

Christians Under Construction:
Foundations are Critical

Matthew 7:24-27

Dr. J. Howard Olds
August 31, 2003

We are Christians under construction, trying to build a life that really matters. Hundreds of you are now putting God first and practicing random acts of kindness on a daily basis. I can only imagine what God might choose to do with these simple acts of devotion. I know personally the powerful impact of fervent prayers, and I continue to thank God for you each day.

A first time guest at our church last week wrote me to say, “I came searching for God and discovered God was there all along searching for me. I have made the 40-day commitment. I sincerely want to build a life that really matters.”

Another member wrote to say, “Last night we had the first gathering of our construction crew. Several participants are not in any church. We are excited about this 40-day opportunity to grow in our faith.”

To God be the glory for the things that are happening in our very midst.

When Jesus wanted to drive home a truth, He told a story. A certain man had two sons, a certain farmer went out to sow seeds, a merchant sold everything to purchase a pearl of great price. So it should come as no great surprise to us that this Son of a carpenter would tell a story about building houses. Perhaps you remember it from childhood.

The wise man built his house upon a rock. The foolish man built his house upon the sand. The rains came down and the floods came up. The house on the rock stood firm. The house on the sand fell down.

The sermon is shorter than one of our “Faith Breaks” on television. But the truths are eternal. Everybody is building a life. The storms come to all. Foundations make all the difference.

EVERYBODY IS BUILDING A LIFE.

Whether we plan to or not, whether we want to or not, whether we feel good about it or not, from the cradle to the grave we are in the **life** construction business. We didn’t ask to be born and we will not likely decide about our death, but the days of our lives are in our hands. Piece by piece, plank by plank, brick by brick we are building lives—lives that shape us for time and eternity.

Every thought is like a piece of timber. Every habit is like a beam. Every

exchange is like another plank. Every dream is like a window. Day by day we add new bricks and mortar until the house takes shape and the rooms find their place. We are all building a house. It is a house called life.

A closer look at the two builders in Jesus' story reveals they had much in common. Both had the same dreams. They wanted a house, a shelter from the storm, a safe place to raise a family, a comfortable place to call home. Dreams are not everything, but dreams are windows of the soul. As Horatius Bonar said years ago, "Let our reach exceed our grasp for what's a heaven for."

Both builders lived in the same community, associated with the same people, listened to the same teachers, attended the same synagogue. Community is not everything, but it is a door of opportunity. I didn't choose to be born into a family that honored God and taught the values of personal responsibility and hard work. There were periods of my life when I even despised some of the things they valued. Now I thank God for the foundation they provided. It's a lot easier to remodel a room than it is to redo a foundation.

Of the two builders, Jesus says one was wise and one was foolish—not good and bad, mean or helpful, intelligent or ignorant, just wise and foolish. Jesus says in verse 24, "*Whoever hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house upon a rock.*" In verse 26 Jesus says, "*Whoever hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.*"

To be wise is to be discerning, perceptive, prudent, astute, shrewd, farsighted. But most of all, to be wise is to be obedient, to be a doer as well as a hearer. To be foolish is to be careless, indiscreet, preposterous, flighty, nutty. But most of all, it is to hear and fail to do, to know and fail to implement. Some of the dumbest things we do are not out of ignorance, but out of our insensitivity to the importance of the task at hand. Jesus said, when it comes to life there are two kinds of builders, wise and foolish. Which are you?

THE STORMS COME TO ALL.

Verses 25 and 27 are exactly the same. *The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house.*

God never said you'd only have sunshine.
He never said there'd be no rain.
He only promised a heart full of singing,
about the very things that once caused pain.

I'm concerned about a style of architecture that is emerging in Christian churches throughout our community and around the world. We are building auditoriums with the finest of sound systems, the latest in stage lighting, and the best of theater seating, but no cross is to be found on the premises. Do our crossless

houses of worship imply a crossless Christianity? Is this old emblem of suffering and shame an embarrassment to post-modern Christianity? Has the crucifixion of Jesus become in the 21st century what Paul described in the 1st century as a stumbling block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks?

I just want to say, as one whose life has been something less than a rose garden, I take great comfort in the thought of a Savior who suffers along with me.

When the woes of life o'er take me,
Hopes deceive and fears annoy,
Never shall the cross forsake me,
Lo, it glows with peace and joy.

Bane and blessing, pain and pleasure
By the cross are sanctified.
Peace is there that knows no measure,
Joys that through all time abide.

If you want a feel good religion that ignores the pain, entertainment that seeks only personal gain, a faith of success that has a neat answer for every problem under the sun, you will likely be happier in some other church of your choice.

There is still a cross towering on our steeple, and at the heart of our worship. When some of us survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died, we still get a lump in our throat, and cold chills up our spine. By His grace, we have been forgiven. By His stripes, we are yearning to be healed.

FOUNDATIONS MAKE ALL THE DIFFERENCE.

The house on the rock stood firm. The house on the sand fell with a great crash. Paul said, "*No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid which is Christ Jesus.*" The solid Rock is Jesus. May you find the grace to dig through the debris of your lot of life until you find the solid Rock.

A construction worker puts it this way: I have dug many foundations in my day. Once the grass and topsoil are scraped back, the hard work of shoveling begins. Invariably we find many obstacles—rocks, tin cans, long forgotten water and sewer and pipes. Diligently we remove all these obstacles until our ditch is straight, square, and clean.

I received a letter this week from a young adult I baptized thirteen years ago when she was twenty-four. She was not raised in the Church and had a host of obstacles to overcome, including drugs, infidelity, childhood abuse, and extreme family dysfunction. But she was sincere in her commitment to Christ. She wrote, "I just want to thank you for introducing me to Jesus Christ. After all these years my faith is still strong and my husband, my daughter and I are being fulfilled through church in ways we never imagined possible."

Peter said, *“The one who trusts in Christ will never be put to shame.”* On Christ the solid rock we stand, all other ground is sinking sand, all other ground is sinking sand.

The Chief Cornerstone is Jesus. Here is strength to live. Ephesians 2 says, *“Christ Jesus, himself, is the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building holds together.”* Matthew 21:22 says, *“The stone the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.”*

Cornerstones in our day are ornamental and symbolic, the last stone to be laid often containing mementoes of the past. Such was not the case in Jesus’ day. The cornerstone in Jesus’ day was the standard against which all the distances and angles of the structure were measured. The one thing that prevented crooked doors, leaning walls, and warped windows was the cornerstone.

The teaching of Jesus is the standard by which life is to be measured, the criteria by which life is to be judged, the end to which life is moving.

A teenager, after wasting a lot of time and energy trying to make everyone happy said, “I finally decided to ask God to guide my decisions. I sure feel different about myself. I am beginning to discover who I really am.” Why not let Christ be your cornerstone?

If you want to build a life that really matters, be very wise about the foundation. Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever. He is the Rock of our salvation; the Chief Cornerstone of all life’s structures. Have you accepted Him as Lord and Savior? Are you building your life by his values?

Amen.