

"Choosing the Right Building Lot"

The dogs in the small town seemed to be the first to sense what was coming! Eleven year-old Marcel had never seen his pet in such a frantic stage. One man who took the family dog outside couldn't help but notice the dog dashing around in circles, sniffing the ground— but he brushed it aside and went back to the Stanley Cup playoff game he was watching on TV.

Other strange things, however, were happening. A few cracks appeared in the asphalt of two streets. Two driveways settled about five inches. One lady, visiting a neighbor, complained, "I don't know what's happening around here. I hear water flowing under our house, but my husband tells me I'm crazy." One night many residents heard a loud thump that seemed to come from under their houses. People checked their basements, and peered out their windows, but could detect nothing.

On the following day a local farmer drove out to the far eastern corner of his farm to work. There was a 40-foot hill there that blocked his view of a large town six miles away. When he drove around the hill he was shocked to see that the back half of the hill had disappeared. In its place was a huge hole – maybe 80 feet deep, 200 feet wide, and 500 feet long. People from all over town came to look at it.

The rains had been heavy during April, and a sudden rise in temperature was producing a quick thaw. People figured what they were experiencing was like a natural spring phenomenon. No one realized that all the rain was not running off, but seeping slowly into the soil, and liquefying the clay underneath the ground's surface.

Tuesday, May 4th, the clay began to move. About 10:45 that night peoples' lights went out. One resident lit a candle and went outside to investigate. He heard shouting on the east edge of town. In the street he could make out a bus, headlights burning, angled into a hole. Beyond that he could see only a black void where a neighbor's house had stood! He raced back inside and shouted, "The Laval house is gone! Get our boy! We must leave now!"

That was the beginning of a night, and days, of absolute horror. The pleasant, well-kept, industrious town of St. Jean Vianney, 135 miles north of the city of Quebec, eventually was dubbed "the town that disappeared." Chilling accounts of people and homes and property disappearing as the ground beneath them simply gave way. One man, carrying a high-powered battery lantern, stood at the edge of a huge hole, and said, "I heard screams for help from below. There was a kind of muffled, liquidy, sucking noise from the hole. Then the cries grew fainter and stopped, as if they were coming from a boat moving down the river." By midnight the sliding and liquefying of earth had stopped. Thirty-one men, women and children had perished; 38 houses had disappeared from the town.

No one realized that the town had been built on the site of a gigantic landslide that occurred some 500 years before. Beneath the crust of topsoil, the earth underneath was composed of clay *with pockets of sand*. When the *sand pockets* became oversaturated with moisture, the pressure against the clay caused it to dissolve and simply flow away.

Building a house on sand can be a risky proposition.

Jesus told a story about two men and where they chose to build their house. “Everyone, then, who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!” (Matthew 7:24-27).

The first man (Jesus calls him a "wise" man) built his house on rock. A strong and solid foundation. Heavy rains came, the area flooded, the winds whipped up – but the house stood secure. The second man decided to build on sand. Jesus calls him a "foolish" man. The Greek word is a word from which we get the English word "moron!"

In Palestine, where Jesus lived, much of that land was dry. It didn't rain very often. The land was dotted with *wadis*. A *wadi* is a dry river bed – a creek or stream that's perfectly dry most of the time. But when a rainy season comes, it can quickly turn into a raging flood of water that barrels through that dry riverbed. No matter how massive or elegant or beautiful a house built there, it's no match for flood waters or powerful winds! So, someone might build a house there, not realizing it's a dry river bed. Someone else might build a house there just because it's a lot easier to build on soft, sandy soil than on rocky land.

Jesus says that those of us who hear His words and do them are like the wise man, who built his house on a secure foundation of rock. And those who hear His words and don't put them into practice are like the "moron" – the foolish man - who built his house on sand.

Notice, it's not enough just to *hear* Jesus words! It's not enough just to log hours and hours *listening to sermons*. It's not enough just *reading the Bible* every day or *going to Bible studies*. We have to follow through and do what Jesus says! James 1:22 puts it clearly: "Be doers of the word, and not hearers only."

This is a parable about our lives, and what we're building our lives on! Are we going to build our lives on Jesus' words? That's what makes all the difference in the world! Where do we find Jesus' words? In the gospels – Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

Something to note here: Most translations of verse 24 begin with the word "Therefore". "*Therefore* everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice..." (Matthew 7:24 NIV). Whenever you come across this word "therefore" in the Bible, you have to look at what came *before that*. Something has been said, and then the writer says, "Therefore..". In other words, in light of what was just written, *therefore* do this, or *therefore* don't do this! (That's what the word therefore is there for)!

So, what came before this parable about the wise and foolish builders? *The Sermon on the*

Mount! Matthew 5, 6 and 7. This collection of Jesus' teaching. Matthew says Jesus went up on a mountain and taught the people (and His disciples). So, Jesus finishes teaching, and then says, "Ok. If you hear these words of mine that I've just spoken, and do them, you're like a builder who builds on a solid foundation. If you've listened to these words that I just spoke to you, but don't put them into practice, you're like the moron who built a house on sand!"

We want to find Jesus' words? The Sermon on the Mount is a good place to start! "Blessed are the merciful..." (Matthew 5:7). "Love your enemies..." (Matthew 5:44). "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth..." (Matthew 6:19). "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, or about your body, what you will wear..." (Matthew 6:25). "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33). "Forgive" (Matthew 6:14). "Do not judge" (Matthew 7:1). The Sermon on the Mount is just a starter when looking for the words of Jesus. Check out Matthew, Mark, Luke, John!

Ever hear the term "red letter Christians"? The "red letter" part refers to Bibles where the words of Jesus are in red letters. There's even a network of "Red Letter Christians", who are committed to "taking the words of Jesus seriously."

So the question is: Are we building our life on rock or sand? I guess it was so much easier to build a *house* on sand. Avoid the grunt work of building a solid foundation! And it's easy build a *life* without the grunt work of building a solid foundation: just live for the moment, just please yourself, don't bother to set worthy, unselfish goals, don't make any effort to learn what Jesus said and work hard at putting His words into practice! But when the storms and floodwaters of life come crashing on us – as they will in this life – we lack the strong Foundation to withstand these difficult times.

Let's think for a moment beyond just what this story says to us as *individuals*, and how it relates to society and our culture at large. ***People at large – a whole society – can pretty much ignore or discredit the words of Jesus.***

We can be ignorant of Jesus' words. That's more and more where our American society is going. Fewer and fewer people in our culture are even exposed to Jesus' words. Each succeeding generation of young people have less and less experience of church. They're not even *hearers* of the word.

But this ignoring or discrediting the words of Jesus is also happening within the church! Liberalism, skepticism, for decades has seeped into academia (colleges and universities), and the arts. Now it has filtered down to the media, the entertainment industry. *And even into the church!*

There are the sands of *false doctrine* – moving away from the foundational beliefs and doctrines of the Christian faith. Our adult Sunday School class recently finished a study of the book *Another Gospel*. It's author, Alisa Childers, documents well how many church leaders today deny Jesus' atoning death on the cross for our sins, and His actual physical resurrection.

According to 1 Corinthians 15, these are core doctrines of our faith! Unfortunately, we find this especially in the mainstream Protestant denominations, including our own United Methodist Church. Even in the Church the authority and validity of Jesus' words are eroding in the minds and practice of many who call themselves Christians.

Along with this (unsurprisingly), ***our society is in many ways falling into the quicksand of a "what feels right to me" mentality and pattern of behavior.*** When the words of Jesus, found in the Bible, are no longer the compass that guides our lives, people begin to do what's right in their own eyes, what "feels right" to them. It's like that last verse in the book of Judges: "In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25).

I think of a song written by Kris Kristofferson. "Help Me Make It Through the Night." Basically, it's about a lonely guy singing how he just needs a woman to snuggle up to, to help him make it through the night! "I don't care what's right or wrong, I don't try to understand; Let the devil take tomorrow, 'Cause tonight I need a friend" I heard Kris sing this song a while ago. And when he came to those words, "I don't care what's right or wrong...", he quickly interjected, "Yes I do." *If we really tried to build a community...a culture...a citizenship on the words of Jesus, don't you think that would make a world a whole lot better!*

The foolish man (the moron) built his house on sand. The rains fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat on that house, and it fell. And great was its fall! The wise man built his house upon the rock – the rain fell, the floods came, the wind blew and beat on that house, but the house did not fall. When we hear Jesus' words and do them, our house will stand. Christ is the sure foundation!

Ephesians 2:17-20 reminds us of this. "He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone."

The hymn also expresses it well: "My hope is built on nothing less, than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but wholly lean on Jesus' name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand. All other ground is sinking sand."

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