Digging Down Deep
Luke 6:46-49

I asked my girls over breakfast the other day: what's your favourite Bible story? Well one of them said the story of Esther, another Hannah and the boy Samuel, one of them couldn't make up her mind and one of them said this story about the wise and foolish builders. And it's got to be one of the best known Sunday school stories hasn't it?

Well, Su and I had lunch with David and Lyn McChesney last week. If you don't know them they're New Zealanders, and they were telling us that after the recent earth quake that caused so much damage to Christchurch in New Zealand, a 5 story hotel has been left leaning at this dangerous angle. Apparently, despite the hotel having been built to earthquake standards, the earthquake messed up the underlying water table, and turned the ground the hotel was built on into something like the consistency of jelly/jell-o. And now the whole thing is going to have to be pulled down.

Well, Jesus is bringing this sermon on the mount to a close. And he ends with this story about these two builders. And in telling this story Jesus wants this crowd and you and me to get a hold of what those hotel owners in Christchurch have discovered the hard way: that foundations are crucial.

Words aren't enough

So Jesus says in v 46: 'why do you call me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I tell you?' Which means, and this won't come as a surprise to anyone, that it's possible to hear what Jesus says, - to be a member of this great crowd listening to this sermon on the mount for the first time, or like us to read it in the bible, and to walk away completely unchanged and untouched by it, to go away and let his words roll off you like water off a duck's back. And yet that's not the kind of person Jesus principally has in mind here. He's not talking about what we might call a nominal Christian – the kind of person who when asked says 'yeh, I'm a Christian, I mean I was born in England and I'm not a muslim, so I must be a Christian, I think.' That's not who Jesus is talking about principally.

The guy who Jesus is talking about is much closer to home for us. Jesus says this person who doesn't do what Jesus says calls Him, 'Lord, Lord'. He doesn't just call him 'Lord' – the once, like it's a throwaway remark, like it's an easy thing to say – he calls him 'Lord, Lord', so he's serious about this, he's emphatic about it. This person is sure he or she is a disciple, a Christian. Jesus is his Lord and he's adamant about it. And Jesus says 'yup, you can say that, but the reality is different.' You have the words, but there's not the life to back it up. As we used to say at school, you're all mouth and no trousers, all thunder and no lightening. All talk and no walk.

Now remember what Jesus said last week – how he said the person who was an expert at pointing out others' faults but couldn't see that something was seriously wrong with their own heart, was a hypocrite, they were like one of these play-actors wearing a mask. Well, here's another example – the talk, the mask is all there, but there's a difference between the mask and the heart. And James, Jesus' brother picks this up in his letter, in James 1:22 he says 'be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.' So it's possible to deceive

yourself: to hear Jesus words, to say all the right things, but not to do them. And it's not just others you convince – you can convince yourself. You can pull the wool over your own eyes. You can persuade yourself 'Jesus is my Lord', but effectively deny that by how you live, by how you respond to what He asks of you.

But Jesus tells us what real discipleship, real Christianity looks like: v47 'Everyone who *comes* to me and *hears* my words and *does* them.' That's what it means to be my disciple, Jesus says. Discipleship is about coming to Jesus, hearing what he says and doing it. As Paul says later – the Kingdom of God is not just a matter of talk.

And yet one of our problems is that too often we can call Jesus 'Lord', but instead of our lives being shaped by what He says, we do what others say. We are squeezed by the pressure of friends at school, or you do what this person, or that person says, or you're captivated by and pushed along by the spirit of the culture, or by advertising, or any other external influence that wants you to go their way. And against all of those voices, who want you to be like them and live like them, Jesus says, if you're going to be my disciple you have to do what I say.

You see it's possible to *call* him Lord, and yet not be under his Lordship. He isn't your Lord just because you say he is. He's your Lord when He *is* your Lord. And you *live* like He's your Lord. Now just think about this. Imagine a servant living in one of these grand English country houses – think Jane Austin, Pride and Prejudice kind of setting. Now imagine a servant who doesn't do his master's bidding. Doesn't do what his master asks of him. That's an odd kind of servant, isn't it? In fact, his failure to do his master's will, says a lot about what he thinks about his master and what he thinks about himself. In fact in his heart there is this kind of role-reversal going on: he thinks that his own will, what he wants to do, is greater and carries more weight and deserves more attention, than his master.

And tragically, we see the same kind of role reversal in Christianity– we've made the eternal God our servant: Lord, I want you to do this or that for me, and we fail to see that true happiness, true fulfillment, true discipleship can only be found by bringing our lives into line with His will and by bringing both our talk and our walk under his Lordship.

And in explaining this Jesus tells this story about two builders. Which is interesting, because though He's saying that when it comes to how people respond to Him, there are really only two types of people, who either build their lives on Him, or they don't, whatever group you fall into, we're *all* building a house.

Foundations matter because everyone's building

We're all building a house Jesus says, some of us are just starting out, some of us are further on, but we're all building a life. You're constructing the building of your education, of your career, you're building the house of your family, of your marriage, of your key relationships. And all of us – whether we realize it or not -

are building a house for our souls – it's about where you feel secure, it's about your values, priorities, the ultimate things in your life. The house of your inner life. And Jesus is saying, '*How* you build now, and on *what* you build, is crucial'.

Now, when I was a medical student I used to cycle to and from the hospital every day. And the road from where I lived to the hospital took me past this office block that was being built. And I watched it going up over those months, but then when it was finished, it just stood empty. Prime location on one of the main roads going into Cambridge and no-one wanted it, and that baffled me. You know what the demand on housing is like here, well it was like that back then for housing and office space in Cambridge, and yet no-one seemed to want this brand new site. And in the end I spoke to a friend of mine from church who was/is an award winning architect – so he knows his onions. And barely suppressing a smile, he said that to save money the builders hadn't employed an architect: it was a 'design and build'. The builders had designed the building and built it to their own plans. And they had managed to design the integrated multistory car park in such a way that there wasn't enough space to turn a car in. So you could get your car into the car-park, but you couldn't get it out again. So, this building they had invested so much in was wasted. The location was unparalleled, the edifice looked great. But building to their own designs had cost those builders dearly, and the whole thing was going to have to come down again.

Now when it comes to building right, perhaps the most elegant testimony to the need to build on a firm foundation is the tower of Pisa. A beautiful building but a building that is crooked and inherently unstable because of a misjudgment on the importance of foundations: within 5 years of construction starting, it began to tilt. They simply hadn't dug the foundations deep enough and the subsoil they dug down to was unstable – they never got to bedrock.

The lesson here is in building your life, don't build to your own plans and don't neglect foundation work. If you do you risk your life being seriously misaligned and skewed, or wasting your life building to faulty plans. But to end up like that doesn't require you to be deliberately disobedient, or to willfully ignore the words of Jesus, you don't have to go that far. It just requires you to be neglectful.

And that's what the first builder isn't. Jesus says the man who comes to Him, and listens to Him and does what He says, who orientates his life around Jesus and His word, is like a man, v48, 'building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock.'

But not so the second builder. He doesn't do any digging. He, Jesus says in v49, 'built a house on the ground without a foundation.' So it's possible, Jesus says, to build your life without paying any attention, or just passing attention, to the foundation. Instead, you build it straight on the ground, or as Jesus says in Matthew's gospel, on the sand; on the shifting sands of culture, or what's new, or what feels right or good to you. You build it on the sands of external religion, or morality. But if you build on anything other than me and my words, Jesus says, you're like a man building a house for his family, his marriage, his career, his

relationships, his soul, on shifting, sinking sands. And that does two things, it leaves you vulnerable to life's storms, and we'll look at that in a minute, but it also makes for a shallow kind of spirituality.

You see with the second builder, what you see is what you get. But it's all you get. His house is entirely above ground. There's no depth to it. It's all surface stuff, there are no roots going deep, no foundation below the surface. But Jesus is looking for something deeper than just surface stuff. He's looking for something more than a kind of shallow, insipid, superficial, luke-warm Christianity-lite. He's looking deeper than shallow confession, shallow repentance, or shallow worship that doesn't engage your heart.

Instead Jesus calls us to dig deep. Sure he's interested in the externals but the externals, the doing what he says, that life is built on this hidden, inner life, this foundation of private devotion and heart-obedience to Jesus; the hidden, underground, inner life of our hearts that no-one else but God gets to see. And just as 90% of an iceberg is below water, out of sight, so with a disciple – his real life, the substance his life is built on, is foundation stuff. The foundation of acknowledging Jesus as Lord, as master of your life in a way that transforms how you live and how you build. It's having a whole life in Christ – not just words, but changed heart so that there's this consistency, this wholeness between what you say and what you do.

But to build a house on that rock, to do that, this first builder has to dig deep and there's a cost to that.

The cost of digging deep

V47-8 again: 'Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock.'

This guy dug deep, and that takes effort. It takes personal involvement. Digging deep is active not passive. And it will cost you. The guy who just builds his house on the sand, he can go off and enjoy himself while the other guy is digging. He can go play golf, or go to the movies, or head to the mountains all the time the other guy is sweating away, with an aching back, neck deep in a hole. But the guy who's digging deep sacrifices those things. He lets other things go, so that he can dig. Now, the second builder might think the first builder is a fool to spend so much time in a hole, working on foundations, but in reality, the man who digs deep is the wise man, investing at his cost for his future.

Now if you were in home group this week and you did the discussion questions, you'll remember the one that looked back to Jesus saying forgive and you'll be forgiven, give and you'll receive, and we asked the question: 'what do giving and forgiving have in common?' Well, one answer in our group was 'cost'. Giving and forgiving both cost us something. And so will obeying Jesus' words and putting them into practice and building our lives upon him and humbly submitting to his lordship in more than just words. There's a cost to loving your enemy, there's a cost to cultivating a generosity of spirit, there's a cost of forgiving those who hurt

you. Sure, there's always an easier way out, there's always a less costly way to live, but the man or woman digging deep doesn't take the easy way. They dig to build their life on the bedrock of Christ.

But how can you do that, practically? Well, Bill Hybels is the senior pastor at Willow Creek Church in the States. Which is by any standards, but especially by ours, a mega church and they were at the forefront of developing seeker sensitive services and putting on programs to help people grow and mature as Christians. Well, just 3 or so years ago they surveyed their people to find out how all their programs had helped their people dig deep and build on this foundation. This is what Hybels reported:

"Some of the stuff that we have put millions of dollars into, thinking it would really help our people grow and develop spiritually, when the data actually came back it wasn't helping people that much. Other things, that we didn't put that much money into and didn't put much staff against, is stuff our people are crying out for."

"We made a mistake. What we should have done when people crossed the line of faith and become Christians, we should have started telling people and teaching people that they have to take responsibility to become 'self feeders.' We should have gotten people, taught people, how to read their bible between services, how to do the spiritual practices much more aggressively on their own."

In other words, all this external stuff – programs, courses just doesn't help you grow, not in the long term. The way you and I can dig deep and get to bedrock is through those untrendy disciplines of prayer and bible reading. When Mark and I were talking about this this week, he said that sometimes he feels like a stuck record with the young people: because most weeks he finds himself saying 'guys, you need to read your bibles and pray. Read your bibles and pray. If you want to grow, read your bibles and pray.' But that's it. There may be a hundred and one other things we'd rather do, and it's a whole lot easier to admire them from a distance than to actually do them, but the simple day in, day out tasks of repenting from sin, and humbling our pride, and turning from self-righteousness, and drinking deep of grace and forgiveness at the cross, and reading our bibles and prayer, those are the means of growth; that's how we dig down deep.

And that's how you avoid Christianity-lite, but you also need to do that for another reason, because what Jesus says here is that the storms of life are no respecters of person.

The storms come to everyone

Now, when life is easy and times are good maybe you can argue that foundations don't matter. After all, the hotel in Christchurch could have stood for years had it not been for the day the earth shook. But the earth did shake.

And Jesus, interestingly, doesn't say that the first builder dug down deep and laid the foundation on the rock and everyday thereafter he enjoyed beautiful sunshine and nothing so much as a spring breeze troubled him all the rest of the

days of his life. No! For both these guys the day came when, as Jesus says in v48, 'a flood arose, and the stream broke against that house.'

So the question isn't '*are* you going to face storms in life?' The question is: '*will* you stand *when* you do?' And these two houses, from the outside, would have been indistinguishable. Now, maybe with time the one without foundations would have had some cracks developing. But mostly they would look the same. And it's the same for the people those houses are describing. Mostly you couldn't get a credit card between them: they go to the same church, they say the same words, they say they believe the same things. But when the inevitable events of life hit, it's then that we discover the strength of what we've built on. It's then that we see the worth of digging down deep. Because the person who has dug deep and has built their life on Christ and His word has a poise, a dignity, a settled peace that means they can weather these storms, because in the end their confidence isn't in themselves, it's in the rock they've built on, and they know that He can take the strain.

But the sobering thing that Jesus implies here, and makes explicit in Matthew's account, is that while we face storms of difficulty in this life, there's an eternal dimension to this as well. And it's in the last great trial of life, it's in death and the ultimate judgment beyond death, that you discover the real value of building your life on the right foundation.

And here's why. You see, if you face the ultimate test – the test of death and judgment on your own, like this guy who builds on the sand without foundation of rock beneath his feet– then all you've got to stand on is yourself. And however many good things we do, they can never wipe out the wrong things we also do or make up for all the stuff we didn't do but should have done.

But in dying for us, and paying the full price for our sins – both the stuff we shouldn't have done and the stuff we should have done but didn't, out of His great love, Jesus faced the ultimate storm for us. He's the rock that has weathered the storm: the storm of God's justice, the storm of God's wrath. And He stood the test. He stood the test so that we never have to on our own. And so he has become for us the foundation on which we can build our lives, build the house for our families and for our souls, the foundation that means that we can stand in the storms and face the final storm with hope and faith. Faith not in ourselves, but in Christ, the solid rock of our salvation.