

**Sermon preached by Dr. Neil Smith at Faith Evangelical Presbyterian Church,
Kingstowne, Virginia, on Sunday, July 19, 2009**

BUILT ON THE ROCK

Matthew 7:21-29

INTRODUCTION TO SCRIPTURE

We have been looking at the Lord's Prayer for the last several weeks. We are almost finished, but I want to take a brief break from it in order to focus on something which was at the heart of our Vacation Bible School this past week.

As you know, our church campus served as the setting for "Son Rock Kids Camp," which was attended by more than 240 kids. It was our largest VBS ever. And I want to say how grateful I am to Director Julie Cloutier, Pastor Bob Barnett and the whole VBS staff, many of whom went above and beyond in a bunch of ways.

"Son Rock Kids Camp." It is that title, that idea of Jesus as the Rock on which to build our lives, that I want to focus on today. Jesus Himself talked about it at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, in Matthew 7, which is where we find our Scripture reading today. Let's look together at Matthew 7, beginning with verse 21.

Like the parables of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) and the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), this parable at the end of the Sermon on the Mount is one of the most famous stories Jesus ever told.

The parable of the prodigal son is about the lavish, extravagant love of the father for both of his sons – not just for the one who went away and squandered his inheritance before coming to his senses and coming home again, but for the "good" son as well, the son who never left home and never caused trouble, but who did not understand that his father's love was unconditional. It couldn't be earned by good behavior. That, of course, is a picture of our heavenly Father's love for us. Regardless of where we have been or what we have done.

The parable of the good Samaritan is about understanding who our neighbor is, what it means to be a neighbor and how we are to love our neighbors. Being a good neighbor involves showing mercy and kindness to people in need. When the man with whom Jesus was talking got the point of the parable, Jesus said to him: "Go and do likewise" (Luke 10:37). And He says the same thing to us.

The message today is about this third famous parable, the story Jesus tells at the conclusion of the most famous sermon ever given. It is the story of two builders, two houses, and two foundations. You could say it is really two stories. One of the keys to understanding the message of Jesus here is to notice the things in each story that are similar and the things that are different. In each story two parts are the same. And in each of the stories one part is different.

Which elements are the same in the two stories? First, in each story there is a person who builds a house. The house serves as an analogy for life itself. It represents a person's life. Jesus is saying that we are all house builders. By the decisions we make, by the choices we make in terms of our career or relationships, the way we handle money, our lifestyle and our faith commitment, each of us is building a house of some kind. We are making – and living – a life. It is true of everyone. There is no escaping it. Each of us is building a house.

Second, in each story, there is a storm that comes. Each house faces a storm. Jesus describes the storm in dramatic detail: the rains fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat against the house (Matthew 7:25, 27). According to Jesus, we all have storms. I appreciate Earl Palmer's insight into this. He says this is not a parable about weather. It is not a parable about finding a safe climate for growing your faith or raising your family. It is not a parable about avoiding storms but about building houses – building your life – to endure the storms. That, says Palmer, is a big difference.

So, in each story there is a house built. And in each story there is a storm that comes – a violent storm with torrential rains, whipping winds and potentially destructive floods.

What is the variable in the parable? The variable in the stories is the foundation upon which each house is built. One house is built on a rock. The other house is built on sand. From the outside, both houses appear to be secure. Both houses appear to be safe and strong. The difference is in the foundation. And the foundation is hidden from view. You can't see the foundation. Only when a storm comes, only when each house is battered by rain and wind and flood, is the difference between the houses revealed.

What does Jesus say? He says that the wise person is the one who builds his house (his life) on a firm and solid foundation that will withstand the storms that inevitably come. The foolish person – the person without wisdom or sound judgment – gives little or no thought to foundations, or chooses the wrong kind of foundation on which to build.

So, what do you think Jesus wants us to take from this? There are three points I think Jesus wants us to see and apply to our lives today.

1. JESUS IS THE ROCK ON WHICH TO BUILD YOUR LIFE

This is the message we wanted to get through to the kids at Son Rock Kids Camp last week. It is not just that Jesus rocks – which He does! – but that Jesus *is* the Rock, the foundation, on which to build our lives.

Everybody builds their life on some kind of foundation. Everybody. Some people (a lot of people) build their lives on the foundation of their investments. Their financial security is their foundation in life. But when the economy tanks and the bottom seems to fall out of the stock market, how secure can that foundation be? It is good to be financially secure. But is that really a foundation that can withstand the storms of life? “A man's life,” Jesus said, “does not consist in the abundance of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). Or, to say it another

way, your life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot (Luke 12:15, *The Message*).

Some people base their identity and security on the foundation of their job or career. But no job lasts forever, does it? Then what? Even Walter Cronkite, the most trusted man in America, was forced by CBS to give up his anchor's chair at the age of 65.

Some people build their lives on the foundation of their health, or their athletic ability. In some cases, they will even use banned substances in an attempt to increase their performance or prolong their career. If you base your security on your health, what do you do when you are confronted with cancer or heart disease or chronic pain?

Some people even build their lives on the foundation of their physical beauty. And they will go to great lengths and great cost, it seems, both to attain it and to retain it. But you know what the Bible says. Proverbs 31:30 says:

Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;
But a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.

I think it applies to women and men alike: Beauty *is* fleeting. It doesn't last. But a right relationship with God is something that lasts.

People may build their lives on all kinds of things: Popularity, approval ratings, political power, knowledge, relationships, marriage or family. But we have no guarantee that any of these will last. We know God designed marriage to last for life. But it doesn't always turn out that way. It is not a sufficient foundation for your life. For marriage to last, for a marriage to thrive and be the source of fidelity and intimacy and loving service God designed it to be, it must be built on a sure foundation – the kind of foundation that can endure the challenges and storms of life.

The only sure foundation in life is found in the person and words and work of Jesus Christ. He is the solid rock on which to build your life. If you don't put your trust in Jesus as the foundation for your life, what is it going to be? On what foundation are you building your life?

Some of you, I'm sure, have seen – or crossed – the Golden Gate Bridge out in San Francisco. Did you know that the San Andreas Fault actually goes under the south pier of the bridge? The Golden Gate Bridge has two piers, it has this mile-long span in between, and in the middle, the bridge sways. I'm not sure how much it sways, but they have only closed the bridge three times in its history because of windstorms. They closed it not because the bridge itself was in danger but because vehicles were tipping over on the bridge because of the wind – which is generally not a good thing!

Here is something that may surprise you. If you go to San Francisco and you want to find the safest place to be in the event of an earthquake, go to the middle of the Golden Gate Bridge. It will withstand probably 9.0 on the Richter Scale. It won't fall, for two reasons. First,

because it is flexible. It has that sway. Second, because every part of the bridge is interrelated, and every piece of metal in the bridge finally relates to two giant cables which come up to the two great piers which go down into bedrock, with two anchors out on each side. The genius of a suspension bridge like the Golden Gate Bridge is that every single piece of metal, every single piece of concrete, is preoccupied with its foundation. And it is satisfied with the foundation. The builders of the bridge decided to trust the bedrock on which those piers at either end are built.

You can trust the Lord Jesus Christ to be the bedrock foundation on which your life is built. Your foundation matters. And Jesus says that wise men and women build on the foundation of faith in Him and obedience to His Word. He will give you a foundation that will enable you to withstand the trials and troubles and storms that come.

I hope that each of you is intentionally building your life on the rock-solid foundation of faith in Christ. If you have never put your trust in Him, if you have been building your life on some other foundation, I want you to know it is not too late to start building on the right foundation. It is not too late to start building your life on the truth of God's Word and the hope that is found in the Lord Jesus. I encourage you to take that step today. I or one of our elders would be happy to talk with you after the service.

Jesus is the Rock on which to build your life.

2. STORMS COME INTO EVERY LIFE

This is the second point (very briefly). Nobody's life is storm-free. Storms of one kind or another will and do come into every life. Sometimes they come when we least expect it, when life is going just the way we want it. And sometimes it seems that the storms come in waves.

If you think you can get through life storm-free, think again. If you think you *ought* to get through life without having to face storms of some kind, think again. Storms of testing and trouble come into every life. Remember what Jesus said to His disciples: "In this world you will have trouble" (John 16:33). You *will* have trouble. Me, too. As true as it is, we can be thankful that Jesus didn't stop there. Trouble in life happens to us all, but then Jesus said: "But take heart! (Don't lose your cool... or your faith.) I have overcome the world" (16:33).

The storm in your life may not have the force of a hurricane or a tornado or an earthquake, figuratively speaking. It may not be as severe as the storm(s) someone else has to endure. But storms will come. Storms do come. It may have to do with your health or your finances, your marriage or family or some other relationship, your job or something else.

If it hasn't happened already, there is going to be some storm in your life. And how you deal with it will depend on the foundation on which you are building the house of your life. To withstand those storms, make sure your life is built on the Rock. As the hymn says, "All other ground is sinking sand."

3. FAITH IN JESUS REQUIRES ACTION

Hearing the message of Jesus is not sufficient. Knowing God's Word in your head is not enough. You can be exposed to the message of the Savior day after day, week after week, year after year, but if you do not put it into action, what good is it? You and I have to make the decision daily to build our lives on the foundation of Jesus' love. We have to decide each day to believe and obey the truth of God's Word. We have to make the decision in the midst of the storms that come to live by faith in Jesus.

Hearing without doing is useless. Just like faith without works (James 2:17). The same thing is true of our "religious" words. Jesus is looking for more than just the right words from our mouths. If you think that because you made a profession of faith, or because you are an official member of the church, your place in heaven is secured, don't be so sure! I want you to have the assurance of eternal life, but not a false assurance. Jesus said: "Not everyone who calls me 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

Let's get this straight: A verbal profession of faith in Christ is indispensable. Paul says in Romans 10: "If you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (10:9). But it is not enough merely to call Jesus "Lord." As John Stott says, talk without truth, a profession of faith without reality, will not save anyone on the day of judgment. If you call Jesus "Lord" but do not submit to His Lordship, of what value are your words?

Does Jesus want us to call Him "Lord"? You bet He does. But unless our words are accompanied by action – by doing His will in our daily life – in the little things and in the big things, in the easy things and in the hard things, we risk being rejected by Him. And that is not a pleasant thought.

CONCLUSION

There are only two kinds of builders. Which kind are you?

There may be lots of different varieties, but there are only two kinds of houses. Which kind of house are you building?

There are only two kinds of foundations. On what foundation are you building your life? Jesus – the Son – is the Rock on which to build your life. A life built on the foundation of faith in Him can and will survive every storm. Yes, it can! Yes, *He* can!

Let Him do it in your life, to the glory of His name. Amen.