SIMPLE FAITH

The Simple Secret of an Unsinkable Life

Matthew 7:24–29

LET'S BEGIN HERE

Storms and life go together. There is no place on earth where any of us can be free—completely free—of tension or pressure, trouble or pain. Escaping such is only a dream . . . a fantasy.

Our need, therefore, is not to think of ways to get away from the storms but to learn the secret of going through them. This brings us to the last words Jesus spoke in His immortal Sermon on the Mount. As He drew His remarks to a close, He used a vivid word picture of two houses built on opposite foundations. From this familiar illustration, we can learn the secret of an unsinkable life.

LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. Stories That Stay with Us

Part of what makes stories so effective as teaching tools is their ability to stick with us. What exactly gives the best stories staying power? What is it about a good illustration that digs its teeth into our gray matter? Stories stick with us because *people and personalities give stories interest*. Stories stick with us because *stories present us with life situations that we can imagine or with which we can identify*. Stories stick with us because *stories offer lingering lessons that span the ages and from which we learn*.

Quotable

If your foundation is sure, no storm will cause your life to collapse. You can't move an immovable Rock.

— Charles R. Swindoll

2. A Parable of Lasting Value

As Jesus concluded His magnificent sermon, He did as He so often did during His ministry—He told a story. And this story, though brief, had all the elements to make it memorable: unique personalities, identifiable situations, and lingering lessons.

The elements of Jesus' story at the end of Matthew 7 are simple and well-known. A wise man built his house on a strong foundation, and the home withstood the storms thrashing at its walls. In the meantime, a foolish man built his house on a foundation of sand, and his home succumbed to the storms thrashing at its walls. However, a close look at the story and at Jesus' commentary uncovers oft-overlooked but relevant truth for our lives.

Notice the identical elements between the two sides of this story. Both of the main characters in the story are builders. In fact, they are even building the same thing, a house. However, Jesus had more in mind here than giving advice on proper building codes. The houses and the builders' techniques are images of our lives and the approaches we take as we "build" them. As we embrace values and make decisions that have implications for eternity, which approach will we follow? Will we build on rock, or will we build on sand? Through imagery, these two builders represent the variety of human beings who approach life in vastly different ways.

A CLOSER LOOK

This Is the House That Jews Built

The standard dwelling in Israel usually included four rooms and a central, open courtyard (2 Samuel 17:18; Mark 2:1–4). The courtyard provided a place for family and friends to assemble, as well as an open-air spot for cooking. Stairs from the courtyard allowed access to the flat roof, usually made of wooden crossbeams that supported reeds and branches held together with mud. Scripture refers to these rooftops as places for sleeping (1 Samuel 9:25–26; 2 Samuel 11:2), religious devotion (Jeremiah 19:13; 32:29; Acts 10:9), and even escape from marital tension (Proverbs 21:9).

The Jews constructed their homes largely from bricks and stones (Leviticus 14:40, 42), which were whitewashed and decorated with sycamore, olive tree, and cedar woods (Leviticus 14:45; 1 Kings 7:2; Isaiah 9:10). In Capernaum, archeological discoveries reveal that the houses there were built from basalt rocks—stones remaining from ancient volcanic activity in the area. One home in particular has received special attention. Very strong archeological evidence, including several uncovered first-century artifacts like fishhooks and the home's structural layout, leads many to believe that this house was Simon Peter's (Mark 1:29–35; 2:1–4).[1] In the fifth century, Christians built a church over the structure.

LET'S LIVE IT

As you seek to make the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount a reality in your life, you need to recognize that you are a builder . . . and that the storm clouds are gathering in the distance, if they haven't already arrived. With these truths in mind, you should ask yourself two questions.

- First, *is your foundation absolutely solid?* This isn't a question about how often you attend church or how good an employee you've been or how high your ethical standards are in comparison to everyone else's. Are you completely committed to Jesus and His desire for your life?

- Second, *is the house you're building eternally reliable?* Take a look at the house you've been building. Is it strong? Will it hold when the storms come? Do you need to find stronger materials for the structure?

Which elements of Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount are the most difficult for you to commit to? Why?

ENDNOTE

1. David E. Garland, "Mark," in *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary*, vol. 1, *Matthew, Mark, Luke*, ed. Clinton E. Arnold (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 215–16.

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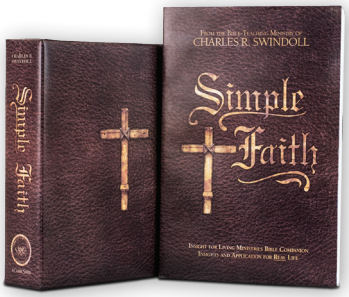
Tools for Digging Deeper



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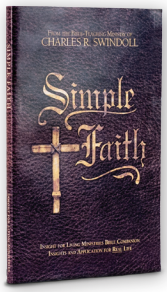

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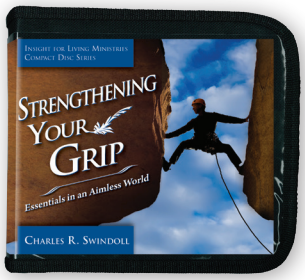

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