

How Firm a Foundation?

Matthew 7:24-27

The single most important day of your life is not the day you were born, or the day you got married, or the day you got that dream job or that promotion. The single most important day of your life is still in the future. It is the day you stand before your Maker, the King of kings, and hear Him tell you where you will spend eternity.

The most important day of your life is the Day of Judgment, when the Judge of all the earth, the Lord Jesus Christ, will either say to you, *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world”* (Matt. 25:34); or He will say to you, *“Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Matt. 25:41).

On that day nothing about your present existence on this earth will be of any concern to you. Your vocation, in which you invest 40, 50, 60 hours a week of your mental and physical energy, will be of no consequence whatsoever. Your home, vehicles, toys, hobbies, bank accounts—those temporal things on which you spend much of your time and place much of your value, will be of no use to you at all. Your appearance, talents, proficiencies, IQ, athletic ability, physical health and strength—none of these things will matter in the least.

On that day there will be only one thing about your life on this earth that will be of any concern to you, and that is, did you meet the requirements that the Lord established in order to gain entrance into His kingdom? Are you *in* or are you *out*? Will you spend eternity with Jesus in heaven...or with the devil and His demons in hell?

Which raises another question: Is it possible to have assurance *today* that Jesus will welcome you into His kingdom on the Day of Judgment? Can you know for sure that you really, truly belong to Jesus and will live with Him forever? Especially because Jesus said that on that Day there will be some surprises. He said, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’* (Matt. 7:21-23).

You need to know that it is not enough to *profess* to be a Christian; it is not enough to *do* things—even *great* things—in Jesus’ name. There is something more basic, more foundational about our relationship to Christ that proves we belong to Him.

We’ve come to Jesus’ conclusion in the Sermon on the Mount, in the last part of Matthew 7. But before we read it I want to remind you that when Jesus taught it was *not* merely to offer a few interesting ideas and insights. He did not teach in order to stimulate intellects. He did not teach in order to take sides on the theological issues of His day. He taught in order to impart truth that would transform a person’s life. He taught in order to rescue people from judgment and hell. And when He taught the people who were listening were *always* confronted with a choice, and often it was a choice would determine their eternal destinies.

That’s what He is doing in **Matthew 7:24-27**. *“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”*

Jesus closes His famous sermon with a story. You may already know that Jesus *often* told stories about ordinary life in order to illustrate something in the spiritual realm. And in this story He is describing what is going to happen to people on the Day of Judgment. He says that what will

happen to people is determined by what they do with His words.

It is extremely important to know that this story is not *just* about hearing Jesus' words. It's not enough to *hear* or to *know* or even *like* what He says. What really matters is what you do with those words.

Look what He says in verses 24a and 26a. *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice... But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice..."*

Notice, He does not say what those who do not apply them do with them. Maybe they reject them, maybe they ignore them, maybe they say, "I'll think about them later." But however they respond they all have this one thing in common: *They do not apply them*. They do not do what Jesus says.

This story goes on to illustrate what happens to each type of person. And Jesus does this by describing every person as a house builder. **Verses 24 and 26.** *"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock... But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand."*

Again, each person is involved in the exact same activity. Every person is a house builder. Every person is constructing a shelter. That is a point of comparison in the stories. But, interestingly, Jesus does not say what *kind* of house each person builds, because the kind of house it is and the way it looks is not important in the story.

It is important to *us*, because we live in them. And so we take pains to build a house that suits our particular tastes—one that is comfortable, one that is built with quality materials, one that is big enough to accommodate all our stuff. And we tend to be preoccupied with the house.

But for Jesus, the house is not the most important thing. In fact, it may be possible to infer from the parable that these two houses look identical, even though they are fundamentally different.

That is certainly one of the recurring themes in the Sermon on the Mount. Things are not always what they appear to be. Looks can be deceiving. We saw it in the religious leaders that Jesus exposed when He said, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Scribes and Pharisees you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven."

We saw it in the religious activities that people did which were nothing more than performances which called attention to themselves. And we saw it especially in verses 21-23 of chapter 7 when Jesus said there would be many on that day—the Day of Judgment—who would say to Him "Lord, Lord, did we not do wonderful, powerful things in your name," and Jesus would say to them, "Depart from me I never knew you."

And so, it is not surprising that what is most important about this parable is not what you see, but what you cannot see—the foundation. Before we look at that, however, let's look at the other point of similarity in the story, which is the storm.

Verse 25a. *The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house.* And notice that verse 27 starts out with the exact same words.

There are two things about this storm that are significant. First, Jesus describes a very intense storm. He includes heavy rain, flooded streams, and gale force winds. Secondly, the storm is identical in each story. Each house is ravaged by the same storm with the same intensity.

But please be aware, this is not a story about how to escape the storms of life. It is not a parable about finding a safe climate in which to avoid the storm. Every person *will* face the storm. Every person's house *will* come under the influence of that storm. And it is the *storm* which will reveal that the houses, even though they appear to be identical, are in fact very different, because they are built on very different foundations.

And that is where we come to the one thing that makes these stories different. Jesus is saying that the most important thing about your life is what you have built upon. Have you built upon the rock, or upon the sand? What is your foundation? That is the issue. Because the security and

permanence of what you have built is dependent entirely upon your foundation.

And when the storm comes—and it most certainly *will* come—that foundation will determine whether you stand or fall. Look at the end of verse 25. If you have built your house on the rock, your house will stand, because it was built on the rock. Now the end of verse 27. If you have built your house on the sand, your house will fall with a great crash.

Now, let's relate the story back to what Jesus said at the beginning. Every person is a house builder. Every person has built upon either one of these two foundations. So what is the foundation?

Again, Jesus is talking about people who hear His words, and He is saying that those who hear His words *and put them into practice*—who apply them—are the ones who have a solid foundation and thus will be safe in the storm.

Those who hear His words but do *not* put them into practice—who do *not* apply them—are the ones who will *not* be safe in the storm. And, notice, (this is important) Jesus is deliberately emphatic about what happens to the house built on the sand. Look at the end of verse 27. “*...it fell with a great crash.*”

Again, the storm here is *not* referring to the difficult circumstances, trials, and hardships that we all experience in this life. He is not talking about how we cope with these things.

Prior to telling this story, Jesus has been talking about a person's eternal destiny. He talked about the narrow gate and the difficult road that leads to eternal life, and the wide gate and the easy road that leads to destruction, a metaphor for hell. He said that many will be surprised on the Day of Judgment to learn that they never belonged to Jesus, even though they were somehow associated with Him while living on the earth. He's been talking about life and death, judgment, heaven and hell. He's been talking about what is going to happen to individuals when they come to the end of this life and stand before God to give an account of what they did and the choices they made. And this is what the storm refers to. God's judgment.

Now, here's why Jesus gives us this instruction. Our Lord wants us to be absolutely certain that we are going to be safe when the storm comes; specifically, that we will be safe in the Day of Judgment. And there is only one way that you can know if you are safe. And I want to be very clear about this.

It is not listening to Jesus that counts. It is not even being able to correctly interpret His words that counts. You can read your Bible twelve hours a day; you can memorize all of Jesus' words; you can be an expert New Testament scholar, and still have a foundation of sand. Because knowledge, by itself, counts for nothing.

Furthermore, it's not merely agreeing with or liking what Jesus says that counts either. You can nod your head, clap your hands, say “amen,” be amazed at Jesus words, and still have a foundation of sand.

Jesus says the way to determine your foundation is by how you *respond* to Jesus' words. He is talking specifically about whether or not you *apply* His words.

If you were in an airplane, and that airplane was going down and someone offered you a parachute, it's not enough to look at that parachute and know that it *could* save you. It's not enough to hold it and admire the design or the craftsmanship of that parachute. It's not enough to know how it works when you pull the rip cord. The only way that parachute is going to save you is by putting it on and then following the instructions.

So what does it mean to put Jesus' words into practice? First, let me tell you what it does *not* mean.

Applying Jesus' words does not mean following a list of dos and don'ts. It does not mean trying really hard to be good, or generating enough willpower or discipline to do good works. The Bible makes it clear that our attempts to impress God through our own righteousness is futile, because anything we generate in our own strength is tainted with sin.

You say, “But Jesus said, ‘You must put my words into practice.’ Doesn't that mean that we must obey what He says?”

The answer is “yes.”

You say, “Yeah, I thought so. And that’s what is so disturbing. In this, His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that looking lustfully at a woman is adultery, and that losing your temper and cursing at someone is murder. He said that we must *love* people that hate us and hurt us, that we must bless those who take advantage of us and pray for those who attack us. He forbid us to worry, or to store up treasures on earth, or to judge. There’s not a person alive who can live up to those standards! All of us come up way short!”

And I would say again, “Yes, that’s right. Nobody *can* do it...in their own strength.” That’s one of the things Jesus wanted to do in this sermon. He wanted to create a crisis in the hearts of every person who heard His words and compel them to admit, “There is no way I can do this!” For when we come to the point of saying, “there’s no way,” we come to the point when we discover *the* way.

We *can* obey what Jesus says here, but only after we have been born again. Only after we have confessed that we are incapable of doing anything on our own to impress God. Only after we have trusted Him to cleanse us and make us righteous in Him. Only after we have trusted Him to make us into new creatures who have new capabilities. Only after we have received the Holy Spirit who empowers us to do what Jesus says.

And that brings us back to the Rock. Remember, it is not the house I build that is the emphasis in the story. It is the *Rock* on which I build. When I am preoccupied with the Rock, who is Jesus Christ, when my life is built upon Him, when I have placed my full weight upon Him, when He Himself is my righteousness, my salvation, my hope, indeed, when He is my life, then I am safe from the impending storm.

By the way, Jesus used the illustration of a storm because that was something everyone in His audience could identify with. They knew the perils of a violent storm because they were common around the Sea of Galilee.

If Jesus were addressing an audience in Northern California where I grew up, He might have used the example of an earthquake. You have heard of the San Andreas Fault. It goes up the heart of California and then out through the Bay Area right underneath the South pier of the Golden Gate Bridge, and then up the coast to Alaska.

But do you know where the safest place is to be in an earthquake? On the Golden Gate Bridge. You know why? For two reasons. First, it is flexible. It is built to sway twenty-two feet. Second, every piece of steel and concrete relates one piece to another and to two great giant cables that come up to two great piers each of which go down deep into bedrock with two anchors on each side. It will withstand 9.0 on the Richter scale because the whole bridge is preoccupied with its foundation. The entire bridge is completely related to the rock, and that’s what makes it secure (Earl Palmer, COBE).

If you want to be secure, your life must be connected to, built upon, preoccupied with, and dependent upon Jesus Christ. He’s the Rock. He’s the only secure foundation. All other ground is sinking sand. And if you build your life on anything else—someone else’s opinion, some other religion, your own efforts—anything! You won’t stand up in the storm. You will fall with a great crash.

That’s how Jesus ends His sermon. Notice, He does not end it on a positive, upbeat note. He does not end it in a way that would make the audience go home feeling good about themselves. He ends it with a warning of judgment.

And I believe there is a simple reason for that. Jesus knew what hell was all about. That is why He talked twice as much about hell as he did heaven. He spoke of it as a place of conscious, unending torment. A place of utter loneliness, despair, exclusion, rejection. A place of outer darkness where the fire never goes out and the worm never dies. Where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. A place where there is no relief, no let up, no possibility for redemption.

Jesus ended this sermon this way because He knew the horrors of hell.

What about you? Do you know for sure where you are going? Are you absolutely certain you

are building your house on the Rock? Or is it possible you have been building on sand?

The good news is that even if you have spent your whole life building on sand, you can actually replace your foundation just like that (snap fingers). That's God's gift to you. It's begins by agreeing with God that you've been building on the wrong foundation—a foundation of good works, religion, charitable deeds and gifts, human kindness, or whatever else is *not* Jesus.

Then it's a matter of confessing that Jesus is God's provision for your eternal life—that when He died on the cross He died for your sins because you were incapable of saving yourself. It's a matter of confessing that Jesus is the Son of God who proved it by rising from the dead, and that when He rose He conquered death and made it possible for us to have eternal life.

It's a matter of putting all of your weight, all of your trust on that foundation.

Please, don't wait until it's too late. What you do with Jesus in this life determines where you spend eternity.

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Main Idea: Those who apply Jesus' words will be safe on the Day of Judgment; those who do not apply Jesus' words will have to face God's judgment

Those who apply Jesus' words are compared to a wise man (24-25)

Who builds his house on the rock (a firm foundation)

Who encounters a great storm

Whose house stands firm because of its foundation

Those who do not apply Jesus' words are compared to a foolish man (26-27)

Who builds his house on the sand (a soft foundation)

Who encounters a great storm

Whose house falls because of its foundation

The meaning of "putting My words into practice"

The natural inability to apply Jesus' words

The supernatural ability to apply Jesus' words
The inevitable result of being "born again"

The inevitable result of being "built" on Jesus

Family Life Groups

Sermon Discussion Questions

Matthew 7:24-27

How do you know if you have built your house “on the rock” and not “on the sand?”

The evidence that a person has “built his/her house on the rock” is that he/she is applying Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount. Prayerfully read through the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), asking God to shine his light on your soul.

If there are areas in your life in which there is not a pattern of obedience to Jesus’ words in Matthew 5-7, what would Jesus have you do about it?