

“Building Sand Castles”

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East Cobb United Methodist Church
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Scripture: Ephesians 5:15-20

Prayer

Sand is fun, but it can be deceiving. I grew up loving to play in the sands of the Outer Banks of North Carolina. I still love the beach. But when I look back at some of the things I did at the beach, I am amazed. I liked to stand in the water of the Atlantic surf and wait for the waves to come in. I always stood sideways to brace myself against the powerful inflow of the mighty ocean. Sometimes, I underestimated the power of the sea and was unceremoniously knocked down by the waves. I remember that, as I stood there feeling the waves wash over me, my feet would sink deeper and deeper into the wet sand below. Even the ground upon which I was standing was betraying me.

Sand Is Not Dependable

Sand is like that. It is fun to play in sandboxes and on the seashore, but sand is very unpredictable and unstable. The tallest sand dune on the east coast is Jockey's Ridge in Nags Head, NC. Each time we went to the beach, the great dune would be a little different. Often, the force of the sea breezes would cause the sand to become airborne, and you actually could see the shifting sands that so readily moved in response to the forces of nature.

Then there were the many sand castles I built on the Atlantic coast. But not one of them is there today. It was a bit silly to select a spot the incoming tide would cover in a matter of hours and begin the process of building a sand castle or fort. Often I had my back to the ocean and defiantly worked to build something that would stand against the tenacious, persistent inflow of sea water that influenced everything in its wake. As the ocean waters got closer, I would build barriers and trenches in the path of the water, hoping that the inevitable destruction could be averted. Sometimes the sand castle would still be there when I left, but often the tides would take their toll before we were ready to leave, and certainly before I was ready to see my creation washed over. There was a pang of grief that welled up in me when I saw hours of work inundated by the first big wave that reached much farther than it should have, in my opinion.

Water and wind. Both effectively move sand, and there is little anyone can do to stop it. When high winds from storms, hurricanes, etc., bring fierce tides, something has to give, and that sand is at the mercy of those elements.

We are having a Beach Party for VBS starting next Sunday night, and that sparked my reflection on sand. Sand that runs through your fingers; Sand that

sifts through the hourglass marking the hasty passage of time; Sand that is not an adequate foundation for buildings or roads. Yet we continue to place our faith and hope in the shifting sands to support our dreams and aspirations. All we need to do is visit a seaside resort community and consider all the money invested there, knowing that one day sooner or later, a storm will wash it away. We then come to the realization that we tend to put our greatest trust in things that are not reliable. We often play in the sands of the world because it is fun, taking no regard for the risks of trusting the sand.

Sometimes we become the sand, being blown and washed about by the winds and tides of worldly change, behaving like we have nothing of stability to hold on to in our lives. What moves you today? What causes you to place confidence in the shifting sands of worldly promises and worldly things? What makes you think you can stand alone against the forces that come against you?

Distractions Are Always Appealing

We are the sand, and the circumstances of life are the wind and water that shift us about. We are easily distracted and easily convinced that the things of the world will satisfy our eternal needs if we could just get enough of them or gain some elusive opportunity.

I remember being a midlevel manager many years ago and having a meeting with my Director. Salary was common knowledge because of grade structure and published pay scales. The conversation in the group turned to pay, and I jokingly told the boss that he certainly had nothing to worry about considering his salary. I'll never forget his reply: "Oh, I make more, but I'm just broke at a higher level." That was the first time I began to consider seriously the idea that no amount of money is really enough if your priorities are wrong.

Just like building the sand castles, we spend time, effort, and resources on things and efforts that we know will have no lasting value. We get on our knees and arch our backs in the heat of the day, burning our skin and spending our resources to produce something that will endure for an afternoon at the most. Paul uses a different term. He calls us "*unwise people*" and says, "*Don't be foolish, but understand what the will of God is.*" (v. 17).

The foolishness that Paul speaks of accurately describes much that we do every day: Consider the time we waste surfing the internet, convincing ourselves that we are "better informed" as a result. What about the blogs and images that we visit that corrupt and contaminate our minds? Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, not the shifting sands that move at the whims of the world. Yet we abuse our bodies with too much of the wrong kinds of food and not enough rest and exercise. We procrastinate; seek power, prestige, and influence; and work hard to become wealthy while our spirits get poorer every day. Success becomes our god, and work becomes the worship of that god. The human condition is like the

sands along the coast. We will yield to any pressure; succumb to any temptation; compromise any principle; and break any promise we have made to others and to God if the price is right! If there is sufficient reward in it for us, human nature will consider anything. Like the sands, we are incapable of consistency and stability. We cannot stand against the world in our own strength.

Mix Well, and Pour

Sand, however, can be very useful if mixed with the right proportions of cement and water. We, too, can be made into the firm and enduring likeness of what God intended us to be if we allow the cement of His Spirit, along with the living water of His presence, into our lives. If we are “*filled with the Spirit*,” as Paul puts it, and we thoroughly mix that Spirit into every facet of our lives, then we no longer are susceptible to the waves of the world and the whims of others, including the forces of evil. Great walls and foundations can be built from the concrete of the commitment we make with God. Nothing can destroy that structure, although many will try. In fact, the more committed you become, the greater the effort may be to knock you down.

So build well with enough of God’s Spirit to solidify your relationship. Build your life on a firm foundation that has eternal value, not on a whim or fad that may wash away in the afternoon. To do less is to cheat God and to cheat yourself out of the wonderful plans He has for your life.

Let me illustrate: Let’s say you want to build a skyscraper that is fifty stories high. You would never cut corners on the foundation. That foundation needs to sink deeply into the ground to hold that building up. O yes, people will be impressed with the beauty of the architecture and the high vaulted atrium. They will be impressed that it is one of the tallest buildings in the city; but that which they cannot see is the most important – the foundation. The foundation will determine whether or not that building withstands the storms for fifty or more years. You can cut back on the atrium and decorative features but *never* on the foundation.

Similarly, you *never* compromise your marriage. If you want your marriage to last fifty years (or more!), you do not cheat on the foundation. That foundation is where you put into practice **loving** the way Jesus wants you to love each other; where you put into practice **forgiving** each other as Jesus teaches; where you put into practice **being servants** of one another the way Jesus was to everyone. When you put His values and Spirit into the realities of your daily lives, even when nobody is watching, the foundation is solidified.

Your children need a good foundation also – regardless of their age. So do not cheat on the foundation for your children. If you want your children to be able to stand up to the hurricanes and storms of life, they need that good foundation of the Spirit in their souls. That’s a great reason to register for Beach Party Vacation Bible School with Rev. Cindy today!

If you have children, God has blessed you. (That does not mean that those who do not have children have not been blessed to be a blessing, too.) But having children, whether by birth, adoption, or whatever means, brings a joy and privilege, but also a responsibility to introduce them to God and His ways. Do not cheat on the foundation that you give your children. If you are short of time, cheat on other things. Cheat on your recreation. Cheat on your golf game. (Some of you may do that anyway!) Cheat on the work you bring home. Cheat on the amount of TV you watch. But do not cheat your child out of a home of security, love, peace, prayer, and quality time together.

We seemingly are so short of time these days; and when you are short of time, you are going to cheat on something. Something, somewhere, is going to give (or be completely washed away!). That is why it is so critical to make right choices in the use of the precious time you have. If we squander an hour here, an hour there, then soon we have dug the proverbial hole in the sand, and we are sinking. Some of you have simply buried your heads in the sand and are in complete denial that your life can be better. It is time to dig out and give God a chance in your life. Others of you are still digging. You know the adage, "If you find yourself in a hole, quit digging!" Some of you are in a hole, but are still digging with all your might. Stop digging and start mixing – make decisions that give stability and purpose to your lives and the lives of those around you.

And don't cheat God. Give Him what He has asked of you – in time, resources, service, and witness. Yes, you can fool some – even those who know you well – into believing that you are a great disciple for Christ. But remember, Paul says that in doing so, we become the fools. The choice is always there between the temporary and the eternal. The world makes the temporary look so attractive, only to be washed away along with the effort and resources you could have used for building the eternal. He has given us an architectural design for life, a way of living, a way of loving, a way of worshiping God.

So make the most of the time God has given you; avoid foolishness; praise God; and give thanks to Him at all times for everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Avoid the shifting sands, the unstable sands, and sinking sands. Do not attempt to live your life with that kind of risk. Instead, embrace the solid Rock that gives you the strength to do all things, and having done so, to stand.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Prayer

Response of the People