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Pastor Matthew Woods

“The Lessons We Have Learned”

Do you learn from your mistakes? Is it possible that one can learn from tragedies? Is it possible for something good to come from a tragedy? This last weekend we remembered the 20th anniversary I hope this morning that we can consider some of the things we have learned to do better because of it. So, for today's text I would ask you to consider Matthew 7:24-27 where Jesus finishes His Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7.

Jesus says, 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. ²⁵The 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. ²⁶But 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. ²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

This last weekend many programs centered on the 9/11. One program talked about what has been learned from 9/11. The collapse of World Trade Center Towers have in all of it horror also given other buildings a better future. One example is fire resistance and structural integrity. When the planes hit the towers temperatures quickly reached 400 degrees Fahrenheit. Steel beams were exposed to the heat causing it to buckle and eventually give way. When the remaining supports could not support the load the buildings came down.

Interestingly enough one of the artifacts found at Ground Zero was a King James Bible cradled in melted steel, literally fused to the metal. It was found by a firefighter sifting through the rubble in March 2002. The pages were opened to what many think is an interesting passage from Matthew 5:38-39, from Jesus' sermon on the mount. ***“Ye have heard that it hath been said, An eye for an eye, and a tooth for a tooth: But I say unto you, That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also.”*** [Matthew 5:38-39](#). It's an interesting find. How that Bible didn't simply burn up is in itself a miracle. And then to have the steel melt all around it is amazing.

Anyway, in the New World Trade Center Building steel is now covered with high strength concrete because concrete can withstand the heat much longer. And this is not just normal concrete like you would pour on a driveway (3000-5000 psi). Now they use 30,000 psi with steel rebar and high-strength steel fibers like this are mixed into concrete to make it even stronger and tougher. These steel fibers bond with the concrete and prevent the spreading of any cracks that occur because of an explosion or other extreme force.

Another important thing that has been learned is about the stairwells. In the Twin Towers the stairwells were narrow. While escaping, people in the buildings descended the stairs in single file because it was so narrow. This slowed everyone down and made it difficult for the fireman to go up. In the new buildings the stairwells are twice as wide and reinforced with three foot thick concrete walls. Whereas the stairwells were in the center of the previous buildings the new World Trade Center has spread them out so that it is harder to trap residents in a fire with multiple locations for those stairwells.

At the Pentagon renovations were actually underway on 9/11. More importantly, by some miracle, the plane that hit the Pentagon actually hit the one section that was being refit with structural improvements to resist car bombs. So, when the plane hit it did a lot less damage than would have happened. Concrete walls are covered with a membrane that prevents debris from becoming shrapnel and killing or wounding more people. Glass windows were coated in the same way preventing them from shattering or even breaking. Again, saving lives from the shrapnel.

These are just the structural lessons learned from the tragedy of 9/11. They have been learned through careful study of what happened that day; by observing all the things that went wrong; all the failure, why it failed, and engineers have learned to build better and safer. The same can be said about airport security or even national security. No one imagined a plane being hijacked with a box cutter or a plane becoming a terrorist smart bomb. All we have to do is fly somewhere and we will discover quickly how critical security remains at an airport. Much has changed. It had to.

Likewise, in the sermon on the Mount Jesus is teaching about spiritual lessons. Jesus has a way that is different and much more effective in surpassing the righteousness taught by the Pharisees. Often, He used a

formula. “You have heard it said...but I say unto you.” “You have heard it said do not murder. But I say unto you that anyone who hates his brother is subject to judgement.” ²⁷“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall not commit adultery.’ ²⁸ But I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” In regard to oaths, don’t make them. Let your ‘yes’ be ‘yes’ and your ‘no’ be ‘no’. “Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.”

By doing the things that Jesus teaches we will be building a better spiritual life. These improvements surpass superficial ways of the Pharisees. The winds and waves will not shake it nor destroy it. The winds will blow and the waves will hit but it will not come down with a great crash. It’s a lot like remaining vigilant against the terrorists. We are to guard our hearts from being invaded by lust or anger or greed or dishonesty. The key is to be aware of where they are and never letting them in. It’s not enough to keep up appearances. It is something that must be put into practice. But when these things are put into practice Jesus says, it’s like building a house on the rock.

The most significant lessons are often learned from heartbreak and failure. Experience is often a cruel teacher built on previous sins and poor decisions. What if we could go back and teach our younger selves a little bit of wisdom that we may have gained over the years would you do it? Where would you start? Yea, there is a lot I would tell my younger self. But then again much of the wisdom I have gained has come from learning from my own personal failure. In my Tae Kwon Do days I would often learn more from a defeat than a win. A defeat usually caused me to examine what happened much more closely. Likewise, the things that cause my heart to burn, my brain to spin, and my conscience to swirl were the things that always left the deepest mark and biggest lessons. I am not saying this is the only way to learn important things but some of our best wisdom comes from things that go wrong.

Thankfully, by the grace of God, I am forgiven for such things. By the grace of God, I take such lessons and rebuild using better spiritual materials like the ones Jesus hands out at the Sermon on the Mount.

We can expect to fail, fall, and do something stupid once in a while. But in Jesus we can do better. Jesus brings something better in the wisdom of His Word. We can be smarter because of it. Because in Jesus even our worse moments can be remade into something that God can bless. Just ask the Apostle Paul or Peter who know all about learning from their failure. May the Lord bless us in the same way they were blessed so that our shortcomings turn into reasons to praise the Savior who turns crucifixions into resurrections.

And now the Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make His face to shine on you and be gracious to you. The Lord look on you with His favor and give you His peace in Jesus. Amen.

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John 3:30