



New Day Church

Need a fresh start?

RAINY DAY PEOPLE

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Do you ever get a piece of news that makes you a little worried about America? I'm not talking politically or economically or environmentally. I mean more like our basic motor skills as a country. There is cause for concern that we may be in bad shape.

Here's what I'm talking about: I read a statistic this week that over 55,000 people a year go to the doctor for flip flop related injuries. 55,000! And that data is actually from a few years ago, so it's probably gotten even worse.

"Flip flop related injuries." I didn't even know there was a box for that on those medical forms you fill out when you have an appointment. "Do you have a history of beach footwear in your family?" But this was a serious report. Some people get shin splints because flip flops are so flat. Some people twist their ankles because there's no support. Some people get a little chafing between their toes. Some people get one stuck in a crack and trip. It's amazing how the simplest shoe in the world can be so difficult to wear.

All summer long we've been looking at the flip flops Christ introduced. Everything about him cut against the grain of conventional thinking. When the world says we need to get noticed and seek attention, the Bible says lead a quiet life. When the world says influence is everything, Jesus says the smallest are the greatest. When it makes more sense to hate those who hate us, Christ tells us to love our enemies. God's kingdom runs on values that are direct opposites of what feels natural to us.

They sound pretty simple. But they're difficult to wear. So sometimes we leave them in the closet. That's not what Jesus had in mind. He intended for these radical truths to be put into practice.

So how do we sum up this series? As I was considering that, I thought it would be good to look at how Jesus wrapped up his most famous flip flop message, the Sermon on the Mount. We've examined some of the statements he made in that sermon, but if you go back and read the whole thing, you'll find it's a shock from top to bottom. He says you're blessed when you're poor. You're blessed when you're persecuted. Don't chase money. There's no need to be worried.

When he has contradicted almost everything his listeners held dear, he summarized it all with a short story about wearing all these flip flops and living in them, and I think it's a fitting way for us to conclude as well.

Matthew 7:24-29

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

If you spent any time at all in Sunday School as a kid, you probably learned this story in the form of a song. "The wise man built his house upon a rock..." For me it was really all about the hand motions and getting to make that foolish man's house go SPLAT. That was the real payoff.

I don't know who first came up with it, but it's pretty brilliant. The song needs to be an action song, because the whole point Jesus is making in the story is that it's important to act on what he says and not just listen to it.

The third verse of the song spells out the moral of the story: "So build your life on the Lord Jesus Christ." I love it that this is a concept even small children can grasp, but that there's always more to learn about it the older you get. And you discover that actually building your house on that rock is a lifelong process.

We've taken in a lot of information this summer that has challenged our thinking. We've examined words in the original Greek and explored the deeper meanings of various texts. And it's fantastic to learn more about our faith all the time and really gain a good understanding of why we believe what we believe.

But Jesus presents us with one more flip flop in this parable that pulls us up short. He says, **the question isn't, "How much do you know?" The question is, "Where do you live?"** Are we living on the rock or on the sand? We can go to church all we want, attend every class that's offered, read every book we hear about, but if it doesn't impact our daily life, all that knowledge isn't much good. The question isn't how much you know, the question is where do you live.

I played soccer for one year in high school. Let's just say there's a reason I didn't play all four years. My strengths were elsewhere. I was really pulling the team down. The C team.

I played defense, and I remember one game where I was in at left fullback. One of the forwards on the other team came barreling toward me with the ball, and somehow managed to slip past my airtight defensive skills. Actually, I got intimidated and kind of just let him go by.

After the play, my coach yelled at me, telling me what I should have done. I was embarrassed that he was singling me out, so I yelled back at him, "I KNOW!" And he responded by saying to me, "Then DO it!"

Having the right knowledge of the game in my head wasn't enough to help us win; I needed to act on what I knew. That's always the rub, isn't it? Getting what we know in our heads down into our hearts usually means we have to move it out to our hands first. We have to live in it to own it.

So what exactly does Jesus say about this? First, he tells us that **we all are builders**. There are only two categories of people in this little illustration: wise builders and foolish builders. There are no non-builders.

No matter who you are, you're building some kind of life for yourself every day. Each moment you spend, each relationship you invest in, each dream you pursue, each grudge you nurse, each and every choice is adding another board or another nail to the house that is your life.

Once we accept that concept of being builders, Jesus draws a line in the sand (I guess literally) that divides builders into two groups. Interestingly enough, the groups aren't the good builders and the bad builders. The quality of workmanship is not the issue: What's in question is where they build. They're either on the rock or not on it. There's no middle ground.

And Jesus says the way the two groups are distinguished is by what they do with what they hear. And this is a little disturbing to me. I typically think of listening as a somewhat passive thing that I do. I might pay attention or I might not. But this would suggest that once I have heard a word from God, I am responsible for what I do with it.

James 1:22-23

Don't fool yourself into thinking that you are a listener when you are anything but, letting the Word go in one ear and out the other. Act on what you hear!

On NPR the other day I heard an interview with the singer John Mellencamp. He was talking about his songwriting process and he said, "If I hear words, they're mine. I will take ideas from anywhere, anyplace, anytime. Life has become a song to me."

I love that idea of owning what is spoken to us. If you hear the words of Christ, they're yours. They are yours to work with to transform your life into one big song of praise to God.

How do you picture yourself when it comes to hearing God's word? Are you a seat warmer, watching the clock and hoping to go unnoticed? When you come to church and sit through a sermon, do you think of yourself as having a role to play with the message once it is passed to you? I don't claim that everything in my sermons is a message straight from God. But I do always include a lot of Scripture, which I can safely say DOES carry a word from God to each of us. And as soon as it is read or spoken, each one of us then has a relationship with what we hear. There's no real neutral ground: either we act wisely with Christ's words or foolishly. And in this case, not doing anything is what gets us lumped in with the foolish builders.

The second thing Jesus implies is that **we all get weathered**. We're all exposed to the same kinds of storms. In fact, he does more than imply it: Earlier in this sermon, he stated that outright:

Matthew 5:45-46

He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

Here again is a bit of a flip flop. Because if I were telling a story about a wise and foolish builder, I think I would tell it so that the wise one avoided the storm while the foolish one got dumped on. That feels more fair. If you're doing the wise things, it seems like you should be rewarded and get to skip the negative stuff.

But that's not the distinction Jesus makes. In fact, Jesus describes the nature of the storm in exactly the same way for both the wise builder and the foolish builder. Both got rain. Both had flooding. Both had wind. No one is exempt from the hardships of life.

This really catches us off guard sometimes, because deep down, we want our good behavior to score us some bonus points. A little part of us believes that we deserve better than other people. And we will question God when times get tough. "Why would you allow this to happen to me? Me of all people. God must have it in for me." And we see ourselves as being singled out for an attack, not realizing that life happens to everyone and rain falls everywhere.

When Karin's friend told her she had breast cancer, she said with tears in her eyes, "Haven't I been good?" That's the question that haunts us. We can feel bewildered when difficulties come our way, because we take it personally. And we've assumed that the good things we've enjoyed from God were somehow things we deserved – not realizing he causes his sun to shine on everyone as well. The weather happens to us all, regardless of what we have or haven't done.

I don't want to overanalyze Jesus' words here, but I think it's helpful to reflect a bit more on the three elements of the storm he describes. He mentions rain, flood and wind. Each one of these symbolizes a different kind of hardship in life.

First is the falling rain. I don't know how many times as a kid I was so much looking forward to our 4th of July plans, only to have them cancelled due to rain. Rain dampens enthusiasm and ruins picnics. Rain is a plan changer and a mood changer. It stands for everything that leaves us with unmet expectations. If rain were a hardship, it would be disappointment.

Flooding has different associations. If you're caught in a rising stream, your feeling isn't disappointment – it's panic and anxiety. It is the terror of being overtaken by the rising tide. Whenever we are drowning in fear, we are experiencing a flood. Bills that are piling up. Children that are growing up. Things we don't know how to handle that scare us can feel like a flood.

Jesus also talks about the wind that's beating on the house. It causes stress and strain on the house, which struggles to stand against it. So much of life is just getting through the daily pressures and stresses that would beat us down. They don't scare us – they just take it out of us and leave us worn out. As Chuck Swindoll put it, "The problem with life is that it's so daily."

Which of those struggles do you most identify with right now? Are you dealing with the rain of disappointment, waves of fear or the winds of pressure? Nobody is immune to any of those. Being a good, faithful Christian doesn't mean you'll be spared from the normal difficulties that come with living in a fallen world.

Where our faith DOES come into play is how those difficulties affect us. Are we devastated by them, or do we grow through them? Jesus says it all depends on where we have positioned ourselves. And this really brings us to the third implication he makes, which is that **we all choose our base**.

Houses are built on foundations, and Jesus contrasts two types: rock and sand. His main point is that one is solid and dependable, while the other is soft and prone to shift around. One will prove to be trustworthy and one will not.

Let's talk about the sand first. We all know how sand is constantly moving and shaped by the elements. You pick up a handful and squeeze and you can see how quickly it slips through your fingers and how impossible it is to keep it one place.

But technically, sand is at least partly made up of little rocks. You look at this close up picture of sand from Pismo Beach and you'll see lots of tiny rocks. But there's also a lot of quartz and sea shells, maybe some coral. The small rocks are mixed in with everything else and not connected in any way.

I find that helpful in thinking about the foundations we choose for life, and how we can end up on sand. It's not that we're necessarily rejecting Jesus or his words – we're just taking them in tiny pieces. There are little bits of what we're standing on that are good. I grab some principles from over here, some morals from over there, a few grains of truth from different places. But I mix them in with other values and assumptions. My attitude

toward money, my views on sex, my understanding of success – all that can contain a jumble of ideas from the surrounding culture mixed in with what Jesus has said. Truth is only a small part of the picture. And that doesn't provide a steady, consistent platform for life.

In contrast, Christ said that building on his words is like building on solid rock. He told his disciples,

Mark 13:31

Heaven and earth shall disappear, but my words stand sure forever.

You might think, “Well any teacher could say that. There's plenty of wisdom out there. What sets his words apart from the words of another rabbi, or Buddha or Mohammed or Dr. Phil for that matter?”

There are many things, but I see the main difference as being this: No other person in history has ever claimed to perfectly embody their own words. Every other great teacher of every religion or philosophy, every powerful leader has at one point or another fallen short of their own statements. They've never claimed perfection and they've all had inconsistencies between word and deed.

But Christ's words are rooted in his very person and all his actions flow out of them. His words are solid because he is solid. There is nothing false or unreliable about him.

He said, “To be great, be a servant,” and he washed his disciples' feet.

He said “Turn the other cheek” and he did that literally as he was being beaten.

He said, “Love your enemies” and he prayed for their forgiveness on the cross.

He said, “I am the light of the world” and he blinded a man named Paul with that light who would share it with the nations.

He said, “My strength is made perfect in weakness” and that truth has changed history over and over as his followers have proved that to be true.

He said, “I will never leave you or forsake you” and Christians to this day know and count on his presence.

He said we matter to God and he pursues us relentlessly.

This is why Matthew tells us the listeners were astonished as they heard him, because there was this ring of credibility and authority in his voice that was like no other teacher they had heard. He is solid clear through. There is no one else like him. So many things in life start out seeming solid enough but erode over time or when put to the test. Christ

is the only one you can count on. You can put all your weight on him and know that he will hold. What is your base? What are you counting on to get you through the storm?

Sometimes it's hard to tell exactly what we are basing our lives on. Once a house is built, you don't really see what's underneath it. As you plow through life, you're not always conscious of what you're standing on. It's like a house where everything looks fine until something happens and the ground gives way. A big sinkhole forms and we start to fall apart and don't know why.

This is where the storms we were talking about earlier come into play. Because when we're going through hard times is when we catch glimpses of how solid our foundation is or isn't. Willa Cather once said, "There are some things you learn best in calm, and some in storm." Knowing what we really believe and where we stand sometimes becomes the most clear in the middle of a crisis.

So we can take some inventory and ask, "What's crumbling in my life? Where are the points of despair? Where do I feel like the rug has been pulled out from under me?" When we can identify the places where we feel the most shaky, we can begin the process of peeling back the layers to see what's underneath that area.

Maybe I have been operating from the assumption that my career was going to be my source of security, and now I've lost my job. Suddenly I'm forced to examine what I've really been trusting in. That's a foundation question.

Maybe my whole identity has been wrapped up in parenting. Now my kids are going off to school and I don't know who I am. That's a foundation question.

Or maybe I had dreams and plans for where I would be at this point in my life and nothing has panned out according to my wishes, and I'm dealing with the grief and disappointment of knowing some things will never happen. That's a foundation question.

Take a look at the slips of paper that are being passed around. I've listed out a number of statements of what the world would have us believe, and then the flip flop of each that God says is true. The one side is sand – half truths and misconceptions that work their way into our thinking. And you can see how much scrambling is all the way through it, the unsettledness of being on sand. The other side is bedrock. It's unshakable and unchanging. It's solid and that's freeing.

When I find myself caving in or falling apart or constantly frustrated, it's time to ask questions, to inspect the foundation more closely. Here are some things I can ask myself:

- 1. What am I dealing with – disappointment, fear or stress?**
Can I identify more specifically what's rattling me and why?
- 2. What did I assume that hasn't proved true?**

What belief has let me down? Maybe there is something I didn't even realize I believed until it turned out to be false.

3. What did I expect that hasn't happened?

Much anger comes from unmet expectations. Sand doesn't stay where it is supposed to. So what's the thing I was counting on that wasn't reliable?

4. What wrong idea of Christ have I been living with?

Maybe I had it in my head that Jesus would act differently or answer prayer differently than he has, and the sand I have been standing on has been a false image of God. Am I upset because I feel I've earned a blessing and that he owes me somehow?

5. What flip flop do I need to embrace?

Which truth of God do I see a need for in my life right now?

I'd encourage you to take some time this week to reflect on these questions. Read through the flip flops and look up some of these verses. If I'm honest when I look at the list, I have to admit that I've built my house partly on the rock and partly on the sand. I can look at that list and see some points where I've got a firm grip on truth and other places where I'm still struggling with a worldly mindset.

The beauty is that we don't have to stay in the sand. Christ lets us move, inch by inch more and more of our life onto the rock. And each time I hit a challenge, it gives me the chance to look at one more room of my heart and say, "What has this been built on?"

More often than not, the answer will be sand. We're flawed, broken and stubborn people who have a hard time accepting truth. So how do we have hope? There is one answer and that is the greatest flip flop of all:

John 3:16-17

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.

Every flip flop we've looked at finds its source in the cross of Jesus. That is the one act of all time that most defies everything we know. The eternal God who died for us. The God we showed unconditional love to the people who rejected him. The creator of humanity who became its humble servant. On the cross Jesus showed what it means to love God perfectly, because he was doing the will of his father. And he showed what it means to love people perfectly, doing the most selfless thing he could by dying in our place to take our sins away.

It gets back to where we started this morning – with flip flop related injuries. We're really not all that good at wearing these shoes. In fact we're incapable of perfectly living

out all the words Jesus shared on our own. But praise God the rock is solid when we aren't.

Psalm 145:14

The LORD upholds all those who fall.

When we trip up, we land on him and he doesn't let us sink. To build on the rock of Christ is to admit we have no foundation to stand on other than what he has done. We keep coming back to who he is and cling to that when the weather of life, the rain, the floods and the wind sweep over us.

The question is not how much I know. The question is not even how hard I work. The question is where do I live.

Christ has given us his word. You have now heard it and it's yours to build on. What are you going to do with it and where will you live?