looking to as our savior to deliver us from this problem (Redemption). What transformation in the present and hope in the future look like (New Creation).

Like those two builders, everyone has a gospel story, a foundation they believe is good news that they believe in and seek to live by. Pay close attention to movies and books, songs and sitcoms, commercials and comedians, and you will see this storyline spill out, you will notice answers to these longings and fundamental questions. If the major actor in the storyline we build our life upon is Jesus, if it is his word we are building our life upon and if it is his word that is directing our choices, his promise is not that we will have all of our questions answered, but that we will be able to live well and to stand firm amid the storms of life.