

Remembering the Flannelgraph Storyboard

I can vividly remember the flannelgraph storyboard. When I was a boy my Sunday School classrooms were always furnished with what I can only describe as a felt-covered whiteboard - sometimes attached to the wall and sometimes perched atop a flimsy easel. Cut-out characters and objects from popular Bible stories could be stuck and un-stuck from these storyboards and arranged in a seemingly infinite number of ways to help illustrate whatever story-point the teacher was trying to make.

Stories like *The House Built Upon the Rock* were always popular. One man's home would easily succumb to a stuck-on picture of blue waves hitting sandy shores while another man's home would stand stalwartly -resisting even the most tempest-driven swells.

When Jesus told this short story (Matthew 7:23-24) I'm not so sure He had the flannelgraph in mind, but I do know that hidden within its simplicity sits a profoundly deep truth. Not just deep, but incredibly relevant. The somewhat humorous situational comedy of a man building his house on the sand was meant to illicit the obvious reaction, *"Who in the world would possibly build their house on the sandy shore of a beach?"* And of course, the obvious answer would be, *"Nobody who values his house."* And, *"Why?"*, we ask. Because undoubtedly the wind and subsequent waves would absolutely overwhelm and destroy it. Simple yet profound. But the question remains. *"Have we embraced the wisdom of the flannelgraph?"*

Immediately following the telling of this story Matthew records Jesus saying these words, *"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock...but everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand."* These sayings that He references include much more than this story. Jesus is referring to the embrace of all of His teaching, not just the ones easy to accept. It's a fact, the gospels communicate some difficult truth coming directly from the mouth of Jesus.

Make no mistake though, the storms of life, which are common to all of us, and the storms of spiritual pressure are not only on the horizon they are already here. Jesus assured His followers that they would have added and unique troubles because they bear His name but building with the storm in mind constitutes wisdom. There is an hour in which the intensified troubles of the human condition reach their fullness and express themselves in a multitude of disturbing ways -a truth which the New Testament clearly bears out. But there is no need that we should live as uninformed, *"So that this Day should overtake [us] as a thief."* (1 Thess.5:4).

As we are witnessing a radical acceleration of global shaking in this hour let us be sure to prioritize understanding and obedience. The church is meant to be an ark of safety at the end of the age but if we struggle to discern between sand and stone, cloud and clear sky we don't ultimately offer much in the way of realized hope. The ability to balance the realities of increasing glory in the midst of increasing trouble will be key for the church going forward in this season.

In this hour may we have ears that hear, eyes that see and hearts that are teachable!