

Matthew 7:24-29

CENTRAL THEME: *'Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says... Faith without deeds is dead'* James 1:22, 2:26

Context:

7:13-29 form the conclusion to Jesus' teaching about life in the kingdom of God, which began at 5:1. Our experience of faith is so often mixed and compromised, but Jesus here reminds us clearly that the reality is stark alternatives. Two paths, two trees, two houses, and two clear destinies. To follow Jesus requires a clear, decisive commitment.

1. Two houses (24-27)

'Therefore...' Jesus has just taught in 7:21-23 that *'not everyone who says "Lord, Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father.'* In other words, he has just taught that obedience to God is a salvation matter. We are saved by grace, but those who are truly saved turn to Jesus as Lord as well as Saviour; those who are truly saved will demonstrate their trust in Jesus by obeying his words. This last parable is a development of this idea. *'Just as the difference between the false and the true prophet is that the true prophet "does the will of my Father" (v.21), so the difference between the false and the true Christian is that the true Christian puts into practice what he has heard from the `master in this sermon.'*
SB Ferguson

It's one of the best known images from the Bible. There are two houses which appear similar. They are described in the same terms. The only difference between them is something that cannot be seen – the foundation. One is built on rock, the other on sand. The seriousness of this difference is only revealed when the storm comes – the house on the rock stands firm, while the other one falls.

The houses represent people. What though is the foundation of rock? Jesus is described as the true, sure rock/stone in Isaiah 28:16 and Acts 4:11-12. In those passages to be built on the rock, the cornerstone which is Christ, is to put your trust in him for salvation. But the point in Matthew 7 is more specific than simply 'trust in Christ.' To have a foundation of rock is to *'put these words of mine into practice'* (24). That is, live in obedient faith to Jesus, doing all that he has commanded in chapters 5-7 and elsewhere. It is clearly not a call to earn our salvation as the words we are to put into practice include being *'poor in spirit,' 'mourning'* and *'hungering for righteousness'* (5:3-10).

What then is the sand? It is a life built on anything other than obedient trust in Jesus' words (26). That might mean living by the standards of the culture around us; it might mean trusting in another religion; it might mean trusting myself and following my heart and my ability to determine what is right and what is wrong. Only Christ is the rock.

The storm – the rain, the wind and the streams – is best understood as referring primarily to God's final judgement (see Genesis 6:11-17; Ezekiel 13:10-12; Psalm 18:6-15 – note that in verse 31 God is described as our refuge and *'Rock'*;). That is the context of every section from verse 13 onwards. God's final judgement will reveal

the truth about us. Only those who are relying on Christ will be able to stand on that day (Acts 4:12). However it is also true that in a lesser way, the storms of life reveal how secure our foundations are. Many people turn to Christ because illness, or relationship breakdown, or redundancy revealed that the foundations they had been building life on were just sand.

→ The implications of this are very simple: we are to respond to Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount (and presumably elsewhere in the gospel) with obedient faith. Note too that verse 24 doesn't limit it to '...and puts *some of them* into practice...' It is not an exam where we only need to attempt 3 out of the 5 questions.

We may feel a little uncomfortable that Jesus says it is those who *do* what he says, rather than those who trust in him who are safe from judgement. But that is because Jesus' principal target in the Sermon has not been those who think their good works earn salvation, but those whose hearts are far from him and seek to water down his words and limit their obedience to him (see his explanation of the demands of the law in 517-48 for example).

NB Our attitude to Jesus' words *is* our attitude to Jesus. We cannot claim we love and admire Jesus while ignoring, watering down or denying some of his words. In Matthew 10:14-15 Jesus sends out the disciples to proclaim his gospel message saying, 'if anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, leave that home or town and shake the dust off your feet.' Then as he receives them back in verse 40 he says 'Anyone who welcomes you welcomes me.' In other words, to receive Jesus' words, is to receive Jesus; by contrast, to reject the message about Jesus is to reject Jesus himself.

2. One Lord (28-29)

The crowd who heard this sermon were amazed – and rightly so, it is one of the greatest and most revolutionary speeches ever given. But it was not so much the oratorical skills which impressed them so much as the authority of the speaker. The teachers of their day had to cite which authority in the rabbinic schools backed their interpretations, but Jesus has no such need. As the Son of God he teaches by his own authority. This brings us back to verse 26. The true Jesus, the Jesus of the Bible, is Lord as well as saviour. He comes with authority as well as grace. He is to be obeyed as well as loved.

APPLICATION

Theologian RT France put it well: '*The teaching of the Sermon on the Mount is not mean to be admired, but to be obeyed.*' Ultimately, there are only two ways to live, and only one ends in eternal salvation. It is not enough to learn about Jesus and to hear his teaching. His person – his words – demand a response of obedient faith.

At this point we would do well to flick back through the Sermon on the Mount and ask ourselves whether that is our response, or whether there are some sections that we explain away / water down / just ignore, because they are too costly for us.

QUESTIONS

- What does Jesus most want from you?

Verses 24-27

- What is the image that Jesus describes?
- What is the only thing that is different about the houses?
- According to verse 24 and 26 what do the houses represent?
- In pairs: what do you think the *foundation* and the *storm* refer to? Look at Isaiah 28:16 & Acts 4:11-12; Ezekiel 13:10-12.
- How does the context of verses 21-23 help us see that it is final judgement that is most in view here?
- In pairs: why do you think Jesus says that it is those who put his words into practice who are safe from eternal judgement, rather than saying 'those who put their faith in me and don't trust in their works'?
 - In what ways do the storms of life also expose our foundations?

Verses 28-29

- What struck the crowd most when they heard Jesus preach this sermon?
- Why do you think this particular point is stressed here? [*right response to authority is obedience – v.24!*]
- What?
 - What would you say to someone who said '*Jesus cares most about the heart. I know I don't always obey him, but it matters more that I love him*'? [1John 5:3: '*this is love for God: to keep his commands.*']

Flick back through the Sermon on the Mount using the chart below and answer the questions at the bottom

The Sermon on the Mount Summary

Matt 5:1-16	Introduction
[Matt 5:17-32	<i>'Do not think I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets...'</i>
Matt 5:21-7:11	Main body of teaching
Matt 7:12	<i>'...this sums up the Law and the Prophets.']</i>
Matt 7:13-29	Conclusion

'everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.'

Matthew 7:24

	<i>What it looks like to put these words into practice:</i>
Matt 5:21-32	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Don't be angry ➤ Don't show contempt ➤ Be reconciled, don't let grievances fester ➤ Do everything you can to avoid lust ➤ Do be faithful in marriage
Matt 5:33-47	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Speak honestly, don't hide behind oaths ➤ Turn the other cheek, don't seek revenge ➤ Love your enemies
Matt 6:1-18	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Don't look for praise from men for your good deeds ➤ Do pursue the spiritual disciplines of giving, prayer and fasting ➤ Do these things for the reward of your Father in Heaven
Matt 6:19-24	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Sacrifice earthly 'treasure' now and store up heavenly treasure by serving God ➤ View all of life through the lens of the Bible ➤ Take practical steps to ensure you are devoted to God not money
Matt 6:25-34	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Don't worry as if you don't matter to God ➤ Don't worry, have faith in God's provision ➤ Seek first God and his kingdom
Matt 7:1-6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Don't apply Jesus' words to other people before you've applied them to yourself ➤ In evangelism, be discerning ➤ Pray for help to put these words into practice

What I have been most encouraged by _____

What I have been most challenged by _____

What practical steps I am going to take _____

Who I am going to tell about this _____

'For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened.'