

The Rock on which we stand

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This summer I have been taking some time to do some reading about the lives of people such as David Brainerd, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Eric Liddel and William Wilberforce. I have been greatly encouraged by the way that they lived out their love for Christ with such resilience and conviction. We see similar faith in scripture. As we read about Joseph, Moses, Ruth, Nehemiah and many others, we find a level of faith shown most clearly when life was most difficult. By the grace of God they were victors and overcomers.

We, too, face difficulties. At times we do well, and at other times we struggle. In those moments of struggle there seems to be a disconnect from our faith and our actions. We are drawn into worry, anger and fear, and take the weight of our suffering on our own shoulders, instead of trusting in the One who is our Rock and our Refuge. Why does this happen? Jesus speaks into this issue in Matthew 7:24-29.

In Matthew 7:24-29, Jesus Christ speaks directly into this issue and makes the choice remarkably clear:

“²⁴ Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

²⁸ And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, ²⁹ for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

Jesus described the life of one who hears and lives out His teachings as one who builds his house upon a rock: *“The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall.”*

When we try to build our life on anything else but Christ, it may seem logical and even work for a while, but when the storms of life come, the truth is made clear. Our misplaced trust is then exposed for what it truly is and we are left with only instability and a sense of hopelessness.

To know what Jesus means by *“these words of mine”* one has to look back at what Jesus had just said during the earlier portions of the Sermon on the Mount. This sermon had started two chapters earlier, hygiene in Matthew chapter 5. In the beginning of this sermon, Jesus had started out describing what type of person was blessed by God. Jesus then continued by describing what life should be like for those who are truly followers of the heavenly Father. Jesus spoke of the witness we should be. He spoke about anger, lust, divorce, revenge, loving your enemies, giving to the needy, how to pray, fasting, laying up treasures in heaven, worry, judging others, seeking God, doing to others what you would have them do unto you, discerning between true and false teachers, and true and false Christians.

For three chapters Jesus called His listeners to a life that is pure and holy, and is also impossible. Verse by verse Jesus exposed the futility of trying to live the Christian life in our own power, and the worthlessness of a life built on outward righteous deeds that come from a sinful heart. At the same time, He challenged those who claim to follow God, but then have no fruit to verify this claim. Those who hear Christ’s words and do them will have built their house on a rock. Those who have not will watch as their lives falter when facing the storms of life. We cannot build our lives on both Christ’s truth and our own ideas. We will live submitted to either one or another. Jesus is not seeking to belittle our suffering, He is only seeking to show how great He can be in our lives.

²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

A similar storm came against a second man and his house. Because of its lack of foundation it was destroyed. This is what happens to a person who hears the words of Christ but does not put them into practice. His life will be unstable when He faces the difficulties of life.

Scripture never promises that a life with Christ will be storm free. It tells us the opposite. Rain will fall on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45), and at times even more suffering will come on those who stand for Christ. But in 2 Corinthians 4:8-9, those who follow Christ are encouraged by these words: ***“We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.”***

Some believe that they have built their lives on the foundation of God’s Word due to their outward works of “righteousness”, but their true foundation of sand will become evident when struggles come. At times God allows or even brings the storms to reveal in what we are truly trusting (Ezekiel 13:13-14).

God uses difficulties to grow us and refine us and reveal the condition of our “foundation.” This is a gift of grace. The storms tend to drive us back to Him, the best place that we can be. When we try to build our lives on anything else but Christ, it may seem logical and even work for a while, but when the storms of life come the truth is made clear. Our misplaced trust is then exposed as empty and void.

For non-believers, these storms can draw them to salvation as they finally realize their desperate need for Christ. For those who are already believers, the storm will drive them towards greater faith and submission. Through the difficulties, He will draw us to Himself (John 6:44).

We don't know why the second man chose to build on the sand. Maybe because it took less time, less money, or just because he was lazy. Or maybe he thought the storm would never come, or that his house was strong enough and didn't need a good foundation. It seems easier to forego the difficult foundation (holiness, purity, perseverance, accountability, godly disciplines, etc.) at the time of building in the sunshine, but all will be made known when the storms come.

Many of us have our own strategies of how we try to succeed in life. We trust in money, personality, romance, manipulation, talents, or even good sounding strategies like hard work, intelligence, organization, or planning. But here Christ claims that if we have built our lives on anything but Him and His truths, then our life will, in the future, be washed away, either in the present life or at death.

“When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.”

There was something about Jesus that was different than every other person who ever walked this earth. And when He spoke there was a sense that you were listening to One whose wisdom was otherworldly. As one reads these verses of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:1–7:29) we sit under His teaching, but how will we respond? Have we come to the place in our lives that we now believe and submit our lives to Christ's Words? Do we cry out for His authority to rain down over our lives?

So, how do we build our lives upon the rock? First we need to understand that faith, like sanctification, is a process. We see it in the lives of biblical characters such as Abraham, Moses, Esther and Peter. We see their level of faith early in their story. God had granted all of them faith, but it continues to grow as their experiences with God continue. They hear God's Word, they trust in Him, they obey, and experience God working in their lives. This process continues time and again. As God proves His faithfulness their faith in Him grows. The hearing of God's Word and the obedience that follows lays the foundation for one's life.

With this in mind read God's Word (suggestion Matthew 5:1–7:29). Ask God for guidance as you read His Word. Pray for the faith to believe and obey. Experience God and watch your faith be strengthened.

Christ's Words and our obedience form a foundation that will be sufficient for the storms of life. Today, step out in faith and be sure of this, ***“That He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ”*** (Philippians 1:6).