

**Scriptures and Doctrine :: THE TWO HOUSES****THE TWO HOUSES - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/7/14 20:55**

THE TWO HOUSES

Alexander Maclaren

‘Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. . . . 25. And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand.’—MATT. vii. 24, 25.

Our Lord closes the so-called Sermon on the Mount, which is really the King’s proclamation of the law of His Kingdom, with three pairs of contrasts, all meant to sway us to obedience. The first is that of the two ways: one broad, and leading down to abysses of destruction; the other narrow, and leading up to shining heights of life. The second is that of the two trees, one good and one bad, each bearing fruit according to its nature; by which our Lord would teach us that conduct is the outcome and revelation of character, and the test of being a follower of His. The third is that of our text, the two houses on the two foundations, and their fate before the one storm; by which our Lord would teach us that the only foundation on which can be built a life that will stand the blast of final judgment is His sayings and Himself.

Now, there are many very important and profound links of connection and relation between these three contrasted pictures, but I only point to one thing here, and that is that in all of them Jesus Christ most decisively divides all His hearers—
—for it is about them that He is speaking—into two classes: either on the broad road or on the narrow, not a foot in each; either the good tree or the bad; either the house on the sand or the house on the rock. Such a sharp division is said nowadays to be narrow, and to be contradicted by the facts of life, in which the great mass of men are neither very white nor very black, but a kind of neutral grey. Yes, they are—on the surface. But if you go down to the bottom, and grasp the life in its inmost principles and essential nature, I fancy that Jesus Christ’s narrowness is true to fact. At all events, there it is.

Now, following out the imagery of our text, I wish to bring before you the two foundations, the two houses, the one storm, the two endings.

I. The two foundations: Rock, Sand.

Now, to build on the Rock, Jesus Christ Himself explains to us as being the same thing as to hear and do His sayings. The one representation is plain fact, the other is metaphor which points precisely in the same direction. It is scarcely a digression if I pause for a moment, and point you to the singular and unique attitude which this Carpenter’s Son of Nazareth takes up here, fronting the whole race with that ‘whosoever,’ and alleging that His sayings are an infallible law for conduct, and that He has the right absolutely to command every man, woman, and child of the sons and daughters of Adam. And the strange thing is that the best men have admitted His claim, have recognised that He had the right, and have seen that His precepts are the very ideal of human conduct, and, if they have ventured to criticise at all, their criticism has only been that the precepts are too good to be obeyed, and contemplate an ideal that is unreachable in human society. Be that as it may, there stands the fact that this Man, in this Sermon on the Mount, which so many people say has no doctrinal teaching in it, assumes an attitude which nothing can warrant and nothing explain except the full-toned belief that in Him we have God manifest in the flesh.

But what I desire to point to now is the significance of this demand that He makes, that we shall take His sayings as the foundation of our lives. The metaphor is a very plain one, by which the principles that underlie or dominate and mould our conduct are regarded as the foundation upon which we build the structure of our lives. But the Sermon on the Mount is not at all of these ‘sayings of Mine.’ It is fashionable in certain quarters to-day to isolate these precepts, and to regard them as being the part of Christian Revelation by which men who set little store by theological subtleties, and reject the mysteries of the Incarnation and the Atonement, may still abide. But I would have you notice that it is absurd to isolate this Sermon on the Mount, or to deal with it as if it were the very centre of the Christian Revelation. It is nothing of the sort. Beautiful as it is, wonderful as it is as a high ideal of human conduct, it is a law still, though it is a perfect law; and it has all the impotences and all the deficiencies that attach to a law, if you take it and rend it out of its place, and insist upon dealing

ng with it as if it stood alone. There is not a word in it that tells you how to keep its precepts. There is no power in it, or ra-ying from it, to make a man obey any one of its commandments. It comes radiant and beautiful, but imperative, and just because no man keeps it to the full, its very beauty becomes menacing, and it stands there over against us, showing us what we ought to be, and, by consequence, what we are not. And is that all that Jesus Christ came into the world to do? God forbid! If He had only spoken this Sermon on the Mount—which some of you take for the Alpha and the Omega of Christianity as far as you are concerned—He would not have been different in essence from other teachers, though high above them in degree—who speak to us of the shining heights of duty that we are to scale, but leave us grovelling in the mire.

The Sermon on the Mount, with its stringent requirements, absolutely demands to be completed by other thoughts and other sayings of Mine. And so I remind you, not only that there are other sayings of Mine to be kept than it, but also that there is no keeping of it without keeping other sayings first. For the highest of Christ's commandments is Believe also in Me, and you have to take Him as your Redeemer and Saviour from death before you will ever thoroughly accept Him as your Guide and Pattern for life. We must first draw near to Him in humble penitence and lowly faith, and then there comes into our hearts a power which makes it possible and delightful to keep even the loftiest, and in other aspects the hardest, of those sayings of Mine. So, brethren, the obedience of which this text speaks is second, and the building of ourselves on Jesus Christ Himself, by faith in Him, is first. Only when we build on Him as our Saviour shall we build our lives upon Him in obedience to His commands.

Behold! I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried corner-stone, a sure foundation, and he that believeth shall not make haste; and long after the prophet said that, the Apostle catches up the same thought when he says, Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid. Let every man take heed how he buildeth thereon. Jesus Christ is the foundation of our lives, if we have any true life at all. He ought to be the foundation of all our thinking. His word should be the absolute truth, His life the final all-satisfying, perfect revelation of God, to our hearts. In Him are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The facts of His Incarnation, earthly life, Death, Resurrection, Ascension, and present Sovereignty—these facts, with the truths that are deduced from them, and the great glimpses which they afford into the heart of God and the depths of things, are the foundations of all true thinking on moral and social and religious questions, and on not a few other questions besides. Christ in His Revelation gives us the ultimate truth on which we have to build.

He is also the foundation of all our hope, the foundation of all our security, the foundation of all our effort and aspiration. His Cross goes before the nations and leads them, His Cross stands by the individual, and anodynes the sense of guilt, and breaks the bondage and captivity of sin, and stirs to all lofty emotions and holy living, and moves ever in the van like the pillar of cloud and fire, the Pattern of our lives and the Guide of our pilgrimage. It is Christ Himself who is the foundation, and His death and sacrifice which are the sure basis of our hope, safety, and blessedness; and it is only because He Himself is the Foundation, and what He has done for us is the basis of hope and blessedness, that He has the right to come to us and say, Take My commandments as the foundation on which you build your lives.

The Rock of Ages cleft for us, is the Rock on which we build if we are Christians; the other man built his house upon the sand. That is to say, shifting inclinations, short-lived appetites, transitory aims, varying judgments of men, the fashions of the day in morality, the changing judgments of our own consciences—these are the things on which men build, if they are not building upon Jesus Christ. Like a vessel that has a raw hand at the helm, you sometimes head one way, and then the puff of wind that fills your sails dies down, or the sails that were flat as a board belly out a little, or you are caught in some current, and round goes the bowsprit on another tack altogether. How many of us are pursuing the objects which we pursued five-and-twenty years ago, if we have numbered so many years? What has become of aims that were every thing to us then? We have won some of them, and they have turned out not half as good as we thought they would be. The hare is never so big when it is in the bag as when it is hurrying across the fields. We have missed some of them, and we scarcely remember that we once wanted them. We have outlived a great many, and they lie away behind us, hull down on the horizon, and we are making for some other point that, in like manner, if we reach it, will be left behind and be lost. There is nothing that lasts but God and Christ, and the people that build their lives upon them.

I press upon all your hearts that one simple thought—what an absurdity it is for us to choose for our life's object anything that is shorter-lived than ourselves!—and how long-lived you are you know. They tell us that sand makes a very good foundation under certain circumstances. I believe it does, but what if the water gets in? What about it then? But in regard to all these transitory aims and short-lived purposes on which some of you are building your lives, there is a certainty that the water will come in some day. So, friend, dig deeper down, even to the Eternal Rock. That is the only foundation on which an immortal man or woman like you is wise to build your life. Are you doing it?

Continued:

Re: THE TWO HOUSES - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/7/16 21:33

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Alexander Maclaren

‘Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. . . . 25. And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand.’—MATT. vii. 24, 25.

II. Let me say a word, in the next place, about the two houses.

The one is built upon the rock. That just means, of course—and I need not enlarge upon that—a life which is based upon, and shaped after, the commandments of Jesus Christ, His Pattern and Example. And that life will stand. Now, of course, the ideal would be that the whole of His sayings should enter into the whole of our lives, that no commandment of that dear Lord should be left unobeyed, and that no action of ours should be unaffected by His known will. That is the ideal, and for us the task of wisdom is daily to draw nearer and nearer to that ideal, and to bring the whole of our lives more and more under the sway and sanctifying influence of the whole sum of Christ’s precepts. Of course, on the other side, the life that is built on the sand is the life which is not thus regulated by Christ’s will and known commandments.

But I desire rather to bring out, in a word or two, some of the lessons that may be gathered from this general metaphor of a man’s life as a house. And the first that I would suggest is this:—Have you ever thought of your life as being a whole, with a definite moral characteristic stamped upon it? I look upon the men and women that I come across in the world, and I cannot help seeing that a great many of them have never got into their heads the idea that their life is a whole. A house? No. A cartload of bricks, tumbled down at random, would be a better metaphor. A chain? No! A heap of links not linked. Many of you live from hand to mouth. Many of you have such unity in your life as comes from the pressure of the external circumstances of your trade or profession. But for anything like the living consciousness that life is a whole, with a definite moral character for which you are responsible, it has never dawned upon your mind. And so you go on haphazard, never bringing reflection to bear upon the trend and drift of your days; doing what you must do because your occupation is this, that, or the other thing; doing what you incline to do in the matter of recreation; now and then sporadically, and for a minute or two, bringing conscience to bear, and being very uncomfortable sometimes when you do. But as for recognising the mystic solemnity of all these days of yours in that they are welded together, and are all tending to one end, and that each passing moment contributes its infinitesimal share to the awful solemn whole—that has seldom entered your minds, and for a great many of you it has never had any effect in restraining or stimulating or regulating your conduct.

Then there is another consideration which this metaphor suggests—viz. that the house is built up by slow degrees, brick upon brick, course by course, day by day, and moment by moment. It is slow work, but certain work. ‘Let every man take heed how he buildeth,’ and never despise the little things. Very small bricks make a large house.

Then there is another consideration that I would suggest, and that is, you have to live in the house that you build. Your deeds make the house that Christ is here speaking of. Like the chrysalis that spins out of its own entrails the cocoon in which it lies, so are you spinning, to vary the metaphor, what you lodge in, until you eat your way through it, and pass into the next stage of being. Our deeds seem transient, but although we are building on the sand we are building for Eternity, because, though the deeds are transient in appearance, they abide.

They abide in memory. Some of you know how true that is. Black memories haunt some of us, and there could be for some no worse hell than that God should say, ‘Son, remember.’ You have to live in the house that you build. The deeds abide in habit. They abide in limiting and determining what we can be and do in the future; and in a hundred other ways that I must not touch upon. Only, I bring to you this question, and I pray God that you may listen to it and answer it: What are you building? A shop? That is a noble ambition, is it not? A pleasure-house? That is worse. A prison? Some of you are rearing for your incarceration a jail where you will be tied and held by the cords of your sins, and whence you will be unable to break out. Or are you building a temple? If you are building on Christ it is all right. Only take heed what you build on that foundation.

Continued:

Re: THE TWO HOUSES - posted by pastorfrin, on: 2008/7/17 22:54

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‘Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock. . . . 25. And every one that heareth these sayings of Mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand.’—MATT. vii. 24, 25.

III. Now let me say a word, in the next place, about the storm.

I need not dwell upon the picturesque force of our Lord’s description, so true to the sudden inundations of Eastern lands, and as true to the sudden floods of Northern countries when the snows melt. The house is attacked on all sides. From above, the rain comes down to beat on the roof, the wind rages round the walls, the flood comes swirling round the eaves from beneath, and if the house stands upon a cliff, the polished rock turns the flood off innocuous, but if it stands upon sand, the furious rush of waters eats a way beneath and undermines the whole.

But you will notice that the description of the storm is repeated in both cases, and is verbatim the same in each. And the lesson from that is just this—let no Christian man fancy that he is not going to be judged according to his works, for he is. The storm that comes, which I take distinctly to mean the final judgment which falls upon all men, beats against the house that is built upon the rock. For every one of us, Christian or not Christian, must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, that we may receive according to the deeds done in the body. Christian people, do not fancy that the great doctrine of forgiveness of sins and acceptance in the Beloved, means that you have not to stand His judgment according to your works. According to the other metaphor of the Apostle, working out the same idea with some changes in figure, the Christian man who builds ‘upon the foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble,’ has his ‘work tried by fire.’ So all of us have to face that prospect, and I beseech you to face it wisely. A sensible builder calculates the strain to which his work will be exposed before he begins to put it up. Or if he does not there will befall it the same fate that years ago befell that unfortunate Tay Bridge, where, by reason of girders too feeble, and piers not solid enough, and rivets left out where they should have been put in, one December night the whole thing went over into the water below. You have to stand the hurtling black storm. Take into account the strain which your building will have to resist, and build accordingly.

IV. And now, lastly, one word about the two endings.

‘It stood’; ‘it fell’; that is all. A life of obedience to Christ is stable, a life not based on Christ vanishes; and these two statements are true because whatsoever a man does for himself, apart from God in Christ, he is sowing to corruption, and he will reap corruption. As I said, nothing lasts but God, and what is done according to the will of God. And when the storm comes, whether the builder was a Christian man or not, all which was not thus built on Christ will be swept away, as the flimsy habitation of Eastern people, made of bamboos and oiled paper, are whirled away before the typhoon. All that was not built upon Christ—and much of you Christian people’s lives is not built on Christ—will have to go.

And what about the builders? ‘If any man’s work abide he will receive a reward.’ ‘Their works do follow them.’ ‘If any man’s work is burned, he himself shall be saved, yet so as by fire.’ And if any man has reared a structure of a life ignoring Jesus Christ, and with no connection with Him, then house and builder will perish together.

Jesus Christ does not speak in my text about the righteousness or the unrighteousness of these two courses of conduct. He does not say, ‘a good man does so-and-so, or a bad man does the other thing,’ but he says: A wise man builds his house on the Rock, and a foolish man builds his on the sand. To live by faith and obedience is supreme wisdom. Every life which is not built upon Christ is the perfection of folly.

Alexander Maclaren

Re: - posted by HeartSong, on: 2008/7/17 23:13

Quote:

-----Every life which is not built upon Christ is the perfection of folly.

Re: - posted by enid, on: 2008/7/18 8:31

Insightful message about the two houses, and much to meditate upon.

Thanks for the messages that you bring for our edification.