

Two Houses

Luke 6:46-49

The jailor was brave and battle hardened. But he was terrified. An earthquake had rumbled through the city of Philippi, shaking his underground dungeon, crumbling walls, and shattering locks.

The sky was ink black and the prison was cave dark. So the jailor could not see anything at all. But he didn't have to. Dealing with prisoners was his business.

And he knew what had to have happened. Finding themselves free, they had all scattered into the night, scurrying away from the ruins of their cells like uncaged animals.

The jailor knew the penalty for losing prisoners, too. Death! So in his mind there was only one thing to do.

Pulling out his short, battle sword, he prepared to shove it into the soft flesh of his abdomen. But that very moment a voice rang out from the rubble of the prison.

But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"

The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved." Acts 16:28-31

The jailor knew what it meant to call someone lord and really mean it. He called Caesar lord because that Roman ruler was his commander and king. His family and his fortune were all Caesar's.

And that was not all. Caesar actually owned him. His family and his fortune were all Caesar's personal property. And so was his heart.

That same night, the Philippian jailor proclaimed Christ as his one and only Lord. But he was not the only Roman soldier who called Christ King.

Some soldiers did the same thing at Jerusalem. In the courtyard outside the barracks at the Fortress of Antonia, swarthy Syrian mercenaries tied the Master to a whipping pole. Then they lashed His back to a bloody pulp.

The Nazarene was charged with pretending to be the King of the Jews. So the soldiers threw a worn out royal robe over His shoulders and jammed a crown of thorns on His head.

...after twisting together a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand; and they knelt down before Him and mocked Him, saying, "Hail, King of the Jews!" Matthew 27:29

They did not mean it, of course. It was just a joke to them. But it was really blasphemy. Nevertheless, they are still a step above some people who sit on church pews.

At least those soldiers were honest about it. They did not piously pretend Jesus was their Lord when they had no intention at all of obeying Him. Then and now, our Savior considers that an insult. It is spitting in the face of the loving Lord who shed His blood and gave His life for us.

And that is unthinkable.

Two Formulas

Jesus said that if we would claim Him as Savior and King, we must do so proudly and publicly. But making the Master the Lord of our life is much more than a public profession or even a one-time commitment.

Jesus considers a faith that fails to go beyond that both unacceptable and insulting.

Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: Verses 46-47

Our Lord introduced His illustration by defining three steps to saving faith. First, we must come to Christ. That is the Savior's loving invitation to every man.

Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Matthew 11:28

But asking Jesus to heal a hurting heart, a lonely life or a sinful soul is just the beginning. After we come to Christ, we must hear the message of His love. And we must listen with believing ears.

Describing Himself as the Good Shepherd, the Savior said that is the identifying mark of those who really are part of His flock.

My sheep hear My voice, and I hear them, and they follow Me; John 10:27

Coming to Christ and both hearing and believing the Gospel is a good start. But it is still incomplete. One essential step remains.

If Christ really is to be our Captain, Commander and King, we must also obey Him. Merely believing the message that Jesus can deliver us from the darkness and death is not enough. We must also turn to Him and leave all our sin and selfishness behind.

Refusing to take that third step is not only foolish. Jesus said it is also fatal. So to help us understand the importance of adding works to our faith, the Savior told a story about two men: a wise builder and a foolish builder.

Two Faiths

Jesus started His story with an echo that harkened back to a terrifying warning He once gave.

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father... Matthew 7:21

There is an emotional intensity to the repetition of the title Lord, Lord. There is sincerity, too. So the difference between the two men in the Savior's story cannot possibly have anything to do with how earnest and sincere the foolish man was when he came to Christ.

On the surface there seems to be one difference between these two builders. One, the Savior said, comes to me and hears my words and acts upon them. The other one hears. But that is where he stops. He does not act according to Christ's words.

But there is yet another difference. The verb tense Jesus used to describe one man's actions is very different from the one He used for the other builder.

The wise man not only heard and obeyed. He kept on believing and obeying Christ's commandments. He lived by the Gospel message of the Master's sacrifice and the salvation He purchased with His blood.

Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man... Matthew 7:24 (NIV)

When Jesus turned His attention to the other man, He used a different verb tense. Like the first man, the second builder also heard that Jesus loved Him, died for Him, and rose again from the grave for him. And when someone told that foolish builder he could come to Christ and be forever forgiven, he not only heard that message. He sincerely and genuinely believed it.

But he did not keep on believing it. His faith withered and died. Christ compared the kind of faith that man had with a seed planted in shallow soil.

The one on whom seed was sown on the rocky places, this is the man who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; yet he has no firm root in himself, but is only temporary, and when affliction or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he falls away. Matthew 13:20-21

That man's faith failed for the same reason the foolish builder's house fell. It was incomplete. And partial faith cannot continue for long.

...are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless? James 2:20

For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead. James 2:26

The first builder was wiser than the second. He not only came to Christ and heard the wonderful message of salvation that he could have a new life simply by trusting in Jesus' blood. He really believed it.

We do not have to wonder if that is really true, either. Of course, we cannot see the root of faith in his soul. But we can see its flower.

You have faith and I have works; show me your faith without the works, and I will show you my faith by my works. James 2:18

Obedience is an essential agreement to faith. The second man's faith died because it was on life support from the beginning. Faith that lives only in our mind and our mouth is not really faith at all.

It is not enough to believe that Jesus loves us and died for us: that He can transform us from a sinner to a saint. We must also act upon that message by confessing and forsaking our sins.

And even that is not all. Every hour and every day, we must keep on hearing, believing and living as born again children of God.

That wise builder took Jesus' words to heart. He went beyond hearing them. He even went beyond believing them. He lived by them, acted upon them, and obeyed them.

That, the Savior insisted, is full faith and a complete commitment: to come to Him, hear His words, and order our lives by their truth.

Two Foundations

The men in Jesus' story were both builders who constructed houses for themselves. The houses are symbols for the lives they chose to lead. And sitting side by side, the difference between them was hard to see. But there was a difference. An eternal difference.

The wise man's construction took a bit longer. And for good reason. He started out, not with a hammer and a saw, but with a shovel.

...he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; Luke 6:48

The sandy soil was flat and hard. And I am sure it seemed solid, too. But the wise man was not satisfied. So he started digging and kept shoveling until he reached bedrock.

Even when his shovel scraped against a great rock, he was not content. He actually dug into the rock. Only then did he start his house.

That man did not want merely to build his house upon a rock. He wanted to build it utterly, only and absolutely on solid stone.

In much the same way, our faith must not be partial. We cannot live for Jesus Christ yet also see the sparkling sequins this world flashes before our eyes.

Jesus must not only be our Lord. He must be our one and only Lord. Unlike the other man, we must build upon the Rock and on nothing else.

But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; Luke 6:49

After carefully consulting his plans and doing some measuring and marking, the other man simply started building right on the packed earth. And that, Jesus said, was a foolish thing to do.

The problem was simple, really. The earth was not nearly as solid as it seemed. That is why the wise man dug down into the bedrock base. He wanted to build his house upon something solid, something that would not move or shift.

If we are wise, we will want to do the same thing. We will build our lives upon something that cannot, does not, and will not change. And the Bible tells us there are only two things that do not change—God and His Holy Word.

I, the Lord, do not change; Malachi 3:6

Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever. Hebrews 13:8

Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. Luke 21:33

There is absolutely nothing else in all the universe that does not change. Even this world is temporary. Mountains might seem everlasting and eternal. But the Bible tells us they will all melt like butter and run down to the sea in boiling rivers one day.

We cannot found our lives on money or men, power or popularity, either. They are all mere mists that will vanish in a moment.

No, we must build our lives upon the Rock. And God's Word is emphatic that there is but one rock. And that is the Lord Himself.

...who is God, besides the Lord? And who is a rock, besides our God? 2 Samuel 22:32

And building our lives upon Him means both believing and obeying.

Two Fates

So we are left with two houses: two lives that seem the same. But one terrible day, the difference became painfully clear.

The truth came with black clouds that boiled in off the Mediterranean. Lightning traced jagged scars across the sky, and thunder exploded, echoing across the valley. Rain pelted. Winds moaned. And rivers rose to churning floods. Then everyone knew the two houses were not really the same at all.

...and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great. Luke 6:48-49

It is worth noting, that the storm raged around both houses. It is a grave error and a foolish, false hope to believe that, just because we are Christians, dark and desperate days will not come.

It is hard to hear. But storms do come to believers. Our children do get sick. Our loved ones do die. Our hopes do crumble. And our businesses do fail.

That is true for everyone: those who love Jesus Christ, those who carry around empty professions of faith, and those who have never even pretended to trust Him.

The difference lies in the effect those storms have on our lives. With the wind howling, hail pounding, and floodwaters swirling around it, the house build on bedrock stood solid.

But the torrent quickly washed away the earth beneath the other house. And in a moment, it was a mass of splintered wood and crumbled stones. Luke says it collapsed in a moment and all fell together.

Neither houses nor lives are built for sunny, spring days. They are built for the storms that are sure to come. And faith built on the sand of supposition and partial, incomplete faith cannot stand the storms of troubles and trials, of sicknesses and sorrows that are sure to come.

We all want to own a house that can stand any storm. And we all want to have a faith that will not collapse into depression, despair and disillusionment when troubles come.

But it is wise to remember that only a life founded completely upon Christ can stand all the storms of sorrow of suffering, the winds of troubles and trials, and the floods of pain and problems.

A life laced together with nothing stronger than loyalty to self-interest, financial security, and human philosophy is merely waiting for a catastrophic collapse.

Such lives are not built upon false foundations. Jesus said they have no foundation at all. Writing to the church at Corinth, Paul echoed the Master's words.

...no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 3:11

The storms that beat upon our lives are the true test of our faith. Indeed, they are one reason why we study the scriptures and discipline ourselves to trust God in every area of our lives. We are building a faith that will stand strong and firm, no matter how savage the storm.

We cannot know what form the storm may take. But we can be sure we will not be carried away with it. Not because we know we are strong, either. But because although we are weak, our God is strong.

He is faithful, too. And He has promised to watch over us through every midnight maelstrom.

...in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; in the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock. Psalm 27:5

That is the Bible's message to you. You can trust our beloved Savior. He will never leave you or forsake you. From childhood to old age, He will faithfully carry you through any and every trial if you build your life only upon trusting in Him.

So the time to inspect our own foundation is now. If we wait until we hear the wind whine, the thunder rumble, and the lightning crackle, it will be too late.

Now, while all our horizons are still peaceful and calm, is the time to make sure we have founded our faith upon Jesus Christ.

And only upon Him.

