

Foundations

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, we're going to turn back to Matthew chapter 7 this evening, the last section of this area of the scripture that we've been looking at, this sermon of Jesus and the Mount, and from verse 24 to the end.

We hear a lot about first impressions and how important first impressions are, but actually I think last impressions are quite important as well. Sometimes we would call lasting impressions, the kind of impressions we leave with people. And the conclusion to a book is very important, as is the conclusion to a film.

It's not even worse than a real damp squib of an ending to a film, or a book, or dare I say a sermon. Sermons should start well, but they should also finish well as well. And Christ is the great sermon preacher, and he both starts his sermon well and of course finishes it gloriously here.

And it's quite explosive. And I hope that we will realise this evening both the challenge and the excitement of the end of, and encouragement I hope, of the end of this sermon.

It is challenging because it's for people like us. I think we've found out as we've gone through this sermon that it was preached to a specific audience.

[1 : 2 4] It was preached to the crowds that gathered to listen to Jesus, and also to the scribes and Pharisees, who Jesus speaks against a lot of the time in the sermon. So there's, what we have are two groups of people, but they're all at least religious to some degree. They're all wanting to hear, maybe sometimes for different motives, the words of Jesus.

But what we do realise is that the piercing eyes of Jesus reach into the hearts of the hearers, and he says some very significant and important things. Coriel last week preached very solemnly, or the passage was a very solemn passage about those who say, Lord, Lord, didn't we do miracles in your name?

And he says, depart from me, I didn't know you. I didn't know you. And that, I think, I don't know about you, but I was pretty uncomfortable in that. And I hope at one level uncomfortable then to the point of being comforted by the knowledge of Jesus and the grace of the gospel, which is a good thing, isn't it?

Don't want to leave comfortless unless, of course, you find yourself to be in that position where you don't know the Lord. And then you want to be challenged to come to him. And in many ways, this section is saying the same thing, but just with different illustrations.

So what I want to do is I want to just take six words from the section as focus and go through these six words quickly, because they're all important words in the passage here.

[2 : 5 7] And they all relate to how we respond to Jesus Christ as well. So the first is the first word is hearing, because Jesus, everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like the wise man at the Balist House in the rock.

And then it goes on saying everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn't do them will be like the foolish man. So hearing, Jesus is saying hearing him is very important understanding of people's relationship to him.

He has things to say. John describes him in John 1, as you know, as the word. So he's given this title, which reflects the fact that he is a communicator, that he is something really important to say.

And the sermon on the mount is words that he speaks, he communicates to us. And it's interesting at the end of the sermon, we find that the people, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, at what he said, at his words, because he taught them as one who had authority.

They looked around them at the scribes and they said, he is much more authority than them. When they speak, nobody listens. But he spoke with great authority. So the hearing of Jesus' words is really important. And the hearing of this sermon is very important.

[4 : 22] And how you hear and how you respond, obviously, is very important. But what is he saying in the sermon? Well, he's saying lots of things. We've looked at lots of things in the sermon. I just want to pick out one, and this is another word, but it's not one of the six.

Okay, so it's really a seventh. But it's not one of the words. But it's kind of core through the sermon. So in Matthew 6, if you go back a chapter, of course none of you have Bibles because you've all just got on your order of service.

But if you do have a Bible, Matthew 6 and verse 33, Jesus says something that we spoke about before. He says, but seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.

So he's saying seek first kingdom of God and His righteousness. So His righteousness, righteousness is the word that I'm looking at. Then going back, we're reversing back into the sermon, chapter 5 and verse 28.

No, that's the wrong reference. Yeah, I should have checked this.

[5 : 38] Chapter 5 and verse 6 reminds us, blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied.

And he speaks about the importance of righteousness. And I have no idea where the reference for the other righteousness is that I was looking at.

But I will find it. And when I find it, I will tell you next Sunday. If anyone else finds a reference for righteousness in 20, what chapter 5, 20, I must have just transcribed my letter of Rome.

5 verse 20. Yeah. You got the same Bible as me. Yeah, that's absolutely the right one.

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. And he's speaking about the importance of His righteousness. He's comparing it with the self-righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees.

[6 : 46] He's saying that as believers, we will need to hunger and thirst after His righteousness. And he says that we are to seek His righteousness first and all these things will be added to Him.

And he's reminding us where our appetite should lie and what is the core of the message of the sermon on the Mount. This is the good news of the gospel is that he is reminding his audience, pointing forward to the work that he will do, that he will provide for them a righteousness that will exceed the law and the righteousness of the law and the scribes and the Pharisees, which will never be able to change them. That's the good news of the gospel.

And what Jesus is saying here is an unchanging message of good news. That is what he wants us to hear. I heard a really interesting quote, or read a very interesting quote this week that came from a minister, and not in our own denomination.

But he was talking about the need for a new breed of ministers. And he was saying, we need a new breed to catch the vision, the passion for the good news of Jesus Christ.

But whose understanding of the faith is not frozen in time, but develops and matures with new revelation and understanding. And he was coming from a very strongly liberal point of view.

[8 : 10] But it was an interesting quote, catch the passion for the good news of Jesus Christ, but one that is changing and developing and maturing with new revelation and understanding.

We heartily disagree with that message. The message of the good news of Jesus Christ is not, how can we keep the good news of Jesus Christ if we're always changing?

How can it be good news if it's maturing and changing and being revealed differently as time goes on, as if we know much more than these peasants from 2000 years ago?

What we have is the unchanging message of Jesus Christ, and it never changes, but it never goes out of date. And we don't need a new breed of ministers.

We need a kind of old breed of ministers who are going to keep preaching that unchanging, living, passionate, glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. And that is what Jesus wants us to hear, and that's what he's speaking about in this sermon.

[9 : 17] So that's the first word. The second word is practicing. Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them or practices them will be like a wise man.

And then he who doesn't hear these words and doesn't practice them will be like a foolish man. And that again is hugely significant, because he's talking about taking his words and responding to them.

Responding to the message of Jesus Christ. In John 6.29, Jesus says, The work of the Father is to believe in the one that he has sent.

So responding to the words of Jesus involves hearing and believing and acting on that belief. When he speaks here about doing the word of God or practicing the truth of God, who puts him into, who does them, it is about putting our trust in this Christ who gifts us his righteousness.

It's about stopping and listening to him and looking deep into our hearts to see that message and allowing that message to transform who we are.

[10 : 40] It grows on us as we pray to the one to whom we hear. It's about a life of obedience and trust out of gratitude to this living God.

And the sermon speaks about these things. It speaks about lust. It speaks about murder and anger. It speaks about our attitude to money, a hatred, pride, being judgmental, showing mercy, being servants.

All of the ethical and practical outworking of his righteousness that we accept by faith is to be put into practice.

So Jesus says two very important words. He says that we need to be hearing and we need to be practicing. But then he gives us an illustration. And I think this is where it gets really quite interesting.

Well, very interesting, but more interesting just as it unpacks a little bit more of what he's saying. So the third word is building.

[11 : 45] Everybody hears, does this word of mine, why is man who built this house in the rock and the foolish man who built this house on the sand? So the third word is building. And in reality, this is an illustration of what he's being saying about hearing and putting into practice.

It's an illustration of putting into practice or not what we have heard about Jesus Christ. Whether we are acting on the truth or not acting on the truth in our life is illustrated by the type of life that we live spiritually, the type of life that we have as is illustrated by a building.

And so the question really that Jesus asks to the crowd and to the scribes and Pharisees and to us is what kind of life are we building? What does it look like?

Now, this is, I think this is very interesting because I believe there's an unstated truth in this picture of the wise and the foolish man that fits in with the sermon, the whole sermon and the theme of the sermon and the audience of the sermon.

The unstated truth for me is that these houses that are built by the wise and foolish man look the same.

[13 : 10] There's no evidence whatsoever that they're wildly different houses. And I also think fitting in with the context and with the sermon and with the message that they were built beside each other.

It's not that one was built on a beach and one was built on a great beautiful piece of rock that was clearly a piece of rock and which it was built. They were both built together and they look the same.

There was no real difference with the material that they used. But the wise man dug deep to find the rock beyond the sand.

He dug deep and worked hard at building a house that was founded on the rock, whereas the foolish man just went ahead and built on the sand there.

And that's the difference, that the wise man has counted the cost and he has paid a price and he has recognised what needs to be done.

[14 : 20] But I think to look at the houses looked the same. There was no real difference until the storms came. And that's when the difference between these two houses was clearly evidenced.

And that's where I think it becomes very challenging for us. And not just a simple story of how you built your house on the rock and where you built it and how you lived your life, but one that challenges each of us and challenges us in the lives that we live.

Because there's two types of lives defined here. They both seem to be faith-based, they both look the same. It's like the Lord, Lord passage previously.

Lord, Lord, didn't we do many things in your name? It seems like they were absolutely completely people who trusted in the Lord.

It seems that their lives are faith-based. It seems that both lives are Christian lives, can we say. Lives that both have good works, decent, good lives.

[15 : 32] What's the difference between the two lives that are represented by the two houses at the end of the sermon? One is Christ-reliant, one is self-reliant.

And that's the difference as it's illustrated by the rock. The rock is Jesus Christ. The person who hears these words of mine, who acts on them, is the person who is building their life on the rock that is Jesus Christ.

Christ-reliant. They've listened. They've heard what Jesus had to say about their own hearts, about their own need, about their own sin, about their own inadequacy.

And they have recognised the need for coming to Jesus Christ for salvation and for denying their sinful selves. And they have a life, they have what is significantly, they have a hidden life of faith.

You know, the building of the foundation, or the foundation is hidden, isn't it? The two houses look the same. You don't know what is underneath. There's this implication that there's something hidden that's happened or not happened.

[16 : 46] And so the life of faith, there's this hidden life of faith where, to all intents and purposes, you don't know that a believer is living a life of dependence on Christ.

You don't know the privacy of their prayer life and the way they are studying God's Word and digging deep into God's Word and understanding their own heart and exposing the sin and working through that and being dependent on Jesus Christ.

It's hidden, it's unseen, it's what Jesus says about prayer life, go into that closet, go into that private place and you do your business with God in a way that's unseen.

Because it's deeply personal and it's deeply, deep-seated as we recognise that grace is coming in and transforming our lives.

And we seek Him first. You know, there's little bits or little texts from the sermon come through all the time. We seek Him first. And His righteousness and everything else is added to us.

[17 : 44] And so the foundation of our lives is clearly founded in our relationship with Jesus Christ. Regularly and in an ongoing way. Christ reliant.

The wise man who built his house in the Rock, the wise person. The opposite is the fool. Looks like a Christian, acts like a Christian, talks like a Christian.

And every way is the same as the other person. But there is no hidden life of faith. Okay? Comes to church, reads the Bible, says the right things, knows how to pray in public.

In public, looks exactly the same. No hidden life of faith. No foundation, no digging deep. Faith for them, for such, is like wallpaper.

Christ is like gloss, paint. A self-reliant life which likes the ideas of the Gospel, likes the lifestyle of the Gospel, likes sometimes even the ethics of the Gospel and the community of the Gospel and even the church of the Gospel. But in day-to-day living doesn't need the Christ of the Gospel.

[19 : 06] Because we're not bad enough for the Christ. We're not dependent and sinful enough for the Christ every day. And in our day-to-day living there's no dependence on the Christ.

There's no foundation and relationship with the Christ. No knowledge of the Christ. And a personal, no self-examination of the light of the Christ into our own dark hearts that changes us.

Prayer of such a fool is to Santa Claus. It's not to Jesus Christ, the living God. It's to the Santa Claus that will give us what we want and what we think we should have from him.

And we pray constantly like a shopping list. There isn't any worship because prayer is about what we can receive and get from this Santa Claus figure that we actually don't know.

There's no serious self-denial of sin. And we have... The fool has moulded a God who is very close to the New Testament Christ.

[20 : 12] An angel of light but so far away ultimately to be no saviour at all. No foundation. No hidden life of faith and love.

Grace is not the motivation. Self is the motivation. And there is no hungering and thirsting after the Kingdom.

And his Kingdom never comes first in our agenda. So it's a very solemnising passage that Jesus... This is really the third section of the same truth that is reminding us of where the reality of our faith must lie.

And it's a challenge to 21st century Western Christians like us, most of us who have been brought up in the church, who are from Covenantal families, who have known the Gospel, who do church things, and who maybe rely on our church involvement and our friendships with Christ, the importance of where our foundations are, and where they lie and how our lives reflect who we know spiritually.

And how will that be revealed to us? So I come to the fourth word. Battering. This is when it will be revealed.

[21 : 38] Battering. Because we're told that the rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house. And it did not fall because it was on the rock.

And the winds came, the wind and the rain, and the winds beat against the house built on the sand, and it fell and great was the fall of it.

So what is it that exposes the life of faith in a Christian? Or what exposes the difference between a life of faith and a life of self-righteous religiosity?

The storms of life. That's what does it. That's when, if God is your Santa Claus and the storms of life come, then you ditch Him.

That's the difference. When the seasons of trouble come, that will expose the genuineness of your dependence and your knowledge of Jesus Christ.

[22 : 48] Storms of life, whatever they happen to be, whether it is illness, broken relationship, financial loss, persecution, opposition, bankruptcy, old age, or the perfect storm of death, which I believe is included here.

The testings of life and the great enemy of us all, death, will prove our faith, or otherwise.

And I think it's important for us all to look inside ourselves this evening, especially in the storms of life. Because at any point you want to be judgmental, because you say there but for the grace of God go I, I don't know how I would cope in such a situation.

But we've often seen and pastored people, I guess it's a bit like the parable of the sower, you know, the seed doesn't get deeply rooted and when the heat comes of the sun, the plant withers.

We've seen that, you know, and it breaks our heart. When people face opposition and the heat of opposition and they blame God and their faith withers.

[24 : 29] And there's two responses, isn't there? And this is where we look at our own hearts tonight, either we're going to be standing, or we're going to be crashing.

And that is the great litmus test of where our foundation lies in Jesus Christ. Either we're standing, you know, the wise man, Billus House, and the house, the life that is represented by his house, it did not fall, it stood firm.

The believer whose life is firmly grounded in an ongoing relationship with Jesus Christ, who knows Jesus Christ, who knows that he's the rock, who knows that he is good, he's a redeemer.

We've learned to know him and trust him and believe in his promises and he is a great God. We have come to know him so that when the storms come, we say, I trust you even though I don't understand and I don't want this.

I know you fundamentally deep down are a good and a precious and a kind and a loving and a gracious and a merciful God, and that you will hold me and that I will be able to stand.

[25 : 50] You know what I say, I speak about that beautiful picture of soaring on wings like eagles, running and not being weary, walking and not fainting. But here, it's not even that, it's just standing.

And there's sometimes we just stand, we do not fall, because the Holy Spirit is our strength, and our lives are rooted in relationship with God, the invisible life of faith, the foundations, the unseen strength of our life is based in hearing God's word and responding to him in faith and trust.

And that is something that will be obvious. The house stands, the storm has passed, the house stands.

You know what it's like in a tsunami, we've seen it on our screens or in a terrible storm, you see the house that stands, it's still there, it's well founded.

It is the focus of attention. And so as believers, people, we will testify to Jesus Christ when we stand and we still confess him and love him.

[27 : 09] When every ounce of life around us says, curse God and die, what's the point of you being a Christian if you're going through what you're going through and you can still testify to his grace and to his love, and you will still stand and of course in the perfect storm of death, we stand.

We stand. The spiritual powers of darkness will see those who are Christ's children whose foundation is in Christ because of his death and resurrection, we too will stand.

Death is not the end and therefore is not casual teaching. It's not insignificant truth that Jesus is speaking about.

He's talking about what kind of life you're building. However young or old we might be tonight, what life or where is our foundation? Where do we, in the privacy of our hearts, what is our hidden life of faith like?

And you can only answer that question as I only can. So either standing or lastly we're crashing. The rain fell, the winds, floods came, the winds blew and beat against that house and it fell and great was the fall of it.

[28 : 29] Because ultimately there was simply either self-righteousness and self-reliance or religiosity, but there was not a deep foundation.

It was a God of sand that the fool believes in. Because the fool believes in a God that is not a saviour because they don't need a saviour.

The fool is someone who is ultimately trusting in their own goodness, their own law keeping, their own righteousness. And faith for them is just like wallpaper.

And when the house starts to crumble, when the walls start to crack, wallpaper doesn't hold it together. Wallpaper is just a veneer. It doesn't hold a building up.

It's a poor foundation. And so a life that has no hidden walk of faith, where there's no personal relationship, developing, growing, knowing God and knowing what he's like, even in the storms that we will face, will leave us with a life that will crash.

[29 : 47] Because we don't know ourselves and our hearts and we don't know Christ. And so we say in such situations, my shopping list God isn't listening.

Why has he given me cancer? I don't deserve this. And I blame him for being a wretched God, careless God.

And I'm too good to go through suffering and difficulty. And I curse him because of what he's done. And I give up. There's been no value and no goodness and no benefit for me in following Jesus Christ.

Because I've never counted the cost of recognising my own heart's need and his own diagnosis of the reality of the world in which we live.

The fool wants the benefits of the gospel, but also wants self-rule and doesn't want to dig deep into Christ and into their own hearts.

[30 : 53] And therefore they blame. They blame the church and they turn away from the church and they turn away from Jesus. And they say, well, I've tried to be a Christian, but it doesn't work.

I've tried to follow Jesus Christ, but things have just been a nightmare. And I've had nothing but trouble and difficulty. What's the point? I've just been battered by rain and wind and storms.

And tragically, that crash is catastrophic. And it is seen by all around and it brings Christ's name into disrepute.

But of course, the most catastrophic crash of all for the fool is in death, isn't it? And that perfect storm of death.

They're the ones who say, as Jesus says, well, Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name? Jesus says, depart from me, I never knew you.

[31 : 56] There was no knowledge. God didn't know them. They didn't know God. And the spiritual powers, the unseen powers, will see and will know and will understand that the fall is great.

The crash is great of those who don't know Jesus Christ. And that's a very exciting, encouraging, challenging and self-examining truth that Jesus leaves us with.

What life are you building spiritually? In whom do you put your trust? What is your day-to-day life like? The house that's founded on the rock doesn't move every day and move to a different foundation.

Every day it's dependent on the rock on which it is built. And that's the kind of life of faith that we seek to follow as we listen, as we hear and as we listen and respond to the living Word of God in Jesus Christ.

And we thank God for this great sermon. What is your priority? Do you seek Christ and His Kingdom first? Do you hunger and thirst after righteousness?

[33 : 19] Does your righteousness and mind surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees? That is what Jesus is speaking about here. And how do you find that you respond in trouble when the storms come?

That is the test of where our foundations lie. Please don't be deceived on that day of trouble by walking away from Jesus and saying, well, He let me down.

Please don't do that because He never lets us down. We must understand ourselves and this world we live in and His grace and His goodness.

And remember that He is the one who has great authority and we long to be astonished by His teaching. Father God, help us to know you and understand you and follow you and serve you.

Help us to do that simple thing of entrusting our lives to you. The work of God in us is to believe in Jesus, whom He has sent.

[34 : 31] And may we believe in you not with just our heads but with our hearts and with our entrusting of our sin to you for forgiveness and to your grace for wholeness.

And may we be Christians who, when the batterings of life do come because they do come, and they have come and they are what we have experienced in our lives and will experience.

And each of us will indeed know and go through the perfect storm of death. So may it be that in these times that we don't curse God and die, may it be that we don't blame you, that we don't think you are servant or you're some kind of idol that is there, some kind of genie that is there to make our wishes come true, that you're not kind of some Santa Claus figure, but you're the living sovereign God of the universe.

You've poured out blessing upon blessing on us. You've given us life. We are here tonight because you've sustained us and enabled us to be here. You give us breath. You give us family and friends. You give us hope. You give us a future.

Above all, you've given us eternal life in Jesus Christ. And Lord God, there is an amazing future for us. And may we take that and be founded in that.

[35 : 47] And as we are founded in the person of Christ, may we stand on that day. We long to be people who stand, help us to do so in your strength and by the Holy Spirit.

And may we be exposed this evening if we are foolish and if we are not putting your words. And if we are not entrusting our lives and our hearts to you, may we be moved to do so.

For we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.