

## “BUILDING CODES”

Matthew 7:21-29

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Matthew 7:21-29: Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?” Then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.” Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall! Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

Most of us probably have memories of building sand castles at the beach. Last summer, at the beach, I watched a dad and two children build an enormous sand castle. They worked all morning with buckets and shovels – using the buckets to put the sand in place, the shovel to shape. I got the feeling that this dad must have been an architect or engineer because this was not like any sand castles I had ever built. It was enormous and complex. It had turrets, towers, ramparts and draw bridges, inner and outer walls. The walls were made to look like they were made of stones fit together. When finished, it looked like it could withstand any assault.

The next morning, when we went for a walk on the beach, I looked for the castle. At first I couldn’t see it anywhere. But then I noticed a few piles of sand where the castle had stood. The towers and walls had disappeared. All that remained was a bare outline in the sand. What happened? Well, of course, the tide came in and the waves washed up against the castle and it crumbled. All that time and effort washed away in a few moments because it was built on sand.

A few summers ago we were at another beach in northern France. About a kilometer off the coast is a rocky tidal island rising out of the sea by the name of Mont St. Michel. It is made up of huge blocks of granite that emerged from the bay, having resisted the wear and tear of the ocean better than the surrounding rocks. Suspended high on the rock is an abbey which was begun in the Eighth Century and evolved over time to a massive castle-like structure which can be seen from miles away. It is one of the most spectacular places I have ever visited.

For part of the day, the waters recede and you can walk to the island on the sand. But the safest way is to crossover on a man-made causeway. There is a little village at the base of the *mont*. To get to the top and the church, you climb hundreds of steps. But the climb is worth it. The view from the top, out into the surrounding bay, is spectacular. Surrounded by medieval buildings, it is almost like being lost in time. The danger of drowning, due to coastal tides after getting caught in quicksand, continues to claim lives. There are warning signs all around listing the time of high tides. Each day the tides come rushing in and surround the *mont*. These buildings have withstood time and the elements because they are built on a foundation of rock.

Jesus was a carpenter. He knew something about building codes. What you should do and not do: “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man

who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock.” On the other hand, Jesus said, “Everyone who hears these words of mine, and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall.”

All of us are builders. We are in the contracting business. Every one of us is building a “house” – the structure of our lives by the choices we make. The shape of our lives, the ability to withstand the storms of life, will be based on those choices we make. And Jesus intimates there are certain “building codes” to life that we ignore at our own peril. There are values and principles that can help us to build strong lives.

There is an old preacher’s story about a businessman who called in his right-hand man one day. He told the man, “I am going to be away on an extended vacation. While I am away I want you to build a house for me at the lake. Here are the plans and here are the funds you will need.”

The employee saw an opportunity to feather his own nest. He hired a crooked contractor, employed unskilled labor whenever possible, and used cheap materials. When the house was finished, it looked great, but it was poorly constructed. Shoddy.

When the man’s employer returned, he asked to be taken to the house to see it for himself for the first time. It looked beautiful sitting beside the lake. “What do you think of it?” he asked. “I think it’s great,” the employee answered. “I’m glad you like it,” the man’s boss said. “I am retiring and I wanted to do something for you for your faithfulness all these years. This house is for you. Here are the keys.”

The truth is, that all of us must live in the house we build for ourselves. If we settle for the cheap, we will eventually pay the price. If we lie and cheat our way through life, we end up cheating only ourselves. If we take the shortcuts, we only cut ourselves short.

Take care how you build, Jesus says. You will have to live with what you build. And the most important part of building is with the foundation. I know next to nothing about construction. Luckily, when we began our latest building program here, we had lots of people who did know what they were doing to guide us. And along the way, I picked up a few things.

Before we began building, the engineers did a soil test on the building site. And it’s a good thing they did. A few feet down they struck soft soil, almost like mud. In the next meeting, they told us we were going to have to revise our plans, the foundations won’t support the building. We will have to dig another twenty or thirty concrete piers for the foundations. When they told me how much more it would cost, I asked, “Do we have to do it?” They, very kindly, very firmly, said, only if you don’t want to become another leaning Tower of Pisa and sink. And so we spent an extra \$60,000 or \$70,000 on foundations. We had to. The building would only be as strong as its foundations.

The wise man built his house upon the rock, the foolish man built his house upon the sand. When the storms came and the rains fell, the house upon the sand fell. The house built on the rock stood.

When times of testing and trial come, our standing will depend upon what the foundations of our lives are. What we have built upon. What we are talking about here are our

priorities in life – what we put first, and our principles that guide us.

Foundational questions include things like: What is worth working for in life? What do we dedicate our lives to in service and labor? What are our goals, and are they worthy to make the sacrifices acceptable? What is worth living for? What is that thing, or things, that you must have to make life meaningful.

Management consultant, Stephen Covey talks about the need to have a personal mission statement. What is it that you want your life to count for? What words would you like inscribed on your tombstone? What legacy do you wish to build?

These are sometimes hard questions. And, in fact, we sometimes fail to ask them. Instead we go with the flow. We jump from one thing to the next without ever being sure what it is we are seeking. As a result, our lives lack depth and substance. When times of crisis come, we find ourselves on shaky ground. We build our houses on a solid foundation when we have a clear sense of our values, our priorities and principles.

But it goes further. “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only one who does the will of my Father in heaven.” It’s a matter of acting on these priorities – of putting them into play, building the structure of our lives upon them. Once we know the building code, we start building according to the code.

Coach Vince Lombardi was the legendary coach of the Green Bay Packers. After a disappointing loss to a team the Packers were heavily favored to win, he gathered his players in the locker room. It was deathly quiet as the players realized they were in for a talk. Lombardi slowly turned to face his team, and in a stern voice he said, “Men, in all my days of coaching and playing, I have never witnessed such a poor exhibition of football. We did not tackle, run, throw or catch in the way you have been taught. Starting right now we are going to begin with the basics.”

With that, he pulled out a football and held it in front of them, “Men,” he said, “this is a football.” After a couple of seconds of silence, one of the players on the team raised his hand. “Coach,” he said, “could you go a little slower.”

We can know the basics. We can have the right principles and priorities. But if we don’t act on them, then we are out of the game before we start. Execution! Acting on our principles and priorities in a consistent way is the foundation of a strong life

There is always the danger in life that the seemingly urgent can crowd out the important. We are all pressed for time. We have more to do than we can do. And so we find ourselves running around, staying busy, but our business doesn’t get us anywhere. It is not an expression of our values and principles. Urgent will crowd out the important. We end up majoring in minors.

The real questions for us are: What is the rock upon which we want to build our lives? What will provide the solid foundations upon which to build a strong life capable of withstanding every storm? For us, the question isn’t, What? But Who?

“The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer, my God, my rock in whom I take refuge.... Who is a rock except our God.” (Ps. 18)

On Christ the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.