

For your Edification

The Joy of Life

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In **Matthew 7:24-27** we read the parable of two house-builders. As we read let us have this question in mind, Why was one builder called wise and the other foolish?

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.

A closer look at this parable will reveal to us that one man was foolish because he did not mind about the life-span-value of his investment. All his efforts were directed at simply having some form of shelter. How long that shelter would stand, or thinking seriously about what might happen in case of a heavy downfall rain, did not bother him. He was only concerned about his present need of comfort. Well, he finished his project, and certainly had happiness. This word “**happiness**” has an interesting meaning in the **Chinese language**: it is written like this: 快乐 and means “**fast joy**”! That’s exactly what the foolish man had – fast joy. But the problem with ‘fast things’ is that they don’t last, and this is what happened to the foolish man: when the rains descended and boisterous winds blew, his fragile house was destroyed. Quite a sad ending.

In this world the value of something is often determined by how long it will live. For example, a pure leather shoe often costs more than one which was made out of a simpler and cheaper material. And many times, a simpler material may look more attractive and better polished but yet with a short life-span. Now, we don’t want to spend our hard-earned money on such things. What we want is not “fast joy” but what the Chinese call “**eternal joy**”, 永樂. This joy may take longer to achieve, but once achieved, will stay longer. That is what made the other man in the parable to be wise.

The parable of the two builders has never had such a wonderful meaning and importance to me like this time around when I am now engaged in a project to build a house for my family. This is not an easy undertaking— there are all sort of builders, good ones and bad ones. There are those who steal your building materials and those who are faithful. The strange thing is how most of the constructors, when you ask for advice about what needs to be done will almost always advise you to compromise with standards and quality. I told the constructor we hired: “**Sir, kindly advise on the proper standards and materials that need to go into the house. My concern is not money but quality. I am not rich but if it**

takes me a number of months to save money for just a simple construction task so be it. Three months down the line the building works began to take shape. My



pockets were empty but I had this constant joy of knowing that the money is going into a long term investment. One day thoughts began going through my mind, **“Suppose I live to see this structure completed and it becomes a good house. So beautiful that our church won’t need to hire hotels for visiting ministers who come from overseas. How would I feel if an earthquake was to occur and tore this structure apart?”** If

this were to happen, then no matter how long the structure would live, whether 50 or a 100 years, the joy which would have been earlier experienced would have been a temporal one. It would be a loss. However, not so if we follow the other way of determining value.

Eternal Value

We live in a busy world. Every day human beings arise early in the morning. Rush for work. Work hard. Earn money and then spend it. Before one realises, he or she is old and remains with few years to live - **“our life lasts for seventy years, eighty with good health, but they all add up to anxiety and trouble – over in a trice and then we are gone”** (Psa. 90:9-10, the Jerusalem Bible). When death arrives, all that one had accumulated is left behind. Now, if all what that person had lived for were earthly objectives, the story ends there and he would have lost the value of whatever he had pursued!



His properties may remain with his children, siblings or other people, but he himself will no longer feel any attachment to the earthly things when his soul would get into that dimension where the value of physical matter ceases to affect him. The rich and wise King Solomon of Israel had once pondered over these matters and felt discouraged. **“I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me”** he said. **“And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have showed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity”** (Ecc.2:18-19). But friends, with the blessed hope of eternal life that humanity has received in Christ, there is another way of determining value: it is by considering what value our work, assets, or activities contribute to the eternal purposes of God. The Lord Jesus put it this way: **“lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”** (Matthew 6:20-21). Think of it: this is not a value based on a lifespan of 3 years, 10, 20 or 100 years but eternity! This is what we are admonished in Proverbs 3:5-10:

Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths. Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil. It shall be health to thy navel, and marrow to thy bones. Honour the LORD with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of all thine increase: So shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine.

How wonderful to know that we can trust in God and stop to worry about this problem and that problem, and in the process blame this circumstance and that person for our misfortunes. That moment when one receives the revelation of resting our cares in Him, he or she shall realise how often it is futile to fight the various things that come to distract our faith with our might. ***“They that wait upon the LORD”*** says the Word, ***“shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint”*** (Isa. 40:31). This strength of our spirits will come from the true joy that abides within our hearts. But how shall a believer have the joy when he or she is never in the presence of God? In God’s presence we commune with the one who made us. The one who knows our needs that no other person will understand or see. Yes, God is the one who heal whatever deeply hurts within your life. In His presence you shall experience the joy of spirit, and that joy is what will give you strength to live each day as it comes – ***“the joy of the LORD is your strength”*** (Neh. 8:10). Amen.



Rest in His promises!

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