

Matthew 7:24-29
(Psalm 127:1-5; 1 Peter 2:1-12)
“What Is Your Life’s Foundation?”

Introduction

In our culture, where so many claim to be Christian, but so few follow Jesus, where so many of us talk a good game but seldom even take the field, where are we to look for an true and compelling picture of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gives us a series of descriptions, a sort of verbal portrait gallery, of the kind of life he wants his followers increasingly to live.

In the beatitudes that open the sermon, we find a countercultural composite of the blessed life, countercultural because Jesus describes as blessed and joyful the poor in spirit, the mourners, the meek, the persecuted. We hear Jesus call us to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world, and are surprised at what it means to let our light shine in such a way that God will get the glory. He calls us to keep God’s law, not as a mere matter of external righteousness, but as a deep expression of love for God and for one another. He warns us not to try to impress people with our religious observance, but rather to pray and fast and give for God’s eyes only. He calls us not to worry and not to judge others, but to entrust ourselves to the Lord.

Jesus concludes the sermon with a number of warnings, describing two paths – one leads to life and the other leads to death, two kinds of guides – one coddles us while the other challenges us, and two kinds of travelers – one thinks he has already arrived while the other knows that he is still on pilgrimage.

Now in our final verses, Jesus sharpens the contrast and speaks of two different kinds of builders – one builds for the moment, the other builds for eternity.

Body

1. The picture: Two kinds of builders who build two different kinds of houses.

One builds on the rock, the other on sand. One house – the one built on sand – goes up quickly and may even be the more attractive. The house built on rock takes much more time. There is the work of excavating down to the rock, of fastening to the rock, and only then may the work begin on the house itself. As long as the sun is shining, there seems to be no compelling reason for going to all the trouble of working with rock, with struggling over foundations. Why not put your time and money into making the place comfortable and attractive? But when the storms come, as come they will, the house on sand collapses, while the house on rock stands fast.

2. The point: Two kinds of listeners who build two different kinds of lives.

Of course, Jesus has in mind something other than building houses: he's talking about building lives. There are those who are concerned with making everything as easy as possible, cutting corners, only dealing with what shows. The deeper, unseen work of laying strong foundations – of building on the rock of Christ, who has both reconciled us to God through his life, death and victory, and has given us his own Spirit that he might begin to live his life through us, transforming our character and developing in us the core competencies for life in the Spirit – such things as these are not nearly as appealing.

But the wise person realizes that unless those core matters of daily surrender to the Lordship of Christ with its attendant character development, learning the lessons of the heart, and learning to live not for the passing show but for God's Kingdom and righteousness – unless these lessons are learned, when the storms come, as come they will, this life will begin to shake and crumble and collapse.

Jesus sees the people sitting around him listening to his words, probably nodding their heads in agreement and muttering "Amen" at the proper time. But he knows that all the good teaching, all the study, all the analysis and discussion and theory in the world will not do us any good at all unless we begin to *do* what we are taught. "Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock" (7:24).

3. What, then, are we to do?

Listen to what Jesus says: We cannot do what we do not know. We must sit at the feet of Jesus and listen to his words.

Do what Jesus says: Here is the point of disconnection for all of us some of the time and for some of us nearly all the time. Being a Christian is not merely giving assent to a creed: it involves following Jesus. That was how he called his disciples then and how he calls his disciples today: "Come, follow me!"

Do not turn grace back into law: How can we help falling back into a life of religion and performance if the emphasis falls on what we *do* rather than on what we *believe*? The answer is found in understanding that, in the Bible, what we truly believe is demonstrated not as much by what we profess to believe as by what we do. If we really believed Jesus' words and heeded his warnings, then we would realize that life and joy and peace are found with him and in him. If we caught a glimpse of what this world could be if led by love, justice and compassion rather than by power, self-interest and violence,

then we would long for God's kingdom to come and his will to be done on earth as in heaven, and we would seek ways to build a community that demonstrated the presence of the kingdom even now.

Conclusion

Why should we listen to these words? Why should we take them seriously? Why should we seek to follow? Because of the One who spoke them so long ago and who still speaks them to those with ears to hear. "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" (7:28-29).

What of you this morning? Are you listening daily to Jesus, seeking to hear and understand his words in order to *do* them in the strength he has provided? This is at the heart of his commission to his people: Make disciples by baptizing them into the Body of Christ, the church, and by teaching them to *do* everything that Jesus has commanded. To those who trust and obey, he has promised the comfort, joy and power of his presence until this world's day is passed and Christ makes all things new (see Matthew 28:18-20).

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