

INTRODUCTION:

Story illustrating reaction to challenge.

Someone told about how he walked with a Quaker friend to the newsstand. He bought a paper, and politely thanked the newspaper salesman. However, the salesman didn't even acknowledge it. "He's a sullen fellow, isn't he?", the man commented to his Quaker friend.

"Oh, he's that way every night," the friend shrugged.

"Then why do you continue to be so polite to him?" the man asked. "Why not?" inquired the Friend.

"Why should I let him decide how I am going to act?"

One who knows who he himself is, what he stands for, and how he should behave, should refuse to let anyone get him off the track.

If we return rudeness for rudeness we lose command of our own conduct. This is no way for a Christian to react.

This is an example of a small challenge in life. But there are great challenges that face us almost every day. How do we react to them?

In the parable represented by our scripture reading for this morning we find an example of reaction to a great challenge. If you have ever built a house you know what a challenge it is. I have done it, or helped to do it, and I know a little about what it is like.

Jesus himself was a carpenter or a builder, and he was probably speaking out of his own experience as he spoke this parable. He had also seen devastating flash floods.

I. This is a PARABLE.

A. What is a Parable?

1. An earthly story with a heavenly meaning.
2. A short story which by a comparison illustrates a central idea of religious truth.
3. The original word in the N.T. for "parable" means "to throw next to," or "to line up." The idea of comparison or similarity is important. That is why we often find the phrase "the Kingdom of God is like unto . . ."

2. One third of the recorded teaching of Jesus consists of parables.

3. The parables describe the kingdom of God in action. They do not deal with abstract truths.

They tell us of something that happens when God is busy reestablishing himself as King among and over men.

4. Normally a parable has only one main point. The details of the story have no independent significance of their own.

5. The parables of Jesus were spoken to ordinary people. They were told to be understood by even the most simple person, if he had faith in Jesus.

They are a source of information and inspiration for the most ~~complicated and intricate~~ childlike trust.

II. THIS IS A PARABLE ABOUT CHRISTIAN LIVING.

A. Notice the SETTING of the parable.

1. In Matt 7:24

a. Beware of false prophets, v. 15.

b. Not everyone who calls Jesus "Lord" will enter the Kingdom of God, v. 21.

c. Concerns one who HEARS the words of Jesus and ACTS upon them. He is like

2. In Luke 6:47

a. Blind leading the blind, v. 39.

b. Hypocrisy; "speck of sawdust in your brother's eye, with never a thought for the great plank in your own eye."

c. Each tree is known by its own fruit.

d. "Why do you keep calling me 'Lord, Lord', and never do what I tell you?"

e. Idea of consistent and false professions.

f. Everyone who COMES to me (not in Matt), and HEARS what I say, and ACTS upon it, I will show you what he is like. . . ."

B. In Luke 6:46-49 It might be called "the Parable of the Two Houses."

There is no indication in Matthew's version that there was any difference in the construction of the houses.

Luke stressed the importance of good construction, rather than just the selection of a good site.

"Because it had been well built" (RSV, vs 48) is the better attested reading. ("soundly built", NEB)

C. In Matthew the wise man builds on a rock, but the foolish man builds a house of mud bricks (adobe) in a Wadi or dry river bed, which is smooth and inviting, like our S.W. USA "arroyos".

When the rainy season comes up in the mountains such watercourses may quickly become raging rivers.

Luke thinks of the wise man as digging deep to build on a solid rock foundation.

Even the wise builder built NEAR the river bed, so that the high flood waters could reach his house too, but they did not destroy it because of its solid foundations.

III. THIS IS A PARABLE OF REACTING TO CHALLENGE IN CHRISTIAN LIVING.

A. What is meant by challenge?

The figures in the parable are obvious -- rain from above, flood from below, winds from the side -- All-Around Tragedy.

Challenges or testing or tragedy may come to us from any direction.

B. What are some typical challenges in life?

1. Employment, vocation, duty.

2. Home, family, marriages do not endure when they have no ground except in physical attraction and personal and economic security or convenience.

3. Friendships cannot endure if they are based only on the sands of selfishness. Many people have friends only to USE them - not to be friendly with them.

4. Sickness, death, financial crisis, military and personal relationships, fear, hostility, guilt, loneliness are all challenges to life's stability and strength.

C. What are some typical challenges of Christian Living?

--Sense of failure, unforgiven sin, yielding to temptation, backsliding, fruitlessness, lack of faith.

D. Every house is tested sometimes.

The ~~day~~ summer does not stay all year.

No man escapes temptation, testing, sorrow, trouble, or the claims of responsibility.

Often "flash floods" come, completely unexpectedly.

E. What are some of the ways of Reacting to Challenge?

1. Try to avoid it. - (painful personal emotions)

2. Compromise with it. (Church + its mission)

3. Take the course of least resistance - the easy way.

4. Face it and deal with it, even if it is hard to do so.

Too many people build their life on any basis that happens to be easy and agreeable.

So long as the weather is fair, his foolishness may not be evident. But when the floods of trouble come, and the rushing torrents and currents of unforeseen temptation come,

his whole moral structure may collapse.

F. A man's character is like a house.

Every thought is a piece of timber in our life.

Every habit is like a beam.

Every imagination is like a window, well or badly placed.

G. Of the two builders one is a THOUGHTFUL man who deliberately plans his house with an eye to the future.

The other is not called a "bad" man, but he is THOUGHTLESS, and casually begins to build in the easiest way.

Christ is the true and sure foundation for any life.

Beneath all the surface wisdom of the world he is ROCK.

The thoughtful man digs deep into his truth until on that solid foundation life rests.

There is a story of a rich man who hired a builder to build the finest house ever built and to spare no expense.

When it was finished the builder was rather pleased with his work. Then the rich man said, "The house is yours, but you must live in it the rest of your life."

Then the blotches and cheap materials and workmanship stared up at the builder, and he realized how much better he could have built.

A man must live in what he builds.

Man's greatest judgment in eternity will be to have to live forever in the character house he has fashioned for himself in his life on earth; "Let the evil-doer go on doing evil and the filthy-minded wallow in his filth. . ." forever.

H. The best way to react to challenges and crisis is to prepare well in advance.

This means to begin with the foundations.

You don't prepare for crisis at the last moment.

It's like collecting insurance; you must take out the policy and pay the premiums in advance.

1. You need to Come to Jesus - (Lk 6:47)

2. You need to Hear the Words of the Lord.

3. You need to Act on them.

This means you must have convictions and principles and live by them regardless of the circumstances.

There is a story to the effect that the President of the U.S. once asked Robert E. Lee to give him his opinion about the capability of a certain man who was being considered for a public office. Robert E. Lee gave the man a rood report. Someone said to General Lee, "I can't understand why you have said so many nice things about that man when you know that he is saying many uncomplimentary things about you." General Lee said, "I understood that the President wanted my opinion of him, not his opinion of me."

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