

A Word to Preachers: Are You Ready for the Storm?

A storm is coming. The torrential rains shall fall. The waters shall rise. The floods shall sweep away all wood, hay and stubble. The violent winds will blow away all that was built irresponsibly.

Are you building your house on the rock or on the sand?

“Whoever hears these sayings of Mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on a rock. And the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house. And it did not fall, for it was founded a rock. And every one who hears these sayings of Mine and does not do them will be likened to a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house. And it fell. And its fall was great ” (Matt. 7:24-27).

“What sayings of Mine” is Jesus specifically referring to in these passages? Reading in context, Jesus began a lengthy teaching from Matthew 5-7 and the central theme of it seems to be the character of the heart of man—from the Beatitudes, to loving our enemies, to having the right motives in giving, praying and fasting. Then He goes on to teach them about the Father’s care for them and not worrying but seeking first the kingdom of God. Finally, Jesus comes to the end of that teaching and speaks about hypocrisy and righteous judgment and reverting back to heart matters followed by a warning of false prophets and those who call Him Lord but don’t do His will. This entire teaching is traditionally known as the Sermon on the Mount, and it ends with the parable of the wise and foolish builders.

This was one of Jesus' first and most foundational teachings. It set the tone for His public ministry. As ministers that is important for us to know. We must emphasize what Jesus emphasized. These sayings prepared the people and His disciples for what was to come. Herein we find the standard of Jesus' life and ministry for all He did and taught. The heart must be right or nothing else will be right. If the heart is not right people won't do what He says. We must build our lives on Jesus' words, especially these first words of the first lengthy sermon He preached.

Storms Test the Strength of the Foundation

Jesus was the Master Builder. When it comes to building people, He is our primary example and pattern. The apostle Paul refers to God's people as God's field and God's building (1 Cor. 3:9), and he calls all ministers his fellow laborers who plant and water the field, and who are to build on the foundation of Jesus Christ.

The image of the people as a building under construction is very interesting because it highlights the responsibility of ministers to be faithful in how they build. Ministers are like building contractors who are only permitted to build on the prescribed foundation (see 1 Cor. 3:12-15). There are both wise builders and foolish builders (Matt. 7:24-27). To build on the foundation a building of durable material (gold, silver and precious stones) means not only to teach sound doctrine but even more importantly, to be a godly example and live a sanctified life of fidelity to the truth, thus helping to mature the saints. Ministers and especially pastors/shepherds, because they live with the people, teach more by their life example perhaps than anything else.

On the other hand, to build with perishable material (wood, hay, and stubble) is to provide inadequate or unsound teaching or to compromise the truth by living a lifestyle that contradicts or falls short of modeling it. It is the quality

of every builder's work and not the quantity, as seems to be much of the focus today, that shall be tested by fire, for which every builder shall give account to the Lord.

In Jesus' parable (Matt. 7:24-27) He uses a storm, signifying the pressures, hardships and trials of life, as well as the persecutions we will suffer for the gospel, as a measuring gauge for how solid our foundation is. And what is our foundation based upon? Jesus taught us that it is based upon doing His sayings. Obedience is the issue. ""Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven" (Matt. 7:21). Obedience, not lip service, is what God requires.

Have you ever thought about what gives us the strength and fuel to obey God? Why are some people obedient and some are not? Why are some doers of the Word and some are not? Why do some people stay faithful to God and remain true while others do not? Why do some start this Christian race but never finish? What is it that causes us to endure to the end (Matt. 24:13)?

It is the fear of the Lord. Obedience to the Lord is not only proof of your love for Him (John 14:21), but also of your fear of Him. There's been an emphasis on love, although we've fallen short of the full counsel of God in that area, too, but there has not been nearly as much of an emphasis on the fear of the Lord. It takes both of them to produce a strong constitution in your Christian life. Notice in the following two different translations how the love of obedience in Jesus was rooted in the fear of the Lord. They are identical. Or a better way to say it would be that the manifestation of the fear of the Lord is obedience to His Word and His sayings/commandments.

"His delight is in the fear of the Lord" (Isa. 11:3a, NKJV).

"He will delight in obeying the Lord" (Isa. 11:3a, NLT).

I love this verse of Scripture. It feeds and fuels the fear of the Lord in me and the delight to obey Him. This is our sure foundation. Since our obedience is the manifestation of the fear of the Lord in our lives, and since that is the difference between building your house on the rock or on the sand, we then could say that the fear of the Lord is what builds a strong foundation for our houses, which represent our lives. The fear of the Lord produces durable materials in our lives that will strengthen us to stand even in the midst of the storms. Can you see that?

A house is built by wisdom, and the fear of the Lord is the beginning or the foundation of wisdom/knowledge. Once again, a house represents our lives, homes, families.

“Through [skillful and godly] wisdom a house [a life, a home, a family] is built, and by understanding it is established [on a sound and good foundation]” (Prov. 24:3, AMP).

“Wisdom begins with the fear of the Lord” (Prov. 1:7a, CEB).

“Fear of the Lord is the foundation of true knowledge” (Prov. 1:7a, NLT).

If we build our lives and homes on the true wisdom and knowledge of God that comes from the foundation of the fear of the Lord, we need not fear the storm, because we will stand.

Paul's Great Desire

One of the apostle Paul's greatest burdens was this very thing: that the people He ministered to would stand firm in their faith and remain obedient to God even in the midst of the troubles and persecutions of his day. Other New Testament writers shared the same burden.

Paul's great desire was that the people he taught would not falter under pressure, lest his work be useless or his labor be in vain. Notice his great concern for the Thessalonian

saints (1 Thess. 3:1-9). He had warned them of the troubles that would soon come. In his farewell speech to the Ephesian elders, he warned them of the same troubles (Acts 20:25-31). To the Galatians and the Hebrews he did the same, warning them not to turn back to the Law. He was preparing them for the storm and the persecution they would receive from preaching the cross and paying the price to follow Jesus. Warnings are such a large part of the Scriptural admonition that Paul and the other New Testament writers gave to the churches. Today there is a glaring absence of these warnings in our preaching.

Here are just some I found in the New Testament: Matthew 7:15, 10:17, 24:4-5, 24:11-13, 24:24; Mark 12:38-40; Luke 12:1, 15; Acts 20:29-31; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10:12, 11:3; Galatians 6:7; Ephesians 5:6, Philippians 3:2, 18; Colossians 1:28, 2:8; 1 Timothy 4:16; Hebrews 2:1-3, 4:1; 2 Peter 1:10, 3:17.

Fellow minister and preacher, how well are you preparing yourself and your people for the storm? Are you teaching them the whole counsel of God or catering to itching ears? Are you including the warnings in your preaching? Are you preaching on only the goodness and mercy of God, or do you also preach on His severity, wrath and judgments? Are you only preaching on the love of God, or do you place emphasis on His holiness too? Do you ever preach on sin and repentance? Are your concepts of the love of God and the grace of God accurate and in accordance with Scripture?

If not, then you may be guilty of the blood of men: "Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. For I did not keep from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. Therefore watch, remembering that for three years night and day I did not cease to warn everyone with tears" (Acts 20:26-27, 31).

Make sure you are preparing yourselves and those whom God has entrusted to you for the storm. Oh, how much stronger our churches would be if we included these things in our preaching

and teaching and living them out before the people!