



Central Peninsula Church

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Matthew 7:24-27
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Built to Last

It was great just to watch you all come in this morning and check it out. Some of you even look a little lost. You're not sure where to sit. You had your territory staked out in the old building and now you're not sure where to go. It's a little awkward for me, too. I'm further away from you. For some in the back I can't see your eyes, which means I don't know when you fall asleep. But I can still see your head drop!

They said we'd never do it. We'd never raise the money, or find the parking, or get the city to approve it. And you know, they were right. We didn't do it. God did it. At least we HOPE he did it because the Bible says, **"Unless the Lord builds the house those who build it labor in vain"** (Psalm 127:1). This is a day to celebrate God's grace to us as a church. I'm grateful God has given us a place that we can fit and where more people can be here. I'm grateful God gave us people willing to believe the impossible and willing to sacrifice their time, talents and treasure to make this happen. I am grateful that I don't have to preach three services any more. I'm even grateful that we had to wait longer than we thought.

On September 11 we saw a horrific sight - the twin towers of the World Trade Center collapse into dust and rubble. We needed to pause for that before we could celebrate this. It's so ironic that we were gearing up for all you visitors the first few weeks in this new building, but guess what? You already came three weeks ago. We had our agenda; God had a better idea. God has spent the last few weeks preparing our hearts for a new work. His timing is perfect!

Not only that, on September 11 God brought us a vivid illustration of what I've been planning to talk about today. We've been studying Jesus' famous Sermon on the Mount. For months I've planned to save his last words in that sermon for this day. Remember as Jesus concluded that sermon he told a story about two houses built by two men. They could have been two churches or they could have been two towers. Jesus said a violent storm hit those two structures and one collapsed and Jesus said, "great was its fall." We saw a vivid picture of that on September 11 as both towers collapsed. But in Jesus' story one structure survived and remained standing. The question Jesus poses to us in this story is, why? Why does one structure survive the violent storms of life while the other collapses? Of course, Jesus wasn't just talking about architecture, he was talking about lives; about the way people live. What kind of people will be able to endure

the storms of life? We could ask the same question about churches because churches are made up of people. What kind of churches will remain standing through the storms of the twenty-first century?

As you read this story you can see that these two men and their homes were similar in many ways.

"Therefore every one who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. And every one who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall" (Matt. 7:24-27).

I. The two men and their homes were similar

Both of these men were building, and both of these men had the same desire to build a home to live in. They weren't putting up toolsheds. They wanted to settle down, raise a family, and even pass on that home to their children. They were probably building very similar homes. Jesus didn't say anything about differences in design. For all we know they used identical blueprints. If they were building today they would each have the same double pane windows, single chimney, two car garage, three bedrooms and two baths. To those strolling by, the two houses looked the same.

Not only that, but both of these men had their work tested by a storm. They must have been in close proximity to one another since they both were subjected to the same elements. Neither was able to escape or ignore the pounding rain, the rising flood level, and the swift wind as it slammed against their house.

Jesus says each of us are like one of these men. Each of us are building our lives. Whether we know it or not, we're constructing something. We have families and jobs and friendships and hobbies and bank accounts. Like these men each of us desire to create something secure and lasting. We don't want our lives to collapse. We want security and happiness and friendship and even love. All of us are pretty much the same in these ways. And like the men in the story each of us will be tested by storms.

Whether you are a wise or foolish builder, storms will come your way. Christians and atheists are alike in this. Christians don't get a free pass on this one. God doesn't pamper his people.

Sometimes a storm breaks with a great fury of temptation. A woman in her forties is single and alone. She tries to stay close to the Lord but she also longs for the companionship and affection of a man. One day she meets a guy. She wasn't looking for it, he just walked into her life like an unexpected guest. But he paid attention to her. He listened to her. He treated her with respect. He made her feel beautiful for the first time in years. He wasn't Richard Gere, but she wasn't Julia Roberts either. She finds herself awake at night thinking about him. The fact that he doesn't know Christ seems less and less important. That's the storm of temptation.

Sometimes a storm breaks into our lives as a crushing personal loss. In the last few months in the Silicon Valley we've seen the economy take a plunge. Carefully constructed stock portfolios have collapsed. People have lost their jobs and are on their third or fourth month of unemployment. The savings account has dwindled. Your self-esteem has gone to pot. It's like a tornado has rolled through the nice life you built for yourself. That's the storm of personal loss.

Sometimes the storm comes in the form of an illness. It might be chronic pain that keeps you from doing the things you love to do. It might be something more that causes the flood waters of death to slowly rise above your head. I just heard this week of a pastor friend of mine who discovered he has inoperable lymphoma. He has a wife and three small kids and a growing church, but he now faces the prospect of losing it all. That's a storm. That's a storm that sooner or later we all must face.

For all of us, there is one storm that we cannot avoid. It is the storm of judgment. Throughout the closing chapter of this sermon Jesus emphasized that. When he spoke of the two gates he said one of those gates leads to destruction. When he spoke of two trees he said the tree that doesn't bear fruit will be cut down and thrown into the fire. When he spoke of those who make a false profession of faith he said the day will come when Christ will say to them, "Depart from me. I never knew you." All these pictures point to the final storm of God's judgment. All of us will stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account of our lives.

Churches are like people. Thirty-five years ago a few families from Peninsula Bible Church in Palo Alto decided to build a church closer to home in the San Mateo area. They wanted to build something

that would provide spiritual shelter and growth for folks in this area. They began to meet in places like CSM, Foster City Recreation Center and Bowditch Middle School. They bought a parcel of land here in Foster City they hoped to some day build on. That dream began to be a reality 15 years ago as first offices and then the old auditorium and classrooms were built. Today we've taken another major step forward. But that's not the whole story. In the last thirty-five years there have been storms. We've seen storms of financial difficulty. We've lost key leaders that we thought we could never survive without. We've been tempted to follow the shifting winds of what's popular both on the cultural scene and the church scene. These are storms.

It's in these ways that people and churches are alike. We set out to build something that will last and our work is tested by storms. But notice something else in this story. The two men and their houses are also different.

II. The two men and their homes were different

One man built his home on the rock, while the other built his home on sand. We read that and it sounds absurd. Why would someone build a home on the sand? I was walking around our property this week and it hit me that maybe we've done exactly that. Foster City doesn't have a lot of dirt, but it has a lot of sand. I talked to our contractor and he confirmed my worst fears: we have built this building on three feet of sand! Fortunately, they knew what they were doing. Beneath the sand is about 180 feet of bay mud. On top of it all they laid 650 yards of concrete. So we're in good shape. But in Jesus' day a man who built on sand was foolish. Why would he do it?

One reason is that he is in a hurry. He doesn't want to take the time and make the effort to dig deeply and find the rock beneath the surface. Foolish people are always in a hurry. They're always looking for short cuts. They want to get rich quick. They want to get in shape without breaking a sweat. They want five easy steps to Christian maturity. Like a friend of mine says, "They want the ice cream but they don't want to turn the crank." They don't have the patience to build a solid foundation.

But there is another reason he would be so foolish to build on the sand. He doesn't really think through future possibilities and eventualities. He doesn't expect the weather to change. He probably builds in the summertime. He sees this nice stream meandering by and he never stops to think through the fact that in the winter the rains might cause that stream to swell and flood. He thinks things will always be the way they are. But things do change. Storms do come. And it's the storm that reveals the real difference between the two houses. One home endured the storm because it was founded on the rock, while the other fell, and "great was its fall."

Each of us are like one of these men. We are either like the foolish man or the wise man. Jesus says there really are only two ways to go. There is the narrow gate and the

wide gate. You are either building on the sand or on the rock. There are only two ways to live. We only have two options open to us.

We can build our lives on the sand. Maybe we're in a hurry. We don't want to take the time to do the hard work of digging deep and dealing with things beneath the surface. We want forgiveness without repentance, growth without discipleship, resurrection without the cross. Or maybe we look into the future and we really don't see any storms coming. We think we're in control. This is one of the benefits of what happened in the storm of Sept. 11. Satan overplayed his hand and now people in America are beginning to see that the weather CAN change, rather quickly! We're NOT in control. We ARE vulnerable. We DO need help. But some will forget this warning. They will think a day of remembrance can replace a day of repentance. All we have to do now is tighten up security, hunt down the terrorists, and we're safe. After all, God IS on our side. These people will continue to build on sand.

We can continue to build our lives on how much we can acquire; on our possessions, on our six-figure paycheck, on the stock market's ability to bounce back, or on our home equity that will rise again. This is all sand. We can continue to build our lives on the sands of our position - the degrees and the jobs and offices we hold. We can continue to see our worth as a person rooted in the labels we wear - doctor, lawyer, teacher, pastor. We can continue to build our lives on our passions, the satisfaction of our desires. It might be the desire for family, fun, education, travel, sex, sports or even religion. We can build our lives on good things, but they're sand.

Churches can build on sand, too. Some churches build on the sand of one very charismatic leader and when he leaves or when he falls the church collapses. Churches can build on tradition. Tradition is not a bad thing, but it can become a bad thing when we're bound by it and refuse to rethink our traditions in light of God's Word. Paul wrote to the Thessalonians, "**Examine everything carefully; hold fast to that which is good...**" (1 Thess. 5:21). He doesn't say "Hold fast to that which is OLD." Just because it's old doesn't mean it's good. Get rid of it if it doesn't pass the examination! But he doesn't say we should hold fast to that which is NEW either. Some churches build on the sand of what is new, original and relevant. And so the focus becomes slick programs, alternative forms of worship, and even new buildings. It's all sand and when the storms come these churches crumble.

But there is another option open to us. We can build our lives on the rock of Jesus Christ and his word. Jesus says it's those who hear his words and put them into practice who build on the rock. It takes more time to do that. It's much harder work. Think of just the Sermon on the Mount. Putting his word into practice starts with the Beatitudes and they start with recognizing we are spiritually bankrupt: "**Blessed are the poor in spirit...**" And then after

the Beatitudes he goes on and tells us we have to go beyond an external observance of the law. It's not enough just to not murder someone, we can't even hold a grudge. It's not enough to keep our hands off another woman, we have to keep our eyes and minds off them, too. It's not enough to love our neighbor, we have to love our enemies. Then there's all this business about not storing up treasures on earth; we aren't even allowed to worry about losing a job and feeding our family. Hearing and doing the words of Jesus is hard work. It takes time. You have to dig deep. You have say no to yourself. You have to walk by faith and not by sight. You have to fall down a hundred times and keep getting up. But we do that because we know the weather will change. We know a storm is coming when we'll give an account of our lives before God and only those built on the rock will stand.

III. A church built on the foundation of Christ and his word

Churches can choose to build on the rock, too. Jesus asked his disciples who they believed him to be. Peter raised his hand and said, "You are the Christ, the Son of God." Jesus said, "Right you are, Peter. And on this rock (this foundation) I will build my church." That rock is Jesus Christ. Paul founded the church at Corinth. Later, others came to Corinth to build on the foundation he laid. Paul warned the Corinthians, "**I laid a foundation and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds, for no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ**" (1 Cor. 3:10-11). In order to endure the storm, the church must be built on the solid rock of Jesus Christ and his word.

But how do we do that? What does that mean for us, today, as we start a new chapter in our life as a church? We have to remember what our purpose is. Our purpose is to make disciples of Jesus Christ who worship God's person, obey God's word, love God's people, and share God's grace. That's why we're here. That's why we built this thing. Not so we can come here once a week and nod our heads to God and feel all warm and fuzzy inside. It's about making and becoming disciples of Jesus. That's what it means to hear and do the words of Jesus.

First, it means we're a people committed to worshiping God's person. That seems so basic, but we can forget that like a football team can forget to block and tackle. Worship is a fundamental. Jesus said, "**True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be his worshipers**" (John 4:23-24). God seeks out people who will worship him in spirit and in truth; not just going through the motions, but really loving him and adoring him and serving him from the heart. Worship is more

than singing songs. William Temple said, "Worship is to quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the truth of God, to open up the heart to the love of God, and to devote the will to the purpose of God." One thing that's clear: worship is God-centered, not me-centered. That's why I get a little tired of all this talk about "worship styles." You know, "Well, I like traditional worship." Or, "I like contemporary worship." Do you know what that's all about? It's all about ME. Since when did worship have anything to do with MY taste? We treat worship like going to Starbucks: "I'd like a non-fat, no whip, decaf mocha, with an extra shot." We come to worship and say, "I'd like a non-traditional, no hands in the air, decaf sermon, with a shot of drama." What's that all about? We should come to worship and surrender all that we are to all that he is.

Second, it means we're a people committed to obeying God's word. Do you know that this is a dangerous place to be? You see, we're a church where you'll hear the word of God taught. We're committed to that. You'll never come to church here and not hear God's word. But that's dangerous. Jesus says it's not enough to hear the word, we have to act on it. James says if we hear God's word and don't do it we're like a person who looks in the mirror in the morning but doesn't do anything about it. (James 1:22-24). That's a sad state of affairs! Once in a while I get up and look at myself in the mirror and go out to say hello to the family. I do that when I want to scare my kids! So most of the time when I look at myself in the mirror in the morning I know I have some work to do. Don't look at me like that - you do too! I'll bet not one of you came this morning without looking in the mirror and doing some serious work! It's not enough just to brush my teeth, I have to work on my hair, get the junk out of my eyes, and shave. It's not enough just to obey the parts of the Bible that are easy; that's selective obedience; we have to obey it all. We don't get to pick and choose. We can't say, "I'll love my neighbor, but that business about my enemy is going too far."

Third, it means we're committed to loving God's people. Jesus said "love one another," not "love your new auditorium." You see, people last forever; buildings are temporary. And so we work at being a family who takes care of one another. We weep with those who weep, rejoice with those who rejoice, pray for one another, and serve one another with our spiritual gifts. Years ago, Lynn and I were in France visiting the famous Cathedral of Chartres. We were newlyweds and as we walked through the Cathedral I

had my arm around her. Both of us were startled when a man walked up behind us and asked us to either refrain from touching one another or leave the building. It wasn't a hard choice! We want this to be a church where people can put their arms around each other and care for one another, both outside these walls and inside these walls. We are committed to loving God's people.

Finally, it means we're committed to sharing God's grace. That's his plan. Jesus said he didn't come into the world to judge but to rescue the world. He sends us out to complete his mission. We've seen a great picture the last few weeks of rescue workers running up stairs to bring people down to safety, many of them dying in the process. We've seen them digging through the rubble just in case there was someone still breathing. Do you know what? Those pictures put me to shame. We are called to sacrifice ourselves and run up the stairs and sort through the rubble to rescue people with the gospel of Jesus Christ. People are dying without him. Why aren't we running up the stairs to get them? Why aren't we digging through the rubble? We can't just expect them to come and adore our building! We have to go dig around and find them. That's what it means to be committed to sharing God's grace.

That's what it means to be a church built on the rock. That's who we are. I love the scene from the movie *The Lion King* where Simba is just reaching adulthood and he has a vision of his dead father. Simba is wavering in his courage. He doesn't to be the Lion King. But old Mufasa comes to him and says, "Simba, you have to remember where you've come from. You have to remember who you are."

In the opening scenes of the book of Revelation, John has a similar vision of Jesus. It's a glorious yet frightening vision. Jesus is clothed in a robe that reaches to the ground with a golden sash across his chest. His head and his hair are white like wool and his eyes a flame of fire. His feet are like burnished bronze and his voice is like the sound of many waters. John says looking at his face is like staring at the sun at full strength. Out of his mouth comes a sharp two-edged sword. He calls himself the first and the last, the Living One who has the keys of death and Hades. How different he is than the mushy god of our society, the god that welcomes everybody; the god who comes in bubble wrap and has no sharp edges to bump into; the god with no particular theology; a soft Cream of Wheat divinity. How different this Jesus is! John says this Jesus walks among the seven lampstands which are the seven churches. He writes a letter to each one of them. In essence he says to them, "You have to remember where you came from; you have to remember who you are."

That's what Jesus says to us this morning - you are a house built on the foundation of Jesus Christ and his word. May we not just hear his words, but may we act upon them. Only then will we survive the coming storms.

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