

## **LUKE 6.46-49: THE PARABLE OF THE TWO HOUSE-BUILDERS**

*Chelmsford 30 November 2008*

Do you remember the story of the three little pigs?

*Once upon a time there were three little pigs. Before they left home their mother told them, "Whatever you do, do it the best you can because that's the way to get along in the world".*

*The first little pig built his house out of straw, because it was the easiest thing to do.*

*The second little pig built his house out of sticks, because it was a little bit stronger than a straw house.*

*The third little pig built his house out of bricks.*

*One night the big bad wolf came along and saw the first little pig in his house of straw. He said: "Let me in, let me in, little pig or I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house in!" Not by the hair of my chinny, chin chin, said the little pig". But of course the wolf did blow the house in and ate the first little pig.*

*The wolf then came to the house of sticks. "Let me in, let me in, little pig or I'll huff and I'll puff and I'll blow your house in". "Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin", said the little pig. But the wolf blew that house in, and ate the second little pig.*

*The wolf then came to the house of bricks. "Let me in, let me in, or I'll huff and I'll puff till I blow your house in". "Not by the hair of my chinny chin chin" said the pig. Well the wolf huffed and puffed, but he could not blow down that brick house.*

*But the wolf was a sly old wolf and he looked for a way into the brick house.*

*The little pig saw the wolf climb up on the roof and he lit a roaring fire in the fireplace and placed on it a large kettle of water. So that when the wolf crawled down the chimney, he went 'splash' right into the kettle of boiling water and that was the end of the big bad wolf.*

*The next day, the little pig invited his mother for tea. She said: "You see it is just as I told you. The way to get along in the world is to do things as well as you can". Fortunately for that little pig, he learned that lesson. And he lived happily ever after.*

That's the story I was taught when I was child. However, in our politically correct world the story has been changed.

- In one version the nasty bits were taken out: the first two little pigs escape to their brother's house, and so too does the wolf - it was felt that children couldn't cope with the idea of the wolf being killed, let alone being cooked into a stew and then being eaten by the pig!
- In March 2007 the story was modified in some British schools to the three little puppies to avoid offending Muslim families.
- In January 2008 it was changed to "the three little cowboy builders", but that upset people in the building trade.

Jesus once told a similar story – save it wasn't about three little pigs – nor indeed about three little puppies or three cowboy builders – but about two house-builders.

One was wise and one was foolish: one went to a good deal of trouble ensuring his house had decent foundations – the other went for the quick-fix.

The story is found in both Luke's Gospel as also Matthew's Gospel. There are minor differences of detail between both stories, but essentially it is the same story.

My guess is that Jesus told the story more than once – and when you tell a story more than once there often small changes.

This morning I want us to look at the story

The wise man "**built his house on rock**" (Mt 7.24)" – or in the words of Luke the wise man "**dug deep and laid the foundation on rock**" (6.48).

By contrast the foolish man thought he knew a shortcut. He didn't bother to dig down to the shelf of rock below. He "**built his house on sand**" (Matt 7.26). It seemed firm enough at the time - and not surprisingly he finished ahead of schedule.

You can imagine how pleased he felt with himself. He had built his house with the minimum of nagging from his wife. Poor old Fred, by insisting on digging down deep, was getting a bucketful from his wife. Why was he taking such a long time about it? His house looked no better than the house built on the sand - in an estate agent's window they were indistinguishable!

Then winter came: and the houses experienced a right battering.

**"The rain poured down, the rivers overflowed, and the wind blew hard against that house"** (7.25: see Luke 6.48).

It seems as if the foolish man had built his house actually on dry river bed - or, if not on the river bed itself, then on the bank - and what seemed a pleasant sandy hollow became a raging torrent of water.

I'm told that Jerusalem and London each receive 22 inches of rain annually; but while London has on average 200 rainy days, Jerusalem has only 50 (Snodgrass in *Stories with Intent* actually says London has on average 300 days of rain, but surely that is wrong!). In other words when it rains in the Holy Land it really rains.

The outcome was predictable: one house stood firm, and the other went down like a pack of cards. In the case of the wise man when "**the river overflowed and hit that house**", it "**could not shake it, because it was well built**"; but as for the house of the foolish man, "**when the flood hit that house, it fell at once – and what a terrible crash that was**" (Luke 6.48,49).

I'd love to know if Jesus was drawing upon a real-life situation. Had there been a man who had built his house upon a flood plain – and who in the ensuing winter had discovered his stupidity?

One thing for sure: Jesus was not just telling a fairy-tale. He was talking about real life – he was talking about the danger people were courting in not paying attention to him.

**"Anyone who comes to me and listens to my words and obeys them... is like a man who, in building his house, dug deep and laid the foundation on rock.... But anyone who hears my words and does not obey them is like a man who built his house without laying a foundation"** (Lk 6.47-49).

I.e. anyone who does not pay attention to me is a fool.

Incidentally, has it ever struck you how self-confident Jesus was?

Jesus states that our lives are determined by how we respond to him and to his teaching. Indeed, he effectively says that our eternal destiny depends on our response to him.

What kind of man was Jesus? CS Lewis, the great Oxbridge English don, put his finger on the issue when he wrote: *“The discrepancy between the depth and shrewdness of his moral teaching and the rampant megalomania which must lie behind His theological teaching, unless He is indeed God, has never been satisfactorily got over.... A man who was merely a man, and said the things Jesus said, would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic - on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil in Hell (i.e. a liar). Lewis goes on: “You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronising nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to”*

To go back to the parable. Take care, says Jesus, how you build your lives. Build on the rock, for otherwise disaster will inevitably befall you. And do notice, there is all the difference in the world between the moral behind the story of the three little pigs, and the thrust behind the parable of the two house-builders. In the story of the three little pigs the moral is *“Do the best you can”*. But in the story of the two house-builders Jesus challenges us not to ‘do the best we can’ but to build our lives on him and upon his teaching.

So what more do we learn from this parable?

## 1. FAITH MUST ISSUE IN ACTION

In Luke’s Gospel the parable of the two house builders is preceded by the question: **“Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord', and yet don’t do what I tell you?”** (Lk 6.46). Or as more chillingly expressed in Matt: **“Not everyone who calls me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of heaven, but only those who do what my Father in heaven wants them to do”** (Matt 7.21)

Faith must issue in action. Lip-service is not enough. This morning Andrew will be declaring his faith in Jesus as his Saviour and his Lord. In the waters of baptism he will declare his resolve to die to self and live for Christ. But if tomorrow he then goes his own sweet way, then it will be to no avail. Christian faith must issue in Christian living.

Do notice where both Luke and Matthew place this parable of the two house-builders. They place it at the end of the so-called Sermon on the Mount. There in that great sermon Jesus has laid down his pattern of living: a pattern of living in which people are not to angrily abuse one another or lust after one another or retaliate with violence; rather Jesus calls us to be people who keep their word, love their enemies and do good to those who hate them; people who go the extra mile; people who keep the Golden Rule by doing to others what they what they want others to do to them.

This is what Christian living is all about. It’s not about being religious on a Sunday – it’s not about church-going, praying to God, or giving generously in the offering. It’s about the way we live on a Monday – the way we treat others at work, the way we treat others at home.

Many years ago a certain Dr Joad once said: "*Most of us know that Christ's prescription for good living is the right one*". But it is not enough to know the prescription. Jesus through this parable says: "*Either you act on my prescription - or you court disaster*".

## 2. ACTIONS MUST BE ROOTED IN FAITH

**"Anyone who hears these words of mine and obeys them is like a wise man who built his house upon the rock"** (Matt 7.24).

In their immediate context "**these words**" relate to the teaching of Jesus in his Sermon on Mount. But the words of Jesus are not restricted to Sermon on the Mount. The Jesus who declared that it is not enough to say "**Lord, Lord**", was also the Jesus who claimed to have "**authority on earth to forgive sins**" (Lk 5.24); who called and still calls "**sinner to repentance**" (Lk 5.32 NRSV); who says to you and to me "**follow me**" (Lk 5.27); who on more than one occasion said: "**Any who wants to come with me must forget self and take up their cross every day and follow me**" (Lk 9.23).

I.e. Christian faith involves more than simply seeking to live out the pattern of life found in the Sermon on Mount. It begins with a coming to Jesus - receiving his forgiveness – and then taking up the cross and following him.

For the fact is that we will never be able to live up to the pattern of living found in the Sermon on the Mount.

We may, like the three little pigs, try our best, but our best will never be good enough for God. For even our best is tainted by self-interest, by self-concern, by sin in one shape or form.

On the last day our actions by themselves will fail to stand the testing of God's searching glance. As we are, none of us will be able to stand before God when we have to give account of the way in which we have lived our lives.

So, before we start to live out the life of Jesus, we must first come to Jesus and discover the difference that he can make to our lives.

Indeed, according to Luke's Gospel that is precisely how Jesus began his parable.

**"Anyone who COMES to me and listens to my words & obeys them.... Is like a man who, in building his house, dug deep and laid the foundation on rock"** (Luke 6.47, 48)

Our actions need to be rooted in faith in Jesus – Jesus who died that we might be forgiven, Jesus who rose that we might live a new life, a life lived in the power of God's Spirit.

All this will be symbolised before us this morning as Andrew is baptised: for Andrew will not simply be resolving to go the way of Jesus: in the first place he will be claiming the forgiveness & the new life that Jesus offers – as he is baptised he will in effect be saying, 'Yes Lord, you died for me; yes Lord, you rose for me'.

There is then a tension if we are to be true hearers of the word: faith must issue in action: action must be rooted in faith.

### 3. A CHOICE HAS TO BE MADE

The story of the two house-builders is a story of two men, one who built his house on the rock, and one who built his house on the sandy flood-plain.

But it is more than a story. It raises the question: on what am I building my life?

Am I building my life on the rock, am I building my life on Jesus and on his teachings - or am I building my life on the sand by ignoring Jesus and his teachings?

Do note that the story is not about one wise man, and one less wise man, but rather about a wise man and a foolish man.

I am reminded of another parable Jesus told about ten girls - five were foolish, and five were wise.

For Jesus the issue is always very clear cut: one is either wise or foolish.

We are either going his way, or we are not going his way.

There is no sitting on the fence as far as Jesus is concerned - no middle-ground.

Earlier in the Sermon on Mount Jesus had said to crowd: "**Go in through the narrow gate; for the gate to hell is wide and the road that leads to is easy, and there are many who travel it. But the gate to life is narrow and the way that leads to it is hard, and there are few people who find it**" (Matt 7.13,14: also Lk 13.24).

Similarly in this parable, Jesus says there are essentially two kinds of people: one who builds his life on Jesus and his teaching, and one who does not.

For the one who does not, then disaster beckons.

It seems to me there is a two-fold challenge here.

For those of us who are Christians, then the challenge is to be concerned for the fate of those who do not share our faith. The consequences for people who reject Jesus and his way for their lives are dire. To what extent are you truly concerned for our friends? Have you taken up the challenge that David Marson gave to small groups, when he urged people to each pray for three of their friends? To that end he gave out some prayer cards – we have some left over, and we invite you to take them and use them if you have for one reason or another lost your card.

For those of you who have yet to go the way of Christ, then the challenge is surely to build your lives on him. For the parable makes clear our ultimate destiny depends on our response to him and to his words.

Jesus is the rock on which we can stand, come hell, or come high water.

He is the one who makes all the difference to life now – and life in the world to come.

Will you build on him?