

Home Worship for February by the Rev. Robin Wooldridge

February 3 House built on rock

'Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, who built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon the house; and it fell not; for it was founded upon a rock' (Matt. vii 24, 25)

In these two verses we have a wonderful picture of faith in the Lord. But what do these two verses really mean? We may answer that it simply shows we must put our faith in the Lord. But let's consider its deeper meaning.

The most important aspect of this extract from the Word concerns the man who *'heareth and doeth'* the teachings of the Lord. In other words there must be both knowledge and practice. It is our responsibility to respond to the Lord - and to live the life of faith which manifests itself in love or charity. These two aspects - *'heareth and doeth'* - are two sides of the same coin and both deserve our attention. The Lord says, *'If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them'* (John xiii 17).

Indeed, it is the wise man who builds his house upon a rock. But this is no natural house but rather the heaven or happiness he seeks to realise. This must first become a condition of both heart and mind and to make the 'kingdom of God within'. This is a spiritual abode - his heart and mind - which is to become the Lord's dwelling place. The Lord is ready to enter, *'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and sup with him, and he with me'* (Rev. iii 20). We read about the Lord *dwelling* in the heart by faith (Eph. iii 17). Once the Lord has entered and we are thus one with the Saviour, we can never be led astray. We look to the Lord as 'Emmanuel, God is with us' - as being 'one with the Father'. It is our trust in the Lord where our feet are firmly established on the rock. This is the Rock of Ages, the rock on which the church is built. Do we not read that the people of Israel *'drank of that spiritual rock that followed them; and that rock was Christ'* (1 Cor. x 4).

Once built upon that rock we are safe, safe from the rains and winds that blow. But what is meant by winds and rains? These are the challenges we will experience as we begin the journey of regeneration. The promise of the Lord is clear: *'When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee'* (Isa. xliii. 2) No matter what winds and rains may blow and beat upon the house, this house will never crumble, for it is he who *'heareth and doeth'* the teaching of the Lord and so builds on him as the Rock of Ages.

Temptations are necessary for us to be reformed and regenerated and the Lord is with us for, *'In that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted'* (Heb. iv. 15; ii. 18). It is a foolish man indeed who knows the teachings of the Lord but does not live according to them. The house of the foolish man is built upon sand and one day his house will fall. But those who *'heareth and doeth'* the teachings will build their house upon rock. This house will never fall and crumble because it is built on rock.

Prayer: *Teach me thy way Lord; I will walk in thy truth: unite my heart to fear thy name. I will praise thee, O Lord my GOD, with all my heart: and I will glorify thy name for evermore. Amen*

February 10 Parable of the fig tree

***'And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.'* (Matt. xxi. 19)**

This is a very challenging extract from the Word. Here the Lord curses a fig tree for not producing fruit outside of the season. What are we to make of this? And, what is the spiritual teaching contained within?

We must remember that the Lord was the *'Word made flesh'* and therefore everything he did and said has significance. The Lord taught in parables - what appears to be the case on a literal level hides deeper spiritual truths. Firstly, let us consider that trees are often used throughout the Word as being representations of man. For example, *'A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire.'* (Matt. vii. 18, 19). In prophecy good men are referred to as *'trees of righteousness'* (Isa. lxi. 3) while in Revelation the Son of Man refers to himself as *'The tree of life in the midst of the paradise of God'* (ii. 7). In the Psalms we read of the man who delights in the Lord's teachings as *'he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper'* (i 3).

The Lord gave this parable: *'A certain man had a fig tree planted in his vineyard; and he came and sought fruit thereon, and found none. Then said he unto the dresser of his vineyard, Behold, these three years I come seeking fruit on this fig-tree, and find none: cut it down; why cumbereth it the ground? And he answering said unto him, Lord, let it alone this year also, till I shall dig about it, and dung it: and if it bear fruit, well: and if not, then after that thou shalt cut it down'* (Luke xiii. 6-9). This parable speaks about us and how the Lord - who will not let us suffer the consequences of our evil life - tries every possible means to support and help us to reform and thereby be saved.

When the Lord curses the fig-tree, we can see that this refers to the men of the Jewish church. They had lost sight of the doctrines of love and charity. They had committed two evils: they had forsaken the Lord himself - who is *the fountain of living waters* - and had made for themselves cisterns - *broken cisterns that can hold no water* (Jer. ii. 13). We can apply this to ourselves: if we have a knowledge of the truth, we are a fig-tree planted in the garden of the Lord. But are we a *'tree of righteousness'* bearing ripe fruit or are we simply a tree crumbling to the ground? The Lord will come to you as surely as he came to the fig-tree. Let's not miss the opportunity to embrace the Lord and to be in the Lord and bring forth fruit in abundance!

Prayer: *Unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. Show me thy ways, O Lord, and teach me thy paths. Lead me in thy truth and teach me; for thou art the Lord of our salvation; on thee do I wait all the day. Amen*

February 17 *God created man in his own image*

***'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him.'* (Gen. i 27)**

What constitutes a man? His physical form, his mental and physical powers? Are these the only attributes needed by which we can determine a person is indeed a man? It feels that there is a missing dimension. Indeed what distinguishes a man from an animal? Unlike animals, man can by his rational powers rise above nature: he can learn about the Lord and read the Word. In fact man has everything he needs to gain eternal life in heaven. A man in the real sense of the word is rational and learned in both worldly as well as heavenly things. His heart is made for both love and charity and his understanding is moulded by wisdom and truth which teaches these spiritual loves. So it becomes clear that it is not external but rather internal factors by which any one is made truly human. The Word teaches us that what is important is not the outward appearance but rather what lies in the heart - this and this alone makes that person a human being. We read in Jeremiah:

'Run ye to and fro through the streets of Jerusalem, and see now, and know, and seek in the broad places thereof, if ye can find a man, if there be any that executeth judgement, that seeketh the truth' (Jer. v. i.)

The streets of Jerusalem were full of 'men' but what was sought was a person who practised the divine precepts, one that was truly a man. Now back to our opening scripture, 'So God created man in his image, in the image of God created he him'. Does this mean we are all gods? No, as this refers to man who was created after the mind of God. The Lord is love and wisdom, good and truth and man was made to resemble him and to reflect his character on earth. Once we are restored, once we love the Lord above all things, once we love the neighbour as our self, then we are a new man. Man receives life from God; he has both will and understanding - one to receive divine love or good and the other to receive divine wisdom or truth. Of course such qualities are believed to be inherent within man - to originate in himself - but it is the Lord that gives them and such attributes only appear to be in man as his own. Thus to acknowledge this life as being given to us by the Lord is a very important duty on the part of man. This duty means we will acquire oneness with the Lord and are truly on the path to regeneration.

We are to make the declaration that we receive life from the Lord and we are but receptacles of life. We are to focus on our internal life; to love the Lord above all things and to love our neighbour as our self. We are to turn away from love of the self and love of the things and ways of the world. Then we will start to understand that beautiful teaching:

'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him'.

Prayer: Remember, O Lord, thy tender mercies and thy loving kindness; for they have been ever of old. Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to thy mercy remember thou me for thy goodness' sake. Amen

February 24 Gathering fruit to eternal life

'Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. And he that reapeth receiveth wages, and gathereth fruit unto life eternal; that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together' (John iv. 35-36).

The Lord said to his disciples: *'The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life'* (John vi. 63). This means that they had a spiritual application and that these divine ideas were clothed in natural images. In this extract from the Word he speaks of the harvest, of labouring in the harvest but he is referring to the spiritual sense. Here the Lord is explaining the parable of the sower, *'The field is the world'* (Matt. xiii. 38) and, *'the harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest'* (Luke x. 2).

Do you remember how John the Baptist described the Lord? He said of Jesus that *his 'fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner; but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire'* (Matt. iii. 12). The spiritual meaning of our short extract becomes clear. When he says, *'Say not ye, there are yet four months, and then cometh harvest?'* we can see that the Lord is speaking of that great harvest of the church - when the land will overflow with blessings. The Lord had come and now was the time for the blessings promised in prophecy: *'Behold, I say unto you, lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.'* The Lord was not here to establish a natural but a spiritual kingdom. Everyone who follows the Lord has the seed of holy truth sown in his heart. He prays and labours and is rewarded - he receives his rewards here on the earth and afterwards in heaven. He reaps the *'peaceable fruits of righteousness'* and so *'gathereth fruit unto life eternal'*.

We must be careful that we do not look at heaven with natural eyes. In the world we work and are paid accordingly and we must avoid looking at spiritual rewards in the same way; otherwise we will think we gain merit for the good things we do. We will think that we are to be rewarded for, rather than through, our obedience to divine precepts. Such thinking is natural - not spiritual. We are to work with the Lord. We are *'workers together with him'* (2 Cor. vi. 1) and so our works will be *'wrought in God'* (John iii. 21). Our reward is the joy itself - the true happiness which the Lord infuses into our soul and into every soul who delights in the law of the Lord. We may be blessed for this short time on earth and afterwards eternally in heaven. We share in his joy and our joy will be full. One with the Lord we will dwell in him and he in us - *'that both he that soweth and he that reapeth may rejoice together'*.

Prayer: O Lord, to whom all hearts are open, all desires known, and from whom no secrets are hid; cleanse the thoughts of our hearts, by the inspiration of thy Holy Spirit, that we may perfectly love thee, and magnify thy holy name. Amen