

Sermon for Sunday, June 9, 1974 by Andrew A. Jumper, D.D., Pastor
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"THE WHITE HOUSE, YOUR HOUSE, AND THE SAND HOUSE"

St. Matthew 7:13-29

Text: "And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house upon the sand; and the rains fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell; and great was the fall of it." St. Matthew 7:26-27

For more months than I care to remember, the attention of the nation has been focused on Washington and the White House with its inconceivable scandal. Over fifteen high echelon personnel have resigned under duress. Some have been indicted by the Grand Jury; some have now been convicted with other trials yet to come; all have come under investigation by the Senate and now the House in studying impeachment charges against the president. Our vice-president resigned under incredible circumstances and has been disbarred from the practice of law. All in all, it is a sordid story of bribery, breaking and burglarizing, of lying to cover up, of forgeries, of false cables, of hush funds in the hundreds of thousands of dollars, of unreported contributions. And all of this by persons charged with maintaining law and order.

It is not my purpose this morning to try or convict anyone. And if you are as I am, you are mighty sick of the whole dirty mess. The comment that I want to make is this: It is obvious that the moral standards of the nation have deteriorated. It is as if some moral dike has broken and the floods of judgment have come upon us. Watergate and the consequent damage to the presidency is but the tip of an iceberg upon which the ship of America may be wrecked and lost. Like the unsinkable Titanic, we may find our side ripped out and that we are floundering in the seas of our own sins.

The first point I want to make this morning is this: America is a nation that was founded on a belief in God. Let me illustrate. As far back as the Mayflower Compact--long before a legislative, executive or judiciary was established--our forefathers began their compact with these words, "In the name of God. Amen." And then they covenanted to combine themselves together "for the preservation and furtherance of the glory of God and the advancement of the Christian religion." Again, 47 of the 50 states have constitutions which begin with the same authority. For example, the Charter of Connecticut in 1638 began with these words, "For as much as it hath pleased Almighty God by the wise disposition of His providence, to order and dispose of things...." Because of this, in 1892 the Supreme Court ruled as follows: "There is no dissonance in these declarations. They are not individual sayings, or declarations of private persons; they are organic utterances; they speak the voice of the entire people....There is a universal language pervading them all, having but one message: they affirm and reaffirm that this is a religious nation." Even in our Pledge of Allegiance we affirm that we are a nation under God and on our coins we stamp the motto, "In God We Trust." So we are, indeed, a nation founded on a belief in God.

The second point I want to make is this: Because of our belief in God, we have believed that God's law undergirds our society. As one writer has said, "This law has been codified in constitutions of federal, state and civic governments. Law controls the life and relationships of the people of this nation. It holds for governing officials, political leaders, business executives, professional persons and for individuals." He goes on to add, "The nation's freedoms were grounded upon this law...." For example, Washington in his farewell address, declared, "Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports."

The third point I want to make is this: When we had a belief in God and His law as the foundation of our nation, we became a great nation. I will not belabor you with something so obvious, except to say that in 1976 we will celebrate our bicentennial. In these 200 years, we arose from a vassal to Great Britain to become one of the greatest nations--one of the mightiest powers--in the history of the world. As long as we had God and His Law as the foundation of our nation, we were building our foundations on stone. The rains could fall, the floods could come, the winds could blow and beat upon us, but we were founded on a rock.

The fourth point I want to make is this: A change has occurred in America. Our belief in God and His Law is being eroded away. Watergate is but the tip of the iceberg. Today we are building on sand. Let me illustrate. Daniel Yankelovich, in his book, The Changing Values on Campus, has done a study of the social, ethical and political attitudes of college-age students. He has discovered that a fundamental revolution in values is taking place today. Let me give you some illustrations. Only one student in four regards casual premarital sex as morally wrong. Again, students ranked religion as one of the least important values in their personal lives. The study showed that 41% of the students polled believe that the interchange of partners among the married is acceptable, and 74% see nothing wrong with relations between consenting homosexuals.

Let me ask this question: Why do students have this attitude toward God and morality? I would like to suggest that there have been two basic failures, one in the church and one in the home. Let me speak first of the failure in the church. In the moral confusion of our times, the church always seems to end up on the wrong side. A Committee on Family Life in the United Methodist Church issued a resolution implicitly condoning sex for single persons, homosexuals, and those living in unspecified "other styles of interpersonal relationship"--whatever that means! In the United Church of Christ, six Christian education executives have drawn up a statement maintaining that sex is moral if the partners are committed to the "filling of each others' personhead"--whatever that means.

Here is another illustration. It was churchmen who produced the so-called new morality. Paul Tillich--whose wife, since his death, has revealed in a book the absolutely incredible moral corruption of the man--wrote Beyond Morality. John Fletcher wrote Situational Ethics, J. A. T. Robinson wrote Honest to God. They declared that there is only one principle under which men may act, and that is love. In all particular circumstances an individual may do what he pleases, in violation of the Ten Commandments or of any other prohibition, providing that he acts in love: then the action is right. The evidences of this new morality are now piling up. We have blatant nudism, sex and homosexuality in movies such as "The Last Tango in Paris", we have the incredible rise in pornographic literature, the increase in the incident of extramarital relationships in marriage, of promiscuity in personal life and dishonesty in social relationships. What has erupted at the White House is but the tip of the iceberg. Major crimes have increased six times as fast as our population in the last ten years and Watergate is the fruit of the new morality. We need to remember what Jesus said, "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fill."

A flood is striking at the foundations of our national life. As the Psalmist once put it, "If the foundations be destroyed, what can the righteous do?" (11:3) Our moral dignity has been defaced and weakened and in the process, the church has too often appeared to be on the wrong side.

But not only has the church failed, but there has been a failure in the home as well. Mr. J. Edgar Hoover, former head of the F.B.I., said not long before his death, "The country as a whole must draw from its great heritage of religious freedom...to meet

the challenge of the future. The family is so important to the proper rearing of young people."

Back in 1788 Edward Gibbon completed his massive work, The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire. In that work he listed the five reasons for that fall. Let me share them with you and you can make your own application to today. First, Gibbon listed higher and higher taxes and the spending of public money for free bread and circuses for the populace. Second, the mad craze for pleasure; sports becoming every year more exciting and more brutal. Third, the building of gigantic armaments when the real enemy was within, the decadence of the people. Fourth, the decay of religion--faith fading into mere form--losing touch with life and becoming impotent to guide the people. And fifth, the rapid increase of divorce; the undermining of the dignity and sanctity of the home which is the basis of human society.

Can one doubt that these causes of failure fit our society today? And can we doubt that the homes of America are in crisis, under attack? In our homes we must re-discover duty and responsibility to God above our own selfish wants and desires. There can be no moral fiber, no moral backbone to a land whose families are not willing to pay the price of moral responsibility.

In our scripture this morning, Jesus said there are two roads. One is a broad road that leads to everlasting destruction and many of us are traveling that road this morning. But Jesus speaks of another road. It is a road that is narrow and its way is hard, but it is the road that leads to life. It is that road that Jesus asks us to travel. And then he adds, "Every one then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock."

Let me ask each family here this morning, what kind of foundation does your home have? Is yours a home that honors Jesus Christ? Is yours a home that reveres the word of God? Is yours a home that is built on the basis of the plain teachings of Jesus Christ, on the law of God? If so, you are building on a rock foundation that will never fail you. And what about your personal lives? Is your life one that is committed to Jesus Christ? Have you invited him to take control of your life and have you surrendered your life to the commands that he gives us, to the way of life that he demands of us? If not, then you are traveling a broad road that leads to destruction, whose end is disaster--you are building on sand. We are at a crisis in our nation. It is a moral crisis. Our homes are in crisis today. Individuals are in crisis. At base it is a moral crisis. Men must decide whom they believe and what they believe. My prayer for you and for myself is that we will open our lives afresh to Jesus Christ, that we will commit ourselves anew to His laws and God grant that for our nation there might be a renewal of our commitment to Him and to what He teaches.