

Don't Build On The Floodplain

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Preacher: Finlay Mackenzie

- [0 : 0 0] Now it's very nice for me and thank you for asking me to take part in this service. I, Christine and I used to attend St. Columbus when we were, when I was a student at the Free Church College and Derek's dad was minister then.
- Mr. Lamont, Derek will always be Derek but Mr. Lamont was Mr. Lamont. So it's, it's great to see, it's great to see the church doing so well and great to have family a part of the congregation.
- Now it's also nice for me to be participating again in the baptism of one of my expanding family of grandchildren.
- So thank you for asking me to preach today and this is the verse that I feel that the Lord wants me to speak on and you may feel that perhaps it's bringing Coles to Newcastle to talk to you and Edinburgh congregation about the motto of your own city.
- But this is what it is Psalm 127 verse 1 in Latin as it appears on the coat of arms, Missy Domino's frustra, without the Lord in vain, unless the Lord builds the house, the laborers build in vain.
- [1 : 1 3] It also happens to be the motto of the Royal butter of Wick where I used to be minister for 10 years. Unless the Lord builds the house, it's very like something else Jesus said in John 15, he said, without me you can do nothing.
- Now our present house in Glasgow went through a long drawn out process of refurbishment. Progress was very slow and after a while we got behind by several months and difficulties where difficulty included the illness of our building contractor and there were other problems.
- We were several months behind so early one morning, a year last December, when the wind was howling outside and the tarpaulins over our uncomputed roof were flapping noisily and alarmingly in the wind, I was feeling rather defeated and anxious about the whole project.
- Now I usually read, I don't know if any of you use United Christian Broadcasters Bible Reading Notes, I use them quite a lot and I recommend them, but the reading for that morning was Psalm 127 and particularly verse 1, unless the Lord builds the house.
- This reminded me that the Lord God is also a builder and that God was in this project that was going on, that was giving me so much fear and anxiety and that I had to trust him and stop fretting because I was asking the Lord, we were asking the Lord to be in the project.
- [3 : 0 0] But the thought also came to me how easy it is for us, any of us to attempt to build something or achieve something in our own wisdom and strength, relying only on human resources and without relying on God.

It could be a house, it could be any project, any plan or goal you may have for a time in the future, you plan no doubt to have a home with all that the word home means, not just a house, in the Psalm here it's a city, there's the house and then in verse, the second part of the verse, it's the city, the city needs to be watched over by the Lord and it could be a family, if you want to build a family here in verse 3, he has children or a heritage from the Lord, a family who will be a source of joy and support to you in your old age, indeed it could apply to old age itself and retirement, I'm having to think quite a lot about that because it's looming up quite soon ahead of me, unless the Lord builds the house, whatever it is, the labour and vain that build it, having new interests and keeping staying exercised and getting all the financial advice you need for your retirement and so on.

But it applies to a lot of things, it can apply to your career, your home, a family, a city, we need to have the Lord as the builder. When I was a kid we used to sing a chorus, we are building day by day in our work and in our play, not with hammer, blow on blow, don't see any signs of recognition, it's old, not with timber, sawing soul, building a house not made with hands, following Jesus' perfect plans, little children all are we, building for eternity, I think some people do remember it, if you're as old as me you'll remember it.

Building for eternity, let's look at this statement in the light of Jesus' parable of the two builders. If you go back to Matthew 7, it's interesting the context in which Jesus sets the parable of the two builders, Matthew 7, look at verse 21, just before we read, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, we'll enter the kingdom of heaven but only He who does the will of my Father in heaven.

Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name and in Your name cast out demons and performed miracles, then I will tell them plainly I never knew You, depart from me, you evil doers.

[5 : 42] Now this passage there, Jesus envisages a day of judgment. Many will say to me in that day, and He's talking about His kingdom, it's a day for some people, a day of entry into the kingdom in some cases and exclusion from it.

In other cases, verse 23, I will tell them I never knew You. These people, it seems many of them had religion but not Jesus, and then Jesus goes on to say You need to build Your life on my words, on me and on my words.

So this leads us to ask ourselves, what foundation or what builder, what foundation principles are there, do we have in our lives?

For many people, work is probably the most important thing. And it's important to have work. Someone has said happiness is a byproduct of work.

But is that all? Is that all you need? Well, if you work, you'll have money, and money can gain access to a lot. But you can get into a position where you see your money and your access to things.

[6 : 56] Everything you get is a stepping stone to something better, and so it becomes an endless pursuit of money. We have great faith in technology today. We can say that that is a strong basis for life.

We can do amazing surgery. We can prolong life. We can cure diseases. We can do all sorts of other things with technology. We can even, looking ahead into the future, plan to colonise other planets if life on this planet becomes unlivable.

So we, a lot of people, have a great faith in technology, and they believe that that's part of the foundation we need for our lives. Education is another thing.

We can spend enormous amounts on educating ourselves and on our children. But is that the basis of everything? Some people, to some people it is. We can say human love is the basis, the foundation you need.

Romance perhaps. Plenty of friends. And if you have all of these things together, are you well set up for life? Is that the foundation? You can think of the things that add richness to your life, your own spirituality, perhaps whatever it may be, exploring your own spirituality, or what people call spirituality today.

[8 : 08] You can enhance your appreciation of nature, or of music, or of art. And with all of these things, you need to have faith in the inherent goodness of human nature.

You need to have faith in that, that people are basically good and not sinful, as the Bible says. So this is a kind of modern way of thinking.

I want us to ask ourselves, are these the foundation? Are these the true foundation we need for our lives? What does God say in His Word when He says, unless the Lord builds the house, the laborers, labor in vain?

Let's look at Jesus Parable then, and look at the house built on rock.

Anyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on rock. Now here in Jesus Parable, this builder is wise, Jesus calls him wise.

[9 : 07] He has chosen a good site with a good foundation, solid foundation. The house withstands the storm. The inhabitants of the house are safe inside.

And this builder, Jesus says, is like people who build their lives on the Lord Jesus Christ, on me and on my words. And then he moves on to speak about the house built on sand.

Anyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. Now this house, the builder, its builder was foolish.

Jesus calls him foolish in his choice of building site and his building principles. Sand is an unsteady foundation for any house. We don't know how long the house in Jesus Parable may have stood.

It may have stood for a while although it was built on sand, but the test came. And when the test came, the house fell down. When the storm came, the building fell down.

[10 : 09] This builder, Jesus says, is like someone who hears about what Jesus says, hears about Jesus, but he says to himself, I know a better plan. I already have a good foundation.

I have the autonomy to make decisions. I don't need God. I don't need Jesus. I don't need crutches. I need to go through life as some people think of Christian faith.

So let's say, look a little more closely at the thinking of the foolish builder. He builds his house, his life, you might say, on human things and not on God.

He says to himself, it'll be okay to build on a particular site of my own choosing because well today we can live our lives according to the best ideas that learned people and deep thinkers have had for centuries or that we've come to develop.

We can build our lives on the best ideas. Today we can overcome life's problems through education, science and technology, through acquiring skills, through medical science, through friends, through paying attention to human rights.

[11 : 23] We can have a good foundation for life if we have all these things. And someone might say, well I can build, I can build for my life on what I already know, what I already believe.

I don't need to change my philosophy of life. I've been okay so far where I am now is a convenient site. So why move? And they may have gone to say, I'm also in control of the building of my life and I'll be able to protect it.

There probably is no God, he perhaps thinks, but who knows? Belief in God is often written off as a purely sociological phenomenon. It's just something that arises out of man.

It's just man projecting his hopes and dreams onto the backdrop of an empty universe. Well do people write and say that's what Christian faith is?

So the conclusion is build where you like the view, build where you think. But we also have to go on to consider the reality of storms.

[12 : 27] Verse 27, the rain came down, the streams rose, says Jesus. This happens.

Storms come to all places at different times. Storms affect all of our lives. Nobody escapes storms. Things like illness, accidents may be brain damage, the death of a child or a loved one you have depended on, losing one's job.

Think of the folks in Aberdeen, the folks in Port Talbot right now. An economic disaster, personal or national. And then of course there is the worst storm of all and that is the judgment, which Jesus has just been talking about.

Death and the judgment. The foolish builder again, perhaps when he thinks about death and the judgment he says to himself, well I'll just take the drugs, I'll blot everything out, I'll blot out the pain, I'll blot out my conscience if there's any other, any qualms of conscience.

I'll die in peace. That's how the foolish builder thinks. He assumes that that's all there is to it. When you're dead you're dead.

[13 : 36] That may be a comforting philosophy, but is it a safe assumption? Not according to Jesus.

So we need to say a little bit more about the worst storm of all, which is death and the judgment. This is definitely in Jesus' mind when he told this parable, the kingdom of heaven.

He's thinking about not just the present life, we are to enter the kingdom of heaven here, but it has consequences in the life after life.

The letter to the Hebrews tells us, Hebrews 9.27, that man is destined to die once, and after death the judgment.

According to that verse, Hebrews 9.27, God will examine our lives, every one of us. This is a storm that will test the structures you've built around your life.

[14 : 35] It will not matter then what degrees you gained, how much money you earned, how much good you did, how hard you worked. It will not matter how much you were admired, whether you got on Britain's on talent, or whether you won Pointless, or whether you've got a Nobel Prize.

It will not matter in that day. The fatal weakness will be if you didn't acknowledge God, if you did not build with him as your builder and on his foundation.

So the context in which Jesus tells the parable is the context of a day of judgment. So what are the true foundations for life according to Jesus?

Verse 24, he says, whoever hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on rock.

Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice. What foundation does Jesus give? What foundation does Jesus give in the storms of life and in the judgment?

[15 : 47] Verse 21, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

In the storm, let's take the storm of the judgment first. After life is over, well, what does Jesus supply? Jesus is the Savior.

According to the Bible, everywhere Jesus is the Savior. We have, says John, an advocate. That's what we need in a judgment, in a trial. We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ, the righteous one.

And he is the atoning sacrifice for our sins. How can Jesus be our advocate? Well, he lived a perfectly sinless life and he did that on our behalf.

And he can step up to the Father and say, I have lived for them. And he can also come to God and say, I also, not only that, but I died for their sins.

[16 : 53] I took the punishment that their sins justly deserve in your judgment of God. That's what Jesus has done. What Jesus has actually done, everything God requires to enable us to stand in the judgment if we have faith in Him.

If our righteousness is not in our own, hoping our own, our selves and what we have done, but our faith is in Him and we are connected to Him, we need to be connected to Jesus to stand in the judgment.

He is all we need to put us right with God if we are not yet right with God and to keep us right with God and to bring us to heaven and to eternal security.

It's Jesus we need. To stand in the judgment, there's no one else. Your own efforts, your own good works or whatever it may be, it's Jesus you need.

And then there are the storms of life. If you're at school, you may feel that the exams are a storm. Well, it's good to have God with you and to rely on Him.

[18 : 02] If you're at work, if you're a working person, the challenges of work, some of them may be overwhelming. You may have health worries if you're older or if you're younger too. You may have been hurt by someone, devastatingly, or losing someone you love.

There are all sorts of storms that come to us. Well, Psalm 23 tells us that the Lord is our shepherd. The Lord is my shepherd. You know, in a sense, He didn't need to say anything more than that because that just says it all.

The Lord is your shepherd. That's all you need. And but He goes on to say, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil for you are with me.

God is with you in all kinds of situations and the presence of your enemies. He prepares a table before you. It's the Lord you need because He's been here and He has gone through the worst that He has experienced all that we experience.

He's gone through the worst and is able to support us in that He Himself has suffered being tempted and tested. He's able to support those who are tempted and tested.

[19 : 08] And He's right there beside you. Though you walk through the valley, He is with you. He is human and divine. He's been here and He knows what it's like and He has all God's power with Him to support you through.

He communicates with you in the Bible. He hears your prayers. He can change things. He's the Creator and the Judge and the Savior.

Jesus is all you need. So can I ask you this morning to look at your building? Look at what you're building. You need to change your sight. Are you building your life on sand or on some kind of flood plain perhaps?

Or over old mineshafts? Whatever it might be. Is that what your life is like? Well you're in danger. You need Jesus. Are you building your life on a humanistic foundation?

Faith in human nature, faith in science, faith in man. Man is the measure and judge of all things. But not if there's a God there. He's the measure and judge of all things.

[20 : 16] And Jesus is His Son. Are you building your life on the foundation of human religion or good deeds or the hope that you've never done anybody any harm? Well that's fine if you're the judge or if society is the judge.

But if God is the judge, we need someone different. We need something different. Is there stuff in your life that's going on that's going to destroy you?

Destroy you maybe in this life but will certainly destroy you in the judgment. You may be cultured, educated, rich, but there could be things in your life in mind that will destroy us in the judgment.

Jesus calls us here, invites us to leave the old building site and put Him in charge. Put Him in charge of the project if you've never done so before. And He offers us a new building site free.

You know, imagine what it costs to buy a site nowadays. A service site, especially. Jesus is offering us a new site for our lives free and He's offering to build it, to build your life.

[21 : 18] So put Him in charge of the project. He offers us Himself, building your life on the true foundation means receiving Jesus as your God and Savior and believing God's Word.

To as many as received Him, says John, John 1.12, to as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become God's children, to those who believed in His name.

So you can see how practical Jesus' teaching is here. Unless the Lord builds the house, the laborers labor in vain. It can apply to your home, building your home, overcoming the difficulties of building a home.

God builds homes. Jesus tells us earlier in Matthew that we don't need to worry. Our Heavenly Father knows that we have God in our lives, we don't need to worry.

But a thing we do, but God knows what we like and He keeps repeating this sort of thing in the Bible. We've got God's provision, we've got God's provision, we've got God's provision. And God's provision includes everything we need.

[22 : 22] So make sure you're building for eternity. He who dwells in the shelter, there's a building, the shelter of the most high will rest in the shadow of the Almighty.

So for your home. And for building your marriage. You know, a film star I read about who had been through several failed marriages said, I've given up trying to find the right person.

Now I'm trying to become the right person. And the Bible tells us, Paul says, husbands love your wives as Christ loved the church and gave himself for her.

And he says to wives, wives be worthy of respect, temperate, trustworthy and everything. Build your life on Jesus and His words. Here's a way to build your marriage.

Build your family by teaching your kids to love God and by winning their approval. You have to win their approval of God's ways.

[23 : 24] Very often that involves, partly involves allowing your kids to see the seamy side of how people will have no time for God live.

You need to teach your kids to love God and win their approval for God's will, God's law.

So God must build their lives. God must build their children's lives too. Someone has said, giving our children, in fact it was Tim Keller, giving our children to God is the only way we get to keep them.

Tim Keller said that. And then also we have to say something about building the church. Because Jesus said, I will build my church.

And the logic is not that we don't need to do anything. The logic of that is that we are encouraged by it to obey Christ's commission. Go and make disciples.

[24 : 26] And that's for all of us. So let's not lose our vision for that friend or that neighbour or that fellow, that workmate or your vision for your city here or for Scotland or for the world.

Because Christ is building his church. Well then, ensuring that God is at the heart and in the planning and in the overseeing of whatever you're building, that's what the Bible wants.

Unless the Lord builds the house. And if you're having the Lord build your house, build your life, whatever it is you're building, a couple of practical things that you should do.

One is keep exposing yourself to God's word. That way the Lord will do the building. Keep exposing yourself to God's word.

How do we have God in our lives? The means of grace. The word, participating in the sacraments, prayer and fellowship.

[25 : 32] Start with the word. And this way the Lord, the word is basic to all of these. But these are the means of grace. And putting Jesus' words at the basis of your life, God's word, the whole of the Bible really is Jesus' word.

The whole of the Bible really is Jesus' word. Into practice. And this way the Lord will be building whatever it is. It will not be a matter of your own grand ideas and it will not be a failure either.

You know we used to speak about edification. I think it's a known fashioned word nowadays. Edification. But edification is building, an edifice building. It's a building.

And the word of God is useful for edification. That's for building up your life and your faith with God. So use God's word. That's the first thing.

Keep exposing yourself to God's word. Personal reading here in church. If you can get access to it. And the second thing is to pray for repentance and grace to grow and produce the fruit God wants in your life.

[26 : 39] Having the Lord build the house means doing your life God's way. God hates lies and half truths.

God loves integrity, truth telling, transparency, purity, self control, self giving. These are the things God loves.

So always pray to be aware of self. Remember that self is basically sinful. Always pray to be aware of self and pray for repentance and for grace to produce fruit in your life that pleases God.

If you pray for that God will answer that prayer. So build for eternity and in this way you'll also be able to build up the lives of others. I'll leave these thoughts with you.

Let's pray. Gracious God we thank you for Jesus and his words. Thank you for your son. Thank you for all that he has done to put us right with you and to keep us in your way and to keep us all through eternity.

[27 : 46] We pray that we may all be together in heaven and in the new heaven and the new earth after the resurrection. Ask your blessing on everyone here that you will continue to build up your church and your people here from the youngest to the oldest.

We pray in Jesus name. Amen.