

# **“WEATHERING LIFE’S STORMS”**

**MATTHEW 7:24-27, MARCH 25, 2018**

Palm Sunday - Rite of Confirmation

An elderly woman was walking down the sidewalk on a sunny afternoon in the little community where she lived, when she came upon a little old man who was rocking in his rocking chair on the front porch of the little house where he was living! Though he looked “weathered” and “feeble,” he had a rather large smile of contentment upon his face!

“I couldn’t help noticing how happy you look,” the elderly woman said to this little old man. “What’s your secret for a happy life?”

He replied: “Well, I smoke three packs of cigarettes a day,” as he waved his right hand through the air that was holding a smoldering cigarette between his thumb and forefinger. I also drink a large glass of whiskey every day and eat all the greasy and fatty foods I want--in addition to the fact that I never exercise!”

“Wow! That’s amazing!” said the woman. “So, how old are you?”

“Twenty-six,” replied the supposedly-older man.

If you were going to build a healthy body, you would not follow this young man’s example, would you? Building a successful life and developing a healthy body requires a great deal of self-discipline, hard work and personal dedication. So where might you look for advice?

These words of Jesus that I just read to you are about building a successful life and these words of Jesus comprise only one of the 46 different parables of Jesus he told that are recorded for us in the New Testament Gospels.

And this particular-parable is so “TRUE TO LIFE” that I can’t help but wonder if Jesus may not have had two different home builders in mind and the two-totally different experiences they had in building their respective homes!

Jesus may have known something about building houses for after all he was a carpenter, by trade, before he stepped into the Jordan River at age 30 to be baptized by John the Baptist.

This parable is a very believable story when we remember that geologists tell us that still today--there are MANY gullies that are indigenous to Palestine--that are as dry as dry can be in the summer time, but that can also become **TORRENTS OF RAGING AND RUSHING WATER IN THE WINTERTIME**. Maybe this foolish man who built his house on one of those dried-up river beds in the summertime and was completely surprised when those flood-waters came upon his home in the wintertime.

Or maybe the foolish man who built his house upon the sand--was simply trying to take a shortcut and save himself a lot of time and money by building his house directly upon the surface of the ground, rather than expending the necessary time, money and effort--that would have been required of him if he had dug some 6 to 7 feet below the surface of the ground...to reach the “bedrock” or that “rock shelf” upon which a proper foundation for the building of his house--could have been laid!

But what is the point of Jesus' parable? Jesus point is this: Only those people whose lives are built upon a solid foundation will be able to successfully weather all the storms that will come upon them in this life--as sinful human beings living in a fallen world!

And what is this solid foundation? It is our both hearing and doing the Word of God! It is our both hearing and believing the Gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! I am hoping, therefore, that we might the rest of our time together this morning, therefore, talking about: (1) The SIMILARITIES between these two home builders; and then (2) The CONTRASTS between these two home builders; and (3) The CONSEQUENCES for each of these two home builders!

### I. LET'S CONSIDER THE SIMILARITIES

In many respects these two home-builders Jesus is telling us about in our parable are initially a lot of like! They shared several important characteristics. What are these similarities?

- (1) Both these men heard Christ's Word--they both heard Jesus' messages of faith and his call to repentance (v. 24, 26).
- (2) They both built houses! Both these men seemed to believe in Jesus' message up to a point! They each applied the words of Jesus to their lives as they saw it!
- (3) And from the outside, the two respective homes they built may have looked very similar on the outside; in fact, so similar, that the average person may not have been even able to tell them apart!

The point of Jesus' parable here is that two people who hear the very same Gospel may seem to respond to it, in much the same way, initially. They may come to faith in Jesus and each be an active part of the Church for a while! They may say that they believe that Jesus is the long-awaited Messiah and the Promised Savior of the world--for a while. But for all the similarities between these two people; the day will come, however, when one seeks to live in obedience to God's commandments and the other abandons God's commandments entirely.

### II. SO LET'S CONSIDER THE CONTRASTS

Some people seek to live in obedience to Jesus' teaching and conform their lives to the instructions that are given to us in the Bible, while the other people may simply allow the words of Jesus to go into one of their ears and out the other! They hear Jesus tell us how important it is that we become aware of the fact that we are all sinners and the need we all have to confess our sins to God and receive his forgiveness, but over time--they no longer do this! They stop living in the power of their Baptism!

They never ask God for his forgiveness and never ask anyone else for their forgiveness either! They no longer seek to give God the first place in their lives. They think nothing of cursing and swearing, using all sorts of foul language. They think nothing of taking the Lord's name in vain! They think nothing of skipping church services on Sunday morning! They think nothing of being disrespectful and lying to their parents--or of being disrespectful and lying to their teachers at school! When they are old enough and get their drivers licenses, they think nothing of driving 20 miles over the speed limit or running a red light or failing to stop at a stop sign!

They no longer treat their bodies like temples of the Holy Spirit or respect the boundaries between those things that belong to them and those things that belong to other people. They think nothing of carelessly smearing the reputation of another person! And they can never be happy for other people who have things that they don't have!

Instead, they begin to live in any old way they want to live--rather than living as a person who continues to remember and who continues to live, as much as possible, in obedience to God's commandments with the help of God the Holy Spirit!

To a large degree, the day comes when they NO LONGER LOVE JESUS OR PROFESS THEIR FAITH IN JESUS! They may say that they love Jesus and still believe in Jesus--but it's hard for anyone to see any evidence of that because of the way they are living their lives!

But this certainly doesn't mean that people who love Jesus and seek to follow Jesus with their lives--will live totally trouble-free lives; no, for Christians experience their fair share of troubles and heartaches too, because we are living in a fallen world where some of the things that happen to us in this life are far beyond our control!

### III. LET'S CONSIDER THE CONSEQUENCES.

And yet, there is something about having a strong faith in God, the belief that God loves us more deeply and more profoundly than anyone else in this whole world could ever love us that can make us--far more resilient and far more powerful and that can make us far more determined and far more hopeful--to face up to the problems and challenges that encounter us in this life--than we could ever be apart from our faith in Jesus.

St. Paul put it like this one day: "We are more than conquerors through Christ who loved us, for I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things past, nor present, nor things to come--nothing in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God which is ours through Christ Jesus our Lord!

St. Paul also said: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!"

St. John said, "This is the victory that overcomes the world; even our faith!"

Building on the rock speaks of people who hear the Gospel and believe it to the point that they build their lives on it. The "rock" in these verses is identified by Jesus himself when he says: "*Whoever hears these words of mine.*" The rock is the Gospel. It is the same rock as that of the confession St. Peter made one day, when Jesus asks his disciples: "But who do you say that I am?" If there were others present who had the right answer, that day, they were too timid to speak up but Peter, good old impetuous Peter, says to Jesus: "*You are the Christ the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:16)!

People who build their lives on the rock are people who genuinely believe that Jesus Christ and only Jesus Christ has the power to save their souls. Rock builders hear his Word and they conform their lives to it. They hear what the Bible says about Jesus--that he is: "*The Way, the Truth, and the Life--and that no one comes to the Father but by me*" (John 14:6)!

They hear the message and they believe it with all their heart: "*For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16)!

What God tells them to do in his Word, they strive their best to do! And what God forbids them from doing, they do their best to avoid! People who build their lives on the rock believe that God should always, and I mean always, believe that God should always have the first place in their lives!

In Matthew 7:25, Jesus reveals to us why it is so critical for you and me to build on the strong foundation. Jesus says, "*And the rain fell, and the flood came, and the winds blew and slammed against that*

*house; and yet it did not fall; for it had been founded on the rock!*" --- Jesus doesn't pull any punches. Just look at the word "and" in verse 25. Jesus does not say: *"If the rain falls, or if the floods come, or if the wind blows."* He says, *"And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house!"* Jesus tells you and me straight up that storms will come into our lives and because we are his followers does not in any way mean that we will be spared every hardship in our lives!

And it is the storms of life that reveal the strength of our foundation. When we build on the rock we must expect storms because only storms can show your wisdom to the world around you! The storms are what tests us! Living in the sunshine of life doesn't tell us much about ourselves. Anybody can build a house that will stand firm when the sun is shining, and the wind is still.

Sometimes the storm rolls in when we are pounded by sickness or the fear of death. Sometimes the storm rolls in when we learn we have cancer or another life-threatening disease. Or maybe a loved one will suddenly pass away. Or people sometimes develop a nagging injury that refuses to heal. Sometimes the storm is a crushing personal loss. You may lose a job that not only provides income but also provides you with self-esteem and personal security.

Brothers and sisters, many of us learned years ago about the "Leaning Tower of Pisa" that was built in Italy in 1173 AD. For almost 8 centuries, the 179-foot tower was sinking about 1/20 of an inch each year, so that it was eventually 17 feet out of plum in 1990! Fortunately, there were some very expensive renovations that began upon the "Leaning Tower of Pisa" in 1990--that were completed in 2001, to prevent that 810-year-old structure from collapsing completely upon the ground! But do you know what the word "Pisa" means in Italian? It means "marshy land" which gives us some insight into why this magnificent structure began to sink even before its construction was complete! It started leaning because it was built on a faulty foundation.

When personal storms come many lives will be destroyed and left in shambles! Most people don't find the narrow gate (7:13-14)! Most people don't build on the foundation of Christ's Word. But if you construct your life according to Christ's building codes you will not be disappointed! Storms will come and go!

But no one has ever weathered the storm of injustice and crucifixion the way that our Savior has! He is: *"The one who was put to death for our transgressions was raised again for our justification" (Romans 4:25)!*

Building on the rock is the best flood insurance you can invest in. Storms will come and go. You are either in a trial, coming out of a trial or entering, into a trial. Nevertheless, if you've built your life on the foundation of Christ, you have nothing to fear! A good storm will demonstrate the stability of your foundation!  
Amen