

After the Storm

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November 11, 2012
Sunday Sermon at the Learning Center
Manhattan, NY



As we all know, the New York and New Jersey area has just suffered one of the most devastating storms in its history. More than 70 people lost their lives in our area alone. Property damage is in the billions. I talked about this last week. And for many people, the lights have *still* not come back on.

I must say, our family was incredibly lucky this time. We didn't lose power, we didn't get flooded, and our house wasn't damaged. You'd think that with such grace, I'd be full of gratitude and appreciation. But no, I found myself getting frustrated and impatient by small inconveniences. After all, not being able to find gas for your car is small compared to not being able to find your car to put gas into anymore.

Surviving Spiritual Storms

But, of course, I didn't come here to talk about rebuilding after Sandy, or after any kind of physical storm, but rather about spiritual storms, and how to survive them and move on.

One of the first instincts after a major storm is to try to get a handle on the damage. What is still standing? What can be repaired? And what has gone forever?

In all our lives, storms will come. They can be big or small: disappointment, sickness, struggle, heartache. Even the big train wrecks like the death of a loved one, the breakdown of a marriage, and more. Perhaps some of you here in the audience are in the middle of a storm of life right now.

Institutions face storms as well; and our Unification Church is no exception. I think the last two months have put us through two of the biggest storms we have ever faced.

The biggest of all was the loss of our beloved True Father, who ascended to the spirit world September 3rd. He was 92, and we should have probably expected it and prepared for it much better, but whoever wants to think like that?

It would be nice to say that at the time of his passing, our church came together as never before to encourage True Mother, urge the Family to unite, and to comfort and support each other. But that's simply not the case. Many raw emotions came to the surface and continue to boil away.

The second major storm was the resignation of our Senior Pastor, Rev. In Jin Moon, who led our community here in America for more than three years. Most of that time she preached almost every single Sunday from the pulpit over there at the Manhattan Center and made an indelible mark on our community.

And then suddenly she was gone, with almost no word of apology or even explanation. We were all shocked and sorry to hear that she had made serious choices in her personal life that were completely incompatible with our teachings and traditions.

We can see some of the results of these two big storms right now. You can look around this sanctuary, which is small, and notice that many people are staying away, holding back. I've had a number of people

tell me in private and in public that they are alternately hurt, angry, betrayed and confused. Some have said they'll never come again. To be honest, I felt that way myself for a while.

And then, on top of all of that, last weekend our True Mother came to town right after the storm at the end of her historical pilgrimage across America. I think many of us, myself included, hoped that she would have some kind, motherly words to encourage and comfort us in this season of both external and internal storms.

But instead, as you probably all know by now, she spoke in a strong prophetic voice, calling the church in America – and by extension the whole nation – to repent for having failed to share the breaking news of the coming of True Parents with the whole nation.

Even worse, for some people, she raised the prospect of radical consequences of this failure, both in this life and even in the life to come. I think you remember some of the language she used! I've been getting blowback all week long. It's one storm after another.

Building a Life Based on the Divine Principle

How do we deal with all these issues? How do we build a life that is rock-solid, that will endure no matter what the external circumstances?

For an answer to that, I turn to Matthew 7:24-27, the parable of the wise and foolish builders. We know very well how the story goes. Two men. Neighbors, probably. Two houses, that looked much the same on the outside. Same storm: one house stands, another falls.

And by the way, if you think it sounds a lot like that other story involving three pigs and big bad wolf, well, you're quite right. But I thought I'd lose credibility if I made that today's reading.

And I think we already know equally well the moral of the story, provided by Jesus. These are not real, tangible houses down there on Long Island or the Jersey shore. These are spiritual houses, the houses we make of our lives and our habits.

So we can have two people, going to the same church. This church. Singing the same holy songs. Hearing the same sermon. We face the same storm: one survives, and the other does not.

'Course, when I hear that parable, I always identify with the guy who built his house on the rock. My dad was a civil engineer with little patience for shoddy building practices. We look down our noses at people like that. Ha! We think. What a fool! Even as kids we laughed at the pigs that use straw or sticks to build their house. We all like to think we're building our lives on the rock. But are we, really?

Thing is, we may not really know which one we are in the course of day to day living. The only way we know for sure is when we face the storm. Then we'll know if our house, our life, our family, and our future are really built on rock at all.

When we live lives filled with complexities, struggle, doubt and confusion, we are building on sand.

I came here today to declare that I strongly believe that we have to get back to the basics of our faith, to build our houses on the rock. Jesus focused on the fundamentals of faith, a simple message that has endured for millennia. And so did our True Father.

The Rock of Our Lives as Unificationists

So what is it that is the rock, the foundation, of our life as Unificationists?

That rock is the truth of the Divine Principle revealed by God to our True Father, Sun Myung Moon. I say this with the confidence of experience, because for most of the people of my generation, we learned the Divine Principle before we ever met True Parents and before we ever joined this church.

The *Divine Principle* uniquely teaches us who God is. We learned that He is not only the Almighty Creator, but he is also the heartbroken Parent who lost His only children. The suffering of all people throughout human history has been a never-ending tragedy He could see unfolding in slow motion; but because He placed so high a value on freedom and love, He was powerless to prevent.

Divine Principle also teaches us who Jesus was: that He was not just the Messiah, but was supposed to marry and become the True Parent, able to give new life by starting a new lineage to restore the mistakes of our first ancestors. There are many churches, but none other teaches this.

And finally, and most importantly Divine Principle teaches us that God's work of restoration did not end

2000 years ago on the cross, but has continued to this day and time, coming to a new crescendo or climax with the coming of our beloved True Father, the Second Coming of Christ who has now ascended to Heaven.

I declare to you today that we need to think long and hard about the importance of this belief and this proclamation. I know it is unpopular. So did Father. From the earliest years in Korea, his insistence on his mission and purpose won him just a handful of disciples and a boatload of enemies. That's why he ended up being sent to prison over and over again, being tortured and persecuted.

There have been people along the way who advised him "Why don't you try a more diplomatic course? Why don't you try to make partnerships? Why are you always so ... rude?"

When I worked with the Universal Peace Federation, one of our great challenges were the times when we brought VIPS – and especially religious leaders—to meet Father Moon on a church holiday or other important event. We hoped that he would say nice things about interfaith, brotherhood, one family under God, and inspiring things like that.

But instead, he would talk about things like the ownership of the sexual organs and blackjack – thankfully not usually in the same sermon – and bewilder us with numbers and concepts that seemed to be outside the normal three dimensions of life. In his last years, he introduced new concepts like the "God of Day" and the "God of Night" and created a whole new calendar. We're still only in year three!

A "Different, Special and Worthwhile" Church

Why did he do that? Why are his life and his message so staggeringly important that we believe it is a dividing line in all of history, ultimately even more important than BC and AD?

To answer that question, we go back to the Divine Principle. The Principle explains that the *whole* purpose of all of human history is for God to send the Messiah to earth. When Jesus was killed on the cross, thousands of years of preparation through sacrifice and pain were lost in an instant. The people of Israel were exiled for nearly two millennia, and early Christianity became a religion of blood and martyrdom. Later there were battles with Islam and even today the Children of Abraham are not at peace.

Let me say it again: according to the Principle, the *whole* purpose of the last two thousand years of history was for this day and this time, and for the Lord to be born again on earth, to marry, and begin a new history of God's family.

When you think about it, it's a truly staggering claim. All history – the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, the Crusades, Luther and the Reformation, the Great World Wars – even the emergence of America as "one Nation under God" – to say nothing of the histories of the rest of the world—has only one purpose, to make the world ready for this day, and this time: For the coming of the Lord, the True Parents.

It is this, and only this, that makes Unification Church different, special and worthwhile. We all know that there are much bigger churches, with internationally famous preachers you can see on TV almost any day of the week. In New York City, just two subway stops downtown from here you'll see Hillsong, a church founded in Sydney, Australia that now has six services every Sunday and music to die for. But these churches do not understand the Principle, and they do not know who True Father or who True Parents are. Yet.

Whose job is that?

The context of the parable of the wise and foolish builders also needs to be remembered. It is the last paragraph of the entire Sermon on the Mount.

The storm Jesus is talking about is not just one of the storms of life we all experience from time to time. No, he is talking about the final reckoning of a life, that moment when we stand before God and give an account of what we have done with our lives, and in particular, what we have done to help True Parents build God's kingdom.

Be People of Action

There are a lot of people who claim to know True Parents, Sun Myung Moon and Hak Ja Han Moon. But just knowing His name, without investing in a deep, committed and personal relationship, does not mean *He* knows *your* name. This is what Mother Moon was talking about when she spoke last Sunday, November 4, 2012. We don't want to be that person to whom God says, in the Words of Jesus, "I never knew you."

This fact is so important that it is worth the inevitable cost of making some people unhappy. Building a

house that sits on solid rock – the bedrock of Divine Principle and True Parents – is not the easy way. It is the hard way, but it is the only way that will last.

Jesus makes the clear distinction between the person who hears the word and does nothing, and the person who hears the word and does something, who acts on it.

Building the lasting house of the spirit is so important that it demands everything we have. It cannot be done part time and with a lukewarm spirit.

Let's say that you agree with all this. You agree that building a house on rock, rather than sand, is worth the effort. But, you're just so busy. You'll work on it whenever you can.

Some of you know that I have an on-going project to buy up old houses, fix them and then sell them. One of the things that I learned early on is that there's always more work than you think. If a project was due to take a day, it might take three. A three day project can take a week, and a week a month. Especially if you don't give the project top priority and are constantly working on other projects and other goals.

But suppose in that building or restoring a house, I say I can only work on it one hour a week instead of at least putting in full weekends. I think you can agree it would never get done.

Yet how many feel they can just come to church one day for one hour a week and get the job done? It simply isn't possible. Father Moon told us that we must love, study and live with the Word of God all the time. That's why he gave us the daily practice of *Hoon Dok Hwe* and set the personal example of doing it every single day.

That's why today Mother Moon is calling so strongly for us to return to our roots, to a consistent and daily intimacy with God and True Parents. Father Moon may be in spirit world but we can be close to him by living and breathing his word, and sharing the Breaking News with others.

We hear these words of tough love because God cares so much. We are to live for all eternity. Our remaining life on this earth, whether we're fifteen or fifty, is so brief that the Bible describes it as fleeting as a morning mist that is burned away by the sun. In that short time, let's get back to the simple, fundamental truths of our faith. Let us reorder the priorities in our lives, and build our eternal house on the Rock of Truth and True Parents.

If we are to rebuild our church in America, we need to find people who are willing to go "all-in" whether for the first time, or one more time. That is the only way.

Thank you very much.