

15. *The Safe House*

Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock.

Matthew 7:24-27

Living in life

Men dwell in this life, they build themselves a house. Animals only nest from year to year. Or they have a hole to hide in or spend the night. But men build houses in order to live in them. Their whole life is like a house that they set up for themselves. We can also say that someone's house of life has been torn down when his work disappears, he loses his family, his health collapses. Some people are said to have "made it" in life, while others have made a "shambles" of theirs. However it may be, men want to live their lives.

At the end of the Sermon on the Mount Jesus also compares man to a house builder. It is a picture of what we make of our life and of its framework. But Jesus does not differentiate between successful and failed lives, between expensive homes and broken-down apartments. He only differentiates between safe and threatened lives, and this dividing-line runs right down the middle of everything else. Jesus does not ask what we have made of life and how successful our house of life looks, but He does ask how its foundation has been layed. Do we live in safety?

The greatest risk

Jesus' words concerning building on rock or on sand are directed by the thought of one threat which is moving towards all houses and all human life: the deluge of the flood. An image for God's judgment which will come over all life without regard for anybody.

According to some Bible expositors Matthew is speaking about the Palestinian fall storms which turn dry river-beds into strong currents, while Luke has adjusted the picture to surroundings outside Palestine by speaking about a flood (Luke 6:48-49). In fact, Matthew is talking about an unexpected large flood too.

If the passage were only concerned with the winter course of streams and rivers, then the man who built on sand would have been very foolish for erecting his house on the dry summer-bed of a stream. Jesus says, however, that he lived on the sand and not on the river bottom. That was not enough to hold off a calamity when wind and flood attacked the house at the same time.

The unexpected aspect of this disaster belongs to the overall picture. Whenever strong dikes give way in a night of storm, people are quick to say that an unfavorable combination of tide and wind power like that was not expected and should be viewed as abnormal. Jesus warns about what men actually do not expect and what they don't reckon with when building a house. The calamity of God's great judgment will one day come over the earth, and a house regardless of how strongly built, will not stand up to it unless that risk has been calculated in advance. Nevertheless, God's righteous judgment is coming over every human life, and over everything built, whether people viewed it as successful or not.

What was the mistake of the man who built on sand? Everyone builds on sand, don't they? The foolish builder did not lose his mind, like the man in the verse: "He wasn't very nice, and built his house on the ice." If you are that dumb, you can also expect to lose your house when the winter weather disappears. But the man in Jesus' parable is a good builder. He builds on good sand: a firm foundation. Good enough for this life and for a house like that. He is only missing one thing. He has failed to reckon with the outside chance of a hurricane wind in combination with a flood. Theoretically a disaster like that could occur, but who takes a very improbable risk into consideration now? In this way many people wisely build their house of life while neglecting to take into consideration whether God might exist and whether His judgment might one day strike. They have not calculated this risk as a risk for their own lives, and precisely that becomes their downfall. What appears to be the most unlikely possibility today, is the most certain event of the future. The man who builds on sand is negligent, and the consequences are serious: "The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew (a deluge which no one ever took seriously into account) and beat against the house; and it fell with a great crash." The last words leave us staring into a gaping pit. The deluge

still came. Thus Noah was right, and all life which had not taken that into account perished in the flood. The greatest danger for man is the danger in which he does not believe.

Well thought out life

The opposite of the man who builds on sand is the man who builds on rock. According to some Biblical interpreters Matthew is speaking about two different kinds of building sites (sand, rock) while Luke is concerned with a house that may or may not be built with a proper foundation (Luke 6:48-49). In reality Matthew also discusses a man who dug a foundation to the deeper lying rocks underneath (verse 25: it had its foundation on the rock). Of the two builders one builds more safety into his house, and that is the point, by digging further in order to let the foundation settle on the deeper-lying stone-bottom underneath the layer of sand. Isn't it a bit overdone to anchor a middle-eastern house like this: as if it would have to hold up in the ocean. But, of course, it will have to. The wise man prepares himself for the test by fire. For that reason he invests a great deal in the depth of the foundation.

This is a picture of the man who hears Jesus' words and does them. He lives a thought-out life. He knows that no human life can stand before God and for that reason he anchors his whole life in honor for Jesus the Savior and in loving His commandments.

The Bible does not dictate how to build our house of life brick by brick. God created us as responsible men. We have to build ourselves. Copying another man's walls makes no sense unless we lay a deep foundation in our own soil right down to the rock. Foundations are the unseen portion of a house, even though they determine its form and sturdiness. Jesus makes an appeal to our responsibility with His instruction about the wise builder. Living our lives demands thinking through to God, our Creator, our Judge and also our Savior.

Safe housing

Why does the house, well-thought-out when built, stand up against the deluge? Because the rock holds and carries it. In the Old Testament the Lord is often called the Rock of Israel. He carries His people. In this way Jesus now promises that His teaching will be the rock for the church in the new covenant.

The person who takes Jesus' commandments to heart when arranging his life can say: "He is my Rock, I will not be afraid, even though the waters swirl around me." Our own obedience will not save us, but rather it is the Rock upon which we build through faith which holds us fast. Anchored in Christ our life can withstand the judgment and inherit the kingdom of heaven.

In his epistle to the Romans (8:38-39) the Apostle Paul testifies to the security in his life thanks to the foundation upon which he builds: "For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

The Sermon on the Mount points the way to God and gives us the commandments of God's Son. Whoever takes this Sermon on the Mount to heart will live forever in a safe house.