

## "BUILDING A HOUSE"

TEXT: "Down came the rain, floods rose, winds blew, and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, for it was founded upon a rock". (Matthew 7: 25)

INTRODUCTION In recent days, carpenters, painters, decorators, electricians, roofers and others have been "doing their thing" here in our church home. The restoration of our sanctuary is slowly, but surely taking place. It's an exciting thing to watch. A great deal has been done in here since last we worshipped together. Indeed, it has been a busy week in our building.

Jesus, trained as a carpenter, knew a lot about the buildings of His day. You'll recall that one day He put two houses into a parable, a story that has meaning even down to this day...making its claim on our lives.

This simple parable comes at the close of the Sermon on the Mount. He told this story to point up the necessity of doing as well as hearing. I think He knew how prone people are to think that because they've heard a thing, they have therefore done it. The people had sat on the grassy mountainside and listened to His words with wonder and rapt attention. And when He had finished speaking, they were ready to nod their heads, clap their hands in approval. They agreed with Him! This man had spoken the truth!

DEVELOPMENT But He knew of this tendency in our human nature. He knew how easy it is to hear things - to listen to them, to agree with them, and then to go out and not do one thing about them.

This is a subtle temptation of church people today. We're so used to listening to sermons - in approval or disapproval - that we assume that we have accomplished the truth when we have heard it or made up our minds regarding it. Now Jesus told this story to drive home the necessity of action. It is not enough to listen. It is not enough to agree. No word of His is given that we may merely know the truth. Every word is given that we may use it - put it into action, make it a part of the structure of life. And so He said to the people that day:

"Now everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts upon them will be like a wise man, who built his house on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine and does not act upon them will be like a foolish man who buildt his house on sand".

ALL OF US ARE BUILDERS The first truth that Jesus is suggesting to us in this parable is that all of us are builders - that everyone is building a house, and the house we are building is our own. And it's a life-time job building the house of personality and character. Everything we do, every word we speak goes into the structure and becomes part of our life house. Dr. Buttrick, writing in the Interpreter's Bible put it this way:

"Every thought we think and every hope and desire is like a piece of timber set in place; every habit is like a beam holding it together; every bit of imagination is like a window in the house. We may think our deeds and experiences are scattered and unrelated, but they are wonderfully cemented together as day by day the unity of the self is being made - the structure of personality,

the house not made with hands".

It's also true that while some houses from outside appearances may seem to be alike, they are not alike. Jesus put it this way: that some are building wisely and some foolishly. I appreciate the fact that Jesus used that particular distinction - wise and foolish - because so often when we think or speak in religious currency, we use words like good and bad, right and wrong. But this wise and foolish angle gives us a new and refreshing slant on this whole matter of behaviour and the things we do. Let's think about this.

For instance, we've been told that it is sinful to wreck our bodies with intemperance, to form habits that burn up our bodies and befuddle our minds with alcohol, or narcotics and what have you. There are so many people in our nation today caught up in the terrible grip of intemperance. It's a monstrous problem, growing worse all the time. We haven't described it completely by simply saying it is sinful. It is also foolish - unwise - a stupidity and even its victims know this. When they come out of it, when they wake up next morning, what is their first thought? Sin? No. Sanity. Not what a bad man I am, but what a fool I've made of myself.

Or, how often we've been told it is sinful to live a life of moral uncleanness - and, of course, it is! Either before or after marriage to let your sexual passions and appetites rule you completely, control you, dominate your life - to use another person's body for your own private pleasure - to break up a home, your own or another's - to bring unhappiness to those you love, and a great burden of guilt upon yourself - you haven't fully described it by saying that it is sinful and therefore wrong. Yes, it's a question of sin, but it is more a question of sanity. The assassination of one's own happiness is the sin of a fool, of a mixed-up mind that somewhere along the line has lost touch with reality.

The Sermon on the Mount which precedes this parable has so much to say about human relations: treating your neighbor according to the Golden Rule, doing unto others as you would want them to behave toward you; getting along with people; using common sense and good judgement in dealing with hostility; stopping quarrels before they become violent; turning the other cheek and walking the second mile; keeping open the door of communication between adversaries. All of this represents downright, common-sense necessity - to keep open the door whether it's a conflict between two nations or two people - to keep open the door. If your adversary compels you to go a mile, go with him two, stay with him in other words, keep walking, keep talking, don't let communication break down or blow up.

Are these out of date? These are the "common-sense" ways of Jesus. So often we reject them, calling them too idealistic, thus spurning His way, taking our own. But they're so sensible, so practical, so strong. These words of Jesus are not just some good advice. They're not a little "lean-to" you add to the house if you want it and leave it off if you don't. These words are the very laws on which the structure of life has to be built. Said Jesus,

"Now everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts upon them will be like a sensible man, who built his house on rock".

MUST LIVE IN THE HOUSE HE BUILDS

Then, too, there is a <sup>second</sup> ~~further~~ fact that this parable is pointing up to us. Not only is every person building his own house, but everyone must then live in the house he builds. How often we hear it said this way: every person must live with himself, a person can never get away from himself.

I'm reminded of a story I first heard when I was back in Junior High School in a small town upstate. It illustrates so vividly the second truth that Jesus would have us grasp. A number of us had been involved in some mischief and the eighth grade shop teacher took it upon himself to reprimand us. He made us sit down and instead of harsh words of reprimand that we were expecting, he told us story. I've never forgotten it.

It was about a wealthy man who called in one of his trusted workers, a man who had served him for many years, and placed some blueprints before him, saying, "Jim, I'm leaving for an extended trip around the world. I'll be gone for about ten months. While I'm gone I want you to build a house for me. Here's the map showing the general location. It overlooks a lake, and I think it's a choise spot for a home. Here are the plans and general specifications, and here's a check big enough to cover the entire cost. I want you to spare no expense in making it a beautiful home".

Well, when his employer had gone, the worker saw his chance to feather his own nest a bit. He saw how he could cheat on the house, pocket the difference. He hired a crooked contractor, employed some unskilled labor, and wherever possible he put in cheap, inferior material into the home. When the building was finished - while it had the appearance of magnificence - in reality it was a poorly constructed, insubstantial shell.

Then came the day when the employer returned and went with his worker friend to examine the house. "What do you think of it, Jim," said the old, wealthy gentleman. "Why I think it's wonderful" said the worker. "Jim, I'm glad you like it, for I have something important to say to you. I expect to retire from business next year, and I won't be needing your services any longer. And I want you to have a nice home to live in in later years. Jim, this house is yours! Here's the key".

When the teacher told us that story in the class room, he did not have to point out to the eighth graders there the moral. We got the message. It is not good sense to build a shabby building when the house we're building is our own. It is not very smart to play tricks on ourselves, weaken the structure of our own house. If we lie and cheat and play the deceptive game, we're not really putting something over on others. We're just building a house on sand, putting shoddy stuff into the construction of a life.

"Each is given a bag of tools: a shapeless mass, a book of rules.  
And each must make - ere life is flown -  
A stumbling block,  
Or a stepping stone"

TESTED BY THE STORM

Stay with the parable a bit longer. The final thought suggested is that every house, sooner or later, is apt to be tested by the storm. No building is immune from the weather. No life is exempt from life's shifting weather.

We'd like to think that bad things do not happen to good people, but they do. We know this. Hurt and harm hits one and all. Jesus said to look at that storm coming up. It is going to beat on every house. It beats on the house built on sand. It beats on the house built on rock. The same storm beats on both houses. "The rains descended, the floods came, the winds blew". Whether the builder was wise or foolish had no effect on the weather.

The difference is not in the weather, but rather it's in the house, in the stuff that went into building it, the foundations on which it was erected. The strong house stood; the shaky house went down, and great, said Jesus, was the fall of it. This is not just something taken out of the Bible to talk about on Sunday mornings in June. We've seen a number of human houses fall, crumble and go to pieces in recent months. Said Jeb Magruder in recent days:

"Somewhere between my ambition and my ideals I lost my ethical compass. I found myself on a path that had not been intended for me by my parents or my principles or by my own ethical instincts. It has led me to this courtroom."

Here's an illustration that's worth sharing. In Chicago in 1923, a group of the world's wealthiest men met at an industrial conference. The papers were full of it. The headlines of the day said that this was the most significant monetary conference ever held in the history of mankind. Among the powerful men present were eight who were among the most successful businessmen in the world. They were:

- President of the largest steel company.
- Head of the largest utility company.
- Greatest wheat speculator.
- President of the NY Stock Exchange.
- President of the Bank of International Settlements.
- Member of the President's Cabinet.
- Greatest bear in Wall Street.
- Head of the world's largest monopoly.

These eight men controlled more wealth than there was in the United States Treasury. For years, magazines had been printing their success stories, holding them up before the youth of this nation as examples of successful men, the solid men of the land.

We've been told by an insurance company of what happened to those eight financial giants. The president of the steel company, Charles Schwab, died a pauper, bankrupt. The utility executive, Samuel Insull, died a fugitive from justice, an exile in Greece, his fortune gone. The greatest wheat speculator, Arthur Cuttin, died abroad insolvent. The President of the NY Stock Exchange, Richard Whitney, served time in Sing Sing. The member of the President's cabinet, Albert Fall, was released from prison so he could die at home. The greatest bear in Wall Street, Jesse Livermore, committed suicide. The President of the Bank of International Settlements, Leon Fraser, committed suicide. The head of the world's greatest monopoly, Ivan Kruger, the match king, committed suicide. Great indeed was the fall of it. All learned how to make money, but they somehow failed to learn how to live. Successes in business, but tragic failures in life.

This is not to say that a person cannot be both a success in business and in life. It is to underscore what Jesus said and what life confirms that when we put shoddy stuff into the house, when we built on sand, when we try to live apart from the imperatives of moral law, the house will not stand when the winds blow and the storms of life sweep in.

Take heed how you build. Occasionally sit down and consider your "after man" - the kind of person you will be twenty-five years from now, or ten years, or five years. Your "after man" what sort of body are you going to give him to walk in. What sort of morals are you providing him to live with? Take heed how you build.

There was a bit of a "ps" on the bottom of that illustration I used a moment

ago. It said that in the same year of 1923, the winner of several of the most important golf championships, Gene Sarazen, won the US Open and the PGA Tournament. It said that today he's still going strong, still playing an excellent game of golf and still solvent. Some will draw the conclusion that I was very tempted with and found most appealing: stop worrying about business and go out and play golf.

This is a good place to end this sermon. The pews are hard and the air is humid. It's the final day of the United States Open at Winged Foot in Mamaroneck and we want to know if Arnold Palmer can make a comeback and win the Open. All of us are builders. We must live in the house we build. Sooner or later that house will be tested by the storms of life. Take heed, then, how you build.

PRAYER      Divine Father, what a solemn and beautiful thing life is. How serious its issues. This one chance we have to be or not to be. Help us to build our lives on strong foundations. May these moments here this hour make a difference within us, as we consider those values found in the life and the teachings of Him whom we call Lord. Amen

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TEXT: "Down came the rain, floods rose, winds blew, and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, for it was founded upon a rock" (Matthew 7: 25)

### INTRODUCTION

Jesus was a carpenter, a builder. He knew a lot about building. And one day He put two houses into a parable. This parable comes at the close of the Sermon on the Mount, and quite obviously He told this story to point up the necessity of doing as well as hearing. Jesus knew how prone people are to think that because they've heard a thing, they've therefore done it. The people had sat on the green mountainside and listened to His words with wonder and rapt attention. The common folk heard him gladly. And when He had finished speaking, they were ready to nod their heads, clap their hands in approval. They agreed with Him! This man had spoken the truth!

### DEVELOPMENT

But He knew of this tendency in our human nature: He knew how easy it is to hear things - to listen to them, to agree with them, and then to go out and do not one thing about them. May I say without being unkind that I think that this is a subtle temptation of people who have been in the church a long time. They are so used to listening to sermons - in approval or disapproval - that they assume they have accomplished the truth when they have heard it or made up their minds about it. Now Jesus told this story to drive home the necessity of action. It is not enough to listen. It is not enough to agree. No word of His is given that we may merely know the truth; every word is given that we may use it - put it into action, make it a part of the structure of life. And so He said to the people that day:

"Now everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts upon them will be like a wise man, who built his house on rock. And everyone who listens to these words of mine and does not act upon them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand"

### ALL OF US ARE BUILDERS

The first thing that Jesus is suggesting to us in this parable is that all of us are builders - everyone is building a house, and the house we are building is our own. It's a lifetime job building the house of personality and character. Everything we do, every word we speak goes into the structure and becomes part of our life house. As Dr. George Buttrick said in the Interpreter's Bible:

"Every thought we think and every hope and desire is like a piece of timber set in place; every habit is like a beam holding it together; every bit of imagination is like a window in the house. We may think our deeds and experiences are scattered and unrelated, but they are wonderfully cemented together as day by day the unity of the self is being made - the structure of personality, the house not made with hands".

It's also true that while some houses from outside appearances may seem to be alike, they are not alike. Jesus put it this way: that some are building wisely and some foolishly. I appreciate the fact that Jesus used that particular distinction - wise and foolish - because so often when we think or speak in religious currency, we use words like good and bad, right and wrong, righteous and unrighteous. But this

wise and foolish angle gives us a new and refreshing slant on this whole matter of human behavior and the things we do. Let me develop this with you.

For instance, we've been told that it is sinful to wreck our bodies with intemperance, to form habits that burn up our bodies and befuddle our minds with alcohol, or narcotics, psychedelic drugs. There are so many people caught up in the terrible grip of intemperance. It's a monstrous problem, growing worse all the time. But we haven't described it merely by saying that it is sinful; it is also foolish, unwise, a stupidity and even its victims know that. When they come out of it, when they wake up next morning, what is their first thought? Sin? No. Sanity. Not what a bad man I am, but what a fool I've made of myself.

Or, how often we've been told it is sinful to live a life of moral uncleanness - and, of course, it is. Either before or after marriage to let your sexual passions and appetites rule you completely, control you, dominate your life - to use another person's body for your own pleasure - to break up a home, your own or another's - to bring unhappiness to those you love, and a great burden of guilt upon yourself - you haven't fully described it by saying that it is sinful and therefore wrong. Yes, it's a question of sin, but it is more a question of sanity. Certainly the assassination of one's own happiness is the sin of a fool, of a mixed-up mind that somewhere along the line has lost touch with reality.

The Sermon on the Mount which precedes this parable has so much to say about human relations: treating your neighbor according to the Golden Rule, doing unto others as you would want them to behave toward you; getting along with people; using common sense and good judgement in dealing with hostility; stopping quarrels before they become violent; turning the other cheek and walking the second mile; keeping open the door of communication between adversaries. This is not luxury any more what with mushrooms against the sky and terror in our streets. This is a downright common sense necessity - to keep open the door whether it's a conflict between nations or a strike between two groups of people....to keep open the door. If your enemy compels you to go a mile, go with him two, stay with him, keep walking, keep talking, don't let communication break down or blow up.

Are these out of date? These are the common sense ways of Jesus. So often we reject them, call them too idealistic, spurn His way, and take our own. But they're so sensible. So practical. So strong. Bombing our enemies back into the stone age, shelling the daylights out of those who spitefully use us, stoking up the powder keg until a small spark sets off the big explosion - when will we learn the weakness and the foolishness of what seems to us strength?

These words of Jesus are not just some good advice - they're not a little "lean-to" you add on to the house if you want it and leave off if you don't. These words are the laws on which the very structure of life is built. Said Jesus:

"Now everyone who listens to these words of mine and acts upon them will be like a sensible man, who built his house on rock"

MUST LIVE IN THE HOUSE HE BUILDS

Then, too, there is a further fact that this parable is pointing up to us. Not only is every person building his own house, but everyone must then live in the house he builds. How often we hear it said this way: every person must live with himself, a person can never get away from himself.

In connection with this, I was reminded of a story I first heard back in Junior High School. It was after some mischievous escapade in which a number of us had

involved that the eighth grade shop teacher called us into his room, made us sit down and instead of a punishment that we were expecting, proceeded to tell us a story. It was about a wealthy man who called in one of his trusted workers, a man who had served him for many years, and placed some blueprints before him, saying, "Jim, I'm leaving for an extended trip around the world. I'm going to be gone about ten months. While I'm gone I want you to build a house for me. Here's the map showing the general location. It overlooks a lake, and I think it's a choice spot for a home. Here are the plans and general specifications, and here's a check big enough to cover the entire cost. I want you to spare no expense in making it a beautiful house".

Well, when his employer had gone, the worker saw his chance to feather his own nest a bit. He saw how he could cheat on that house, pocket the difference. He hired a crooked contractor, employed some unskilled labor, and wherever possible he put in cheap, inferior material into the building. When the building was finished - while it had the appearance of magnificence - in reality it was a poorly constructed, insubstantial shell.

Then came the day when the employer returned and went with his worker friend of many years to look at the newly constructed house. "What do you think of it, Jim?" said the old, wealthy gentleman. "Why I think it's wonderful" said the worker. "Well, Jim, I'm glad you like it, for I have something important to say to you. I expect to retire from business next year and I won't be needing your services any longer. And I want you to have a nice home to live in in later years. Jim, this house is yours. Here's the key".

When the teacher told us the story in that class room, he did not have to point out to us the moral. We got the message. It is not good sense to build a shabby building when the house we're building is our own. It is not very smart to play tricks on ourselves, weaken the structure of our own house. If we lie and cheat and play a deceptive game, we are not really putting something over on others. We're just building a house on sand, putting shoddy stuff into our own buildings.

TESTED BY THE STORM      The final thought suggested by this parable is that every house will someday be tested by the storm. Every house - no exception - no building will be immune from the weather.

There are still many people who cling to the notion that religion is a kind of protection against trouble, an insurance policy to save them from being hurt or having bad things happen to them. We'd like to think that bad things do not happen to good people, but they do. We know this. Jesus said to look at that storm coming up. It is going to beat on every house. It beats on the house built on the sand. It beats on the house built upon the rocks. The same storm beats on both houses. "The rains descended, the floods came, the winds blew". And so whether the builder was wise or foolish had no effect on the weather.

Every house gets tested by the storm. No life is immune. The difference is not in the weather, but rather it's in the house - in the stuff that went into it and the foundations on which it was built. The strong house stood; the shaky house went down. And great, said Jesus, was the fall of it. This is not just something taken out of the Bible to talk about on Sunday mornings. We've seen those human houses fall, crumble and go to pieces.

In Chicago in 1923, a group of the world's wealthiest men met at an industrial conference. The newspapers were full of it. The headlines said that this was the most significant monetary conference ever held in the history of mankind.

Among the powerful personalities present were eight men who were among the most successful businessmen in the world. They were:

President of the largest steel company.  
Head of the largest utility company.  
Greatest wheat speculator.  
President of the New York Stock Exchange.  
President of the Bank of International Settlements.  
Member of the President's Cabinet.  
Greatest bear in Wall Street  
Head of the world's largest monopoly.

These eight men controlled more wealth than there was in the United States Treasury. For years magazines had been printing their success stories, holding them up before the youth of the nation as examples of successful men, the solid men who had made great names for themselves.

Forty years later -

We've been told what happened to those eight financial giants by an insurance company who sent this out in the form of a memo. The president of the steel company, Charles Schwab, died a pauper, bankrupt. The utility executive, Samuel Insull, died a fugitive from justice, an exile in Greece, his fortune gone. The greatest wheat speculator, Arthur Cuttin, died abroad insolvent. The President of the NY Stock Exchange, Richard Whitney, served time in Sing Sing prison. The member of the President's cabinet, Albert Fall, was released from prison so he could die at home. The greatest bear in Wall Street, Jesse Livermore, committed suicide. The president of the Bank of International Settlements, Leon Fraser, committed suicide. The head of the world's greatest monopoly, Ivan Kruger, the match king, committed suicide. Great indeed was the fall of it. All of these men knew how to make money, but they had never learned how to live. Successes in business, but tragic failures in life.

Now this is not to say that a person cannot be both a success in business and in life. It is to underscore what Jesus said and what life confirms that when we put shoddy stuff into the house, when we build on sand, when we try to live apart from the imperatives of moral law, the house will not stand when the winds blow and the storms of life sweep in.

There was a bit of a "PS" on the bottom of the illustration that said that the same year, 1923, the winner of several of the most important golf championships, Gene Sarazen, won the US Open and the PGA Tournament. Today, he is still going strong, still playing an excellent game of golf and is still solvent. Some will draw the conclusion: stop worrying about business and go play golf. Appealing!

Take heed how you build! ~~It is a good thing~~, occasionally, to sit down and consider your "after man" - the kind of person you will be twenty-five years from now, or ten years, or five. Your "after man" - what sort of body are you going to give him to walk around in? What sort of morals are you providing him to live with? For whatever happens, this parable has the truth. Every person must build his own house, then live in the house he has built, and finally - every house must someday be tested by the storm. Take heed, therefore, how you build.

PRAYER Divine Father, what a solemn thing life is, how serious its issues. This one chance we have to be or not to be. Help us to build our lives on strong foundations. May these moments be long remembered in our hearts as we dedicate our lives to Thee, to the values found in the life of Christ. Amen