

MATT 7.24-27: BUILD ON THE ROCK

[Chelmsford 29 July 2012]

For most people buying a house is one of the most important decisions they ever make in their lives. Few buy houses on pure impulse. Instead advice is sought - the services of a surveyor engaged. It would be terrible if, after having parted with so much money & having spent a small fortune on decorations, the house were to cave in, and it be discovered that in fact the foundations had been improperly laid.

But there is something far more important than buying a house. A house will only last a lifetime - whereas a life may last for an eternity. All the more reason to listen to Jesus, who once said: 'Be careful how you build your lives - make sure you build on the rock'

This morning I to look at the parable of the two builders. It's a Sunday School favourite. Many of us surely remember the action song we used to sing..."*And the rains came down, and the floods came up (3x) and the house upon the sand fell DOWN*"...

Jesus said: There were two men - one wise, and the other foolish; just as at an earlier stage Jesus had spoken about there being two ways - one leading to life, and the other leading to death.

For Jesus the major issues in life are always clear - there are no greys, rather simply blacks and whites: we are either wise, or foolish – we are either walking the way that leads to salvation, or we are walking the way that leads to destruction.

With Jesus there is no sitting on the fence.

One summer these two men set about building a house

- "**The wise man... built his house on the rock**" (7.24) - or as Luke puts it in his Gospel: The wise man "**dug deep and laid the foundation on rock**" (Lk 6.47)
- By contrast the foolish man "**built his house on sand**" (7.26). He thought he knew a short cut - he didn't bother to dig down to the shelf of the rock below. He built simply on the sand.

At the time the one whom Jesus terms '**foolish**' probably appeared the cleverer of the two - he finished ahead of schedule.

But then the winter came: "**The rain poured down, the rivers overflowed, and the wind blew hard against that house**"

Jesus certainly knew how to tell a story.

The two houses began to know a right old battering - indeed, it was a battering worse than most. For it would appear that the two men had built their houses either in a dry river bed itself, or perhaps on the bank of a dry river bed.

Whatever, what had seemed a pleasant sandy hollow in the summer, became a raging torrent of water in the winter.

The outcome was predictable.

One house stood firm, the other went down like a pack of cards.

I wonder whether Jesus was speaking about a real-life situation?

Maybe something of that nature had appeared in the local Galilee Chronicle? I don't know.

One thing for sure: Jesus was not just telling a story - rather he was talking about life.

For Jesus says: **"Anyone who hears these words of mine and obeys them is like a wise man who built his house on rock... But anyone who hears these words of mine and does not obey them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand"**

Be careful how you build - build on the rock!

1. APPEARANCES ARE DECEPTIVE

When the houses were first built, there may have been nothing to tell between them.

Both perhaps were nice detached houses, three bedrooms, two bathrooms (one en-suite)...According to the estate agent's blurb they were like peas in a pod.

Yet one had foundations, and the other did not

Only the most severe of storms ended up in showing the difference.

In the same way at first sight there might appear to be nothing to tell between two individuals or two families:

- they both might shop at Sainsburys,
- they both might go to Centrepark for their holidays
- they both might like Simon Cowell or whoever

But one may be building their life on Jesus, and the other may not.

"So what?" some might think

At first sight this difference may seem insignificant - the fact that people vote for different political parties, support different football teams, do different things on a Sunday, does not seem important

"So what", we might say, "everybody has got a right to be different!"

But there is one difference that does matter - one difference that will ultimately come to the fore - and that is the attention that we pay to Jesus.

It does make a difference as to whether or not we are building our lives on Jesus.

It does make a difference as to whether or not Jesus is truly Lord of our lives.

Sometimes the difference is revealed in this life

For there are times when everything seems to go wrong in life - when a storm blows up and threatens to destroy us: it may be a power struggle at work or an unexpected redundancy, it may be ill health or a sudden bereavement, it may be failure or disappointment of one kind or another.

Often at such a time the difference is revealed between those who build their lives on Jesus and those who do not.

But one thing for sure, in the ultimate storm of life, when death and judgment break in

over us, then the difference is well and truly revealed.

But I anticipate. The point I want to make is that appearance is not what counts, but rather the underlying reality. You may be able to con your friends and neighbours, but you never will con God. And that day will come when all will be revealed.

2. OBEDIENCE COUNTS

Do notice that in this story paying attention to Jesus means more than listening. The foolish man as much as the wise man had heard Jesus. Remember that these words come at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. As Jesus looks around the crowd, he sees his congregation was composed of two different groups

- one group was wise, intent not just on hearing but also on acting on the words of Jesus
- another group was foolish, interested no doubt in what Jesus had to say, but that was as far as it went. They had no real intention of acting on the words of Jesus

Here we have a reminder that the difference between the wise and the foolish is not between those who go to church and those who do not.

The difference is between those who act on the words of Jesus and those who do not. By the law of averages there will be some here this morning who have yet to act on the words of Jesus.

They may be interested in the words of Jesus - but interest is not enough.

Action - obedience - is what is required.

What did Jesus have in mind, I wonder?

Remember again that Jesus has just come to the end of the Sermon on the Mount.

In this sermon Jesus had said a number of hard things:

- **"Happy are those who are humble; they will receive what God has promised!" (5.5)**
- **"Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (5.44)**
- **"If you forgive others the wrongs they have done to you, your Father in heaven will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, then your Father will not forgive the wrongs you have done" (6.14,15)**
- **"Do not store up riches for yourselves on earth... Instead store up riches for yourselves in heaven" (6.19,20)**
- **"Do not be worried about the food and drink you need in order to stay alive, or about clothes for your body... Instead be concerned above everything else with the Kingdom of God and what he requires of you, and he will provide you with all these other things" (6.25,33)**
- **"Do not judge others, so that God will not judge you" (7.1)**
- **"Do for others what you want them to do for you" (7.12)**

For Jesus it was not just a matter of right believing, but of right living too.

Of course, we need to believe - of course we need to put our trust in the Lord Jesus - because the fact is that we can never please God by good deeds alone - but "faith

without works is dead" - Jesus isn't interested in easy believism, but rather in costly discipleship.

To what extent are you acting on the words of Jesus? For instance:-

- Have you forgiven everybody who has hurt you? Or are there still one or two against whom you hold a grudge?
- How does Jesus affect your management of money? What are your priorities when it comes to spending - do you give all you can or frankly only all you feel you can afford? (there is a difference!)
- How does the teaching of Jesus affect your attitude toward others? Are you really loving in all you think, say, and do - or are you a bit of a sourpuss who loves to gossip?

If Jesus is to be our Saviour, he must be our Lord too

It is not enough to hear - we must also act upon the words of Jesus

What's more, there are to be no exceptions: he is to be Lord of our lives, in everything and without reservation.

3. THE FUTURE IS AT STAKE

One house withstood the storms - the other did not

- One house "**did not fall, because it was built on rock**" (7.25)
- The other house "**fell. And what a terrible fall that was!**" (7.27)

Jesus is speaking in pictures - but behind the picture is a stark truth.

For in the Old Testament as also elsewhere in Jewish writings, the violent storm which takes place is a picture or symbol for God's judgment.

Jesus is saying your future - your eternity - is at stake.

Indeed, Jesus toward the end of this sermon keeps on making the same point

- In the story of the *two ways*, he promises "**destruction**" (yes, that's the word he uses) for those who follow the path that is "**wide and easy**" (7.13,14)
- In the story of the *two trees*, he says "**every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire**" (7.18)
- In the story of the *two groups of people claiming to belong to him*, he says that those who are all words will be excluded from the kingdom of heaven: "**I will declare to them, I never knew you; go away from me, evil doers**"
- And now here, in the story of the *two houses*, Jesus likens the man who hears his words and does not act on them to a house shattered, pulverized & swept away by a vicious storm.

It's all pretty heavy stuff, is it not?

What was Jesus trying to do? Was he trying to frighten people into the kingdom?

Frighten is perhaps not the word - warn is better.

Jesus is warning people of the dire consequences of not acting on his words.

Just imagine if you were sleeping soundly in a house threatened by rising flood waters, would you accuse me of frightening you if I were to bang repeatedly on your

door with a view to waking you up? No, you would be grateful.

The fact is that there is a heaven to be gained, and a hell to be shunned. Hell is not a very popular concept today. But Jesus believed in hell. Indeed, it has been estimated that Jesus spoke twice as often of hell as of heaven. Hell is variously described as

- the place of outer darkness
- the place where the worm will not die
- the place of exclusion and rejection
- the place of burning and torment
- the place where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth

OK - all picture language - but behind the metaphor there is truth

If behind the metaphor there is no truth, then the credibility of Jesus is totally shattered - for if he is not telling the truth, then he is either a liar or he is mad. But is that possible?

Can it be seriously maintained that the lofty ethics of the Sermon on the Mount are the product of a deranged or twisted mind?

Surely only the most cynical of minds could reach that conclusion.

Matthew ends the Sermon with the words: "**When Jesus finished saying these things, the crowd was amazed at the way he taught. He wasn't like the teachers of the Law; instead he taught them with authority**" (7.28,29).

His contemporaries were astounded - and rightly so.

They sensed they were in the presence of one who was more than a man, one whom his disciples came to claim to be the Christ, the Son of God.

It is this Jesus who says to you and to me: Don't be foolish - be wise - take care how you build!