

Reflections for New Year's Eve During 2011, build the Church wisely

Do not know about you, but I find it hard to love a fool. Particularly the kind that thinks he knows everything about the whole thing, yet knows nothing about anything. "Fools certainty" is more than frustrating, it's also dangerous. Jesus said that people who do not listen to what he says are like fools who build houses without foundations!

Matthew 7:24-27: "Therefore 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."

Who will argue that we live during times when fools will not cause harm and live lives with high risks? Who wants to enter 2011 a fool and have the house of Faith washed away by the challenges and temptations that lie ahead?

The problem with foolishness is that it often looks so much like wisdom, or at least like being clever, that its hard to see the difference at first. In the parable two men built 2 very similar houses. Both desired to build a home in which they could live with their families, be safe and happy. Both houses had the features to provide the shelter they were looking for, had doors, windows, views and various amenities.

But note, there were also important contrasts or differences between the two houses and the two men. The most important difference between the men is that one is a fool and the other one is wise. This results in the important contrast between the houses. The wise man took the trouble to build on the appropriate foundation, but the fool did not consider the future and the challenges the house would face. He was short-sighted. He saw only the moment and the excitement of living in his new house. He did not ensure the safety, the future and the tests his house would have to survive.

A. When the storm came, the fool's house was taken out and demolished by the circumstances.

Too many church builders find their foundation in fashionable, dated theology based upon the perceived needs of the people of a particular time (pre-modern, modern or post-modern) than on translating and putting to practice the absolute Word of Christ for the sake of the faith-needs of the generation they minister to.

The post WW. II tendency to want to build churches and denominations on other principles than historic creeds, absolute truth and obedience, yes, the foolish desire to promote a life of faith, without being concerned with faith content, is taking its toll in the current inability of the church to now weather storms that have been part of being the church since the beginning.

A review of the past year's research conducted by the Barna Group provides evident main patterns of how the religious environment is changing (this is a very short excerpt from their findings) :

1. The Christian Church is becoming less theologically literate.

What used to be basic, universally-known truths about Christianity are now unknown to a large and growing share of Christians --especially young adults. Few believe that their faith is meant to be the focal point of their life or to be integrated into every aspect of their existence.

2. Christians are becoming more ingrown and less outreach-oriented.

Christians are becoming more spiritually isolated from non-Christians than was true a decade ago. Examples of this tendency include the fact that less than one-third of born again Christians planned to invite anyone to join them at a church event.

3. Growing numbers of people are less interested in spiritual principles and more desirous of learning pragmatic solutions for life.

When asked what matters most, teenagers prioritize education, career development, friendships, and travel. Faith is significant to them, but it takes a back seat to life accomplishments and is not necessarily perceived to affect their ability to achieve their dreams.

4. Among Christians, interest in participating in community action is escalating.

Largely driven by the passion and energy of young adults, Christians are more open to and more involved in community service activities than has been true in the recent past.

5. The postmodern insistence on tolerance is winning over the Christian Church.

Our biblical illiteracy and lack of spiritual confidence has caused Christians to avoid making discerning choices for fear of being labeled judgmental. The result is a Church that has become tolerant of a vast array of morally and spiritually dubious behaviors and philosophies.

6. The influence of Christianity on culture and individual lives is largely invisible.

Culture is driven by the snap judgments and decisions that people make amidst busy schedules and incomplete information. With little time or energy available for research and reflection, it is people's observations of the integration of a believer's faith into how he/she responds to life's opportunities and challenges that most substantially shape people's impressions of and interest in Christianity.

Too many Christian leaders take the foolish man's approach to building faith communities: they go for short-cuts and quick results and instant satisfaction. Fashion theology in stead of eternal truth provides no security to the Faith community.

Instead of building Faith by building on the Word, Jesus Christ, and a relationship with God by means of worship, sound teaching of God's word and earnest fellowship with God and fellow believers, fools try to get by with a fashionable word and a quick prayer when the storm comes up.

B. The wise man is the opposite of the foolish man. He wanted to build permanently. He wanted to build for the future. He wanted a house that would endure the storms that time would bring. He considered what could happen during various possible future scenarios - so he built his house on a foundation.

Jesus reminds us that the most significant and essential thing in the life of a Christian, is his or her foundation. The foundation seems irrelevant and inconsequential because it is out of sight. But if the foundation is done haphazardly and thoughtlessly, the structure will without doubt be destroyed.

When our congregation built our chapel 4 years ago, we had excellent scientists doing a lot of homework, providing us - or rather our engineers and builders - with detailed information. You see, we have a high risk of dolomite and its destructive consequences. We had to get the foundation right to ensure a long lasting, quality structure. The right foundation and protection of that foundation, was the key to successfully building our chapel on this land. Fools cannot build on high risk land!

When it comes to faith, spirituality and our relationship with Christ, to building our lives, our families, our congregations and our denomination, we can never afford to take short-cuts. We simply have to make sure that we are building on the proper foundation.

C. The only foundation which we can build on, is Christ Jesus. This is Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 3. He writes: (1Cor 3:10b,11) "... each one should be careful how he builds, for no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."

To build on anything but Christ is to play with disaster. For when the storms come, what you have built will be washed away, if you are not built upon the Rock that is Christ. Jesus said wise men put his words into practice! Only a fool will ignore what Christ said and what he did to secure our lives' homes and trade it for the fashion theology of the day.

From the outside, at least, there is very little difference between the wise man and the fool. You find them both in the Church. Both seem to enjoy fellowship. They listen to the same Gospel. They may both be involved in the life and ministry of the church. It sometimes is hard to tell them apart.

Starting the New Year, we therefore have to look at our hearts. What do you see there? Do we see a wise man or a fool? Don't answer too quickly because they look so much alike.

Check your heart and resolutions against the following God inspired words:

(Mt 7:24) Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

(Mt 7:26) 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.

*(Mt 7:21) Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, **but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.***

The bottom line is – a wise person listens to and obeys Jesus, but the fool does whatever he pleases, in spite of what Jesus says.

D. It is therefore important to see if we have an obedient heart. Do we see faith working itself out in our daily lives and teaching? Do we see hearts that desire to worship, to learn and to abide by what Jesus expects?

Do you see the fruit and gifts of the Spirit? Do you see an eagerness to serve and love God?

Too many live only for the present, never give a thought to the future and refuse to think of eternity.

These fools eat, drink, party, work, and collect material treasure without realizing that when the storm of judgement comes, all of this will be demolished by the ruling before the throne of God.

The wise man lives in the present, but is equipped for the future. He considers the future. He considers eternity. He therefore has to have the right foundation.

Back to the parable. Within the church of Jesus there are wise builders and foolish builders. There are those who build upon the Rock called Christ and put his words into practice. They are wise and they are safe.

And then there are fools!

May Christ and his gospel help us to be wise builders during 2011.

And may God bless us every step of the way!