

***PRAISE INTERNATIONAL***  
***SANDCASTLES***  
***MATTHEW 23:1-12***

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On one of the days Donovan and I were in Hawaii I had the thrill of watching my new college minted son who had just accepted a professional job for one of the top 5 accounting firms in the country....build a sand-castle - it was actually a sand community. Pretty sure it was a day when we took turns snorkeling, it was our last day on the Big Island so while we were awaiting sunset we just were enjoying the beach. As I came out of the water I found my 6.4 son building an epic sand-castle...all was going well until a big ole wave came in and washed away a bunch of the castle. So we hurried to move the village further up the coast to be free from a tsunami zone:) As a Dad I was just blessed to watch my son not take himself too seriously...but before it was over most of it was a victim of the tide. But isn't that what happens to most Sand-castles?

Its not near as much fun when we experience Sand Castles crush around us. Jesus said it this way 'anyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who builds Sand Castles'....they will not stand. As I began to work with the text this week this was the thought ringing in my head - 'When will we take serious Jesus call to stop building Sand Castles?'

Here is the backdrop for me - last Sunday after church we had a list of chores to accomplish on our return home so it was late afternoon when I finally told Neice I am going to lay down for a little bit...as I laid down I pulled up my facebook feed and saw something that caught my eye. A former acquaintance posted something about the International House of Prayer Kansas City - IHOPKC. I spent several months there in 2004 - even naming our ministry for the first 19 years in like manner - International House of Prayer of Greater Fort Wayne. The article was a shock - then I went to an investigative reporter that I have learned to trust Julie Roys and sure enough she had a something posted one was a link to a public statement signed by 3 men that I knew - 2 of them we have had in our home. They explained how they had attempted to confront the founder of IHOPKC with allegations of sexual abuse and denied even a meeting. So they posted a public statement concerning the matter that has since made national news. I am not sharing this to disparage anyone but to point to how deeply disorienting it is when we find ourselves confronted with the news of someone who had clearly said one thing and did another. Unfortunately this has become all too normal the news of national leaders who have gained prominence and platforms from large church's to ministries only to discover they did not practice what they were preaching. It is one of the worst of betrayals to know that those entrusted with trust used that trust in violation of others - all the while building a 'reputation in ministry' that is just a Sand Castle.

Here is the conclusion I am coming to today - is that these kind of failures are not just a missed step of an organization but something far more basic. It is a failure of foundation. When we build a life of faith around systems and structures that are anything less than a flourishing life of faith - it is a facade of sand. **In our text Jesus speaks to the 'facade' of religion lived to impress and benefit.** He calls them the scribes and Pharisee's - we might call them 'religionist'. Lets be clear about this we all had some religious Sand-castles - that idea that we can earn or deserve the acceptance and favor of God because of what we do or do not do. The idea of earning and deserving is in the human frame - especially when we compare our appearance and practices to the guy who utterly ignores things like prayer and giving.

Jesus develops this further in the eight woes that follow Matthew 23:1-12 that can be summarized by saying you have so missed that the law of God was never about impressing people with what you look or

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sound like....**living a Facade.**

- But rather that you actually inhabit a life built on the **Foundation of Love.**

**Beloved the Good News of the Gospel is all about what God has done - His Grace His Mercy His Faithfulness. His decision to relate to us on the basis of what He has done and is doing! That is the unmovable foundation - Grace!**

**An actual life of human flourishing.**

- **What I want to be clear is that when Jesus speaks to the scribes and Pharisee's the Sand-castle builders of His day - He is actually speaking to me.**
- To every time I have chosen to put more confidence in what I know about God - my cognitive certainty and how well I have obeyed God - my moral perfection OVER actually living in and from His grace – I am building a Sand-castle.

**That is exactly what Jesus is describing in Matthew 23:1-12 – Sand-Castles...according to Jesus**

**1. If we know the right thing to do...but reserve the right not to do it – Sand-castle!**

- According to Jesus you might be building a sand-castle if its easier for you to point out the failings of others and excuse your own - you may have a facade.
- If we are more motivated by appearance....and lets be clear here politicians are not the only ones who have done things for appearances.
- How I live when no one is looking - this has to do with the motivations of the heart.

**2. If we trusts in formulas over formation – Sand-castle.**

- Whether we say to others or ourselves - those statements that sound like this. If you will do this better then it will go better for you....
- Now before I go any further with this thought may I just point out that the scripture says all who want to live godly will suffer - in fact Jesus implies that it will not be your best life now...when they arrest you and hand you over to rulers and authorities....don't worry about what to say.
- You see there has been a not so subtle problem we have had with our lack of clarity as it pertains to 'repentance'.
- For years my best understanding of repentance was to stop doing bad stuff and hanging out with those who do....no wonder we have so many who believe that this is exactly how God is relating to humanity on the basis of their sin, brokenness and failure.
- **If that is our position we will almost always get repentance wrong - we translate it into a formula for 'being sorry' and not actually dealing with what we are believing about God and ourselves.**

*Acts 20:21 '...we taught a repentance unto God and faith in Christ Jesus....'*

**Lets be clear yes there is place for godly sorrow - acknowledging failure.**

- Repentance is a change of mind about how God is inviting me to see him and myself!
- Thanks be to God for His indescribable gift! He not me He has chosen to relate to me on the basis of what He has done and is doing!

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**When we communicate anything less we actually shut the door of Heaven in the face of men and women - when we preach a repentance based purely on our failure we are focused on a failed formula.**

- When we preach repentance based in what God has done it is always about an invitation to be fascinated at the Grace of God - that actually forms His nature in us!

#### **3. When we add tradition to the Grace of God...likely a Sand-castle.**

- Jesus points out that they actually added to the scripture...
- We don't do that...right?
- We just all hold bibles that most of us had 14 books removed....
- Luther – printed them as intertestamental books in 1534 – good but not necessary.
- 1821 – the British and Foreign bible society simply removed them because it was 'cheaper' to print bibles....what?

**When tradition holds more conviction than being stunned at the Grace of God....might be a Sand-castle.**

#### **4. If we have a basic lack love for people.....sand-castle**

- I was getting ready for an early prayer time this week and read this.
- Great preacher and civil rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. said, “Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. **We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality**, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.”
- **If we can watch buildings leveled and not feel anything...we might need to rethink how we are seeing others – 'terrorists' deserve what they are getting?**
- Its actually a lot less complicated to build a sand castle called religion - to say *you are wrong* and with hold love.

**But wait Jesus said something about that - ‘Love your enemy’**

- Jesus its easier to shut people out....
- To see the needy and conclude their circumstance is a result of their choice...and it may be true.
- Funny how Jesus never seems to get lost in that kind of thinking...
- Why because vs 23-24 the weightier matter of the law? Justice, Mercy and faithfulness....

**I mean Jesus actually upsets the Religious Sand Castle builders** when He healed the sick and delivered the needy...

- Then here is a paraphrase of Jesus words *‘you would rather be right than love people’*.

**Beloved the Good News of the Gospel is that Jesus comes and inhabits the message He is declaring - I have come to announce that God wants to relate to you on the basis of His love.**

**So watch how this text ends....**

- **The greatest will be a servant – the one who always serves**

**The path that brought actual life and restoration to humanity Jesus coming to us and embracing all of humanities ugliness on a Cross. I wonder how convinced we actually are as to the power of our life flourishing to reveal His Kingdom.**

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**Beloved the Good news of the Gospel is not how impressive we are at building anything but human lives to become actual human beings that can live in and from the love of God.**

**What will I build my life upon – lets get serious about our Foundation...**

**Repent as a normal practice in my life – Sand or Rock Solid truth?**

- **Its always a good day to repent....from an** facades we live behind can feel necessary especially if we believe the lie that religion has sold us - God is both distant and delayed.
  - Change my mind and believe what He said - He is near.
  - What that means is that I am not alone - I do belong - I am cared for.

- The first step of repentance is actually **identifying the bad news** rolling in my head and heart we have all been touched by this - we have all heard satans whispers....fear, anxiety, shame, guilt you can be sure those are not the words of Jesus.

- The next step of repentance is to let go my inclination to impress God and come back to the reality of the Good News He came to this mess - the one I am in. So watch this don't assume your mind and body does not need to be reminded of what is true...this is where the Practices of Prayer and Gratitude become a part of Repentance.

- Gratitude – I read this from one of the blog writers I follow – Diana Butler Bass – she was reminded by a friend to read her own book – Grateful by a friend.

*A century ago, Albert Schweitzer, theologian and Nobel Peace Prize winner, remarked:*

***The greatest thing is to give thanks for everything. He who has learned this knows what it means to live. He has penetrated the whole mystery of life: giving thanks for everything.***

*He was right: to learn gratitude is to know the “mystery” of life. But he was also wrong in a very important way.*

*Every day there are reasons not to feel grateful and not to practice gratitude. Terrible, distressing, painful, and awful things happen all the time. The emotions of thanks elude us, and it is easy to choose ingratitude. Yet when I watch the news and fear grips my heart about whatever comes next, when a friend is diagnosed with cancer, or when a loved one dies, that Bible verse, the one Albert Schweitzer alluded to, the one I memorized as a teen-ager, calls toward a better way: “In everything give thanks.” It does not say, as Schweitzer seems to have misquoted, “For everything give thanks.”*

*Gratitude never calls us to give thanks for anything that is evil or unjust, never for violence, lying, oppression, or suffering.*

*Do not be grateful for these things.*

*The Greek word is en, which means “in, with, within, throughout.” It locates us here and now, in the past, and in the future; in happiness, in despair; in all things, in all times, in all situations. Gratefulness grounds our lives in the world and with others, always locating the gifts and grace that accompany our way. Gratitude is an emotion. Gratitude is an ethical way of life. It is a*

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*disposition, an awareness, a set of habits. But ultimately, gratitude is a place — perhaps the place — where we find our truest and best selves.*

*To know the mystery of life is to be grateful in all things. In all things, with all things, through all things.*

*I have discovered that I am no longer an ingrate, but I am living in gratitude.*

*Sometimes the world turns on a preposition.*

*To be grateful in these days is an act of resistance, of resilience, of renewal. My journey started because I did not know how to write thank-you notes. And it led me to understand that a politics of gratitude is a way of healing and compassion — perhaps even salvation. I invite you to the journey from ingratitude to gratefulness and to find yourself part of a like-spirited community. You are not alone. There are many on the road.*

*Give thanks.*

*Live in gratitude.*

**The Gospel is all about what God has done - His Grace His Mercy His Faithfulness. His decision to relate to us on the basis of what He has done and is doing! That is called Grace! That Grace is an assault on everyone one of my well painted facades – it is the foundation of a flourishing life and that beloved is Good News.**

Closing Prayer

**God of justice and peace,  
from the heavens you rain down mercy and kindness,  
that all on earth may stand in awe and wonder  
before your marvelous deeds.  
Raise our heads in expectation,  
that we may yearn for the coming day of the Lord  
and stand without blame before your Son, Jesus Christ,  
who lives and reigns for ever and ever. Amen.**

Communion

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