

Jesus the Storyteller

The Two Housebuilders

This parable appears in two Gospels, Matthew and Luke. Please read the two passages below and then you can play a game of spot the differences between them before you read the rest of the paper!

Matthew 7:24-27: So then, anyone who hears these words of mine and obeys them is like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain poured down, the rivers flooded over, and the wind blew hard against that house. But it did not fall, because it was built on rock. But anyone who hears these words of mine and does not obey them is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain poured down, the rivers flooded over, the wind blew hard against that house, and it fell. And what a terrible fall that was!”

Luke 6:46-49: Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and yet don't do what I tell you? Anyone who comes to me and listens to my words and obeys them—I will show you what he is like. He is like a man who, in building his house, dug deep and laid the foundation on rock. The river flooded over and hit that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But anyone who hears my words and does not obey them is like a man who built his house without laying a foundation; when the flood hit that house it fell at once—and what a terrible crash that was!” (GNT)

The terrain in Palestine is mountainous and rocky with sand on its coastal plain. Houses can be built therefore on sand and rock. In the hot, summer months, the sandy ground bakes hard to look like rock and it would be possible, if you didn't know better to mistakenly build your house on sand. When storms come in Palestine, water streams from the mountains filling the dried up river beds and overflowing to create new streams. Sand, along with anything built upon it, will be washed away in such storms. Buildings on a rock base will endure.

In the Bible, rock is often used to symbolise a solid foundation – indeed we use it in the same way, often to describe a

person. Again, as it is for us, storms in Scripture are often metaphors for testing and troubling times.

The parable as told by Matthew is the best-known version. It gives descriptions of the two builders – wise and foolish – helpful if you want to write a children’s book with illustrations! In the parable the word ‘wise’ can be translated as canny, a characteristic which is very helpful if you are trying, in the dry season, to remember which part of the ground was sand in the wet season before you build your house. Matthew’s version emphasises choosing a good location to build your house on. Luke’s version is more concerned about thorough preparation of foundations before building your house.



In both Gospels, this parable comes at the end of a large section of Jesus’ teaching – the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew) or the plain (Luke). So, the first message of the parable is that just listening to Jesus’ teaching is not sufficient, followers of Jesus must act upon his teachings. Secondly, the parable tells us that acting on Jesus’ words will give us strength – strength to help us weather the inevitable troubles of

life. However, the strength that is promised does not always come quickly or easily to us. Being ready to weather troubles, building our foundations, takes time and effort just as the builder in Luke took time to dig deep before he built his house.

Discussion

1. Luke’s version is concerned with good preparation – what can you do to prepare your foundations for the storms of life?
2. Psalm 40:2 is an example of how ‘rock’ is often used to represent a solid foundation: *‘He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand.’* (NIV).
3. If you feel able, share with the Circle a time or times when you feel God has rescued you in some way.
4. Can you recall any hymns or songs which use the imagery of storms and rocks? Do you think they are good images?

As always, if any of you have a parable you would like me to cover, please email me at janet.cooper@moravian.org.uk. But be quick before we run out of papers!