

FAULTY FOUNDATIONS

Matthew 7:24-27

"Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them will be like a sensible man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn't collapse, because its foundation was on the rock. ²⁶ But everyone who hears these words of Mine and doesn't act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house, and it collapsed. And its collapse was great!"

INTRODUCTION

The famous tower of Pisa, Italy, took 177 years to complete. It began to lean less than a decade after construction began in 1173 A.D. It's 183' high and weighs 14,500 tons. But this enormous project was planned on unstable soil, with a shallow foundation of but 9'! The tower has tipped nearly 15' from its base, which placed it in great danger of toppling. After extensive renovations in the 1990s, the leaning tower of Pisa has now stopped moving for the first time in its history.

Pisa's tower was begun nearly 1,000 years ago. We've advanced so much technologically, especially in this country, that we'd never be guilty of such faulty planning today, would we? In the 1990s, Denver proudly planned the nation's largest airport and the world's largest automated airport baggage handling system. This baggage system would serve 88 gates in 3 concourses and reduce aircraft turnaround time from landing to departure to 30 minutes. It featured 17 miles of track, 5 miles of conveyor belts, 3,500 carts, 14 million feet of wiring, a network of more than 100 PCs to control cart flow, 5000 electric motors, 2,700 photo cells, 400 radio receivers, and 59 laser arrays. But the project designers overestimated their abilities and underestimated the complexity of such a vast automated system. Early trials of the automated system found it crushed bags, disgorged their contents, and crashed carts together at high rates of speed. Such problems were the main reason the airport delayed its opening 16 months, at a cost of \$1.1M per day. Even after a decade, and despite \$1,000,000 per month spent on maintenance and improvements, it still couldn't handle sharp corners and often delivered bags to the wrong places, chewed them up, or flung them into the air. In 2005, this grand fiasco was abandoned for a conventional baggage handling system.

Our text today speaks of two contrasting approaches to building our lives, and our plans for happiness, upon a secure foundation. One approach makes a god of our own will (including our desires and abilities) as the best foundation of a good life. The other approach believes God's will provides the best foundation for a secure and lasting happiness. Our two Outline points are Faulty Foundations and Faith's Foundation.

I. FAULTY FOUNDATIONS

The essence of any faulty life foundation is to build our hopes for happiness or success upon unrealistic expectations we place upon people (relationships), politicians (government), positions (status), possessions (things), or precepts (ideas associated with important causes). We are content or upset to the extent we can fill our lives with the people, leaders, things, and status we most desire. Yet, people dearest to us may die or forsake us in other ways (the Internet abounds with young people saying they have no reason to live after their romantic break up). Even the best politicians disappoint us at times or are replaced by bad politicians. We will some day lose the jobs or fame that made us feel important. As layoffs surged late in 2008, the Suicide Prevention Resource Center reviewed two decades of research and found a "strong relationship exists between unemployment, the economy, and suicide." Possessions we spent a lifetime accumulating may be swept away by fire or other disaster in a few moments! Values we believe crucial to our quality of life may be rejected by society, as is now widely happening to traditional marriage. Aside from the instabilities of these temporary foundations is the utter foolishness of trying to build a life of enduring happiness and success upon a world God made without taking God fully into account! This is why **Jesus** declared, "[E]veryone who hears these words of Mine and doesn't act on them will be like a foolish man who built

his house on the sand." "Foolish" is from the Greek word from which we get our English word "moron." It describes someone who is "dense" or "ignorant"; "one for whom knowledge is a mystery."

Our life on earth is a time of testing. God gives each of us opportunity to demonstrate how content we are to live without Him. Many ungodly people are pretty well off today in terms of their prosperity, family ties, or success. But none can say what Paul confidently claimed in **Philippians 1:21** (NIV), "For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Atheists, agnostics, and all who construct a "god" in their minds, who excuse or even bless actions the true and Holy God recoils from in disgust or horror, are in for a big shock. Despite their arguments about what they think should be considered right or wrong or regardless of their false ideas of what God should be like (if they believe God exists), they will never again find opportunity to indulge in any of their lusts or their lies. Death becomes God's everlasting "No" to all their passions.

Lying on his deathbed, a fabulously wealthy but miserly old man told his long-suffering wife, "I want to take all my money with me." He made her promise to put all his money in the casket with him. After he died, his widow attended the memorial service with her best friend. Just before the undertaker closed the coffin, she placed a small metal box inside. Her friend looked at her aghast! "Surely," she said, "you didn't put the money in there." His widow answered, "I did promise him I would. I got it all together, deposited every penny in my account, and wrote him a check. If he can cash it, he can spend it."

Proverbs 11:18 (NASB) warns, "The wicked earns deceptive wages, but he who sows righteousness gets a true reward." The Hebrew word for "deceptive" is from a root word meaning, "to be false, trick," or "cheat." "Deceptive wages" fail to pay or benefit us as we expected. We think we're putting effort into what will give us the life we want, but we are deceiving, even cheating, ourselves.

When **Jesus'** gave His parable of two house builders, He sat close to the Sea of Galilee. The sand there for most of the year is rock hard; dry, compact, and firm. The "foolish man" in this story built upon what had only the appearance of a rock-solid foundation. **Luke 6:48** (NASB) tells us the "man building a house . . . on the rock" "dug down deep" before he was satisfied his home had a secure foundation. Two Greek verbs for digging are used here, essentially saying he "dug" (ἔσκαψεν) "and dug deep" (ἐβάθυνεν). He could have needed to dig as deep as 10' before finding bedrock. We here in Southern Arizona, the most similar region in the United States to the Holy Land, know this would have been back-breaking work!

Let's suppose these two builders are young fishermen come in June to live in Galilee. A house near the lake would be ideal for their livelihood. The first builder listens to those with more wisdom and experience before choosing where and how to build. He learns Galilee is located in the geologic trench known as the Great Rift Valley. It extends from Lebanon to Mozambique. This places the Sea of Galilee, at 700' below sea level, in a basin surrounded by mountains. Cool Mediterranean air is drawn down by the Rift Valley like a wind tunnel, where it clashes with the warm, humid air over the lake, making the Sea prone to sudden turbulence. Storms of the kind **Jesus** calmed in **Mark 4:35-41** often arrive in mid-afternoon. With little warning, mighty squalls can whip the tranquil surface into treacherous waves. When the Sea is swollen by the winter rains, normally hardened sandy areas along the Sea's edges are swamped by these raging waves.

After hearing and believing such tales, the first builder is determined not to be fooled into building upon the sand. Not so the second builder. He's heard the same stories but thinks the warnings are exaggerated. He's seen storms on the lake already; none came anywhere near to posing a danger to his plans for a house. Maybe an unusually heavy rainy season followed by the father of all storms might damage his home, but he thinks that's like trying to protect himself against being hit by lightning. Why bother? Thus, while the first builder continues to sweat and labor, the second builder is relaxing in the shade of his house sipping a cool drink. His house is done, while this other man is still working on his foundation. As he looks over at his weary neighbor, do you think he may have thought this other guy's a fool?

Isn't this the attitude of many who ignore God and the principles He designed us to live by? In the short run, they often seem prosperous, safe, and content. They may even think they're smarter than the "fools" who take God seriously. Some day, however, calamities in life will strike them, or death will carry them with their arrogance, contempt, or indifference into the presence of a holy God, to whom they owed their life breath and who recoiled in horror over their every selfish, unloving, and harmful thoughts and deeds. **Jesus** describes their head-on collision with Almighty God in **Luke 6:49**: "But the one who hears My words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete" (NIV).

II. FAITH'S FOUNDATION

The main point of this parable of two builders is the contrast between those securely within God's arms for eternity and those whose false sense of security about pleasing God will be shattered. Just before this parable, **Jesus** declared, "Not everyone who calls out to me, "Lord! Lord!" will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Only those who actually do the will of My Father in heaven will enter."²² On judgment day many will say to Me, "Lord! Lord! We prophesied in Your name and cast out demons in Your name and performed many miracles in Your name."²³ But I will reply, "I never knew you. Get away from me, you who break God's laws"" (**Matthew 7:21-23**; NLT). But this parable has a second message for **Jesus'** followers. We set ourselves up for a fall to the extent our happiness is based upon the presence of some blessing in our lives instead of upon the presence of Christ, and we often don't realize it until a storm hits.

Jesus described the first builder as "sensible" ("prudent"; "practically wise" in preparing for the future) for his willingness to dig as deeply as necessary to secure his foundation "on the rock." Because he'd "dug and dug deep," "When the flood came, the river crashed against that house and couldn't shake it, because it was well built" (**Luke 6:48**). Allowing God to "dig and dig deep" into our souls to set us more fully upon Christ as the foundation of our happiness and security is often no more pleasant than digging a deep hole in our hardened desert soil. Because of this, we may deceive ourselves that we are much more obedient to the Lord and pleasing to Him than we truly are. King David learned this the hard way after lust seduced this "man after God's own heart" (**I Samuel 13:14**) into adultery and murder. In his prayer of repentance when seeking full restoration of his fellowship with the Lord, David confessed, "The sacrifice pleasing to God is a broken spirit. God, You will not despise a broken and humbled heart" (**Psalms 51:17**). The Hebrew words underlying "broken and humbled" mean "broken into pieces" or "shattered and crushed."

On March 17, 2011, Christian researcher George Barna released *Research on How God Transforms Lives Reveals a 10-Stop Journey*. The Biblical model of making a commitment to Christ as Savior requires brokenness (genuine repentance) prior to becoming "born again." But Barna's findings, based on 15,000 telephone surveys, show American Christianity typically postpones the need to be broken of sin, self, or society until *after* we are Christians. As a result, most Americans who count themselves Christians never progress beyond stop 3 on the transformation path: awareness and concern about sin and its effects but not cooperating with Christ to remedy the problem. "Surprisingly few are focused on completely cooperating with God to experience the kind of whole-life transformation described in the Bible and made possible only through a partnership with God." My severe cold this past week, making me feel the worst I have in three years, reminded me all that's truly important in life is our relationship with the Lord, our service to Him, and our family (including family of friends). We waste good health when we do not use it to serve our God and our family. But America's culture of self-fulfillment conditions us to base our happiness upon attaining the relationships, possessions, status, and triumph of our causes, even as do those who don't know Christ, instead of being willing to abandon our desires in favor of listening to, obeying, and enjoying God. Can you relate to this true story? A woman was driving to McDonald's with her 5-year-old son when they passed a car accident. She'd taught her son that when they witnessed something terrible like that, they should say a prayer for whoever might be hurt. When she pointed to her son and said, "We should pray," he prayed with his earnest voice, "Dear God, please don't let those cars block the entrance to McDonald's."

When was the last time you dug deeply into God's Word, allowed God's moral principles to convict you of ungodliness, and were "crushed" over how much sin still controlled you? Too often, we don't realize how shallow the foundations of our happiness are until the storms of life are already upon us!

CONCLUSION

Augustus Toplady (1740-1778) (now there's a name for a man!) died of tuberculosis a few months shy of his 38th birthday. You may think you've never heard of him, but his name has endured in history better than many who lived much longer or who were more famous in their day. Augustus never knew his earthly father, a major in the British Army who died in battle shortly after his birth. He remained fatherless until age 16. When he yielded to the claims of Christ while listening to a layman preaching in a barn, he gained an everlasting Heavenly Father. He then prepared for life in the ministry in response to God's call.

One day at age 23, as he traveled through rugged country in southwestern England, the clouds burst and torrential sheets of rain and lightning began pummeling the earth. Quite terrifying, as when lightning cracked close enough to our family two summers ago for us to smell wood burning. With no human shelter at hand, he dashed into a fissure between limestone cliffs towering 250 feet high. The base of this fissure widened into a cave in which Toplady found the shelter and safety he desperately needed. Finding a scrap of paper on the floor, he penned words comparing the benefits of this cleft in a mighty rock to the benefits Christ provides in sheltering our lives from the ravages of sin. His words first appeared in print in 1775 as the hymn, *Rock of Ages, Cleft for Me*. In his last hours, he confidently proclaimed Christ remained His firm and sheltering Savior. "My heart beats every day stronger and stronger for glory," he said. "Sickness is no affliction, pain no cause, death itself no dissolution. My prayers are now all converted into praise."

God often speaks to us about how every aspect of our lives can be placed upon a firmer basis in Christ that will bless us with stability and enduring joy for now and eternity. Unless we cooperate with Him and allow His life principles to dig deeply beneath the surface of our hearts, though, we'll be too hardened to hear from Him until the storms of life or death are already upon us. We may then collapse wherever our life has not been securely built upon "Christ the solid Rock. All other ground is sinking sand."