

“Life Improvement --- Mountaintop Makeover --- Solid Foundation”

Isaiah 28:16-17 & Matthew 7:21-29

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock” Matthew 7:24

Isaiah 28:16-17

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, “See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation: One who trusts will not panic. ¹⁷And I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plummet; hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters will overwhelm the shelter.

Have you ever watched the television show “Extreme Makeover”? Ty Pennington and his crew come in and help a family that is living in a house that is not healthy or safe. The house that has the “Extreme Makeover” is usually falling down or inadequate for those living there. The old house has to be torn down and a new house is built in its place. During the course of one week, all of this happens. It truly is an “Extreme Makeover!” I love this show. It always brings tears to my eyes to see how each family in a desperate situation is helped. I wait for the moment at the end of the show when they all scream and shout, “ Bus Driver, move that bus!”

I can just imagine Jesus gathering those that were following him and sitting down together atop the mountainside. Jesus teaches for hours and hours. This is His most famous teaching called, “The Sermon on the Mount.” The Sermon on the Mount covers 19 different topics and is most remembered for the Beatitudes and the Lord’s Prayer.

While on the mountaintop, Jesus also taught on practical helps--like being salt and light to the world and the importance of the Law and the Prophets. He dealt with real life issues that we face today, like anger, lust, divorce, making and keeping vows.

Jesus didn’t stop there, either; he went on to teach about retaliation and loving your enemies. He spoke about giving, fasting and money and tied it all together with His third longest teaching about worry. Sounds like something we all need to hear today.

After Jesus had their attention about worry, he moved to criticizing others. Next Jesus challenged them to ask, seek and knock. And finally, Jesus taught them about the way to heaven and encouraged them to bear fruit and build their lives on a solid foundation. Maybe, just maybe, at the end of His famous teaching on these practical, life-giving, life-changing, life-improving, mountaintop makeover messages-- Jesus had them all shout, “move that bus!” Ha. Mountaintop Makeovers, though, is no joke.

All that Jesus taught on the mountaintop was how to have a better life. Jesus was doing an “Extreme Makeover” in the lives of all those that were following him. It can still happen to us today!

Life Improvements: Mountaintop Makeovers
Week 1: Solid Foundations

The Sermon on the Mountaintop is three chapters long, Matthew 5, 6, and 7. We've already had 13 weeks of sermons on it: two years ago, we spent the Lenten Season (7 weeks) studying the Beatitudes—they are at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount, Matthew 5:3-12. Last summer we had a six-week sermon series on the Lord's Prayer. Today we begin yet another sermon series found in the Sermon on the Mount. I've titled it: Life Improvements: Mountaintop Makeovers.

This morning I am starting at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus culminates the whole of this entire teaching by telling us that we need build our lives on a solid foundation. Let us listen for God's word to us today.

Matthew 7:21-29

²¹ "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven. ²² 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?' ²³ Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.' ²⁴ "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!" ²⁸ Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, ²⁹ for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes. ¹

Let us pray --- Lord, may Your Words be alive and redemptive. May Your Words shape us and mold us into the people of God you are calling us to be. May Your Words strengthen us so that we will build our lives on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ. Amen

The Gospel words we've just heard are when Jesus had finished the Sermon on the Mount and had given His new disciples a detailed "to do" list. Jesus had just laid down all of His great and vital principles, and now is applying the final word of truth. I would say this section is the "So What" part of His message. Jesus is confronting His followers with the two possibilities they will face. ***Will they be wise or will they be foolish? Will they build on the solid rock or will they build on sinking sand?***

The other day I received an email with instructions for the foolish:

The following warnings were found on consumer products:

On a Duraflame fireplace log: "Caution—Risk of Fire."

On a Batman costume: "Warning: Cape does not enable user to fly."

On a bottle of hair coloring: "Do not use as an ice cream topping."

On a cardboard sun shield for a car: "Do not drive with sun shield in place."

On a portable stroller: "Caution: Remove infant before folding for storage."²

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Warnings about being wise or foolish are found all over. The two men in Jesus' house story have the same desire--they long to build a house. They each wanted the same thing, they thought about the same thing, and they were interested in the same thing. There's really no difference between the two at the beginning of the story.

In 1174 the Italian architect Bonnano Pisano began work on what would become his most famous project: A separately standing bell tower for the Cathedral of the city of Pisa. The tower was to be eight-stories and 185-feet tall. There was just one "little" problem: builders quickly discovered that the soil was much softer than they had anticipated, and the foundation was far too shallow to adequately hold the structure! And sure enough, before long the whole structure began to tilt... and it continued to tilt... until finally the architect and the builders realized that nothing could be done to make the Leaning Tower of Pisa straight again. It took 176 years to build the Tower of Pisa--during this time many things were done to try and compensate for the "tilt." The foundation was shored up; the upper levels were built at an angle to make the top of the tower look straight. Nothing worked. The tower has stood for over 800 years, but it leans 18 feet away from where it should be. Experts say that one day it will fall--all because it wasn't built on the right foundation.

The difference between the foolish man and the wise man is that the foolish man does not take the time to listen to others. The foolish man does not investigate all the possibilities of how the building will be built. The foolish man does not look at all the rules and regulations, he just puts it up.

We are told a little more of the Sermon on the Mount story in Luke's account in chapter six. Luke tells us that the wise man dug down deep and laid his foundation on rock, not on sinking sand. The difference between the two builders is that the wise man desired to build on a solid foundation.

FOUNDATIONS: SOLID OR SAND?

That is the question for us today. ***What is the foundation we are building on?*** In the series "Extreme Makeover" they always take the dilapidated, decaying, rundown, broken, unhealthy house and tear it down--even the original foundation is demolished and rebuilt.

With the recent news of the terrible tragedies that have taken place in Haiti this past week, the thoughts of building on a solid foundation is even more apparent to us.

Let me tell you about an earthquake in Coalinga, California. When the earthquake occurred in 1983, it was discovered that the homes that were built and bolted to their foundation withstood the 8.2-on-the-Richter-Scale quake. The structure swayed back and forth, but because it was bolted to the foundation, it withstood the earthquake.

On the other hand, the houses that were built without being bolted to the foundation--the house moved six or seven inches off its foundation. And that's what caused the house to collapse. And so a great discovery was made at Coalinga: Houses should be bolted to their foundation.³

CHRIST IS THE ROCK --- THE PRECIOUS STONE

As I watched the news and read the stories of all that is taking place in Haiti, my heart goes out to them. I wish there was more I could do for those that have lost loved ones and for all those who are suffering such desperation. I read a powerful story of redemption and hope amidst the rubble. It reminded me of building on a solid foundation.

Frank Thorp, who works for *CBS news* in Haiti, felt a tremor from the devastating earthquake centered near Port-au-Prince, but initially didn't think much about it—he was 100 miles away. But when news reports began to paint a horrible picture of the destruction in the tiny nation's capital, he immediately jumped into his car for the six-hour drive to rescue his wife Jillian, a Christian aid worker. (Photo: *CBS News*)



Jillian had managed a 10-second cell phone emergency call to her husband to tell him she and another worker with Haitian Ministries, had been trapped underneath piles of concrete debris—all that remained of their 3-story home. "It's all on the ground level now," Frank said, explaining that she and the co-worker were "completely trapped" under about a foot of concrete.

Upon finally reaching the area where their home once stood, Frank described the scene and what happened. "I jumped into the hole and I was able to see her wave her hand. I couldn't see her whole body. She was just waving and I could hear her voice. And it was—I mean, you know, I couldn't hold it together, but all she was saying [was], 'just hold it together, hold it together, just get me out of here.' And, you know, we had to pull, you know, bricks and bricks and bricks and wood and doors and metal away for at least an hour before we were able to get her and her co-worker out as well."

When asked about going home to America, Jillian refused. "I can't leave, I have to stay and help."⁴

Jillian had built her life on the solid foundation of Christ--the solid rock who sustains her, even during this horrifying earthquake. How about you and me?

SO WHAT?

As we begin a new year, each of us has a decision on how to build the foundation of our lives this year. Will we be like the Italian architect Bonnano Pisano? Miscalculate and have a house that leans and will eventually collapse on us? Will we be like the foolish man who does not listen, who is impetuous and proud and chooses to build on the sand—because it's faster, cheaper or easier? Or will we be like Jillian trusting, hoping and standing in our faith even when the world collapses? Will we be like the wise man—taking time, working out the plans and listening to wise advice so that our house will be bolted fast and firm to the foundation of Christ, the precious cornerstone?

I want to tell you something that may surprise you. If you're making a trip to San Francisco and you want to find the safest place, you go to the middle of the Golden Gate Bridge. That "safe place" will withstand probably 9.0 on the Richter Scale. It's a magnificent structure. It will not fall, for two reasons. One, it's flexible—it will sway. I'll tell you another reason it stands: the Golden Gate bridge is a marvel of cantilever and suspension in construction. Every bit of concrete, and all the pavement material, and

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every bit of steel in that entire bridge--all of it relates--one piece to another. Every piece of metal in that bridge finally relates to two giant cables that finally come up to two great piers that go down into bedrock, and two anchors out on each side. That's the genius of a suspension bridge--every single piece of metal, every single piece of concrete, is preoccupied with its foundation. And it's satisfied with the foundation. You don't see big, huge cables going from the top of the bridge over the Trans-America Tower, or over to redwood trees over in Marin County; you don't have that. They decide to trust the pure living rock that those great piers go into. And that's what the parable of the wise and foolish builders is all about. This parable is about finding a foundation to build your life on.⁵

For the next few weeks, we will be exploring some profound teaching that will help to improve our lives. These teachings are found in Jesus' great teaching called the Sermon on the Mount. We've studied the Beatitudes and the Lord's Prayer; now let's finish our mountaintop makeover. In our opening Scripture Isaiah is prophesying about the Messiah—about Jesus Christ:

Isaiah 28:16-17

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "See, I am laying in Zion a foundation stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation." Thousands of years later, we have a decision to make: Will we build and bolt our lives to this sure foundation?

That, my friends, is the "so what" for us today! And by the way, to quote a really good friend of mine, "Bus driver, MOVE THAT BUS!" Will we view a leaning tower of Pisa? Or will we view the Golden Gate suspension bridge?

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¹ *The Holy Bible: New Revised Standard Version. 1989. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers.*

² *Preaching Today, Submitted by Amy Simpson, Wheaton, Illinois*

³ *Earl Palmer, "The Foolish and the Wise," Preaching Today,*

⁴ *Breaking Christian News 528 Ellsworth St. SW, Albany, Oregon 9732*

⁵ *Earl Palmer, "The Foolish and the Wise," Preaching Today, tape 54.*