

Sermon 48, Building on the Rock, Matthew 7:24-27

The Church then which Christ has founded, neither the rain of false doctrine shall sap, nor the blast of the Devil overturn, nor the rush of mighty floods remove. — Pseudo-Chrysostom

“Here is a very good test. Would you *like* to live the Sermon on the Mount? Is that your true desire? Is that your ambition? If it is, it is a very good and healthy sign. Any man who desires to live this type and kind of life is a Christian.” — Martyn Lloyd-Jones

Proposition: You can build a life that looks exactly like the Christian life, but is not founded on hearing and doing the words of Jesus.

Proposition 2: The wise person builds the Christian life around listening to and obeying the words of Jesus Christ.

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- A. Listen to Jesus' Words!
- B. Obey Jesus' Words!

We come this morning to the final words of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus was no ordinary preacher, and He doesn't end with a promise. He ends with a threat, with a warning. The foolish man's house fell with a great fall, with a great crash.

What does this picture have to teach us? What does it have to say about the topics which the Lord Jesus has addressed over the course of this Sermon on the Mount? Well, the great lesson here is that simply hearing and approving this Sermon is not enough. You might have really enjoyed hearing everything Jesus had to say. You might think it's all very good, and just what the world needs. But according to Jesus, that response is completely and totally inadequate. If you walk away saying "What a great sermon," and that's it, then you are what Jesus labels a "fool." This is not an intellectual judgment, but a moral one. You are a person who doesn't care to do the right thing, in Jesus' estimation, if all you do is mentally and verbally approve of His wonderful Sermon on the Mount.

To ram this point home here at the end of His sermon, He draws a verbal picture of two builders building two houses, and He contrasts these builders and their houses with each other. What I hope to show you is that this picture warns us that hearing *and obeying what we hear* from Jesus is the foundation of the Christian life, and that if you don't have it, then you don't have a Christian life at all. Let me say that again: Hearing Jesus is not enough. You have to hear Him *and obey Him* — or, He declares, you are not a Christian at all.

I. The Picture: The Wisdom of Obedience vs. the Folly of Disobedience.

To see that, we need to look first of all at this picture He draws for us. As we just saw, these two men and two houses are superficially similar. But Jesus emphasizes that they have three great differences.

A. Wisdom vs. Folly

The first is the difference between wisdom and folly. Wisdom is so important that three entire books of the Bible are devoted to inculcating it — Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and James. Wisdom is practical knowledge, knowledge of how to live well, understanding that both delivers from the way of evil and that allows one to walk in the way of good men and keep the paths of the righteous (Prov. 2). Folly is the opposite of wisdom. It is a privation of wisdom, a lack of knowledge about how to live well, an inability to discern between good and evil and stay away from evil.

So right away, when we hear that one of these builders is wise and one is foolish, we know that one is acting in accordance with the way the world really is, while the other is simply doing what comes natural, acting in a way that seems like a good idea at the time.

B. Founded vs. Unfounded

The second great difference between these two houses is that one is founded and the other is unfounded. Oh, the second one is "founded" on the sand, after a fashion — but it's not really

what you could call “founded.” It’s simply sitting there on the surface, not dug in and anchored. We all know the difference between “sitting there” and “tied down.” Jesus says that one of these houses isn’t really fastened to bedrock, but is simply sitting on loose and shifting sand that can and will blow into a different shape tomorrow.

C. Standing vs. Falling

Thus, it’s no surprise that the final contrast is between standing and falling. The founded house stands. It is tied down, and when storms come and beat against it, it won’t move. But the unfounded house is only as good as its foundation. It moves with the sand, and so it falls with a great crash.

These are the basic differences. The fool builds an unfounded house, and it falls. The wise man builds a founded house, and it stands.

What’s the point? What is Jesus trying to say by telling us this story? Well, we need to think of the two houses as parallel to two lives. The fool builds an unfounded life, and when trials come, it falls apart. The wise man builds a life founded on the rock, and when trials come, it successfully endures them.

II. The Principle: Hearing and Obeying Jesus Is the Christian Life’s Foundation

That, in turn, implies that the core idea of this story of the two builders and two houses is that hearing and obeying Jesus Christ is the foundation of the Christian life. If you’re building a life, you need to build it on these two activities — hearing Jesus and obeying Jesus.

A. Hearing Is Necessary but Not Sufficient

Don’t denigrate hearing. Hearing is absolutely necessary. Both the wise and foolish builders are likened to hearers. That means that this story isn’t contrasting people who come to church and hear Jesus’ words with outsiders who never come to church and don’t even know what the Bible is. The contrast here is not between heathens and church people. As tempting as it is to think that, it’s simply not true. Jesus is contrasting two different hearers. These are two different people who have in common this one thing: they both like listening to Jesus’ words! They approve Jesus’ words. They think His words are great, and they listen to them and like listening to them.

The difference, then, is not that one hears Jesus and the other doesn’t. The difference is that one hears and goes a step further to obedience.

B. Obeying Is Necessary but Presupposes Hearing

That’s Jesus’ point: not “Stop listening to me,” but “Keep listening to me, and add to this listening a commitment to doing what I tell you!” To obey Jesus, you have to listen to His words first. How can you do what He wants if you don’t listen to what He tells you? You must hear, and then do. When Jesus says “You may not divorce your wife for any and every reason,” you have to listen to Him. And that means no divorce except for sexual immorality. When He says “Love your enemies,” you have to listen to Him — that means trying your hardest to love those enemies, in the power of the Holy Spirit. When He says, “Pray like this,” then you have to listen to Him, and pray like He says to pray.

1. Hearing Means Listening to Jesus' Words

So to hear is to listen to Jesus. That means that you need to read the Bible, which is all His word. You need to come to church and listen to preaching, which is the living Word of God directed to you. You need to put yourself in a place where you can and will *listen* to what Jesus has to say to you.

But the whole point of this parable here at the end of the Sermon on the Mount is that that's not enough. A non-believer can do that. Someone whose life is built on the wrong foundation can do that. So start there, but don't stop there!

2. Obeying Means Trusting Jesus' Words

No, start by listening — but end by obeying. You have to trust that Jesus really means it. In no way can obedience be separated from His person and His words, or from your own exercise of faith. You can't obey Him unless you trust Him. You can't obey Him unless you believe that He has the right to tell you what to do. If you don't believe that, why would you listen to Him? You have to trust Jesus before you can begin to build your life on the right foundation.

So listen. Then trust. Then obey. All of these mutually reinforce each other: the more you obey, the more you'll trust, and the harder you'll listen. It all begins with obedience and it all requires trust.

You know, some people read this section and say, "Well, according to Jesus doers are saved. So I guess in the final analysis, the person who gets into Heaven gets in because he obeyed Jesus so well." But that's not the right way to look at it. As we've talked about many times, obedience is a post-requisite for salvation. If you're saved, then you'll obey. But trusting Jesus is a prerequisite for salvation. If you don't trust Him, then you can't be saved. If you do trust Him, you'll obey Him.

I say this because Jesus is warning us about false Christianity. He's saying that some people look just like true Christians but aren't, and they aren't because their lives are built on the wrong foundation.

III. The Peril: Your Life Can Look Exactly Like the Christian Life but Not Be Founded on Hearing and Doing the Words of Jesus

You can live a perfectly Christian life that's complete in every detail except one: the foundation.

A. The Two Houses Differ Only in their Foundations

That's the point of this picture. Jesus describes the two houses and the two builders in the same words so that when He mentions a difference, it really "pops." The only difference between these two houses mentioned in the text is that one had a foundation on the rock, while the other was founded on the sand.

1. One Is Founded on Hearing and Doing

The rock-founded house is equivalent to a life founded on hearing and doing the words of Jesus. That's the true Christian life — where you listen to what Jesus says, believe it, and then do your very best to obey it.

2. The Other Is Founded Merely on Hearing

The fake Christian life, outwardly indistinguishable from the real thing, is one in which you listen and applaud but don't believe and do. You say, "Good sermon against worry, pastor," and then go home and worry your head off. You say, "Good warning against writing people off and saying 'I would never!'", and then go home and think about how that so-and-so is completely insufferable and how you would never do what s/he does! You can say "Good sermon, Jesus," all day long, but at the end of the day, if you didn't put it into practice, your life is built on sand.

B. The Two Houses Undergo Identical Tests

The problem with building on sand is that life is difficult. Both houses undergo identical tests.

1. In this Life

In this world, you will have tribulation. Jesus promised that. Even if you're not a Christian, you don't need me to tell you that life is difficult. You work hard, your body breaks down, you get sick, you don't have time to do the things you really want to do — and that's in a country where we're all richer than almost everyone was two centuries ago! Imagine living in Haiti, in a cardboard box. Imagine living in a slum in India. This life will have tests, difficulties, and trials. Things will go wrong. People you love will die. Things you value will break. People will betray you. Some commentators identify the rain with the flesh and its constant assaults, the floods with the world and its overwhelming flood of things on offer, and the winds with the demons who come and tempt us to sin. Regardless of whether that's what Jesus meant or not, the world, the flesh, and the devil are certainly active against every human being who enters this world. They present tough tests.

2. At the Final Judgment

The Last Judgment is an even tougher test. God will require an account of every word and thought, and unless your thoughts are all perfect, you will not have very good answers to give Him about your performance.

C. The Two Houses Respond to Testing Very Differently

So what life will stand up to temptations in this world and judgment in the next? Not one founded on the sand of hearing and then ignoring what you heard. No — only one founded on the rock of hearing and doing will stand. That's what Jesus says.

1. The Hearer-Doer Survives

When temptations come, when the final judgment comes, the hearer-doer stands. He is not cut down by the difficulties of this life or God's wrath in the next. He stands, for God is able to make Him stand. Sinners won't stand in the judgment, Psalm 1 tells us. But the hearer-doer stands.

Do you want to stand in the judgment? Do you want God to say "Not guilty! Well done, good and faithful servant"? Then you will need to be a hearer-doer.

2. The Mere Hearer Perishes

The mere hearer perishes. The person who says, "Great message" and then fails to even try to put it into practice will fall in the judgment, will be condemned in the judgment. He'll fall and he'll fall hard.

a) If Your Life Isn't Founded on Hearing and Doing Jesus' Words, You're Not a Christian

This means in the first place that if your life isn't founded on hearing *and doing* Jesus' words, you're not a Christian at all. You may be a cultural Christian, or a nominal Christian, or a person who says, "Yes, I'm a Christian." But you're not someone who has the resurrection life of the Son of God pulsing in his soul unless your life is built on hearing and doing Jesus' words. Could that fairly be described as your foundation? Could you say, "My life is built around hearing and obeying Jesus"? Is it your heart's desire to live in the way Jesus describes in this Sermon on the Mount? Is it your ambition to actually live the things you hear? And do you take practical steps to implement Jesus' commands? Let's say you hear a sermon about anger, and you realize that you get angry at your children all the time. What's your response at that point? Do you say, "I want Jesus' approval. I want my children to have no need to be afraid of me. I am going to count to ten before I speak to them when I'm tempted to be angry. I am going to pray every night against this sin of anger. I'm going to spend extra time with Jesus so that I can learn to imitate His heart of love for children who disobey!" Is that your response? Do you actually try to obey God? Or when you discover that some element in life doesn't match Jesus' commands, do you simply shrug and say, "Well, hopefully that will fix itself sometime"? If that's your attitude when you discover that you're disobeying God, then you're not a Christian. Your life isn't built on hearing and obeying Jesus. You think obedience is nice, but you don't move heaven and earth to get it.

Imagine being a pet owner and saying, "This dog is my life." Now, if you really meant that, would you go places without the dog? Could you be happy to go away for two weeks and not see that animal, not talk to it on the phone, not hear anything about its welfare? Based on the animal lovers I've seen, I'd say the answer is no. Well, if hearing and obeying Jesus is the foundation of your life, that means that you aren't comfortable unless you're hearing and obeying Jesus. You can't be fine with the presence of a known sin in your life, any more than you can be fine with the presence of a land mine in your front lawn. Brothers and sisters, hear me: if you can peacefully postpone obedience, if you can calmly choose sin and persist in it for days, weeks, months, then your life isn't founded on hearing and doing Jesus' words, and if it's not founded on hearing and doing Jesus' words, then you're not a Christian at all.

b) If You're Not a Christian, Your Life Will Fall Apart Under Testing

And that means that your life will fall apart under testing. If the world, the flesh, and the devil want you, there's nothing you can do to stop them. Your life can fall apart at any time, and you will have nowhere to turn. Oh, you might be able to turn to alcohol or food or being a clean freak or something else that gives you the illusion of control — but you won't have anything that really helps. You won't have any real solutions to the problems in your life. The ultimate meaning here is that you will end up in Hell after the final judgment. The edifice you built during your time on earth will be counted worthy of the flames, and that's it.

c) If You're Not a Christian, Jesus Says You're a Fool

So if you build your life on simply hearing Jesus' words and deluding yourself into thinking that you're a Christian, but you're really not a Christian because you don't listen to *and obey* Jesus, then Jesus calls you a fool. According to the wisest man who ever lived, you are a fool. You don't have the ability to make solid moral judgments and carry them out. You embrace instead the folly of thinking that you are just fine even though your life is founded on something of no value.

Don't think that sitting and listening is enough! Don't think that because you like sermons therefore you're clearly a Christian! Jesus says "No!" Jesus says, "A Christian is someone who not only enjoys listening but who also tries to obey." This obedience is not to obligate God to you; it is simply to show that you love Him and that you want to serve Him by your obedience.

IV. The Promise: A Life Founded on Hearing and Doing Jesus' Words Will Pass Every Test

But though Jesus ends His sermon with a warning, I want to end with the promise that He makes. A life founded on hearing and doing will pass every test, including the final test. If you devote your life to listening and obeying, then Jesus promises that you will stand in that day. You will not be cut down by God's judgment; you will not be sent to Hell with the wicked.

A. Listen to Jesus' Words!

So please, brothers and sisters, listen to Jesus' words! We've had these 48 sermons on the Sermon on the Mount not to tickle everyone's ears, but to get across who Jesus is and what Jesus wants. The thing we've seen every week is that in order to obey Jesus, you must spend time with Him.

B. Obey Jesus' Words!

And by spending time with Jesus, you will begin to want to obey His words. You will begin to desire to be the person whom He described. Listen again to His description of a Christian:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God."

Does that move you? Do you want to be that person? Then strive for it. Seek it. Ask for it. You will find. You will receive. You will inherit the Kingdom. So I beg you: Listen and obey. Build your life on doing these things Jesus commanded you, and you will receive a great reward. Amen.