

THE TWO BUILDERS

By Harold W. Freeze

The subject of our discussion on this occasion is, "The Two Builders," and, by way of introducing its theme, I would stress the thought that, in proportion to our diligence so shall the reward be. Our text, which is found in the Gospel of St. Matthew, beginning at the 24th verse of the 7th chapter, deals with two men, one of whom built his house upon a rock, while the other built upon the sand. This narrative, with its dramatic ending, is so familiar—to the greater number of my readers at least—that I shall not attempt to rehearse it at this time.

It will be recalled that, surrounded by His disciples, Jesus, speaking from the mount to the multitude below, made use of this story as a parallel to illustrate, in the first instance, the prudence of wholeheartedness, and, in the second, the vanity of indifference, in the vital question of eternal salvation. Indeed, we have here a striking simile, employed on an occasion already endowed with immortality through the recitation of the "Beatitudes."

As I read the passage of Scripture to which I have referred, it seems to me that this is not the portrayal of the devout on the one hand and the scorner on the other. Rather, the picture presented, I think, is that of two ordinary men—men who sought security from future woe. Neither spurned the prospect of a haven, but each, in his own way and after his own concept, was ambitious for adequate protection. Accordingly, these individuals decided to provide themselves with housing in the hope of finding therein a shelter in the time of storm.

The first man probably paid little attention to elegance, as far as the outward appearance of his habitation was concerned. He was interested primarily in the laying of his foundation. Methinks I see him digging grimly in the rocky site which he had chosen, while each particle continued to yield to the persuasion of his tools only with the greatest reluctance. Though many a loiterer may have paused momentarily to smile in amusement at the degree of apparently superfluous care lavished on this foundation, or may even have been forced to concede a certain measure of grudging admiration to the workmanship, it is extremely doubtful if any volunteered to lighten the labourer's arduous task; the back-breaking nature of his toil was too uninviting. On the contrary, it is highly probable that he tallied his slow progress alone and in the sweat of his brow. Yet, his faith refused to be shaken—like Noah's confidence in the building of the ark—and this determined man persevered to the completion of his foundation. With such a foundation, it must be assumed, too, I believe, that no mean timber was tolerated in the erection of the superstructure of this dwelling, designed, as it was, for endurance. So it was that the first builder's plans came at last to be executed fully in dependable materials.

In presenting the case for the second builder, I think it is not fantastic to infer that he, too, had taken certain precautions. At the outset, he probably had the foresight to choose a location above highwater mark. For added security he may have braced the sills that lay on the sand, and, finally, it is not unlikely that the decision was made to use the

most weather-resisting materials, without, of course, sacrificing too much of the outward attractiveness of the structure. But it need not be taken for granted that the builder on sand, like the first builder, had discouraged assistance through the inexorable demands of his undertaking, or that devotion to duty had entirely prevented the workman from deferring to the wishes of his associates. In due course his building also reached completion and the second builder took his case.

Thus we behold the two houses overlooking the tide, each, in its way, representing the efforts and hopes of its builder. The first planner had accomplished his task through solitary, unceasing toil, urged on by love for his art and buoyed up by the firm conviction that the sacrifices were worthwhile. The second man had avoided the tiring burdens and the long, lonely hours, wherever possible, and, though beset, perhaps, with misgivings from time to time, he had found reassurance in the approbation of his friends. He had got the job done with the minimum of self-denial. Before taking leave of this phase of our discussion let us note that each man had enjoyed absolute freedom in choosing the location for his house, and in the manner of its building.

Continuing, I would dwell for a short time upon the experience of the one who has been designated as "the second builder," and the similarity to him of many present-day aspirants to spiritual security. In pursuance of my theme I want to emphasize, in this connection, the regrettable returns from doubtful diligence and, accordingly, would make these observations,—

The second builder, as he took the initial precaution of locating above highwater mark, is aptly depicted today by the one who would attempt to win eternal salvation through leading a moral life alone. True, this is a step not to be ignored but it is, of itself, utterly insufficient. This is substantiated in the Gospel of St. Mark (10-17), where we read of the young man who, though he had kept all the commandments from his youth, and despite the fact that Jesus loved him, went away "exceeding sorrowful" rather than meet the conditions outlined by our Lord. There is no record of this young man's subsequent change of attitude and his return to the Author of Salvation.

Then, those there are who emulate the builder on sand when he took the second precaution of bracing the sills which he had placed on the shore. These, apparently, hope to merit eternal bliss by embellishing a moral life by a connection with some religious body, and by accepting that body as their guide and passport to Heaven. The futility of this course is clearly shown in Revelations 3:16, wherein the church at Laodicea is condemned by God as he pronounces judgment upon them and promises to spue them out of his mouth. If further confirmation were required, we have only to revert to the most select body of Christians yet assembled on this earth—the very disciples of Christ. At one time, to have imitated Thomas was to be a doubter; to have followed Peter would have meant denial of Jesus, while collaborators with Judas would have found themselves bartering salvation for silver.

Again, the second builder's third and last precaution of choosing weather-resisting materials for his house is sometimes duplicated,

we fear, by the moral-living, church-attending man who would speculatively make a final contribution towards spiritual ease. His third and last safeguard is to attempt to bask in the sunshine of the minister of his church, and, incidentally, obtain ecclesiastical sanction for his conduct. The propriety of this plan of action is ably disputed in the 32nd chapter of the Book of Exodus, where we note that Aaron, the appointed high priest of God, once condoned the act of idolatry in his people by building them a golden calf to receive their homage. It must be evident, therefore, that even spiritual leaders are not always entirely dependable.

From the foregoing it will readily be seen that builders on sand, and their spiritual counterparts, are doomed to failure before they start. Jesus described as "great" the fall of the house of the second builder referred to in St. Mark's Gospel, which implies the complete frustration of his plans and efforts, while history has recorded many times the calamitous end of the man who did not recognize to the full the importance of the redemption of his soul. Indeed, there are cases on record where, at the last, the disillusioned one has gone out in despair at the apparent hopelessness of his lot.

Let us now consider the result of the efforts of the first builder. He it was who built in the rock, and his house it was that withstood every furious trial. In short, he alone obtained security in the final analysis. Such a one was John the Divine, who likewise built upon the rock—upon the very bosom of his Lord. John's eyes were fixed upon Him who asserted, "I am the Light of the World," and that disciple's ears were ever tuned to catch the lowest tones of the One who said, "My sheep know my voice." Thus, when the rains fell—when the floods came and the winds blew—John remained steadfast, firmly anchored to his Rock. In that shadowed hour of Christ's death, John was there, supporting the mother of his Lord, and to John's loving care was the heartbroken Mary entrusted. Following the departure of his Master from the earth, this "disciple whom Jesus loved" remained constant in his adoration and, finally, before John's own exodus, it was to him that God was pleased to give his great Revelation. What a singleness of purpose on the part of John; how certain its recognition by Jesus, and how full the recompense at the hand of God?

In conclusion, may we not fail to realize that he who would be secure for time and eternity must build in the Rock alone. He must scorn the sand and seek the stone. He only, in the spiritual sense, is he a lifter and not a load. In his home the life of such a one continues to bear fruit even after his death. In his community just law will not irritate him; respect, not fear or contempt, will be his due. His aid and comfort will be sought and God will be a frequent visitor at his door in the guise of the helpless child or the broken in spirit. In his church he will be a pillar—and the church has need of many pillars: praying pillars, singing pillars, testifying pillars, and giving pillars. There he will be, not a burden but a blessing. To his minister he will prove a friend and an inspiration—a co-worker in the ripened harvest fields. In all, through all, he will be one of God's noblemen on earth, and, ultimately, on his brow will rest the crown of Life Everlasting!