

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

In less than a week 170 tornados hit America, a few weeks earlier a cyclone left hundreds of thousands dead in Burma and millions homeless. In China tens of thousands died and many more left homeless as the earth shifted underneath them. The thought and sight of all those people standing amid the rubble and piles of wood that used to be their homes is just awful.

It makes you thankful we live here and have built our houses on a better foundation.

Well that depends on how you judge foundations. These words of Jesus end in a pile of rubble that was someone's house. **"It fell with a great crash"**. Why? What happened? Jesus said it wasn't built on a solid foundation. It was built on sand and when the sand was washed away by a storm the house went with it. Jesus wasn't talking about bricks and mortar but about lives. As he looked at peoples lives, their spiritual houses, he saw they were building on the wrong base and were headed for disaster.

I wonder what he would say as he looks at Australian suburbia and our own lives?

What are we building on and will it stand when tested by life and death and the judgment of God?

A house can look beautiful on the outside but if built on the wrong foundation it can come crashing down in a heap. So can a life, a life that to everyone on the outside seems to have it all, seems to be going strong, but would Jesus see it as a spiritual tragedy waiting to happen. In the picture he paints two men build houses. Both work hard, both houses look good. The only difference is what lies underneath them, what holds them up. It's the same for people. You see what really holds them up when they are tested in life and in the face of death.

You can't stop cyclones and tornadoes and earthquakes but you can prepare for them. A teenage boy in China who watched his school come crashing down and his classmates killed said when interviewed: "The authorities knew this was an earthquake prone area but did nothing. Tragically the same thing happens spiritually, to peoples' inner houses. They know life is fragile and precarious but they choose to ignore the warnings. Sitting on the plane to Brisbane last Sunday morning the hostess went through the usual emergency procedure blurb before takeoff - brace position, life jackets and exits. Noone showed any interest. "We've heard it all before. It won't happen, and if it does we'll all be gone anyway" people thought.

Every time God does let something happen we get a warning that life doesn't go on forever here on earth. We get a chance to rethink, and prepare for our own judgement day, the ultimate tests of what our lives are really built on. So what is being prepared according to Jesus? How do you build a cyclone proof life or a judgement proof life?

Step 1. The first thing is to admit you can't do it yourself.

There is no place for DIYers when it comes to spiritual house building. Many people today cobble together a faith from whatever they read and hear and experience. They try to pick the eyes out of all the faiths and philosophies out there and imagine that's the best foundation for life. But a hotch potch of beliefs that you pick and choose usually has a bias towards what we want to hear and believe and becomes a DIY religion and Jesus would see it as shifting sand that won't hold up your inner house.

There was nothing more pathetic and infuriating than hearing that the military junta in Burma refused all the help that was out there. Ships and planes full of aid but they refused to let them in, they minimized the problem even though their country was pile of house rubble, people were dead or dying and more bad weather was on the way. They refused help and wanted to take credit for any help they did let in even rebadging the aid trucks so it looked like they came from them! Pride stops us from recognizing we can't build a life without God. We can't do it ourselves. It won't stand.

Step one is to admit we can't DIY a faith foundation that will last.

But what God builds stays standing. It passes the test of time and the test of eternity.

"Heaven and earth will pass away but my word will never pass away" the Bible says.

Step 2. Rest your life on the rock.

Hear and believe Christ's word of forgiveness and grace.

Jesus came to be and lay the only foundation on which to build a spiritual house and a life for eternity. That's what his life, death and resurrection do for us. **"No other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ."** Anchored to Christ's death and resurrection by baptism, and nailed to His cross by faith, there is no wind, no storm, no disease or devil, not even death itself that can pry you away Christ. **"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock"**. Let the rain fall, the floods rise, the winds blow. Built on Christ the Rock, you cannot be shaken. Resting on Him by faith, living by his words, you will not fall.

Step 3 Start building your life on that rock.

Hear the other words of Jesus and with his help do them!

The foundation is there, laid by Jesus himself. The grace is solid and secure. Now he calls us to build our daily lives on it by hearing all his other words and doing them. Believing they are best for us and acting upon them. Jesus knew how easy it is to hear things, listen to them, agree with them and then go out and do not one thing about them. And so He told the story to show the necessity of doing as well as hearing. It is not enough to know; it is not enough to agree. Every word is given that we may use it, put it into action and make it a part of the structure and the detail of our lives. His words about relationships. His words about money, his words about serving others, his words about hypocrisy, judging others and words about love. They are all there. Why not go home and read the sermon on the mount chapters 5-7 of Matthew which this text brings to a conclusion. Ask God where you need some home renovations. Where your life needs changing by his words.

Don't stop at hearing Jesus' words of grace. Build on them. Hear his other words pray about them and do something with them. There is enough there for a lifetime of building and renovating and demolishing and rebuilding for all of us. At times God will have to show you how you have been building wrongly, off the foundation, in a wrong direction. His Law condemns what we build ourselves without him, and it won't stand the test of life or the judgement of God.

To base your life on your own works and holiness is to build your house on a pool of quicksand that will quickly pull you down into despair and doubt. Good works are an important aspect of the Christian life. They are the result when the word of Christ has its forgiving and renewing way with us in our lives. But good works are not the foundation, they don't make you a Christian. Christ and the gospel do that.

Step 3. When you fail go to step 1

Not if but when. We don't set out to but we do. We step back and look at the life we have been building and we sometimes feel like condemning it ourselves let alone exposing it to the building inspection of God. God is a perfectionist when it comes to spiritual house building. Jesus said "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect". No spiritual house we put together ourselves can compare to the holy God.

But all not lost. When we see we don't measure up and our lives are not true we go back to step 1. Admit you need God's help. Then go to step 2 and rest on the rock, on Christ and his forgiving grace. Then start building again with all his other words. If your foundation is Christ there is always a new start, a new day, a new beginning.

And when the test comes?

Today's Gospel ends in the disaster of a house crashing to the ground and being swept away. Jesus wants to make sure it isn't your house, your spiritual house. Our lives are in danger of collapse, of not standing the test of time and the things life throws at us, let alone the judgment of God on the last day. We are always in danger of building our lives on something that won't last, won't hold us up when trouble strikes, and won't enable us to pass the building inspection of God when he judges every human life at the end.

To build a cyclone and earthquake life, a judgment proof life, begins and ends with God, with Jesus himself. Admitting we need Christ as our rock, believing and building on his grace and hearing and doing all his words with his help. And when the cyclone hits and the flood waters rise and the winds howl around your life. Sure you'll be scared, sad, and hurt because you are human. But you will stand, stand in this life and if the worst happens you will stand before God in his judgment. That's the promise of Jesus' words. That's why we keep building on them.