

## **Build Your House Upon The Rock - Readings**

A sermon by Rev. Matthew Genzlinger

**Matthew 7:24-29:** Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a prudent man, who built his house on the rock. And the rain descended, and the rivers came, and the winds blew, and they fell upon that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does them not, shall be likened to a foolish man, who built his house on the sand. And the rain descended, and the rivers came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house, and it fell, and its fall was great. And it came to pass when Jesus had ended these words, the crowds wondered at His teaching. For He was teaching them as One having authority, and not as the scribes.

**Isaiah 40:1-8:** Comfort yes, comfort My people, says your God. Speak on the heart of Jerusalem, and proclaim to her, that her warfare is ended; that her iniquity is pardoned; that she has received from the hand of Jehovah double for all her sins. The voice of one proclaiming in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of Jehovah! Make straight in the desert a highway for our God! Every ravine shall be lifted up, and every mountain and hill shall be made low; and the crooked shall become a plain, and the rough places a vale: and the glory of Jehovah shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together; for the mouth of Jehovah has spoken. A voice says, Proclaim! And I said, What shall I proclaim? All flesh is grass, and all its holiness is like the flower of the field. The grass dries up, the flower fades, for the spirit of Jehovah blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass dries up, the flower fades; but the Word of our God shall rise up to eternity.

**Arcana Coelestia 2850:** “In the Word, the ‘sand’ represents memory- knowledges specifically or in particular. Memory-knowledges are compared to ‘sand’ because the little stones of which sand is made in the internal sense signify memory-knowledges.”

**Arcana Coelestia 6479:** “Spirits not so well disposed who were for some time with me continually injected doubts from the fallacies of the senses against the possibility of all things flowing from one fountain, and thus from the Lord....With those who are in what is negative, that is, with those with whom what is negative universally reigns, doubts cannot possibly be removed. For with them one scruple has more weight than a thousand confirmations. For one scruple is like a grain of sand placed close before the pupil of the eye, which, although single and small, still takes away all the sight. But they who are in what is affirmative, that is, those with whom what is affirmative universally reigns, reject the scruples from the fallacies of the senses which are contrary to truths, and if there are any things which they do not apprehend, these they cast to the sides, and say that they do not as yet understand them, and nevertheless they remain in the belief of the truth.”

**Conjugal Love 16:** “The love of being useful, and its consequent application in useful service, keeps the mind from being dissipated and wandering, and from taking in all sorts of seductions which pour in alluringly through the senses from the body and from the world. As a result of these seductions, the truths of religion and the truths of morality are scattered with their goodness to the four winds. In contrast, application of the mind in useful service holds these truths and anchors them, and orders the mind into a form receptive of wisdom as a consequence of them. Moreover, the mind then thrusts aside the shams and pretenses of both falsities and illusions.”

**Arcana Coelestia 44:** “It is the office of the understanding to hear the Word and it is the office of the will to do it. To hear the Word and not to do it, is like saying that we believe when we do not live according to our belief in which case we separate hearing and doing and thus have a divided mind and become of those whom the Lord calls ‘foolish.’”

## **Build Your House Upon The Rock**

A sermon by Rev. Matthew Genzlinger

*“Whoever therefore hears these words of Mine, and does them, I will liken him unto a prudent man, who built his house upon the rock.” (Matthew 7:24)*

The basic meaning of the Sermon on the Mount’s closing verses is simple. The Lord implores us to build a life for ourselves that is founded on Him and the teachings of His Word. If we do this, then when temptations, challenges and the often unseen influences of the hells do assault us – the rain, rivers and winds - the Lord will be able to sustain us. As we sing in one of our popular church songs: “My faith is in the Lord alone, His Word my help and shield. When thousands stumble by my side, His faithfulness is revealed.”

This week, to help us appreciate the importance of this simple teaching we are going to focus on the second part of this parable. Specifically, on the spiritual meaning of sand: “And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does them not, shall be likened to a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand.” (Matthew 7:26)

On a basic level, when mentioned in the Scriptures, “sand” represents truths or pieces of knowledge that have been collected into our memory. “Sand” represents facts that we’ve learned and that exist in the lower levels of our mind. Often we can memorize various facts or pieces of information, but these ideas, these facts, are not necessarily understood on a deeper level or being used for anything that is of real value. So again, “sand” represents what the Heavenly Doctrines call “memory-knowledges” or mere facts that are stored up in our external mind.

Now interestingly, ideas or facts that we store up in our external memory aren’t necessarily bad. In fact, memory knowledge can be very useful when it is used to understand and confirm the higher, more spiritual truths that we receive through the Lord’s Word. And so, in the Scriptures “sand” is often used in a good way to represent memory knowledge that has been conjoined and enlightened by higher knowledges of goodness and truth. For example, in the book of Genesis, Jehovah tells Abraham that He will multiply his seed, “as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore.” (Genesis 22:17) The literal sense of the Word is at times compared to “sand” in which we can find precious things. And so when blessing Zebulun, Moses said that the people would, “partake of the abundance of the seas and of treasures hidden in the sand.” (Deuteronomy 33:19)

In the parable of the foolish man who built his house on the sand, this “sand” obviously does not represent something good. Here sand is something that is scattered and it causes the annihilation of a man’s house. There are two reasons why “sand” in this story is depicted as such a destructive thing.

1. First, in this parable “sand” is used in a negative way to represent memory knowledge that is solely based on input we receive through our physical senses. On one hand, we need to recognize that the Lord created the physical universe and He wants us to use our own physical senses to explore and enjoy the world around us. But at the same time the Lord also ardently warns us that we need to be very careful about falling into the trap of basing our entire understand and outlook in life solely on what we see and perceive through our physical senses. Our physical senses can and should be used to confirm what the Lord teaches us in His Word;

but they cannot be used as our sole authority when it comes to determining what is real; and what is genuinely good and true.

Why is this? Why is building your house on this “sand” so dangerous? It’s simply because on their own, our physical senses are easily fooled and led astray. If we want to become truly spiritual people, one of the most important things that we need to come to accept is the fact that without guidance from the Lord’s Word, our physical senses are easily misled into thinking that certain things are true and good that are not true can good; and vice versa. Without guidance from the Lord’s Word, our physical sense are easily deceived into assuming that various pursuits will bring us happiness when they will not. Without the Lord’s Word in our life we are easily duped into chasing after things that we think are good for us and perhaps good for others, but that ultimately will lead to our own spiritual downfall. And so again, the “sand” that the foolish man built his house upon represents these scattered ideas and thoughts and perspectives that are filled with falsities because they are not founded on the genuine truth that the Lord provides us with through His Word. They are also apt to drift and shift based on current fads and the changing tides of finite human opinion.

How many of you have ever been playing at the beach and gotten a piece of sand in your eye? When you get a piece of sand in your eye, even though it’s very small, it still ruins your entire sight of the beautiful world around you. One piece of sand placed by the pupil of your eye can ruin your entire day. The Lord uses this as an analogy to show that the more we base our understand and outlook in life solely on what we see and perceive through our physical senses – on that sand - the more the smallest doubt will cause us to utterly reject and to be unable to see anything the Lord teaches us through His Word. The more we insist on building our house on the sand, the more we will come to doubt and eventually dismiss anything the Lord teaches us if we cannot see and prove it by means of our physical senses. We read that with people like this, “One scruple has more weight than a thousand confirmations. For one scruple is like a grain of sand placed close before the pupil of the eye, which, although single and small, yet takes away all the sight.” (AC 6479)

2. Besides representing memory knowledge that is solely based on input we receive through our physical senses, the “sand” in this parable also represents something else. It represents truths or teachings in the mind that have not yet been bound together by a life of love and charity.

You think about the image of sand, and sand is something that is easily scattered. If you make a sandcastle on the beach, one thing is for sure, and that is that your sandcastle will not last very long. A strong wind and a rough sea can easily wipe away huge amounts of sand in just a few hours. Of course, it is this unstable nature of sand that caused the foolish man’s house to fall.

Just like individual pieces of sand, the truth or the teachings we learn from the Lord’s Word end up being disconnected and easily scattered if there is not something to bind them together. Love or charity is what does this. Elsewhere the Lord tells us that the truths we learn from His Word are like rocks or stones, but love is like the mortar that holds those rocks together.

Another way to think about this is to recognize that being a loving or charitable person, is really the same thing as being a useful person. If we genuinely love the Lord or love our neighbor, we don't just sit back and feel this sense of ethereal love for them. Loving someone means that you want to be of service to them; you want to help them and do something that will better their lives. Because being a loving person really means being a useful person, the Lord teaches us that it is a life of usefulness that binds together the truths that we learn. When we strive to use what we know to serve others, the Lord is able to take the truths that exist within our own minds and bind them together into the very form of heaven. Regarding this, I'd like to read again a very profound passage from the book *Conjugal Love* paragraph number sixteen: "The love of being useful, and its consequent application in useful service, keeps the mind from being dissipated and wandering, and from taking in all sorts of seductions which pour in alluringly through the senses from the body and from the world. As a result of these seductions, the truths of religion and the truths of morality are scattered with their goodness to the four winds. In contrast, application of the mind in useful service holds these truths and anchors them, and orders the mind into a form receptive of wisdom as a consequence of them. Moreover, the mind then thrusts aside the shams and pretenses of both falsities and illusions." (CL 16:3) Isn't that a wonderful concept. The love of being useful is what holds the truths in our minds together that exist in our minds and anchors them. The love of being useful is what orders our minds into a form that is receptive of heavenly wisdom. It is the love of being useful that makes us spiritually strong and able to overcome during times of temptation.

Now of course with the man who built his house on the sand, the opposite of this is represented. Here we see a person who may know a lot of truth, but this is a person who is not doing or living according to that truth. Instead of working to love others through a life of useful service, the man who built his house on the sand is living a life of faith alone. And because of this, because he lacks the love, the mortar, that can bind the truths in his mind together, those truths that he has learned are easily dispersed. When temptations, challenges and the often unseen influences of the hells do assault him – the rain, rivers and winds – the Lord is not able to sustain him and his spiritual fall is great. People like this are also described in the book of Revelation by Gog and Magog, of whom it is said that their number is, "as the sand of the sea." (Revelation 20:8)

Before we end, I wanted to point out one more fascinating detail about this story. Honestly I just couldn't find a comfortable place to fit this in, so I just add it here as an additional fun fact. So assuming we've all heard this story before, we know that with both the man who built his house on the rock and the man who built his house on the sand, it says that the rain descended, and the rivers came, and the winds blew, and beat upon the house. Right? Both houses experience these natural disasters which represent temptations and the influences of the hells in our lives. But what is very interesting, is that in this story the word translated as "beat upon" – the rain, rivers and winds "beat upon" both houses – changes. In the original Greek a different word is used to describe what happened to the house built on the rock as opposed to what happened to the house built on the sand.

With the house built upon the rock it says that the rain descended, and the rivers came, and the winds blew and they "prospiptoed" the house. Prospipto is a Greek word that doesn't really mean to beat upon. It more means to fall down before. This same word is used in many places to describe unclean spirits falling down – prospipto – before the Lord. In the gospel of

Mark this word is used to describe a woman who was healed by the Lord also falling down before Him. (Mark 5:33) So with the man who built his house upon the rock, what really happened is that the rain, the rivers and the winds ended up falling down before his house. What a beautiful image of how temptations and the influences of the hells don't beat us up, but end up falling down before those who choose to live a life that is founded on the Lord and a life according to His Word. With the man who built his house on the sand, it says that the rain descended and the rivers came, and the winds blew and they "proskoptoed" the house. Again, it's a different word. Proskopto is a Greek word that does more properly mean to beat upon or to slam against. So, when we do not choose to live a life that is founded upon the Lord and His Word, but instead merely rely on the input we receive through our physical senses, and don't conjoin what we know with a life of love and charity, that is when various temptations and the influences of the hells will beat us down, slam against us, and eventually destroy any semblance of spiritual life that we may have had.

This week, reflect on this simple, yet vitally important story of the Lord imploring us to build our house upon the rock; to build a life for ourselves that is founded on the Lord and a life according to His Word. To help us see just how important this is, it can be useful to spend some time reflecting on the meaning of the sand that the foolish man built his house on. This sand represents a mind that is relying too much on the things that appear to be true and good to our physical senses, and not enough on what the Lord Himself has revealed to us through His Word. Do we need to spend more of our time learning from and trusting in what the Lord teaches us through His Word? And this man who built his house on the sand also represents each one of us when we may know what is true, we have a lot of knowledge floating around in our heads, but we are failing to use that truth to actually live a life of love and charity. We need to remember that love, charity and a desire to be of service to others is the glue or the mortar that binds the Lord's truths together. Love and a focus on usefulness is what makes the truths we know strong and able to withstand the many storms in life that we will face. If we can focus every day on hearing the Lord's words and doing them, we will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock. Think about choosing to be like this wise man, for the sake of your own lasting happiness, but also so that you can be an example, inspiring others to do the same. Reading from the book of Isaiah: "A voice says, Proclaim! And I said, What shall I proclaim? All flesh is grass, and all its holiness is like the flower of the field. The grass dries up, the flower fades, for the spirit of Jehovah blows on it; surely the people are grass. The grass dries up, the flower fades; but the Word of our God shall rise up to eternity." (Isaiah 40:6-8) Amen.