

Then Came The Storm - September 1977

With great delight and childish exaggeration, the children fell about all over the place graphically illustrating the utter collapse of the foolish man's house. As I watched, smiling, it suddenly hit me, the gravity of what Jesus was saying in the parable of the two men in building their respective homes. It would be tragic to lose its significance by relegating it to the nicety of a Sunday School story, or ideal for an action chorus for the kids. If we had only learned its significance and heeded its moral, so much of the disastrous collapse of churches and the weakness of many Christians could have been avoided over the years.

The Crunch Issue

The parable has to do with the Lordship of Christ in our lives. Jesus began this parable by speaking of the inconsistency of many who "call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say" (Lk. 6:46). To call Him Lord involves acknowledging His undoubted authority to direct our lives. To recognise His lawful right to govern us by His own will and command and our absolute obligation to obey Him. It is not enough to have understood the message of the gospel intellectually, or to have been excited emotionally by the fervour of its presentation. It is our practical obedience to the laws of the Kingdom that prove the reality of our words when we say, "Lord. Lord." When Jesus said, "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", he exposed the unreality and sham of so much religious profession. The word does doesn't mean 'intends to do' or 'promises to do' but it is the utterly practical doing of it. We are no better for knowing the will of God, we must obey it, do it. We are building our lives, our homes, our families and our churches by doing the will of God, by practicing the principles of the Kingdom as given us in the life and teaching of Jesus.

Deliberate Forethought

The contrast in the parable is not of two men deliberately selecting different foundations on which to build their houses, but the two men, one of whom is careful, and after serious deliberation determines where his foundation must be, and the other who gives no thought or consideration to foundation whatsoever, but is in a hurry to build his house, without overmuch effort and with as little cost as possible, and consequently builds on the surface. Here is where we are first challenged — what considerations have we given to the foundation of our lives? Is our Christian life a haphazard building, a life lived with as much blessing for as little cost as is possible? The contrast in the whole approach of those two builders is stark and glaring.

The wise man began by "digging deep, and laid the foundation on the rock" (Lk. 6:48). He, on hearing Jesus preaching the principles of Kingdom life, began to get rid of the dirt in his life, got down below the surface of his heart and allowed the Spirit of God to work deep within him. He had seen the Pharisees and other religious leaders whose religion was like that of the foolish man, who 'built his house on the ground', it was built on the surface. It called for no deep inner change, its whole base was the exterior trappings of religion, the outward forms and ceremonies, laws, traditions, self righteousness. This man wanted his house to be different, he wanted a solid foundation for he knew the building is only as sound as the foundation is firm. The apostle Paul makes 'the foundation' a principal part of his wise master building (1 Cor. 3:10). How often I have passed modern high rise buildings and seen the scaffolding all around as repairs are going on, due to cracks in the walls; the result of a poor foundation. Many minds are breaking, families splitting up, marriages falling apart, churches dividing, because of poor or wrong foundations.

God's Foundation

A right foundation to life is always neglected to our personal loss and often to our eternal peril. There can only be one foundation. God has already established what it is: "Behold I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone, a costly cornerstone, the Foundation firmly placed. He who believes in it will not be disturbed" (Is. 28:16). "For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 3:11). The foundation to life is our abiding relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ, it is knowing Him as the centre and spring of our existence; that He is the very Lord and sovereign of our life; that all else in our life is as related to Him as to ourselves. We are not built on His teachings apart from Him, we are not building on an ideal, but on Him who is the sum total of every concept of ideal man. In Christ we see the perfection of manhood, so exquisitely portrayed in word, in attitudes, in action, in being — and our whole desire is to 'dig deep to lay our foundation on such a rock'.

Our foundation is not prayer, nor faith, nor understanding, nor relationship to others, but Christ — the perfection of all these various parts of the whole. All decrees of councils, synods, committees or boards, all ordinances or traditions of men, all rules and regulations, all tenets of faith or constitutional beliefs, all religious practices that differ at all from the law of Christ our foundation are treasonable insults to the majesty of King Jesus. He has laid the foundations of the earth; God has made Him the foundation of His own eternal purpose and counsel; God has laid Him as our foundation in the ancient promises and declarations. He laid His life down and then God raised Him again to be the foundation and capstone of the Church — the author and finisher of our faith. Dare any man seek to lay another foundation? The principles by which we live our lives are to be those displayed in Jesus. We are to train our children in His ways. Our schools and society at large assault their minds with beliefs, practices and values contrary to the law of Christ, but our confidence is that as we "train our child in the way he should go, when he is older he will not leave it."

We will have given him or her a foundation to life. We are to do our work not as unto the 'boss' or the 'firm' or the 'government' or the 'union', but as unto the Lord. He is the foundation to our whole attitude to our job. As already mentioned, to reach the rock he had to 'dig deep'. It is amazing how obscured the simplicity of life in Christ has become by men's additions to His gospel. We have often to dig down through what we have been taught, through our misconceptions, through our prejudices and narrowed beliefs, getting rid of wrong attitudes and feelings until we reach Christ and build our lives on Him. Jesus said, we build by doing or practising His words. It seems to me we have been happy to do those things that call for little self discipline, little personal denial of self, little cost to time, money or reputation, but where any of these is likely to be involved we have invented explanations to His words, that have blunted their penetrating thrust. Sometimes we have devised doctrines that have relegated whole areas of Jesus' words to the history of Israel in the past or to be outworked only by the Jews in the millennium. Such doctrines are very convenient for those who wish to go through life without the challenge or cost to fulfil the principles and commands of Jesus now. However, though slothful and devious men devise comfortable teachings, God will continue to pierce the complacent heart and conscience with the sword of the Spirit, His own Word, which demands our attention and defies all attempts to be explained away.

Darkening Skies

Jesus then went on to give the imperative reason for securing such a firm foundation, because the 'storm is coming'. This is not only the final day of Divine Judgement, but throughout life crises and trial will arise that will discover the state of your foundations. Again the contrast in our story is glaring — not the two builders now, but the two buildings. The identical storm beat against both houses, the one with no foundation shook, tottered over and utterly collapsed. The other did not even shake! Ominous clouds are already darkening the skies of our generation filling us with the tense uneasiness that usually precedes calamitous times. Divinely instituted moral standards are brushed aside as outdated, Victorian, hypocritical legislation.

Faithfulness in marriage is no longer expected or prized. Permissiveness and moral impurity threatens to gain the respectable label 'normal behaviour'. The violent assaults on the forces of law and order, with street demonstrations unleashing a holocaust of political and racial hatred has brought terror to large areas of our land. A spiralling crime wave, the exit of large numbers of demoralised police from the force, increasing militancy of trade unions, the mushrooming of numerous extremist groups on the right and left highlight the seeming inability of government to arrest the decline of our nation. All this indicates a growing storm is beating on the structure of family life and society in our land. In no way can we pretend as Christians to be untouched by these stresses and strains. Our homes and jobs, our minds and morals, our children and churches are feeling the violent winds of adversity beating on our doors. Our foundations are being tested now.

The Rain Came...

Here is a man whose whole foundation was his good church, happy choruses, bright meetings, understanding pastor. Then the storm came, the church tore apart over some contention, pastor left, meetings waned. His faith ebbed and he grows cold, eventually leaving the faith altogether. How could it be? How has he lost his foundation? The truth is, he had never discovered it and the storm showed it up.

...the Floods Rose...

Here is another man — intellectually brilliant, a business executive of great prospects. He was very strong in his religious convictions, a regular attendee at the meetings. Very scathing with those who did not 'grasp the doctrines of the faith' as clearly as he, to his mind they lacked the foundation ("What will they do when challenged by the Jehovah's Witnesses to explain the Trinity?"). Then came the storm. The firm's shares collapsed on the stock exchange, he is redundant and joins the pool of unemployed executives. Months pass without adequate income; his mortgage drifts into arrears. He becomes bitter and desperate: "Where is God? Why does He do this to me? His faith shatters — how could such a man lose his faith when he had such a strong foundation of Bible knowledge? The point is, he had not dug deep beneath his intellectual grasp of truths to anchor his life in the Rock who is Truth.

...the Wind Blew

In contrast, here is a man who was well placed in life, a successful and wealthy business man with a beautiful home and fine family; then came the storm — a tragedy. One night his children were all killed, his business raided and within weeks he was stricken with a strange and dreadful sickness — his wife blamed God, his friends blamed him, yet he did not shake. He said at the height of the storm, "I know that my Redeemer lives and in the last day will stand on the earth" (Job 19:25). The storms are coming, you will be ridiculed, taunted, accused, humiliated, pressured in every conceivable way. What is your life building like? Will it collapse or remain unshaken?

Listen again to the children's voices happily singing, "The rains came down and the floods went oops, but the house on the rock stood firm."

Will yours?