

Choosing Your Foundation

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[0 : 00] All right, let's read together from the New Testament. One last look at the Sermon on the Mount together. We're reading Matthew 7 tonight, verses 24 to 29.

! Everyone then who hears these words of mine, Jesus says, and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house.

But it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it. And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority and not as their scribes.

This is God's holy word. Well, if you have a Bible, please open it at Matthew chapter 7, and these verses that Corey read for us a little earlier.

[1 : 15] One of our next-door neighbors is a country music fan. And on occasions, he loves to blare his music out across the back garden.

There is no escape. Willie Nelson, Johnny Cash, and my neighbor's particular favorite, George Jones.

Now, there's one song by George Jones that he plays more frequently than any other. I almost know all the words and can sing along.

And it's a song that's simply called Choices. I won't sing it, you'll be glad to know, but I've had choices since the day that I was born. There were voices that told me right from wrong.

If I had listened, no, I wouldn't be here today, living and dying with the choices I made. And here in the closing verses of Matthew chapter 7, Jesus is drawing his famous sermon on the mount to a close, and he does so by presenting his listeners and us with a series of choices.

[2 : 27] There is, as we saw last week with Ryan, a choice of paths, the start choice, two possibilities, two ways, two gates, two roads, one broad, one narrow, one leading to life, the other to death.

And we're all on one road or the other. And there are two trees in verses 15 to 20 bearing two types of fruit, representing two influences or voices that will shape our lives.

Only one bears good fruit, the other bad. One brings life and health, the other disease and death.

And tonight we turn to look at a third contrast, one of the most well-known of the stories or parables of Jesus.

A parable of the wise and foolish builders. The house on the rock and the house on the sand. And it brings Jesus' sermon really to a dramatic conclusion.

And it's again a story that presents us with a choice. Where are we building our lives? On what kind of foundation are we choosing to build?

[3 : 42] And these concluding words of Jesus really comprise a serious and solemn appeal.

Listening or hearing the teaching of Jesus means that we're all faced with a choice.

Are we going to embrace His teaching or not? And are we going to embrace Him or not? Let me share three things from our text this evening that I want us to see.

First of all, let's look at the story that Jesus tells. The story Jesus tells. It's a famous story. We've been brought up in church and Sunday school and whatever. We know this story well.

Two men who each build a house. And Jesus designates one of them as wise and the other foolish.

And the way that the story is told is as a comparison between these two houses that they construct.

And I think we might be led to imagine that the houses they built might have had many similarities.

Perhaps they used a similar design. Maybe they used the same kind of materials.

[4 : 53] We might deduce that they were constructed in a similar location. And probably in a riverbed or a wadi. Certainly both buildings endure the same climatic conditions.

The rain falls. The floods rise. The winds blow upon both houses. And the language in both parts of the story is almost identical. Except for one thing.

There's this one crucial difference. For after the storm has passed, one of the houses is perhaps battered and weather-beaten.

But nonetheless it remains stable and standing. The other house, however, is in a very different condition. It is just a pile of rubble.

It's utterly destroyed. The words used here mean something catastrophic has happened to it. It suffers a great collapse. And so what is the explanation of this very different outcome?

[5 : 54] After all, these houses perhaps look much the same. They may have been made of that same material. They both face the same elements. The rain, the floods, and the winds. So how is it that one collapsed and the other remained standing?

And the answer, of course, is to be found in the different foundations that the two men chose to build upon. One man chose wisely.

He built on a foundation of rock. Luke, in his account of the parable and the Sermon on the Plain in Luke chapter 6 verse 48, says that the wise man dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock.

This man made sure to build on something solid. He took time to dig down, to establish good and strong foundations. And so when the rains fell and the floods rose and the winds blew, it was able to withstand the pressure of the elements and to remain firm.

The other man didn't choose so well. Jesus calls him a foolish builder. He too built his house in the valley, but not on a rocky outcrop.

[7 : 06] In his folly, he chose to build on sand. His building had no real foundations at all. Luke, in his account says, Luke 6 49, he built a house on the ground without a foundation.

He built on sand, something fluid, movable, malleable. And so when the storm came and beat upon the house, the ground beneath simply gave way.

A great collapse was inevitable. So the big difference between the builders and their houses was in the foundations they chose. From the outside, those foundations were hidden.

They couldn't be seen. Foundations are often, by their nature, unseen and unnoticed. Yet nonetheless, they're utterly critical. For without a proper foundation, no house can withstand the power of a great storm.

And so this is the story Jesus tells. It's a very dramatic, a very striking contrast. Let's look secondly then at the issue Jesus addresses.

[8 : 18] What's the point? What's the, why is Jesus telling this story? The story is not, of course, about architecture. Or construction methods. His parable is about people, not buildings.

It's all about what we do with the teaching of Jesus. How do we respond to the words of Jesus? How do we respond to the teaching of the sermon?

The difference between the wise and foolish builders, between the rock and sand as a foundation, comes down to what we do with the teaching of Jesus.

Look at verse 24. Verse 26. Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. Verse 26.

The difference between the two men and the parable is that one man simply hears the words of Jesus, while the other hears and puts them into practice.

[9 : 33] Both listen, but only one responds with faith and obedience. Only one responds positively. And this is the difference between rock and sand.

And this is the issue Jesus is addressing. What we do with Jesus' words, you see, reveal what we really think of Him.

In John's gospel, Jesus says to His disciples, If you love me, you will keep my commands. In other words, our love for Jesus is to be seen in what we do with His words, His instruction, and His teaching.

If we ignore someone's words, really that's really a form of insult, isn't it? Shows that we perhaps have little regard for them. If we don't, we maybe don't think much of them at all.

Their words and opinions mean little to us. But if we claim that Jesus is our Lord and King, then we will not ignore His words.

[10 : 39] Instead, we will want to honor Him and do His will. It's not that we will ever do that perfectly, but we will want to honor Him with our lives.

James, in his letter, picks up that theme. It's an interesting thing to look at the teaching of the book of James and compare it to the Sermon on the Mount. But in chapter 1, James says this, James is saying that the more you obey God's Word, the freer, really, you become.

You become more of who you are in Jesus Christ. The Bible always shows you who you are before telling you what to do.

That's a pattern we see right throughout the Scriptures, pattern we see in Paul's letters. Actually, it's the pattern we see here in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus first describes the radical new identity of His kingdom followers, before then spelling out the righteousness that is to follow.

It's that new understanding of ourselves that issues in this radical new lifestyle. It's not the other way around. In Jesus Christ, we become a new creation.

[12 : 29] We experience newness of life. And then that new life needs to be expressed. So, yes, being comes before doing. But, of course, doing is important.

The new life we have received has to be lived out. Hearing itself is not enough. It must be accompanied by action. We must live out our new identity and faith and grateful obedience.

Many years ago, I took a period of study to study leave to audit some classes.

Then it was the International Christian College in Glasgow. And I attended some of the lectures. But I didn't take any of the exams. I didn't do any of the assignments.

I just sat in, listened. I was a kind of spectator. It was great. It certainly wasn't demanding. And the other students, they were very envious of my special status.

[13 : 31] I was a hero only. But that kind of approach is not appropriate in the church of Jesus Christ. It's not appropriate in relation to the teaching of Jesus Christ.

We can't just sit in on the class that Jesus teaches. Just listening isn't enough. In the kingdom of God, being just a spectator is not on.

And it's easy to be deceived. To think that by hearing many sermons, that makes us a Christian. It doesn't.

If we are Christians, then one of the ways that will be seen is in this new relationship we have to the Scriptures and to the teaching of Jesus.

We accept them. We look into them. We obey them. We delight ourselves in the Word of God. We delight ourselves in Jesus. We delight ourselves in the gospel.

[14 : 34] And we allow it free reign in our lives. I came across this, I suppose you would call it a paraphrase of the parable in Eugene Peterson's The Message.

This is what he wrote. It struck me as quite interesting. This is what he says. This is how he paraphrases the parable. These words, this is Jesus speaking. These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life.

Homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words. Words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock.

But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach.

When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a pack of cards. I think I've been a Christian for around almost maybe 43 years.

[15 : 47] Corey mentioned this morning I've been minister of the gospel for 37 years this evening, exactly to the day. And over that time I've seen, you know, people fall utterly away.

Completely abandon the faith. People who now have absolutely no interest that appears in the things of God. And some have been people very, very close to me.

It's a tragic but not uncommon scenario. Men and women who are fine to all intents and purposes, fine Christians. Greatly used of God and now they're nowhere.

How do such things happen? Well, of course, there may be many reasons. But one may be that they didn't put down foundations. And without a proper foundation, the house will fall.

May not do so immediately. But eventually the relentless rain of discouragement, the rising flood of opposition, the stinging wind of temptation will take its toll and have an effect.

[16 : 48] And so I want to encourage you this evening to put down solid foundations in your spiritual life. Yes, foundations can be costly.

Yes, they can be time-consuming. Yes, they can be energy-sapping to lay. But they're absolutely essential. Not something you can take or leave.

And these foundations might never be seen by other people. They're hidden away. Costly Christian duties. Prayer, Scripture reading. Vital in putting down good foundations for our Christian lives because they stimulate and encourage heart obedience.

And sometimes we can get away without such things. When the weather is fine, the sun is shining as it was today, the culture around us is warm, and such days we can too easily misplace our confidence.

It's a different matter when the wind starts to blow. The rain begins to fall. The floods begin to rise. And friends, our cultural climate has been undergoing, has it not, a radical change of weight?

[17:59] The wind's picking up. The rain is getting heavier. The enemy coming in like a flood. Are we going to stand firm? And yes, we live in a culture, don't we, that's often obsessed with making appearances, keeping up appearances, looking good, more important than being good.

So much in the modern world is quite cosmetic, superficial. Why bother laying down foundations? Why bother spending time digging down deep?

Why develop a godly character? Therefore, after all such foundations might not be seen. They're hidden away. Friends, we need to beware a shortcut Christianity that's all about appearances.

And let me say that as a minister of the gospel, that, you know, preachers are no exception to this. Perhaps there are specific temptations that come our way to ministers and elders.

We work with the word, but we can fail to work that word into our own hearts. We read the word, we hear the word, we study the word, we preach the word, but do we practice it?

[19:10] Do we allow the word of Christ to dwell in us richly? Sometimes I wonder if that's not why we've seen in recent years, the collapse of some prominent preachers, great ministries.

Because it doesn't matter who we are. Without foundations, we're going to collapse. And great will be the fall. The story Jesus tells.

The issue Jesus addresses. And then thirdly, we need to ask the question, why does Jesus tell this story? He puts his finger on this issue, but what's he looking for?

Well, let's look at the obedience Jesus expects. That's the third thing here. In Matthew's gospel, Jesus is presented as the king. One who speaks with authority. His word is to be obeyed.

And so the challenge, of course, is not simply to be hearers of his word, but doers also. Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

[20:20] And the tense there is present continuous. It means to do them, keep on doing them. A reference to daily obedience, I think, to the word of Christ. It's how we lay a foundation.

We meet with him every day. We read his word every day. We engage in prayer every day. We seek to serve others every day. We resist temptation every day.

We put our faith into practice. We endeavor to put our faith into practice every day. Here's the question, though. How do we get from hearing to obeying?

How does that word of Jesus Christ get worked into our lives? What we need is obedience, but not just any kind of obedience. We need heart obedience.

People can obey for all sorts of reasons. And where does that heart obedience come from? It comes from the, as Corey reminded us this morning, it comes from the presence and the work of God's Holy Spirit through the ministry of his word.

[21:21] There's a passage in Romans 6, Paul says this, Romans 6, 17 and 18. He says, Thanks be to God that you who were once slaves of sin have become obedient from the heart to the standard of teaching to which you were committed.

And having been set free from sin have become slaves of righteousness. And the apostle speaks there of the change that has taken place in the Christian's life.

From being slaves to sin, we've become men and women with that heart obedience to the message of the gospel. In Romans, he's talking about them being shaped and molded by the word of Christ, squeezed into a gospel mold, rather than being conformed to the pattern of this world.

And that's something that is happening to them through the word and the spirit. Righteousness, doing the right thing, living like Jesus, living for Jesus. This is what has become their pleasure and their delight.

I wonder if that's true for us tonight. Do we delight in the will of God? Are we joyfully traveling the way of obedience? Are we allowing the gospel to really change us and transform our hearts, change us from the inside out?

[22 : 43] Some occasions I make the attempt to play golf. My normal routine when I go for a game is something like this. I drive up to the golf club about a minute before my tee time.

I jump out of the car, hastily put on my golf shoes, grab my clubs, dash to the first tee, then take a couple of practice swings and attempt to launch the ball down the fairway.

More often than not, the results of this, and it is a very well-honed routine, are not very good. You know, the ball finds its way into deep rough, it's in the trees, it's in a bunker, it's in a water hazard. I never practice. I seldom, if I ever, go to the driving range. And the reality, of course, is you cannot be a good golfer without hard work and diligent practice.

And if that is true of our hobbies and recreational pursuits, how much more is it true of the Christian life? Discipleship takes effort and energy. Being a Christian is a 24-7 activity.

[23 : 46] We all need the help of God's Holy Spirit to put the Word into practice. He needs to be at work in us. And so the Christian life is not something theoretical.

It must be practiced. Our life in Jesus Christ has to be expressed. We need to get praying to our Father in heaven. We need to forgive our brothers and sisters from the heart.

We need to turn the other cheek. Go the extra mile. Love our enemies. This, says Jesus, is the way of wisdom. And yes, the storms will come.

Again, over the years, I've witnessed brothers and sisters in the Lord who have endured great storms in their lives. The rain has fallen. The winds have blown hard against them. They've had to face all manner of suffering and trials.

Bereavement, loss, illness, much pain. All manner of family difficulties and disappointments. And yet, for all that, they remain standing. Why was that?

[24 : 45] Because they were really well educated? Because they were really gifted? Because they were made of the right stuff? No, they had a foundation.

They built their lives on the rock. They had a heart for Christ, a heart for His Word. We sometimes sing those words, don't we? In Christ alone, my hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my song. This cornerstone, this solid ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm. Now, of course, here it may be that Jesus has in mind not so much the problems of this life as the final storm of death and judgment.

Indeed, the previous verses, verses 21 through 23, kind of allude to that great reality. It's a storm we will all one day have to pass through. And on that day, the only safe place will be on the rock. There's a passage in Ezekiel 13 that speaks of God's judgment as a storm, hail and rain and wind and whatever, exposing the foundations.

[25 : 57] And that storm of divine judgment will reveal and uncover all, expose the foundations of our lives. Were we really building on the rock or were we just fooling around in the sand?

And so you see why Jesus calls those who would literally ignore his words, fools. Strong word he uses here, an idiot.

Because you're a fool if you ignore Jesus' words. He alone has the words of eternal life. build on those words and you build for eternity. Ignore them at your peril.

And when Jesus finished these things, the crowds were astonished at his teaching. He was teaching them as one who had authority and not as their scribes. Easy just to skip over those closing words.

I think it would be a mistake. They're there for a reason. And their significance lies, I think, in directing our attention back to Jesus and the authority that he has.

[27 : 06] Our gaze is drawn once more to the person of Jesus Christ and his authority as the true king. Why should you hear, heed, and obey the words of the Sermon on the Mount?

It's because of the one who taught it. His authority is not derived from any man-made source. It's the authority of one who has come from God.

Indeed, it is the authority of the one who is himself light of light, very God of very God. You remember how at the end of this gospel, risen Jesus will send commissioners, disciples, go into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and teaching them to what?

Obey all that I have commanded you. You see, you can't really embrace, seems to me, the Sermon on the Mount without embracing the one who taught it.

You can't embrace the teaching without embracing the teacher. You can't live out and obey the sermon apart from being united to Jesus.

[28 : 24] Because there's this sense in which he is the rock on which we must build our lives. Paul told the church at Corinth, 1 Corinthians 3.11, for no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

Christ. In his little book on the Sermon on the Mount, Don Carson writes this, We ought not to forget that Matthew's record of the Sermon on the Mount must be taken in the context of his entire gospel. The Sermon on the Mount does not press men and women to despair, still less to self-salvation. rather it presses men and women to Jesus.

Have you been pressed into a living relationship with Jesus? We're all building our lives on something. They all rest on some kind of foundation.

What kind of foundation are you choosing? Maybe it's our work, our career, our family, our marriage, reputation, our business, our ministry, our religious activity.

[29 : 37] But Jesus told this little story to remind us that there's only one foundation upon which it is safe to build. And that is Jesus Christ and heart obedience to his word.

Build on anything else and we're building on sand. Like George Jones, we're all living and dying with the choices we make. So may God give us his grace to make good choices, to be not only hearers of Jesus' word, but doers also.

May he help us to dig down deep and build solid foundations. May he help us to remain standing in the day of trial.

May he assist us by his Holy Spirit so that our whole lives are built not on a foundation of our own making, but on the person, work, and words of Christ alone.

Let's pray together. Amen. God, our Father, we thank you for your word.

[30 : 57] We thank you that it is trustworthy and true. We thank you that your word is alive, that it demands a response.

And so, our God, we pray that you would help us by your Holy Spirit to respond in faith and obedience, to trust not in ourselves, but in our Lord Jesus Christ.

In whose name we pray. Amen.