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ARE YOU STANDING ON QUICKSAND OR THE ROCK?

Today's Text: Matt. 7: 24-29

Extracts:

[Concluding the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said], “**Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock, and the rain descended and the winds blew and beat on the house, and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand, and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on the house, and it fell; and great was the fall**” [Matt. 7: 24-27]

In 1999, Daniel Cormier, now 57, married a 10-year-old girl in a ceremony in a church in downtown Montreal, Canada, which he pastored.¹ He was arrested and tried for sexually abusing a minor. In his defence, he maintained that he did the right thing in that he was properly married. However, the girl, now 19 years old, testified that at the time she was too young to grasp the concept of marriage. On Monday, 26 January 2009, Cormier, having been found guilty in October 2008, was sentenced to five years in prison.

In Cormier's eyes, he married a 'woman' in a properly organized church wedding, both of which are socially and morally acceptable. However, what was missing was mutual consent between the partners. Therefore, although he got married in the house of God, he stood on a platform that could not withstand moral scrutiny. He stood on quicksand instead of a rock.

Most of us are pursuing success in different walks of life, no matter how defined. In the process, we encounter storms in the form of challenges and set backs. In the end, some of us may achieve our goals while some others may not. In most cases, our success or failure depends not so much on the challenges we encountered but the platform on which we stood to face them. Are you standing on the quicksand of human standards or on the rock of God's word?

Those and more are the issues that we shall examine in this week's study.

¹ Based on 'Ex-pastor jailed for sex with 10-year-old 'wife,' : <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/28872042/> , The Associated Press, Jan. 27, 2009.

1. Storms are no respecter of persons!

The 2009 **World Economic Forum**² has just been held in Davos, Switzerland. (28 January – 1 February 2009) Each year, the Forum brings together top political and business leaders as well as intellectuals and journalists to find common grounds on pressing economic and social issues. The theme of this year's meeting was "Shaping the Post-Crisis World." Conspicuously absent from the summit was the newly elected President of the United States, Barack Obama. The American economy is in very bad shape and he could not afford to give anxious Americans the impression that elsewhere would be more critical to his country's recovery. Meanwhile, China that everyone had thought should be immune, being the leading newly industrializing economy in the whole world, was complaining through its leader attending the Davos meeting that China was also in dire straits. So, if the economic giants are not spared from the current economic storms blowing through the world, can you imagine what is happening to the poor economies? In deed, storms, whether in the form of winds, rains, floods or hardship, are no respecter of persons! They can strike anyone anytime anywhere anyhow.

That is the point that Jesus underlined as He wound up the Sermon on the Mount. He had spoken on a number of issues by juxtaposing the old or traditional view on each one with His own teaching on it. For example, murder is not only with a weapon but with the mouth [**Matt. 5: 21-22**]. Adultery is not only the physical act of having sexual relations with some one else other than your spouse, but it has *already* been committed before the physical contact once you have lusted after the outsider in your heart [**vv. 27-28**]. He also taught His listeners to lay their treasures on heavenly treasures instead of earthly things which could not last [**Matt. 6: 19-22**]. In fact, they should know their priorities in life by placing the kingdom of God over earthly pursuits [**v. 33**]. Righteousness is measured not by rituals (such as public show of generosity, praying or manifestation of spiritual gifts, such as prophesying or casting out demons) but by our fruits [**Matt. 7: 1-23**]. He was not going to force people to accept His way. Instead, He laid out the outcomes and let His listeners make their choice and face the consequences.

In summary, two men built their houses, one on the rock and the other on the sand. Both of them faced rain, floods and winds which beat against their houses. The house of the man who had built on the rock withstood the storm while the house built on the sand collapsed. Jesus concluded that whoever heard His sayings and kept them was wise like the man who had built on the rock while he that did not obey was foolish like the man that built on the sand [**vv. 24-27**]:

We see here that both the wise and the foolish experienced rain, floods and winds alike. We tend to associate bad news with unrepentant sinners. After all, the floods during Noah's time only killed the wicked people while Noah's family was protected in the ark. Was it not the morally depraved people of Sodom and

² <http://www.weforum.org/en/index.htm>

Gomorrah that were destroyed in the fire that God rained from heaven while Lot and his family were saved? That may be true. But how about Job that feared God? What did he do wrong that he was reduced from the wealthiest man in the East to a sick and lonely man within a short time period? We do not have the answers. That was why when the disciples asked Jesus whether it was the man born blind or his parents that had sinned, He replied, “Neither this man nor his parents sinned, *but that the works of God should be revealed in him*” [Jn 9: 1-3].

Some of us have been unable to land the first job since leaving college a few years back. Some of us who were working have since been laid off without any hope of a new job. Some of us have already lost their homes because they could not keep up with mortgage payments. Some of us have lost our life-time savings to unscrupulous investors. Some small business owners have folded up and are now left with bills that have to be paid. Some of us are desperate for healing or fruit of the womb to no avail. Jesus is revealing to us in the concluding part of the Sermon on the Mount the strategy for victory over such hardships. Rather than focus on them, which can easily lead us to worry over or run after earthly or temporal treasures, Jesus says we should know the platform on which we stand so that we can withstand the challenges. He says that if you have built your house on the rock, you are wise and you will win. However, if you have built your house on the sand, you are foolish and you will crash.

2. What are you standing on?

Let us begin by attempting to make meaning of the analogy that Jesus used to describe the platforms on which people may choose to stand. The house represents us. For example, writing to the Corinthian church, Paul said, “We know that if *our earthly house*, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in heaven” [2 Cor. 5: 1]. The winds, rains and floods represent the challenges (physical, psychological and spiritual) that we may face for as long as we live in our earthly houses.

In Scripture, we are told that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom [Prov. 9: 10] and that the fool is the one who has said in his heart that there is no God [Ps. 14: 1]. The wise person is, therefore, the person who walks by faith in God. The fool is more likely to stand on human platforms, that is, walk by sight [2 Cor. 5: 7]. After God had delivered David from the hand of his enemies, including king Saul, he said, “The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer” [2 Sam. 22: 2]. Therefore, the rock represents the Lord and the sand represents the world, that is, human standards.

In reality, we may come across people that do not neatly fit into those two clear modes. But in matters pertaining to God, there is no middle ground. You are either for or against Him. You are either cold or hot. If you are lukewarm, He will spew you out of His mouth [Rev. 3: 14-16]!

So, what are you standing on? Let us examine a few platforms to help you to know where you currently stand:

a) *On Quicksand*

The *Encarta Dictionary* defines quicksand as “a deep mass of loose wet sand that sucks down any heavy object falling onto its surface.” When you are in error or sin and you keep finding explanations or justifications for remaining there, you are standing on quicksand. There are many people who do not know God and do not care. Such people are anxious to take morality out of public policy as if that will kill their conscience. God gives up such people as reprobate minds who practise sin and wickedness as a way of life. So death and destruction are their rewards [**Rom. 1: 24-32**].

Look at the wickedness around you. Politicians and dictators are corruptly enriching themselves while their people wallow in poverty and want. Private and trusted funds managers have made away with the lifesavings of those that had entrusted their future in their care. Sooner than later, such wickedness is stopped and punished. Some perpetrators go to jail. Some die prematurely before they can enjoy their loot.

The Psalmist complained to God when he saw the prosperity of the wicked. He said, “They are not in trouble as other men, nor plagued like other men. Therefore, pride serves as their necklace. Violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance.... When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me.” It was only when he went into the sanctuary of God that he understood their end, namely, God has surely “set them in *slippery places* (and) *cast them down to destruction*” [**Ps. 73: 1-18**].

You cannot go far if you think you can make it by hook or crook because to the sinner God “gives the work of gathering and collecting that he may give to him who is good before God” [**Ecc. 2: 26**]. Quicksand is an unsteady and unreliable platform. You will sink sooner than you think “for what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world and loses his own soul?” [**Matt. 16: 26**].

b) *On Artificial Turf*

In many modern sports grounds, they put a synthetic surface that looks like real grass. That surface is called artificial turf. When you look at it from a distance, it is more attractive than natural grass. However, it is not the real thing. It is only as good as the surface on which you put it. If the underlying surface is quicksand, the turf will also soon sink. Therefore, those who give the public image of being righteous when they have not fully given their lives to God are standing on artificial turf.

In the eyes of God, sin is sin, no matter how little and to break one commandment is equivalent to breaking the whole law [**Jam. 2: 10**]. For example, for striking the rock when God asked Moses to speak to the rock, he was not allowed to enter the Promised Land [**Num. 20: 1-12**], the same punishment received by thousands of the children of Israel who had believed the evil report brought by ten of the twelve spies [**Num. 14: 18-25**]. So, when, for example, you hear of a “gay bishop,” it sounds contradictory! According to Scripture, “A bishop ... must be blameless, *the husband of one wife* ...” [**1 Tim. 3: 2**]. Homosexuals who refused to repent and give up that life style were destroyed by fire in Sodom and Gomorrah [**Gen. 19: 1-11; 24-25**]. Therefore, when you claim to be born again but still live in sin, especially sexual immorality and backbiting, you are standing on artificial turf, not yet on the rock of Christ!

c) *On a Stepping Stone*

Some people are anxious to know God and obey His will. They may be very active in their place of worship by following all the rituals of attendance and participation. However, they have not developed a personal relationship with Jesus or may not even see Him as the Son of God. For example, Moslems believe in God and accept Jesus as a great prophet but deny His divinity. The Jewish leaders saw Him as a great teacher [**Matt. 22: 16**], not as the Messiah [**Matt. 26: 63-65**]. There are some people who are very good by human standards. They have great integrity, do works of charity and maintain high ethical standards. Yet, they may be idol worshippers or atheists. They may believe in God but do not belong to any organized religion. Such people can be said to be standing on a stepping stone. They are standing on a spring board that leads somewhere but may not know where. You cannot stay too long on a stepping stone because it can be frustrating when you can neither go forward nor backward! Why not go all the way?

Cornelius, a Roman military officer, “a centurion of what was called the Italian Regiment,” was called “a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people and prayed to God always” [**Acts 10: 1-2**]. By today’s standards, we would call him a holy man. Nevertheless, God sent an angel in a vision to ask him to send for the apostle Peter. He came and preached Jesus to Cornelius and his household. As Peter spoke, the Holy Spirit fell on them and they spoke with other tongues. They received Christ and were baptized [**vv. 3-68**]. Cornelius moved from a stepping stone to the solid rock of Christ.

d) *On the Rock*

The *Encarta Dictionary* defines rock as “any consolidated material consisting of more than one mineral and, sometimes, organic material, e.g., granite or limestone.” So when the Psalmist calls God his rock, he was likening Him to a rock which is stable, dependable and supportive especially in times of trouble.

Take the case of Paul when he was being taken prisoner on appeal to Caesar in Rome. Their ship ran into a storm and all the weather and shipping experts who had insisted on sailing on that day against prisoner Paul’s advice gave up any hope of surviving. In chains, Paul came to them and assured them that only the ship would be lost. The Lord had sent an angel the night before to assure him that no lives would be lost and he added, “I believe God that it will be just as it was told me.” When they saw him thanking God and eating, their courage returned and they ate, after a fourteen-day ‘fast’! Soon after, all arrived ashore safely and Paul found favour with the centurion [**Acts 27: 9-44**]. Paul survived the storm because he had built his house on the rock.

3. Conclusion: Stand on Christ the Rock of God!

Writing about the journey of the children of Israel through the wilderness on their way from Egypt, apostle Paul reminded his Christian brethren not to be ignorant of the spiritual significance of the rock that God had asked Moses to strike the first time and speak to the second time. If you must know, “that Rock was Christ” [**1 Cor. 10: 1-3**]. Also, recall the dream that King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had had concerning future earthly kingdoms which Daniel interpreted for him. Among other things, Daniel spoke of a stone that was cut “without human hand,” that represented the kingdom of God to be established on earth at the end of the age “which shall never be destroyed (and) “it shall break in pieces and consume all (human) kingdoms, and it shall stand forever” [**Dan. 2: 1-44**]. Clearly, the Pre-incarnate Christ of the Old Testament is the same as Jesus the Christ of the New Testament [**Lk 24: 44**]. He is the rock on which the wise will build and be able to withstand the storms of this wicked world. You can stand on Him and be safe.

The journey may be long. The road may be rough. The challenges will be daunting. But the end is sure. Your eternity in heaven is at stake and Satan knows it. Are you going to succumb to his wiles by standing on the quicksand of human contraptions or go with God by standing firmly on the rock of faith in Christ?

In God’s sight, you are wise to choose Christ over the world. Try!