

Economic Recession and the House Built on the Rock

by Coty Pinckney 4/16/2009

In a speech on the economy this week, President Obama quoted from Matthew 7, Jesus' closing words in the Sermon on the Mount. A house built on sand falls when the storms come, but the house built on the rock stands. He used this picture to contend that we must build our economic house on a solid foundation. While those from different political ideologies will disagree about whether or not the president's economic policies provide a solid or shaky foundation for future economic growth, all will agree that our economy needs to be built on rock, not on shifting sands.

But Jesus is talking about something much more important than the US economy. He's talking about whether or not *you* enter the kingdom of heaven – that is, whether you rejoice with Him or you suffer apart from Him for all eternity.

Consider the verses immediately prior to Jesus' story about the two houses:

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.' Matthew 7:21-23

There are many, says Jesus, who think they are His who are not; there are many who call out to Him, who pray to Him, who say, "Yes, Jesus is Lord," who even seem to accomplish great things for Him – and yet He does not know them. He never has known them. They look like Christians. They call themselves Christians. Others think they are Christians. But on the Last Day, Jesus will say to them, "Depart from Me!"

What mark distinguishes those who enter the kingdom from those who do not? This is the key question: Does Jesus know you? That is, are you in an intimate relationship with Him? Are you His family? Indeed, are you His bride?

Jesus says, "This is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent" (John 17:3). Eternal life is not the endless extension of life as we know it. Nor is it an extension of this life, minus the pain. Eternal life is *knowing God and being known by Him*.

Furthermore, those in this intimate relationship with God will desire to do His will. They love Him, they live for Him, and so they will follow Him. Their greatest desire will be to show how great He is – just as the lover desires to proclaim the qualities of the beloved.

So the key question is: Do you love Him?

This brings us to Jesus' story about the two houses:

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." Matthew 7:24-27

Note that Jesus only says what the Father tells Him (John 12:49), so doing the will of the Father (verse 21) is the same

as hearing Jesus' words and doing them (verse 24).

Given our brief look at the preceding verses, consider these questions:

- *What does the storm represent?* Ultimately, the same Last Day Jesus was just talking about.
- *What is the meaning behind the house standing or falling?* Will you enter the kingdom of heaven or will you not?
- *What determines whether our house stands or falls?* Our response to Jesus' words – that is, our response to the Father's words. Do we love Him and thus seek to follow Him? Or do we hear Him and say, "Yes, Lord" – but then show that we don't love Him – indeed, show that we don't even know Him, and that He doesn't know us – by acting contrary to God's Word?

So the key point Jesus is making is this: Do you love Him, and thus agree with and submit to His Word? Or do you simply mouth words that appear to honor Him, but neglect to follow Him, and thus prove that you don't love Him?

Remember what He says just in this sermon: We are to be poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3), knowing that we deserve God's wrath; we are to mourn over our personal sin, and over the broader impact of sin in this world (Matthew 5:4); we are to be meek, not pursuing our selfish ambition, not trying to advance ourselves at others' expense, but humbly to serve God and others (Matthew 5:5); we are to hunger and thirst for the righteousness that only comes as a gift from God, that we can never achieve through our efforts (Matthew 5:6); we are to be merciful, knowing that we have been forgiven far, far more by God than we are called upon to forgive others (Matthew 5:7, 18:23-35); we are to be His light, His salt in this world, doing good works and letting others know that it is only by God's grace that we do them (Matthew 5:14-16); we are to root out anger, and lust, and lying, and the desire for vengeance (Matthew 5:21-48); we are not to seek man's approval but God's (Matthew 6:1-18); we are not to set our hearts on earthly treasure but on heavenly treasure (Matthew 6:19-21).

We could go on and on. For Jesus here has summarized what loving God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength means – and the consequent implications of loving our neighbor as we love ourselves. He thus shows each one of us how terribly short we fall of His perfection (Matthew 5:48) – and thus how desperately we need His grace and mercy, shown to us at the cross.

And that, ultimately, is our rock: The cross of Christ – the center of God's eternal plan of redemption. Only there can we find God's forgiveness for the multitude of our sins.

Have you built your house on that rock? Or are you relying on the shifting sands of a few good deeds here and there, some gifts in the offering box, and church attendance?

Whether the US economy comes out of this recession or sinks into depression is, in the end, of little importance. But whether your house is built on the rock or on the sand is of ultimate importance. Therefore, whenever you hear economic news, or arguments about economic policy, remember this story, and ask yourself: "Is my spiritual house built on the rock of the cross of Christ?"