

JOHNS CREEK UNITED METHODIST CHURCH

Hard Rock Rules

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Matthew 7: 24–27

I confess that with this all this cold and rainy weather I have missed the sunshine of Florida. Florida is known for a lot of things: Lightning (both the hockey team and the real thing!), Gasparilla, beaches, and sunshine.

Florida is also known for something else:—sink holes. They show up a lot in central Florida because underneath the soil is a bed of limestone. When it rains, the acidic rainwater dissolves limestone. Then a large void develops underneath the home or building and it collapses.

“Joe Emerson in his book, *I Wanted the Elevator, But I Got the Shaft*, tells about a skyscraper called the Columbus Building that was built about a hundred years ago in Chicago. And you know Chicago sits on the sandy shores of Lake Michigan.

“When the Columbus Building was erected it soared above the city, but slowly it began to sink into the sand upon which it was constructed. When it was shored up on one side, it would sink on the other. Finally, it had to be torn down. It was impossible to find any way to save it from the shifting sands.

“Fortunately, by the time the next skyscraper was built in Chicago, geologists and engineers had learned their lesson. When the Prudential Building was constructed, pilings were driven deep into the ground until they came to rest on a sheet of solid rock called the Niagara Shelf, which runs all the way to Niagara Falls. Then, and only then, did the Prudential Building rise. It’s still standing today.

“What do sink holes and skyscrapers teach us? It’s important to build on a solid foundation” (King Duncan, “Rock Solid Living”).

A few times Jesus used the example of constructing a building to make this point. Of course, Jesus wasn’t talking about building skyscrapers; he was talking about building a life—a rock-solid life. Here’s what Jesus had to say in Matthew 7:24–27:

“Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation 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. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

The point of this parable is clear: Wise people build their lives on a solid foundation.

But how do we build our lives on a solid foundation? How do we make our lives rock-solid so that no storm, no emotional earthquake, no crisis can break us? What is the formula? What is the right way to do it? Well, in this text Jesus tells very clearly what we must do. **Jesus said we must first hear his words. We Must Listen to Jesus.** Jesus said, “Everyone who hears these words of mine ... is like a wise man who built his house on the rock”

We must listen to Jesus. One of the problems of today is very few people know what Jesus actually said and taught. Even people in the church are not very familiar with the teachings of Christ, or the rest of the Bible, for that matter. Jesus is probably the most misunderstood, misquoted, and misrepresented figure in history. The things said and done in the name of Jesus over the years are appalling. Most people just don’t know Jesus or what he taught. And it’s hard to build a strong foundation when you don’t know Jesus.

Last year Google got into trouble because “Google Home,” its smart speaker, cannot tell users who Jesus Christ is. If you ask Home who Jesus is, it simply says, “Religion can be complicated. I’m still learning.” In fairness, Google says that it does that to protect certain subjects from abuse and vandalism. But it is a commentary on the world’s lack of knowledge of Jesus and what he taught.

Many people approach faith that way. “It’s all complicated. I’ll figure it out when I need it. I have other

things to do with my life.” And then when the storm comes, they have no solid foundations on which to stand. They find their lives have been built on sand.

So, who is Jesus? Who is Jesus to you? Jesus is not complicated. He is God in the flesh. God’s personality in human form. And he came to earth to teach, embody, and demonstrate that love of God and neighbor is the only thing that matters in this world. He also came show that a relationship with him is what will get you through the storms of life.

Are you listening to Jesus on a daily basis? Praying? In scripture? Are you building your life around his love and teaching? Do you really hear him? Really hear him in your heart? Are you committed to following him?

Recently I spoke with someone who has been through some very difficult times. I asked her, “How have you gotten through it?” She said, “Charley, I pray and read the Bible every day. If I didn’t do that I am afraid to think where my life would be.” Throughout my ministry I have learned that the people who survive the storms of life are those who read the Bible and pray on a regular basis.

“In one of the *Chicken Soup for the Soul* books there is a beautiful story told by a medical doctor, Dr. James C. Brown, about a patient of his. The patient was a five-year-old boy named Bobby. Bobby had been diagnosed with leukemia at age four. His cancer was now in remission. Still, he had come to the hospital for a series of diagnostic tests that were a routine part of his treatment plan.

“Bobby had bright blue eyes and a shy smile, says Dr. Brown, that at first glance didn’t reveal the wisdom gained through his one-year struggle against cancer. Bobby had lost all of his hair while undergoing chemotherapy. Chemo often left him nauseous and unable to eat. Bobby had experienced numerous painful procedures and this day was to be no exception. Bobby would undergo a procedure that was extremely painful. He had been through it before, so he knew what to expect.

“Dr. Brown explained to him what they were going to do, and why, and the importance of him remaining very still. Bobby assured his doctor that he would be very still, and he promised that the nurses and technologists in attendance would not need to hold him down.

“As they began, Bobby asked, ‘Dr. Brown, would it be okay if I say the Twenty-third Psalm while you stick me?’ ‘Of course, that would be fine,’ Dr. Brown said, and they began the procedure.

“Bobby recited beautifully. There were no tears and he stayed perfectly still. The procedure went well.

Afterward Bobby said, ‘Dr. Brown, that really didn’t hurt much.’ The doctor and the nurses knew better.

“Then Bobby caught the doctor by surprise. He asked, ‘Dr. Brown, do you know the Twenty-third Psalm?’ ‘Well, sure,’ Dr. Brown answered. ‘Can you recite it like me?’ Bobby asked. ‘Well, I don’t know. I think so,’ Dr. Brown said, realizing that he was going out on a limb. ‘Let’s hear you,’ said Bobby.

“So, Dr. Brown proceeded to stumble through the 23rd Psalm. His performance was quite shabby in comparison to Bobby’s, and he didn’t have a needle sticking in his back like Bobby did. As he recited the Psalm, Dr. Brown noticed all the other white-coated professionals in the room trying to disappear as they feared being called on next.

“Then beautiful and bald Bobby said to all of them, ‘You know, you really should learn the 23rd Psalm by heart. Because when you say it out loud, God hears you and he lets you know inside your heart that He is being strong for you when you can’t be strong for yourself.’” (Duncan).

That boy’s life was built on a solid foundation. The first step is to fill yourself with God’s word and listen to Jesus.

But if we want to build our lives on a solid foundation, we **must not only hear Jesus’s words, we must also put them into action.**

Jesus said, “Everyone then who hears these words of mine *and does them* will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock; and the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock”

Praying and reading the Bible is important, but if we don’t put what we learn into action, we are building our lives on sand. We might as well be spitting into the ocean.

If you really study the teachings of Christ, you will discover that he wasn’t so much interested in telling us how to get into heaven, but how to get heaven into us!

“Dr. Alan J. Meenan tells an important story that emerged from the Los Angeles riots some years ago. These were the same riots that made Rodney King a household name.

“A Hispanic man by the name of Fidel Lopez was trapped by this race-based rioting. He was beaten within an inch of his life, battered by bottles and bats, punched in the face with angry fists, and kicked mercilessly, until an African American minister, Bernie Newton, threw himself on top of him. Bernie Newton cried to the crowd, ‘If you kill this man, you’re going to kill me first.’

“When he finally out-shouted the rioters, he got Fidel into his car, and took him to the Daniel Freeman

Hospital. Sometime later, he raised \$3,000 from a collection in his own congregation to give to Fidel. That was the amount of money the rioters had stolen from him.

“Later Mr. Lopez asked Reverend Newton, ‘How can I begin to thank you? You saved my life. Why did you do what you did? Why did you risk your own life?’ Bernie Newton answered, ‘Because I am a Christian. Because I believe in sowing love, not hate. Because I believe in healing and not hurting. Because I believe in Jesus the Prince of Peace and the Prince of Love’” (Duncan).

This is what the world needs! Again, the world is changed by our example, not by our opinion. Remember that the next time you want to rant on Facebook or fire off the opinionated email. What can you do to transform the world, not just add to rhetoric and noise? I don’t need to tell you that much of the world sees Christians as people who say a lot about love but don’t do much about it.

A man wrote to *Readers Digest* sometime back. It seems his wife was behind a car that sported three bumper stickers: The first one read, “Don’t be fooled by genetically engineered food—demand labels and safety testing for food”; the second bumper sticker read, “Eat for the health of it”; and the third read, “Support organic farmers.” The car was in front of her at a McDonald’s drive-through.

It’s difficult to have an impact in the world if we are saying one thing and doing another!

Unfortunately, that is why the church is not having more of an influence in this world. Because the world sees too many Christians saying one thing and doing another. And I’m not just talking about sin and morality. I am also talking about talking a big game about love, forgiveness, and mercy and not living it. Why should the world take us seriously if our lives do not embody what we teach and preach?

Remember the world is watching us. Does our walk match our talk? Our children are watching us as well. What do they see? What kind of foundation are you building for those you love? Are you helping your family, your children, build their lives on a solid foundation?

“Allen C. Emery was a successful businessman who also has served as an officer for many church organizations. For years he and his wife have hosted a Bible club at their Massachusetts church that draws up to one hundred young people each week.

“Allen Emery says he owes his values to his father. In his book *A Turtle on a Fencepost*, Emery writes, ‘Today I find myself still asking, ‘What would daddy do?’ when confronted with those decisions in business and in life that are so often not black and white,

but gray. I am in debt to the memory-making efforts that my father made to imprint indelibly upon my mind the meaning of integrity.’

“Emery remembers his dad as a man who valued honesty in all the affairs of life. He says that once his father lost a pair of fine German binoculars. He filed a claim with his insurer and collected a sum of money as settlement. A year later he found the binoculars.

“Immediately he sent a check to the company. The insurance people wrote him and said this seldom occurred, that people returned funds, and that they were encouraged by his example. ‘It was a small thing,’ says Allen Emery, ‘but children never forget examples lived before them’” (Duncan).

What values are your children learning? Are you helping them build on a solid foundation? Do they see a commitment to integrity and right living on your part?

“Everyone who hears these words of mine,” our Savior said, “and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock”

The world desperately needs us to put our beliefs into practice. Have you seen the state of our world? Now, more than ever, people need to see and experience the love of Jesus. Now, more than ever, the world needs less talk and more action from Christians.

Most people believe that former President Jimmy Carter is a wonderful ambassador for Christ. “After his term as president of the United States, Jimmy Carter desperately wanted Americans to catch the vision of providing quality housing for under-resourced people.

“Rather than immediately hitting the speaking circuit, he and his wife Rosalyn bought hammers and started hitting nails for Habitat for Humanity. After months of embodying the vision, during which the entire nation had seen him swinging a hammer on the evening news, then he started giving talks about it. And people listened.

“How could they not listen to a man who had calluses on his hands from living out the picture God had painted in his mind?” (Duncan).

The late Bishop Henderson remembers learning this lesson. He was invited to a special black-tie dinner honoring President Jimmy Carter. He got all dressed up, found the best seat at the dinner. He was watching the door all night for President Carter to walk in. Someone got up and announced that President Carter was running late but he would be there soon. Finally, he arrived. Bishop Henderson said he straightened his tie, put his chest out. He looked so proud. Then President Carter entered the room, and Bishop Henderson said he couldn’t believe his eyes. President Carter was wearing overalls and was covered in sweat and dirt because he had just come from building a Habitat house—they had

to finish it. Bishop Henderson said as he looked down at his tuxedo he never felt more convicted in all of his life.

The world needs Christian who aren't all talk, but all action. The world needs people who can be depended on. The church needs Christians who can be depended on. Little children need parents who can be depended on. We need people who not only hear the word, but who put that word into action. For when we do that, we make an impact on this world for Christ.

What kind of foundation are you building for your life and for those you love? Listen to Jesus and put his words into action. The world is desperate for it.

NOTE: I am grateful for King Duncan's message, "Rock Solid Living." His references, illustrations and stories were very appropriate for this message.

Questions for Discussion/Reflection:

1. How has your walk with Christ helped you during difficult times?
2. How do you practice listening to Jesus? What has been most helpful to you?
3. What person or persons has had a significant influence on your faith? Can you recall a time or event that illustrates it?
4. In what ways can your Christian witness influence others? Can you name a time that your faith made a difference to another person?