

BE A GOOD PERSON AND A WISE BUILDER

Luke 6:43-49

Key Verse: 6:48

“They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.”

Thank God for blessing our 2015 Christmas worship service. Through Pastor Bob’s message, and the chorus, skit and dance, Jesus was revealed to us as the horn of salvation. During the last one year, so many people were wounded by the horns of Satan. Fear and anger seem to characterize the condition of our nation. But thank God for Jesus, the horn of salvation, who heals us from all of our wounds, restores us, and enables us to serve God without fear, in holiness and righteousness, before him all our days!

Now it is time for us to prepare for a new year. We may plan many things to build up our families, careers, and health. What should be our most important consideration? We may think that terrorism is the most serious problem to confront. Shall we spend all our effort preparing for terrorist attacks? In truth, many more people die from heart attacks than from terrorism. Then shall we stop eating unhealthy food and invest more time working out to improve our health? That may be a good idea. But this cannot protect us from car accidents due to texting or drunk driving. Tragedies and challenges will come upon us all unexpectedly, like a flood. We cannot prepare for every conceivable trial that may arise. Then what can we do? In today’s passage Jesus tells us to become a good person and emphasizes the importance of laying a solid foundation of life. We should each ask ourselves, “Am I a good person or an evil person? Is my foundation of life on rock or on sand? Will I be able to withstand the torrents that will come this year?” Today, let’s learn how to be good people and wise builders.

After calling the twelve disciples, Jesus did not teach them how to speak well or techniques of driving out demons. Rather, he began teaching them his kingdom value system, to love their enemies, and to not judge others. His words were revolutionary and challenging. Nevertheless, Jesus

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believed that his disciples would practice them and become truly great. Jesus had a great hope for them. Jesus taught them in verses 43-49 why it is so important to become a good person and to build their lives on the foundation of his words. Jesus uses two analogies which reveal timeless truths—a tree and a building.

First, how we can become a good person (43-45). After giving very practical teachings to his disciples, Jesus suddenly began to talk about trees and their fruit. Jesus said, **“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars”** (43-44). Jesus’ focus was not to teach botany. Rather, he wanted to help his disciples grow to maturity by practicing his teachings. Jesus implied that the development of a human being is like the growth of a tree. Just as trees go through a process and then bear fruit in season, so do people. God made each person to bear much fruit for his glory and to be a blessing to others. So God’s first words to mankind were, **“Be fruitful....”** I believe that almost everyone wants to bear good fruit. We would all like to finish our lives well and leave a good spiritual legacy. But to bear good fruit, we must be like a good tree. A good tree is healthy on the inside. It is free from diseases. It draws clean water and good nutrients from the soil, takes in sunshine and grows strong. Then in its season, it bears fruit. But a bad tree that is diseased cannot produce good fruit. In fact, it becomes a danger to the good trees and is cut down. That is why there are stumps here and there along the parkways of our city. So we must know that to bear good fruit, we must be a good tree. Our hearts should be pure so that God can dwell there and produce fruit by his life-giving power. If one indulges in sin, he is cut off from God and cannot produce good fruit. He cannot attach delicious figs and grapes to his corrupt inner person and disguise himself as a good tree. The problem is that by nature we are all bad trees, thornbushes and briars. We were dead in our transgressions and sins (Eph 2:1). We were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another (Tit 3:3). By nature, we were objects of God’s wrath (Eph 2:3). Even if we wanted to be nice to others, our words and actions were harmful, both intentionally and unintentionally. We cannot bear good fruit

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because our fallen nature is sinful and evil. We cannot change this by education, discipline, or giving to charity.

In applying this analogy to people, Jesus focuses on the human heart. He said, **“A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of”** (45). Our words and deeds are the fruit of our hearts. Our hearts are like storehouses. There is a saying, “Garbage in, garbage out.” If we hold bitter feelings and grudges in our hearts, we will become vengeful and say nasty things. If we fill our hearts with images from suggestive songs, immoral movies, and the like, we will naturally speak bad words and engage in bad behavior. Some blame violent video games for desensitizing people’s humanity and contributing to the rise in gun violence. On the other hand, if we fill our hearts with good and noble things through good books, movies, and music, then good things will come out of our hearts. If we fill our hearts with God’s love through his words we can love others and do good to them. So the key to bearing good fruit is having a good heart. But the natural condition of our hearts are no good. After Adam’s fall, God saw that every inclination of the thoughts of people’s hearts were only evil all the time (Gen 6:5). God judged this sin by a flood that destroyed all people except Noah’s family. But sin still remained in the hearts of Noah and his family members. Jeremiah described, **“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure”** (Jer 17:9). Jesus said that out of a person’s heart evil comes: sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly (Mk 7:21-22). No one can claim that they are good. Jesus said, **“No one is good—except God alone”** (Lk 18:19a).

Why is it important to realize this? We need to know that we cannot become good people by our own effort. Many people think that by means of science and technology, and education they can improve themselves and society. But the more science and technology develop, the more powerful people become in doing evil. The more educated people become, the cleverer they are in cheating others. The only way to become a good person is to be changed fundamentally on the inside, at the root of our being, which the Bible

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calls being “born again.” Jesus said to Nicodemus, “**Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying, ‘You must be born again’**” (Jn 3:5-7). Jesus made this new birth possible for us by shedding his blood on the cross to cleanse us from our sins. Jesus’ blood cleanses our hearts and enables us to stand before God as his servants. Still, however, the sinful nature remains. We have a new self that is made to be like God, and an old self that is wicked. The Bible clearly tells us to put off the old self and put on the new self. We should put to death our sinful nature by the help of the Holy Spirit and nourish the new life God has given us. We can do this by meditating on God’s words, praying, singing spiritual songs, and worshiping in community with God’s people. We should offer our bodies to God as living sacrifices (Ro 12:1). We are to walk by the Spirit, and not gratify the desires of the flesh (Gal 5:16). Then we can grow to be good people who bear good fruit. This is what God really wants from us. 2 Peter 1:5 tells us to add to our faith goodness. This keeps us from being ineffective and unproductive in our knowledge of Christ. We should each have hope to grow as a good person in this new year, and make this our goal.

Second, how we can become a wise builder (46-49). It seems that there were a lot of people hanging around Jesus, calling him, “Lord, Lord,” but not doing what he taught. In such cases, only their lips would go to heaven. In verse 46, Jesus said, “**Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?**” Jesus really wants his disciples to lay a firm foundation for life by obeying his words. In order to help them, Jesus gave an analogy of the wise and foolish builders. Jesus first mentioned the wise builder. Let’s read verses 47-48. “**As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built.**” Everyone knows that in constructing a building, the foundation is most important. But to dig down deep and lay the foundation on rock is not easy. It requires hard work and patience and can be very expensive. When the Sears (Willis) Tower was constructed, back in the

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early 1970's, great care was taken to build a strong foundation by digging all the way down to the rock. The building's foundation is a massive cement structure, 100 feet deep. It is surrounded by 200 circular caissons, which are huge cement-filled cylinders bored an additional 100 feet below and set in solid bedrock. These caissons add stability to the building so that it stands firm—no matter what the conditions at the top. This foundation is completely invisible, but without it the building could not stand. This indicates that laying a foundation for one's life is crucial. At the same time, it is costly and difficult.

In constructing a building, the foundation should be the rock deep beneath the surface of the ground. Then what can be the foundation for our lives? Many people build upon some kind of human ideas. America has been established on the pillars of freedom and democracy. Many assume that anyone who comes to America will be melted by this culture and become compliant citizens. But will this hold true for radically committed Muslims? Many think that a safe and secure life is guaranteed by the military power of the U.S., especially all kinds of state of the art weapons. Can that really be a foundation for us? Some rely on money, thinking that it will provide all they need. Can money really be our foundation? Other believe that modern medicine and technological advancement will bring solutions to all human problems, including aging. Is that really a reliable foundation? One very rich man invested great wealth in building a hospital complex, hoping it would prolong his life. But he died in that complex, surrounded by the best doctors and equipment money could buy. Still others want to accumulate all kinds of knowledge as their foundation. But the author of Ecclesiastes, one of the most knowledgeable people in history said, **“For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.”** Then what can be our foundation? Paul said that our foundation is Jesus Christ (1Cor 3:11). Peter said that Jesus is the living Stone and the cornerstone, and that those who trust in him will never be put to shame (1Pet 2:4,6). In a word, Jesus is our rock who is the unchanging, everlasting, life-giving foundation of our lives. When I was young, I tried to build on my self-righteousness and pride. But I failed in a relationship, became foolish with money, and had to delay my graduation. I learned that I had a foundation problem. Through deep Bible

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study, I could learn that Jesus loves sinners and shows grace to us. Since then, Jesus has been my foundation. And he has blessed my life abundantly.

The question is, how can we build on Jesus? We like to hear Jesus' words, **"Love your enemies," "forgive," "be a good person,"** and so on. But when we have to practice these words, we find it is very costly and difficult. Yet the result is that our lives are deeply rooted in Christ, like a building with a strong foundation. Job served God blamelessly by obeying his words. So God blessed him abundantly. Then Satan's envy was aroused and he tested Job's integrity. Job lost all of his vast wealth, his many servants were all killed, and his seven sons and three daughters died when a building collapsed on them. These tragedies took place one after another on the same day. How could he bear all this? At this moment he fell to the ground and worshiped the Lord, saying, **"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised"** (Job 1:20-21). Sometime later, Job was stricken with very painful sores all over his whole body. His wife said, **"Are you still maintaining your integrity? Curse God and die!"** **But Job replied, "You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?"** (Job 2:9-10) Job honored God and did not sin, not only in the time of blessing, but also in the time of unbearable trial. In this way he could lay a firm foundation for his life. God blessed the latter part of Job's life even more than the former.

Barbara Johnson wrote a book called, "Stick a Geranium in your Hat and be Happy!" Her motto was, "Pain is inevitable, but misery is optional." Her life was plagued by a string of tragedies. Her husband was in a near fatal accident and became debilitated. She lost one son in the Vietnam War. She lost another son when he was killed by a drunk driver. Her third son was estranged from the family while pursuing a gay lifestyle. She cried, and complained to God, "Why did you give me these tragedies?" She was miserable all the time. But one day she realized that pain was inevitable, but she could choose to pick flowers instead of weeds. She decided to thank God in any circumstances. Then a miracle happened. Her husband made a dramatic recovery. A desire grew in her heart to help others who were

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suffering as she had. She began to comfort parents of soldiers killed in Vietnam, as well as the parents of those killed by drunk drivers. She founded “Spatula Ministries,” and published many books, including: “When Your Child Breaks Your Heart,” and “Where Does a Mother Go to Resign?” When she decided to be thankful in the midst of painful tragedies, she became a blessing to innumerable people. By obeying Jesus’ words in the midst of trials, she laid a good foundation for her life.

To lay a good foundation for life, each person needs to decide to practice Jesus’ words personally. It requires sacrifice and investment of time and energy. The result may not be seen for a long time. No one may recognize or value what we are doing. We may hear words like, “What are you doing? You are wasting time! You are foolish!” But in the end, we can lay a firm foundation for life. We will all face trials in the coming year. It may be through losing a job, getting poor grades, broken relationships, persecution, unjust treatment, or failures. When we are rooted in Jesus, all the torrents of life cannot shake us; they only make us stronger. Not even death can shake us, it is the end of our struggle in this world and entry to eternal glory.

In contrast to the wise builder, Jesus mentions another kind of builder in verse 49. **“But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete.”** Foolish builders may think they are smart. While others spend a lot of time digging down deep, they just begin building. Their houses go up quickly and look great. In 1942, the town of Vanport, Oregon sprang up as a suburb of Portland. In 110 days, enough houses were built to shelter 40,000 residents who served the shipbuilding industry during World War II. These houses were built without foundations. In 1948, heavy rains caused flooding that broke nearby levees. As floodwaters hit these houses, they were washed away. The town disappeared in a day. This is tragic. But not having a foundation on the rock of Christ is even more tragic. Foolish people think that spending time studying the Bible and writing reflections is foolish. They don’t listen carefully to what the Bible says; they ignore things they don’t like. They tend to pick and choose verses of the Bible

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that sound good without really understanding the meaning. Then, when they confront the torrents of life, they cannot stand. What is worse, they enter eternity without Christ. We need to take Jesus' words seriously, not casually.

As we approach the beginning of this new year, let's decide to study Jesus' words in order to obey them. We cannot suddenly obey everything. But if we obey one word we can experience God's presence and love and lay our foundation of life deeply in Christ. Let's choose a proper key verse which we can hold on to and practice. Let's also spend time to remember what God has done in the last one year and to give thanks to him. Let's be good people and wise builders. May God richly bless you in the new year of 2016!