

# When the Rain Falls

Psalm 31:1-5, 19-24, Matthew 7:13-29

November 28, 1999

It must have been the summer before I turned ten years old. My Dad had gotten a promotion. We moved from Clarksville, Tennessee, to Gallatin, Tennessee. This involved, among other things, the purchase of a brand new house. I was so excited to have a large room, downstairs, away from my three younger sisters. All of my stuff was piled in there, and after an exhausting day I slept soundly through the night. When the morning came, I sat in bed and threw my feet over the side, eager to greet the new day, when much to my surprise the first sound I heard was “splash, splash” as my feet hit the floor. It had rained all night, and my new room, in our new house, had two inches of water standing in it. I was horrified. No, the house did not wash away, and eventually the problem was corrected. But I learned that when the rain falls, it brings a time of testing. Some things pass the test. And some things, even though they look perfectly good in the full light of day, do not pass the test.

The rain falls in all of our lives. And when the rain falls, it brings a time of testing, sometimes severe, life-challenging testing, the kind of testing that sweeps away everything that is false, everything that is shaky, everything that is impure, everything that is faithless, loveless, and disobedient, the kind of testing that exposes to all the world who we are and what we are about. Are we ready for that kind of testing? It will come, as surely as the night follows the day. Are we ready for that kind of trial? We do not have a choice about undergoing it, only about what we want to do to get ready for it, between now and then, whenever then is going to be. Where do you stand? Upon what do you build your life? What is the basis of your relationships with other people? In what do you believe? What basis do you have for good hope for the future?

What Jesus has to say about the single difference between the wise man and the foolish man is both fascinating and instructive. It is not the case that the foolish man failed to build a house. He meant to provide for himself and his family. It is not the case that the foolish man built a shoddy or bad looking house. To all outward appearances it was fine. The only problem was that he built it upon the sand and not upon the rock. And when the rain fell and the time of testing came, the fatal flaw was swiftly and horribly exposed.

Note, moreover, the single difference between the two groups of people to whom Jesus compares the wise man and the foolish man. It is not the case that the foolish man has never heard the gospel, does not know Jesus Christ, or has no

knowledge of God. That is not the case at all. Quite the opposite. The foolish man has heard the gospel but has chosen not to believe, has met Jesus Christ but has turned his back, and knows of God but has sought another foundation for his life. As Jesus puts it, every one who hears and *does* his words is like the wise man, and every one who hears and does *not do* his words is like the foolish man. The difference is not in the hearing but in the doing, and suddenly we realize that this whole thing is aimed right at us.

Over the last few weeks, we have read through and heard the entire Sermon on the Mount here, together, chapter by chapter, verse by verse, every sentence and every word. And even if you have not been here every Sunday, even if you are today only, you cannot escape this conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount: “Every one then who hears *these* words of mine and does them will be like a wise man....And every one who hears *these* words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man.” If we had never heard, we might have some kind of excuse. But that is no longer the case for any of us in the sanctuary or listening to the radio. He has us now. We have heard these words. And now it is incumbent upon us to believe and to obey, to do what he says. Far be it from us to want to be swept away in the storm when the rain falls.

Consider the gift that Jesus has given us in these very words of his. In his words, he has given us himself. In his teachings, he has offered us himself as the one, sure, rock foundation upon which to build our lives. What wonderful grace this is, that God has given us the solid rock upon which to build. We have not been abandoned in this world. We have not been set free here only to drift from hopelessness to despair. We have not been set here to have to find out by trial and error what the proper foundation and organizing principle of life is. God has given us a sure and firm basis for everything that we are, for everything that we do, for all human hope, dreams, endeavor, and aspiration. God has given us a rock on which to build, a good and true and genuine way to be human.

The rock foundation which God gives here us is Jesus Christ. He is not simply one good foundation among many good choices. He is actually the one and only true foundation upon which human life is meant to be built and lived at all. Any other apparent basis for human life leads finally to failure, loss, decline, and despair. But in Jesus Christ we are given the solid rock on which to stand and upon which to build.

To be more specific, we are given the foundation for life in these words and teachings of Jesus Christ. It is not only the case that Jesus reveals God to us. It is also the case that in the very words and teachings of Jesus, God is present with us. At the same time, Jesus reveals true humanity to us. All our other perceptions of humanity are marred and distorted. Here in Jesus we are given a vision of human life

as it is meant to be: centered upon God and not on self, loving and caring for others. Jesus show us what it looks like, and makes it possible for us, to live life as it is meant to be lived, to build it up upon him as the sure and true foundation.

Every week we gather in this place to hear the word of God read from the scriptures and preached from the pulpit. This is the center, the very heart, of the church's life. Then every week we go out from this place, not to forget the word of God, not to neglect the word of God, not to ignore the word of God, not to disobey the word of God, but, as Jesus says, to do it, to obey it, not only here in worship but out there in the world, every day, in every aspect of human life. What are these radical commandments which Jesus places before us? "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven." "Be reconciled to your brother." "If any one strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." "Give to everyone who begs from you." "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect." "When you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." "Forgive men their trespasses." "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." "Do not be anxious about your life." "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness." "Judge not." "Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them." "Enter by the narrow gate." "Beware of false prophets." These are hard! But these are what we are called not only to hear but also and especially to do.

Each of us is building our own house, our own life. Every day we are adding to it. The question is whether we are building wisely or foolishly, upon the rock or upon the sand, whether we live faithfully or faithlessly, whether we attempt to be obedient or disobedient. Nobody does it perfectly; if we could do that, we would not need Jesus to come help us and to forgive our sin. But we need to check to make sure that we are firmly attached to the rock and not out over the shifting sands.

Consider the options. Some build their lives on the principle of self-gratification: if it feels good, do it. Whatever is pleasing to the self, do it. Don't worry about other people, or their feelings or needs. Let them worry about themselves. This is one option. It may sound appealing at first, but in the long run it's not very attractive. Self-centeredness and self-attention does not enhance the self but is a disease. Self-gratification finally destroys the self instead of building up the self.

Another closely related principle upon which some people act has to do with finding the easiest way out: Whatever is easiest, do it. Don't even think about what would be the best thing to do. Don't bother to ask what would be good, or acceptable, or adequate. Just find out what's easiest. Take the path of least resistance. Again, this may sound appealing at first. But there are people and situations in life which call for and require more than the easy way out; in fact, they

demand all our best: our best wisdom, our best courage, our best love, our best commitment, our best intelligence, all the best effort we have to offer. These kinds of responses don't happen overnight. They take a lot of practice. A lifetime of seeking the easy way out would never prepare anyone for responding well to these sorts of demands.

The list could go on and on. The question is, Where do you stand? Upon what do you build your life? What is the basis of your relationships with other people? In what do you believe? What basis do you have for good hope for the future?

The difference between the two houses of which Jesus told was revealed only when the rains fell and brought a time of testing by floods and winds. So it is in our lives. We may build a passing semblance of a Christian life and not realize until the floods come that we have missed the mark and are sliding away on the sand. What are the tests that challenge our lives? What are the storms that blow deep into our souls? What are the floods that wash away all our pretending and expose where we stand, or whether we stand at all? Perhaps the death of a parent, or a spouse, or a child, has shaken you down to the foundation. Perhaps injury, or disease, or the relentless advance of clock and calendar have brought you face to face with your own mortality, and it has rattled your soul. We like to dance around and make only tentative plans for our demise, telling others, "*If* anything should happen to me, then do thus and so." But "*if*" is not the right word. There is no "*if*" about it. The only question is when. The storms will come. The times of testing may be different for each one of us. But the tests will tell what is true and what is not, what is firm and what is shaky, what is real and what is insubstantial, what is built on the rock foundation of hearing and acting upon the teachings of Jesus and what is built on the shifting sands of hearing and not acting on the teachings of Jesus. We are building our houses and our lives, one way or the other. The test may be different for each one of us, but the rain is coming. Are we ready?

The words and teachings of Jesus Christ speak to us not only individually but also to the church as a whole. Do we, as a church, not only hear but also act upon the teachings of Jesus Christ? Are we building on the rock or on some unsubstantial pretender of a foundation? A true church cannot be built around the minister. A true church cannot be built around the attractiveness of a congregation. A true church is built only on the hearing and doing of the word of God. That is what we want to do here at Grace Covenant. The rain falls not only upon individuals but also upon the church. The church around the world stands under the frequent if not constant attack of evil, lies, false accusations, false teachers. All that is false and unworthy will surely be swept away in the flood and the storm. Pray that at the end of the day we shall be found standing on the rock.

So, let us all answer these questions for ourselves and for us as a church:  
Where do we stand? Upon what do we build your lives? What is the basis of our  
relationships with other people? In what do we believe? What basis do we have for  
good hope for the future? When the rain falls, will we be found to have heard and  
done the words of Jesus Christ?

*To God be the glory, forever and ever! Amen.*

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