

Swept Away! Tropical Storm Cristobal recently made landfall in Louisiana and the Gulf Coast area, moving up through the upper Midwest, including Wisconsin and then into Canada. The storm was accompanied by heavy rainfall, high winds and flooding. In some areas of Louisiana, homes were literally swept away by the flood water.

The Festival half of the Church Year, *focuses on the saving work of Christ* (his birth, his ministry, his death and resurrection, his equipping and sending of his disciples to share the Good News.) Christmas, Good Friday, Easter, Ascension, and the Day of Pentecost. Now we are passing into the non-Festival half of the Church year where the *focus* in the readings and sermons is *on the teachings of Christ*. Today, the focus is on the Source of the teachings of Christ – the rock- solid truth of God’s Word.

That Word is precise and powerful. The writer to the Hebrews tells us, **“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart.”** Hebrews 4 The prophet Jeremiah declares, **“Is not my word like fire,” declares the Lord , “and like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces?”** Jer 23:29. Our text this morning, speaks of building on that which is solid, lest we be swept away. We ask the question:

THEME: WHAT WILL YOU BUILD UPON?

I. THE ALTERNATIVES – SAND OR ROCK

II. THE FINAL CONSEQUENCES – HEAVEN OR HELL

To appreciate our text, we need to see what took place before our text. Jesus instructs the larger group of his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount – on everything from murder to marriage, from worry to love for our enemies. He reminds them that there are not many path to heaven but only one narrow gate to life – Jesus. He warns of false teachers that will try to take our focus off of Jesus – to put our trust in other paths – he tells us that you can recognize false teachers by their fruits – whether they hold to the teachings of scripture. At the beginning our text, he speaks of those who are self-deceived and think they are on the Lord’s “good side” because of their own doing – but because of their unbelief will be cut off – swept away in the final Judgment!

Now the call to not only hear the Word but also put it into practice! **“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...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.”** Do you see the contrast in the picture Jesus uses? One who hears God’s word and puts it into practice is called wise. He or she builds on the ROCK...solid ground! The one who hears but does not put the word into practice is called foolish. He or she builds on SAND...when the flood waters of life (challenges and problems) strike – swept away! These words echo the words of the writer James, **“Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.”** James 1:22.

The two alternatives – Rock or Sand. The **Pharisees** of Jesus’ day were very good at listening to the Word. They knew the Law of Moses and were committed to observing its details – Jesus told them, ‘you are careful to give the tithe (10%) in offerings down to the spices in your cabinets but you have forgotten the greater things – to honor your father and mother. For them some of God’s will was inconvenient truth. So they had made a new (man-made) rule that if you have given a special gift to the temple – you are freed from your obligation to your parents. And they thought by keeping their version of the Law God would be pleased with them! Listening but not practicing! Building on Sand.

The disciples to whom Jesus spoke the Sermon on the Mount were listening but would they put his teaching into practice? The natural religion that lays hold of everyone’s heart says, ‘I can please my God by what I do.’ But Jesus wanted them to understand that they could not please God on their own by keeping the Law. He told them, it’s *not just* the **act of murder** that is sin but also hate filled words, *not just* adultery or sex outside of

marriage that is sin but lust filled thoughts, *not just* love your friends but love even your enemies, *not just* stealing but also worrying. These early disciples were more than willing to listen, but later many would say, **“This is a hard saying...”** he is expecting too much! ...and many would walk away. Unwilling to put Christ’s words into practice – rejecting his words – Building on Sand! Swept away!

Don’t we struggle with the same? In the Lord’s prayer, we pray, “Hallowed your Name.” God’s name is everything he tells about himself in his Word. Since his Name is holy by itself, what are we praying for? That we too may KEEP HIS NAME HOLY BY TRUSTING HIS PROMISES, TEACHING CORRECTLY WHAT HIS WORD SAYS AND BY LIVING ACCORDING TO IT. Yet, how often do we say in our hearts, ‘Yes, we should hear the Word – worship, read, and study *but not for me today!*?’ How many have claimed membership in the Church but don’t know the road to the church - built on sand and will be swept away. Do we say, ‘Yes, marriage should be honored by all – *but not for me today*’, I can live together as husband and wife without marriage, even though scripture says, **“Among you there must not be a HINT of sexual immorality?”** Do we judge the angry protester and rightly say, ‘That anger is sin’ but ignore our own anger that may arise because we think in our hearts, ‘They are all lazy or just want to be given more money.’ Or are we silent in the church when we see those who are neglecting the Word or living in some other open sin (whether adultery or other) AND GIVE NO WORD OF WARNING. Afraid to say, ‘Your sin will lead to death if you continue in it.’ Then pleading, **“Turn, Turn! Why will you die?”** Building on Sand! Soon to be swept away! The prophet Ezekiel reminds us that we are like the watchman on the wall of a city under attack. If we fail to sound the alarm and that person dies, God will hold us accountable. And when we fail to recognize the full measure of our sin and the death we deserve because of it, we build on SAND!

But Jesus invites us to build on the Rock! On Christ and his Word and promises! The apostle Peter confessed concerning Jesus, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.”** And Jesus responded, **“You are Peter, and upon this Rock (not Peter but this confession) I will build my church and the gates of hell will not overcome it.”** Those who build on the Rock will not be swept away! Not even Satan or Hell can overcome!

Jesus is the promised Savior – the Christ! On Easter evening, when Jesus met the two disciples on the road to Emmaus they were still confused and he chides them, **“How foolish you are, and how slow to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter into his glory?”** In the Garden of Eden after the fall into sin, the Lord had promised a Savior...that promise was renewed again and again through the Old Testament prophets. The central message, God’s own Son had to come into the world, **“to suffer these things”**...death on a Cross. To carry away our sins – to suffer in our place – in payment for sin (Isaiah 53) to face the pain of hell - forsake by God the Father – suffering the torments of hell in our place (Psalm 22). Then **“to enter into his glory”** - to rise from death to declare his victory over sin and the grave, to ascend into heaven, to sit at the Father’s right hand in power—there to reign over all and soon to return to this world in glory!

Aren’t we still so often very much like those disciples, foolish of heart and slow to believe? We have his Word of Promise! But it all seems to be too much!

But whatever your past, don’t be timid! Build on the Rock! Christ and his Word of promise. Has he not said, **“Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow?”** Sins washed away in the blood of the Lamb! All of them! For the times we have been too quick to judge others. For the times that we have failed to warn our fellow Christian of soul destroying sin and in fear kept silent. For every time we have thought in our heart, “I have done enough”...for all our sins, Christ suffered ...the price is paid... trust his promise...build on the Rock! Then we have God’s solid promises that in the midst of all the storms of life – illness, personal tragedy, family troubles, even death itself – we can remain unshaken – to stand!

II. What will you build upon? There are but two alternatives and there are two final consequences. These consequences are eternal ones. We return to the opening words of our text. Jesus says, **“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. **22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'** **23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'** Jesus set before our eyes a picture of the final judgment and *those who are self-deceived*. Many see Jesus as a new law-giver. These are perhaps those that most would consider to be “religious people”, “good people”, hard workers, those who fight for the poor - for social justice, even people who have had some passing membership in a church. They will say, ‘We talked about Jesus.’ ‘We did miracles!’ ‘We credited Jesus!’ ‘All in Jesus name!’ *But they only think they are doing the will of the Father.* What’s missing, FAITH! The crowds would later ask Jesus, **“What must we do to do the works God requires?”** First and foremost - Jesus answered, **“The work of God is to believe on the one he sent”** **John 6:28,29**

What we build upon and trust in will have eternal consequences. Judgment day will only have two commands, COME! and GO AWAY! To the disobedient (unbelievers) – **“Away from me, you evildoers!”** Without faith in Christ there is no pleasing God. It means, **“into the fire of hell (eternal torment) reserved for the devil and his angels.”** And all the cries of Lord, Lord will be too late – to no avail! Swept away eternally!

But to those who believe – WISE BUILDERS – WHO BUILT ON Christ and his Word – those who hear and practice - a heavenly home. John in his Revelation pictures the beauty and blessedness, **“1 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city... 3 No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and his servants will serve him. 4 They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. 5 There will be no more night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever. Rev 22** At home with the Lord! Light! Life! Joy!

What will you build upon – pin our hopes for this life and the next? The hymn writer captures the simple truth, *“On Christ, the solid Rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand”*. Today, so many build their hopes and dreams on the physical: family; good education; good job; expensive toys and homes...while many of these can be blessing from God *we dare trust in them*. When the Storms of Life they will prove to be only sinking sand. Build on the Rock of Christ and his Word! Daily view his mercy and love at the Cross and let his love be a transforming power in your life. It is a matter with eternal consequences – heaven or hell. Keep the Word daily into your lives – build on the Rock solid word – and he will bring us by faith to the joys of heaven. AMEN