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Building on the Right Foundation
Luke 6:17-26, 46-49

Some years ago, not long after the completion of the Wexner Art Center on the campus of Ohio State University, the noted Christian preacher and apologist Ravi Zacharias (you may have heard him on the radio) was doing a series of lectures at the university.

On his way to the lecture, the man driving him to the lecture hall pointed out the Wexner Center and told him, "This is a new art building for the university. It is a fascinating building designed in the post-modernist view of reality." He went on to describe the building. It has no pattern. Staircases go nowhere. Pillars support nothing. The architect designed the building to reflect his perception of life. It went nowhere and was mindless and senseless.

Zacharias says he turned to the driver and asked, "Did they do the same thing with the foundation?" The driver simply laughed.¹

Foundations are important, aren't they? They make all the difference in a building's structure and integrity.

When I was pastor of the Holly Springs Baptist Church in Wake County, we lived in the church parsonage. It was a very nice, roomy house. It's the only house we've ever lived in that had a basement—I mean a *full* basement, even up under the porch! I found out there was a story behind that basement.

The congregation had intended to build the house on the same plan as a member's house. Originally, it was to have a large fireplace, like the other house. There was never any intention to have a basement. But when they started digging on the side of a small hill to lay the foundation, the soil was softer than they had anticipated. So they had to dig deeper. And deeper. And deeper. In fact, they ended up digging so deep into the side of that hill that the fireplace turned into a full basement!

The foundation Jesus laid . . .

That day on that level place on the side of a mountain in Galilee, Jesus talked about the importance of foundations. As He had taught His disciples and the crowds that had gathered with them how He intends for those who would follow Him to live, He brought things to a close by asking them, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (6:46).² He went on to say that the one who hears His words and puts them into practice is like a man who, when he built his house, dug down deep and laid his foundation on rock. When the flood came, as it so often did in the rainy season in Palestine, the torrent that struck the house couldn't shake it, because it was well built.

Then Jesus went on to say that the one who hears His words but doesn't put them into practice is like a man who simply built his house on the ground without a foundation. As soon as the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and was completely destroyed.

Okay, granted—foundations are important, not just for buildings, but for a life that will stand up to the torrents that rise against it.

I mean, life isn't easy, is it? Some have it better than others. Some have it a lot worse. At some point, most of us will face some kind of crisis that can be likened to a torrential flood. It may be health problems, financial problems, family problems, church problems, personal problems, or relationship problems. It may be some kind of spiritual problem or struggle, a real "dark night of the soul," as it's sometimes called. It may be the death of a loved one or mistreatment or even persecution. It may be some kind of natural disaster like Hurricane Floyd or Katrina or the fires in California or the earthquake in Haiti or the flooding in different parts of our country. How does our life stand up to these torrents? What is the foundation we're to build on?

Did you notice what Jesus said here? The one like the man who dug deep and laid his foundation on rock is the one who hears Jesus' words and *puts them into practice*. It's not a matter of just *hearing* His teaching, or even hearing and *agreeing* with it. It's not even a matter of occasional obedience. It's a matter of *putting His teachings into practice*. The construction of the Greek in this verse indicates that it's a continual action, *a practice* that Jesus is talking about here. It's a way of living day after day after day. It's not hit and miss; it has a real consistency about it. Oh, we may mess up from time to time, sometimes royally. But when you look at the overall pattern of our lives, it will reflect *obedience* to Jesus' teachings.

What Jesus taught . . .

But what are these teachings He's talking about? Well, isn't it all of them? If we look specifically at the context of this passage, it's what He's been saying here. And what He says makes us pretty uncomfortable.

Take, for instance, the blessings and woes He begins with. New Testament scholars tell us that this term "blessed" has to do with a state of being, that such a person is to be congratulated because of something.

Wait a minute . . . "Blessed are you who are poor . . . who hunger now . . . who weep now . . . who are hated, excluded, insulted"—in other words, persecuted? What in the world do these folks have to be congratulated about?

Well, what does Jesus say? The kingdom of God—His rule and reign—belongs to the poor. Those who hunger now will be satisfied. Those who weep now will laugh. And those who are hated, excluded, insulted, persecuted— well, they're in good company with the prophets of old! That's how they were treated.

The exact opposite of all these is true for those who trust in the riches and the plenty they have now. They have theirs in the present, but in the future, they won't.

Could it be that Jesus is saying that there's a lot more to be concerned about than just what we see and experience in the here and now? Isn't He saying that the blessed are to be congratulated because no matter how bad things are now, in the end things will all be set right? Isn't He saying that what we will experience in eternity is much more important than our present circumstances?

Now if we could learn to put that perspective into practice, that's a real foundation for life! That's the kind of perspective that can deal with anything that comes our way, good or bad, weal or woe!

Well, Jesus has already turned things upside down as far as outlook and attitude; He might as well do it for behavior and relationships, too. And he does.

He goes on to tell those listening to Him that day—and us—“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you” (6:27-28). He gives some specific examples, some quite shocking ones, to be honest, to make his point.

Turn the other cheek. Don't stop the one who's taking your cloak from taking your tunic, too. If anybody asks you for something, give it. If somebody takes something from you, don't demand its return. Do to others as you would have them do to you.

What in the world does Jesus mean by all this? Isn't He simply saying that His followers are to respond the way God does rather than the way the world does? Jesus goes on to say that even sinners love those who love them, and do good to those who are good to them, and lend with the expectation of full repayment. But, Jesus says, if we are good to others, including those who would take advantage of us and mistreat us—good to them not because of them but because it's what God would do—then our reward will be great and we will be like God (“sons of the Most High,” 6:35). In other words, Jesus says, we are to be merciful, just as our Father in heaven is merciful. We are to relate to others as God would. When we do, it will show up in our attitudes towards others, in our willingness to forgive, and in our generosity. We'll become like our teacher. We'll help our brothers and sisters with their struggles, but we'll be sure we're dealing with our own faults first. Who and what we really are will be demonstrated by *what* we do and say (the fruit of our lives) and *how* we do and say it.

You see it, don't you? *Putting Jesus' teachings into practice builds our lives on His solid foundation.* Having an eternal perspective, relating to others in mercy as God does, becoming like Jesus—all these are a part of putting his teachings into practice.

What kind of foundation . . .

So what about you? What kind of foundation are you building on? Are you building on the foundation Jesus is talking about here, following Him, learning and practicing His ways?

Or are you building on the shifting sands of the ways of this world, this present evil age that's in opposition to God and His ways and His kingdom? Is the focus of your life getting ahead in this world? Is your life oriented toward time or eternity? In other words, what's most important to you?

Jesus says in this text that those who build their lives on the things of this life and the ways of the world are building on shifting sand. The house they build might look good, and may even be expensive, but what happens when the storms of life come? What happens when the torrential floods beat against what you've built? *It falls.*

But what about those who build on the solid foundation of following Jesus and practicing His ways? Well, when the storms of life assail us and the torrential floods beat against us—as they surely will at some point—*we stand firm.* We may be battered, even broken, but with Jesus and His teachings and ways as our foundation, we still stand. And what's more important, when we face the torrent of the Judgment, because we're trusting in Jesus and what He's done for us, we'll be able to stand firm then as well.

So how can a person build on this strong foundation that Jesus was talking about?

First, you have to *put your faith in Him*. Jesus has done for us what we couldn't do for ourselves. Separated from God by our sin, we could never do enough to earn a right relationship with Him. No matter how much you do or how "good" you are by human standards, we can never measure up. As Isaiah 64:6 puts it, "all our righteous acts are like filthy rags"

But Jesus could do it, and He has done it. He came to earth, the Son of God in human flesh—truly God and truly man—and lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father, fulfilling everything that God requires. And then He died on the cross for us, in our place, as a perfect sacrifice for sin, being fully obedient to the Father, dying rather than sinning by choosing to be the Messiah some other way than God intended. Then on the third day, He rose from the dead, having defeated sin and death and Satan so we could be forgiven and set free from our sin.

We receive and experience what Jesus has done by simply trusting Him, submitting ourselves to Him as our Lord, depending on Him to save us from our sin and its eternal judgment in hell and to set us right with God.

But that's just the beginning. Then we build our lives on this sure foundation of Jesus and His teachings. When we trust Him, we become His disciples. We follow Him, we learn from Him, we begin the journey of becoming like Him—*putting His teachings into practice*.

Do you remember the little song we sang as children?

The wise man built his house upon the rock;
The wise man built his house upon the rock;
The wise man built his house upon the rock;
And the rains came tumbling down.

The rains came down and the floods came up;
The rains came down and the floods came up;
The rains came down and the floods came up;
And the house on the rock stood firm.

Amen.

†MEG

¹ Ravi Zacharias, "If the Foundations Be Destroyed," *Preaching Today*, Tape No. 142.

² Scripture quotations are from the *New International Version*.