

# The Parable of the Two Builders

Of all Jesus' parables, the *Parable of the Two Builders* has perhaps more than any other parable been reduced to a simple children's song. Often times, when something is relegated to Children's Bible class song, we adults tend to not pay it much attention. However, just as dynamite comes in small packages, in context, this parable creates a powerful meaning and application to all who would come after Christ.

It's no accident this parable comes at the end of the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:24-27) and the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:47-49). In both cases, Jesus is calling for the people to move beyond being active listeners (Matthew 7:28-29) and paying Him lip-service (Luke 6:46), to being doers of what He has taught, namely what He has taught them in the preceding sermon (Matthew 5:1-7:23; Luke 6:20-45). To drive home His message, our Lord tells the people a parable contrasting the actions of two house builders. This comparison will highlight the sensibleness of doing what Jesus says and the craziness of not doing what He commands us to do.

In our Lord's parable, two men set out to build a house for themselves. Jesus labels the first man "*wise*" (Matthew 7:24), while He identifies the second man as "*foolish*" (Matthew 7:26). The descriptions "*wise*" and "*foolish*" are not indications of their mental capacity. Rather, the true character of each man is revealed through how each man builds his house, thus causing each to be declared either "*wise*" or "*foolish*" (cf. James 3:13-18). Paul expounds on this notion in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, where he says the wise are those who are faithfully obedient to Christ, though the world may view them as foolish.

It is during the dry season of summer that these two men build their homes. Preparations must be made to complete a sound structure before the late winter rains come. The image of "*building*" is often used by our Lord as a metaphor for the life choices men make such as in the *Parable of the Rich Fool* (Luke 12:13-21) or in the *Cost of Discipleship Passage* (Luke 14:28-30). On the outside the two, or lives, look exactly alike. However, there is one striking difference, their foundations.

Our first man "*dug deep and laid a foundation*" (Luke 6:48) on the "*rock*" (Matthew 7:24). A "*wise man*" builds his house, or life, to withstand the elements. He instinctively knows that the dry, favorable weather of summer will not last forever. He understands that sooner, rather than later, the rainy season will come with its torrential downpours and gale force winds and so he prepares. Therefore, the one "*who hears [the] words of [Jesus] and does them*" (Matthew 7:24; cf. Luke 6:47; James 1:19-27) is like this wise, sensible man, who prepares for trial and judgment. Just as his house will withstand test and trial, so will his life because it is built on the foundation of Jesus and His words (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:10-11). Conversely, the second man, builds his house directly on the "*sand*" (Matthew 7:26), "*without a foundation*" (Luke 6:49). The "*foolish man*" erects his house as if the blue skies of summer will never depart. He gives no thought to the fact that one day soon his blue skies will darken, the sunshine will give way to rain, and catastrophe will swiftly come upon him. In fact, this man is so reckless, it's as if he built his house on a sand bar in the middle of a dry creek bed. Therefore, the one "*who hears [the] words of [Jesus] and does not do them*" (Matthew 7:26; cf. Luke 6:49) is as foolish as a man who builds a house in such a ruinous way. Peter spoke of such people and thinking in 2 Peter 3:1-13. First (vv. 1-7), foolish men live their lives doubting the coming storm of judgment declaring, "*all things are continuing as they were from the beginning of creation*" (v. 4). Second (vv. 5-10), Peter refutes their erroneous thinking by pointing to the sudden nature of the creation (Genesis 1-

2) and the flood (Genesis 6:1-9:17). Finally (vv. 11-13), Peter calls for believers to prepare themselves for the coming judgment by living lives of *"holiness and godliness"* (v. 11). The *"wise"* builds with a faith that understands judgment, though delayed, is coming. Therefore, he builds his spiritual house on the foundation of hearing and doing what Jesus says (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:10-11). However, the *"foolish"* man makes no preparations, going about as if the Lord does not keep His promises. Consequently, this man will surely come to a swift and certain ruin (cf. Proverbs 10:8).

In the course of time the blue skies of summer did indeed give way to the darkened skies of the rainy season. In vivid detail, our Lord describes the storm that batters these two houses. *"The rain fell, and the floods came"* (Matthew 7:25a, 27a). A nearby stream overflowed its banks and *"broke against"* (Luke 6:48b, 49b) the two houses, while gale force *"winds blew and beat on"* (Matthew 7:25b; 27b) the homes that symbolize these men's lives. It is a common interpretation to view this storm as symbolizing the various *storms of life* that all men will endure. Certainly storms, especially floods, are used in scripture as metaphors for the trials of life (i.e. Psalm 18:4, 16-19; 32:6-7; 69:1-3, 14-15) and this would undoubtedly make a good point. However, I believe it would be best to view this storm as representing judgment such as the Noahic flood (cf. Genesis 6:1-9:17) which was used by our Lord and Peter to foreshadow the judgment that will come again on the world while reinforcing God's promise of salvation for those who put their trust in Him (cf. Matthew 24:37-42, 44; 1 Peter 3:18-22; 2 Peter 2:4-10).

In the final analysis, the *"wise man's"* house, *"did not fall"* during the flood *"because it has been founded on the rock"* (Matthew 7:25c; cf. Luke 6:48c). However, the *"foolish man"* was not as fortunate, for his house *"immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great"* (Luke 6:49c; cf. Matthew 7:27c). As in Noah's day, so in Jesus' and ours: the disastrous consequences of only hearing and not doing what the Lord commands will bring utter destruction, but by God's saving power the hearer and doer of the Lord's word will be able to stand and not fall in judgment (cf. Romans 14:4). The *Parable of the Two Builders* is a forceful reminder that a spiritual house cannot stand unless it is built on hearing and doing what Jesus says to do. Let us end with this question: Will your house stand in God's judgment?

~ Clay Gentry