

“Sand Things”
Matthew 7:24-27
September 28, 2008

What is your life built on? Are you building your life on something that will last? Or something that will wash out from under you when the storms of life hit? That is what Jesus asks us in this little parable. Are you building your life on rock, or on sand?

This is a lesson not of a scholar, but of a practical man, a carpenter. But it is not a lesson about carpentry or house building. It is a lesson about life. Every house is built on something. What is your life built on?

William Barclay writes of this story:

“In Palestine in summer, many of the rivers dried up altogether and left a sand river bed empty of water. But in winter, after the September rains had come, the empty river bed became a raging torrent. Many a person, looking for a site for a house, found an inviting stretch of sand and built there, only to discover when the winter came that he had built his house in the middle of a raging river which swept the house away. But the wise man searched for rock, where it was much more difficult to build, and where it was hard labor to cut out the foundations. But when the wild winter weather came, his toil was amply repaid, for his house stood strong and firm and secure.”

Jesus wanted us to know that just possibly there is a storm brewing, while we’re still laying the foundation. To think of the future – not to forget the present, but to understand the meaning of the present.

The story tells you what the rock is: “Anyone who hears these words of mine and obeys them.” That’s the rock. This comes at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. He has just outlined the rock foundation upon which you can build your life and not have it wash out from under you. The teaching He gave us. The things He had to say about the way we live, the way we conduct ourselves, and the way we approach life. That is the rock.

It doesn’t tell us what the sand is. It only implies what the sand might be. By way of implication it tells us – that anything that is not the rock is sand. There’s just one rock. All the rest is sand. So, what are some of the sand things we build our lives on?

We build our lives on our jobs. We work at the same job for 43 years and then get some crummy watch. And a young hotshot in our chair the next morning. There’s nothing wrong with a good job. Until at the end of the 43 years we find that is what we built our lives on. And now the sand has shifted out from under us.

A man returned to an office party after retirement. A friendly young thing, who had come to the company after he had retired, greeted him warmly and asked: “And who did you used to be?”

Casey Stengel, a long ago manager of the New York Yankees, said “There are two kinds of baseball managers – those who have been fired, and those who will be.”

You can work 60 hours a week to give your family everything, but have no time or energy left to sit and listen.

A family in Colorado tried for years to save enough money to replace their ancient bathroom fixtures with nice new ones. But each year as skiing time rolled around, it seemed the bathroom money went for the family ski trip.

The children are grown now. A son wrote home to his parents, remembering the annual ski trips, the good times they had together, and how much he enjoyed them. His father said "I can't imagine my son writing home and saying – "Gee dad, I sure remember our swell bathroom."

Someday, when the kids are gone, you're going to spot that long belt-buckle scar down the oak banister, and smile.

Isn't it funny how we want our kids to look and be like all the other kids? Isn't it interesting how we want to look and be like all the people around us?

How many people worry if their clothes are good enough to come to church and worship God?

Jesus doesn't question our sinfulness, as much as our sanity.

We build our lives on our families. There is nothing wrong with that. We are seeing in our broken-up society how important it is to have a strong family. You want to hold onto your kids. Somebody said, "You don't raise kids, you raise carrots. You sponsor kids."

They want to go to one college. And you say, 'I'll pay your way if you'll go to this one.' They want to take a job and you say, "Hey I've got a good job over here with my company." So they do all the things you want cause you've made them feel crummy if they don't. Let go of them. Then when they come home to see you, you know it is just because they want to see you!

We think we have to grab hold of everything we can and hang on tooth-and-toenail. Let go. Turn it over to the rock. And you will get it back in ways you never dreamed possible.

We're talking about the process of committing the sand. Turning the sand things over to the rock. Even families are good, pure, white sand. "He's a great husband, but ..." "She'd be the perfect wife if she just ..." Turn it over to the rock.

A young man, his marriage tested and torn, said to me, "when we get some money ahead, we'll go see a counselor."

Why is it that we can point to some particular sin, but we can carry a grudge in the church for 100 years and it's ok.

Several years ago AT&T had a commercial bragging “There isn’t much you can count on these days.” Then the line, “But you can count on AT&T.” A few months later they laid off 40,000 people.

When there is a huge drop in the stock market, they still put out suicide watches at places like the Golden Gate Bridge.

During the baseball strike of '94, Chicago Cubs announcer Harry Caray had this to say about the dispute between players and owners: “I don’t know who is right, but they are both wrong.”

Is Coke still the “real thing?”

It isn’t hard to understand why lobbyists for gambling fight so hard in Indiana. But you also understand who the winners are and who the losers are when they pay \$500,000 to put in 3,000 slot machines.

I jotted down some statistics, now dated, but still true. 130 million Americans had bought \$30 BILLION worth of lottery tickets. But in 12 years there had only been 173 millionaires created. Does that mean there is a 173 out of 30 billion chance of becoming a millionaire in the lottery? We would scream to high heaven if our taxes were raised that much. (Most of those 173 ended up in bankruptcy too.)

What we eventually discover, if we are lucky, is that “more” adds up to less. Less satisfaction, less joy, less enthusiasm. We can’t seem to get enough of our god of more. Do you still fall for the idea that fulfillment, love, inspiration, commitment can be purchased for a price? Or are you ready to try finding a solid-rock foundation.

How many electronic gadgets does your kid really need? Or do you buy them that stuff just to keep them from bugging you? How important is it, really, that a new car be in the driveway on the day your 16-year-old gets a driver’s license?

This kind of foolish thinking is what Garrison Keilor has in mind when remembering his Aunt Eleanor who talked about a “\$10 haircut on a 59 cent head.”

I tried selling life insurance for a while. I was told many times by my boss that as soon as I possibly could I should buy a Lincoln Continental. People like to buy from someone who looks successful. I knew right then I didn’t understand the ways of the world. I would rather buy my insurance from someone in an old Chevy – then I would know what my premiums were really paying for.

Did you hear about the little Methodist Church where an old man wore the same treadbare suit every week? The kind folks in the church took up a collection for a new outfit and slipped it to him very discreetly. First thing they knew he was never at church anymore. Someone finally caught up with him and asked him where he had been. He reported that he got the suit, shirt, tie, shoes, everything. Sunday came, he got dressed, looked in the mirror and said he looked so good he just went to the Presbyterian Church instead.

A sign on a subway wall read: "Life is just one contradiction after another." Below it was another scrawl: "No it isn't."

Some wiseguy said the perfect summer day is when the sun is shining, the breeze is blowing, the birds are singing, and the lawnmower is broke.

In a Frank & Ernest cartoon one of the guys said: "The boss said I was a cornerstone of this organization, and then I found out they were cutting corners."

Why is it people will listen to beer commercials to find out what real life is all about? Come to think of it, why is it in this country we equate drugging ourselves up, or getting drunk out of our wits, or having irresponsible sex, with "having a good time."

Did you hear about the little boy who was digging up potatoes with his grandfather? He finally said, "Pop, why did you bury all these potatoes in here in the first place?"

I saw a sign along the road that said, "Slow Church Ahead." And I wondered if anyone had ever seen a fast one.

If you went out to buy a new house today, would you buy one put up as cheaply as possible, just sitting on the ground? Or would you expect some foundation under it?

Why will people spend an average of \$28,000 today for clothes and flowers and booze and bands and food to get married, but resent it if the minister performing the ceremony wants to talk to them 3 or 4 times about what they are getting themselves into.

There is just one rock. He's the only sure thing to build your life on. Anything else is just building a house on sand.

The ultimate question life asks of us is not if we can play bridge, or baseball, or if our figure is great, or how well we play the stock market, or what kind of computer we have at home. But how well we built our life.

What happens to a person when tragedy comes depends on whether he built his life on rock. The parable does not accuse us of being horrible sinners. It questions our sanity. Our sloppy workmanship. Are we putting up our lives to stay? We're talking about lives taken up, not so much with sin, as with nonsense.

The victim in the parable is not a villain, but a guy building his house on trash. There is nothing so wrong with our lives, but we've got God in the wrong place in it all. Trying to fit God in a corner somewhere.

All of us make deep consecrations don't we? We just get caught up in life. Our consecrations and commitments slowly ooze away because the sand has shifted under the foundation.

Some people will say, "Well, I just don't make commitments." I heard someone say that they just bought a new house and signed some papers promising to make a monthly payment every month until the year 2032.

We don't build on sand, most of us, on purpose. We just slowly move away from the rock. We get attached to the sand. We don't say – "I think I need a little sand over here." "I want to get away from the rock." Slowly, almost imperceptibly, we move away.

Jesus is the rock. About all you can say about the rock is He just gets better and better. He never fails. He never washes out on you. When the storms of life come, He holds you firm.

Imagine for a moment holding in your hands all the things you have built your life on. Your hands are pointed up, and there in your hands is everything you hold dear. Rather, all the things you think hold you. Now. Spread your fingers apart and see what happens. If it is sand, it will slip through your fingers. Let it go. If it is rock, it will still be there.

We're talking about the sand things of life. Commit the sand to the Rock. Give it all to Him.

Thank you, Lord, for wanting what we have. And the joy of committing it to you. Amen.