

Sunday 18th April 2010.

BUILDING: OUTREACH: BELONGING x16

READING: Matthew 7: 24 – 29

BE READY – FIRM FOOTINGS.

Deadlines: how many times do we hear that builders/ workers have missed the deadline? They are not ready on time – either the planning was wrong or the workers were doing too many other jobs on the side – whatever!

Yet we have good news that the Olympic site is on time and will be ready for when it's needed. Is that still true Neil?

In the NT both Jesus and also the early Christian leaders & writers speak about the need to be ready. Jesus used many parables to illustrate the need for being prepared and we read one of them today which focuses in on 2 men each building a house. This is of course not just about literal building of material things but also about the figurative reality of being ready as God's people for the situations that greet us each day and also ultimately about building and being ready for the day when judgement comes.

The parable of the 2 builders in *Matthew's Gospel* comes at the end of Jesus' teachings to his disciples called the Sermon on the Mount.

(Luke 6: 46 – 29. Jesus asks why do you call me "Lord, Lord" but don't do the things I say) Jesus describes one man who digs down until he finds rock and then builds his house – this mans house will stand when the rain and flood waters come – just so any person who builds their lives on the rock foundation of Jesus and his teaching will stand when adversity and judgement come, which they surely will. The other man – at the opposite end of the spectrum is not concerned with foundations and is happy to build on sand – when the rain comes and the water rises his house is swept away. Just so any person Jesus says who ignores him and his teaching will be swept away when adversity and judgement come – which they surely will.

In our world of great climatic uncertainty and change this illustration is very powerful to us even in the temperate regions of England.

The theme of being ready is not limited to the sayings of Jesus.

Just last Sunday Geoff spoke to us from *Paul's letter to the Thessalonians (1T 5)* about being ready for Christ's return – which is of course synonymous with Judgement.

In the OT *Psalms* the writer in *110: 3* talks about God's battle with his enemies of greed and injustice and so on. The writer says that God's people will be ready when God acts, when God sends his Spirit against his enemies then his people will be ready to volunteer. I wonder if you feel and are ready for when you are needed?

We spend time getting ready in advance and plan for Christmas, weddings, holidays, secondary school entrance – but are we ready – are we following Jesus now or just paying lip service, *Lord, Lord!* when other priorities really govern our preparation and life.

Readiness to fight the enemies of both God and humanity is a specific theme of *Paul's letter to the Ephesians. (6:15)* **We should be ready because we have the Gospel of peace to therefore share the Good News of peace.** (It's self-perpetuating!)

In the middle of a passage where Paul is using a description of a Roman Centurion's armour to illustrate the spiritual warfare and armour of the Christian Paul talks about peace! (Have you ever thought how strange this is?).

Are we ready to reach out with the gospel of peace – peace which comes of course through Jesus Christ. Do we know what the good news is about God's peace (shalom/erenes). The full version of the Gospel is to be shared and not just a caricature. **(NB The "Gospel" is Jesus Christ and his teaching).**

Shoe yourselves with readiness! In this we work together as a church as well as on our own. We are to be ready for what the spiritual climate change throws at us – *every strange wind of doctrine!* If we are built upon the person and teachings of Jesus then the Church will stand! If the Church does not dig down to the rock and build on the foundation of Jesus it will not stand. If you do not build your life and family life and work life upon the person and teaching of Jesus it will not stand when adversity comes – and it will come.

There are many indicators that in this age the spiritual tides are shifting and rising dangerously. There are political indicators of uncertainty, financial difficulties – houses built on sand, political systems built on falsities – that the house is toppling... while this could be scare mongering ...it could also be true. Beware the prophets who say "peace, peace when there is no peace", beware the Christian leaders who say "Lord, Lord but do not follow the teachings of the Lord Jesus". Now is not the time to revert to battenning down the hatches and sealing the danger in – but rather to dig down to the essential Jesus and his teachings.

In the material world it is not just the low lands of Bangladesh that are facing being overwhelmed by the rising water levels it is the coastal ports of Hull and Portsmouth. The Environment Agency predicts a sea level rise of 1.9m by 2095 and architects and city planners just this year have speculated about parts of Hull becoming a Venice like water world, and Portsmouth becoming a south coast version of Amalfi. Also in the spiritual life of this nation (and the world) we have built into our systems the time bombs of greed and dishonesty and the moral dilemmas are rising with little resistance from true Christian faith. Do not dig yourself in materially and spiritually but rather dig down to Jesus and build up on him so that you are ready to share the message of God's peace through Jesus Christ to everyone who is willing to listen. We cannot speak out against the human enemies of greed and dishonesty unless our house is built upon generosity and truth.

During our extended church which today is on Olympic Outreach we will talk about some of the ways we get ready but here we focus on **READINESS WHICH COMES FROM THE GOSPEL OF PEACE.** That means both knowing the person & teachings of Jesus (as a foundation) and also being motivated by it!

Do not focus on the outward appearance of what is built – it may all be show – consider the collapse of Enron, Lehman Brothers, the current investigation of Goldman Sacks etc etc...Do not focus on Christian leaders who are sharply dressed and flaunting big cars and houses – focus on those who live holy and just lives. Remember **Jesus’ teaching had authority he was not like the teachers of the Law the Scribes of his day** – who stood on street corners and wore showy prayer shawls and only ate with the rich.

You will be ready day by day and for the future if you dig down (effort and time) to the person of Jesus and follow his teaching – you will not be ready if you don’t! (There are only 2 kinds of builders not many according to Jesus)

The rock is a solid mass that will support building on – the sand was once upon a time rock!

Thousands of years of erosion of the rock (by water and ice) produces sand – tiny rounded grains of rock that roll over one another and provide no coherence – no foundation – no solid footing.

The teachings of Jesus for some have been eroded away so that all that they have built stands on sand. Some have even let the foundational teaching of Jesus that he rose bodily from the dead be eroded away – their churches stand on nothing – they will be swept away.

How are we building at VPBC? Are you truly a part of what we are building or just on the side lines?

In the context of facing opposition we need to be ready. In the words of *John Stott* we are to be wearing “gospel boots” and standing “on tip toe”. (*God’s new Society. Ephesians.*) Our feet are to be shod with The Gospel (Jesus is The Gospel) and if we are building on him this means that we are automatically ready and willing and with help can be better enabled...we have some way to go in this preparation.

Firm Footings - The Gospel of Jesus gives us a firm footing – on which to build (footing of a building as well as shoes giving a firm footing) and a **readiness to bear witness to Jesus.**

Readiness – preparedness. How will any of us stand up to the plate/ put our feet in the blocks (to use another sporting metaphor) – we must dig down to Jesus and learn and commit to understanding and sharing with others the Gospel of peace.

All that is evil – the devil if you like – hates the Gospel – it is God’s power of Salvation for whoever believes and acts on it. (*Romans 1: 16*).

Have you a firm footing? Do you understand and base your life upon the Gospel of Jesus?

Are your boots on – your feet shod? If not then you are exposed and on dodgy ground and pretty useless for the days ahead.

If you have a firm footing in Jesus and are seeking to obey his teaching and personal directions to you then you and we will stand – and having done everything God asks we will still be standing.