

# Building on the Rock

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[ 0 : 00 ] Jesus comes to the end of what is, I think without doubt, the most famous sermon that has ever been preached. He leaves a decision in the hands of his audience.

That audience includes you and me. After three chapters of the most wise, authoritative, wonderful teaching, the question Jesus asks of you is quite simply, what are you going to do with what I have just said?

What are you going to do with what I've just said? And let me just offer a spoiler right away. Your response to that question won't just change your life in the present.

It will determine whether or not you have eternal life beyond the short years of this life.

So what are you going to do with what Jesus has just said? You'd be hard-pressed, I think, to find someone who hears the Sermon on the Mount, these last three chapters of Matthew that we've been looking at, and think, what a load of rubbish.

[ 1 : 20 ] Not for me. The crowds listening to Jesus on the mountainside are amazed by his teaching. And millions, perhaps billions more people have been since.

But here's what Jesus wants to make absolutely clear in these last words of this great sermon. Hearing is not enough.

Hearing is not enough. Hearing the words of Jesus and being impressed by them is not enough.

And he presses this point home with this well-known story, isn't it, of a house built on two different foundations. But before we get to the foundations, I think it is worth just focusing for a few minutes on how similar everything else in these two accounts is.

Apart from the foundations, Jesus mentions nothing else that would allow us to distinguish between these two houses that are being built in these verses. If you just compare verse 24 and 25 with verse 26 and 27, you'll see the vast majority of the words Jesus uses are identical.

[ 2 : 47 ] Everyone in these verses is listening to Jesus. Everyone is building a house. Every house is going to have to go through the same storm.

There are two conclusions, aren't there, that are in complete contrast to one another. But until that point, everything outwardly, everything that can be seen above the surface, Jesus gives us nothing to distinguish between the two.

There is a lot of detail in this parable that Jesus is not interested in. And I think that is worth dwelling on.

I think it's pretty clear, isn't it, that the houses that the builders are building are the lives we are all building each and every day. And the lives we put together can look wildly different on the surface from one another, can't they?

Some of them might look neat and tidy. Others might look very messy. Some lives people will look at and be really impressed by what they see.

[ 3 : 59 ] Others will be very obviously broken. But Jesus, when it comes to the question of what will be left standing on that last day, knows the difference won't be between how put together or even how godly looking our lives are.

The buildings might look exactly the same. They might look completely different. In the end, what really matters is what is under the surface. Now we can and should say a life built on Christ will bear good fruit.

We were thinking about that last week, weren't we? But I think it's worth saying, good fruit isn't always as obvious to us as we might think.

Or perhaps I should say it won't always look identical in every person's life. I've probably mentioned this a few times before, but Mary and I, before we came to Aberdeen, we were living in Edinburgh.

And when we were in Edinburgh, we spent four years there working for a church in Nidre, which is a housing scheme in the southeast of the city. And quite a large proportion of the congregation there had no church background whatsoever.

[ 5 : 18 ] And there were all sorts of struggles and social issues that people had lived through and battled through. There was people who had been abused by their parents in the past, single mums with young kids, people who had and still were struggling with all kinds of addictions.

What to the world would have looked like very messy, broken lives. Like houses, right, that looked very unimpressive. Cracked windows, an overgrown garden, a damp interior.

They would not have looked impressive to the world around them. And if you lined up the life I was living at the time next to each of them and gave you 30 seconds from your perspective to figure out who was most godly, you probably would have picked me.

I swore less. I had a better grasp of theology. I was outwardly more patient. I showed up to all the right meetings, said all the right things. Outwardly, I would have looked more impressive.

But this is where Jesus' point comes in. Whose words are you actually trying to live out in your life? That is what really matters.

[ 6 : 35 ] You can appear godly without ever actually listening to Jesus. That's what we were seeing in the passage last week, wasn't it? You can appear godly without ever hearing Jesus' words and trying to put them into practice.

Trust me, I know. You can look like a great Christian by making your decisions not based off what Jesus has said, but based on what you think others will be impressed by.

Now, sometimes the outward action might overlap with what Jesus commands his people to do. But what Jesus is saying, unmistakably, in these last verses of the Sermon on the Mount is, I know what's underneath.

I know the foundation you are building on. So in Nidri, because I had grown up in a Christian home with parents who were always around, had a decent education and spent all my life in church, I knew how to look good on the outside.

And that will be true of many of us here this morning. We know what a Christian life should look like. But Jesus is saying, unmistakably, what will make the difference is what is underneath.

[ 7 : 58 ] For some of the people in Nidri whose lives before Christ were much closer to a tin shack than a five-bedroom mansion, they could live out their life in a far more Christ-centered way, and yet the outward appearance would have still been far less impressive.

But there were many there who did make radical decisions in their life in order to listen to Jesus' words and not their own wisdom. And even if it didn't look like that big a deal to the watching world, they knew, and Jesus knew, that they were building their life on Him.

I say all that before we come to the two foundations as both a warning to some and hopefully a comfort to others.

You might well be building your life on Christ, and that is, sorry, that's not right. When we arrive at the two foundations, know that the difference is not in what is seen by others.

the impressed looks of the outsiders is no guarantee of a sure foundation. You might well be building your life on Christ, and that is a wonderful thing, but don't take your assurance from the compliments of the people around you.

[ 9 : 30 ] On the flip side of that, if you feel like your life needs to look better or be more impressive before Christ welcomes you in, know that there is no truth in that.

Jesus knows your life. He knows your struggles. He sympathizes with your weaknesses. And if life feels like it is falling apart around you, but you are hearing Jesus' words and doing your best to put them into practice, then know that whatever the watching world might think or feel, Jesus knows that you are on a firm foundation.

So there is one outward building that might look very similar to others or might look very different, but what really counts is what's under the surface.

So what are the different foundations that we can be building on? Let's just look now at what is definitely different in these two stories. The first foundation the wise man builds on is the rock.

It's quite emphatic in the original. It's not a rock. It is the rock. There is one good place to build your house. One foundation that is wise to build on.

[ 10 : 57 ] And that rock is of course Christ. How do you know if that's the foundation you're building on? Start at verse 24. Those who are building their lives on the rock are those who hear Jesus'

words and put them into practice.

Those who hear Jesus' words and put them into practice. It's perhaps worth being clear here. Works, whatever they might be, as good as they might be, do not save us, do they? We are saved by grace through faith.

We saw that last week again, that those who come before Jesus pointing to their own works, they will be told by him, I never knew you. It is those coming who know they have nothing to offer but can only point to the work of Jesus who will be welcomed into his presence on that glorious day. So Jesus is not saying you will be accepted based on your ability to put into practice the Sermon on the Mount. That is not what Jesus is saying at all and don't hear anything of that sort, please.

[12:22] We are saved through faith, not works. But here's what we learn from Jesus' words here. Real faith works.

We are saved by faith, not by works, but real faith does work. The faith that Jesus demands you have in him is not merely one that believes he existed.

Or even one that believes he lived, died, and rose again. You must believe that. You absolutely must believe that. But faith goes further. Faith doesn't just believe in the person of Jesus.

Faith trusts in the words of Jesus. the point James makes unmistakably clear in his letter later on in the New Testament. He says, what good is it to my brothers if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds?

Can such faith save them? Show me your faith without deeds and I will show you my faith by my deeds. You believe that there is one God, good.

[13:34] even the demons believe that and shudder. What's his point? But believing God exists is not a saving faith.

A faith that saves is a faith that works because a faith that saves believes not only in the existence of Jesus as a person but believes also in the wisdom and authority of his words.

the difference between those two things is huge, isn't it? I'm fairly sure you all believe I exist but it would be very different, wouldn't it?

For you to say that you believe in me to the extent that you would take my every word as truth. That you would trust my every instruction as the best thing you can possibly do.

That's a different kind of faith, isn't it? Now I'm not asking you to put that kind of faith in me, please don't. But that is exactly the kind of faith we must have in Jesus.

[14:53] That is what it looks like to build your house on the rock. Whoever hears me, whoever hears these words of mine, Jesus says, and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

That means listening and doing Jesus' words. Listening to these last three chapters of Matthew, listening to the sermons of the last few weeks and not just thinking those were some good words but thinking, I trust Jesus completely.

I trust him in everything and with everything so if this is what he has said, this is what I'm going to do. Faith in Christ is what saves us.

Not anything that we do but if we truly have faith in Christ, we will hear his words and do them. And if we hear Jesus' words but do not put them into practice, we are building our lives on sand.

What does a house built on sand look like? Jesus doesn't say, does he? It could look pretty spectacular, it could look pretty terrible.

[16:16] people whose lives are built, who are built on sand, Jesus makes very clear here, are still people who hear Jesus' words.

There is not something obviously apostate about them. These are not heresy-preaching angry atheists. They could look and sound exactly like all the buildings, the lives all around them in this room.

You could be standing in a row of houses looking virtually identical to each and every one of them. But only the owner knows what's under the surface. Only I and Jesus know what is going on under here.

And only you and Jesus knows whose words you are building your life on. Please take a minute to ask yourself this morning, not only whose words do I gladly hear, that is not enough, but ask yourself, whose words am I building my life on?

Whose wisdom informs my decision-making process more than anyone else's? Whose will am I living to carry out?

[ 17 : 54 ] Whose words and wisdom do I truly trust above all else? the answer to any of those questions is not Jesus.

There is a good chance you are building on sand. To be clear, building on the rock does not mean perfectly carrying out God's will.

But it does mean really, genuinely wanting to live out Jesus' words and hating the times in our life when we don't. And here's where the rubber really hits the road.

A storm is coming. And the storm that Jesus speaks about is not just the ups and downs of life. It's not the people who build on the rock will fare slightly better in this life than those who don't. That's not what's going on here at all. The storms that Jesus speaks about, this is judgment language.

[ 19 : 04 ] Think back to the floods in the early chapters of Genesis. The rains fall, the streams rise, the winds blowing. Jesus is carrying on from what he's just said previously.

That's why we read from verse 21. He goes straight from telling those who never knew him, those who he never knew to depart from his presence, to this parable of the two builders.

The two are very much connected. And while the outward appearance of the two buildings might not give much away, the foundation we are building our lives on is the difference between everlasting life and everlasting death.

Because judgment is coming. there is a day when we will be called before the judge of all the earth and give an account of what we have done with our life.

And if we can say to Jesus on that day, I know I failed, but I trusted your work for me and I long to live out your words even though I messed up time and again.

[ 20 : 24 ] If that is what we can say, then he will say, well done. Well done, good and faithful servants. Enter into the joy of your master.

Come into the kingdom of heaven and live here and enjoy here forever and ever and ever. If that is you, if that is your house, whatever it might look like, it will face judgment and remain standing forever.

But if we come with anything else, even if we come to Jesus saying, I loved your teaching, I loved coming to church, I heard you all my life, but in reality I never trusted you enough to try and put it into practice, then he will say, I never knew you.

depart from me. Into a place where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. And that is where Jesus ends his sermon.

The greatest sermon ever preached. Words that all who hear are astounded by. And Jesus finishes by saying, 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.

[ 22 : 22 ] The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house. And it fell with a great crash.

end of sermon. That is what awaits you, even if you hear Jesus gladly, but have no desire to put his words into practice.

Even if you believe in his person, even if you believe he died and rose again, if you do not believe that his words are worth listening to and living out, your life will fall with the greatest of crashes, forever and ever.

Where we will end up, what we build our life on, ultimately I think boils down to who we think Jesus really is. The crowds, as Jesus finishes, are unsurprisingly amazed, aren't they?

they're not amazed by his words, but by his authority. Not only because of what he preached, but how he preached it, and what he says about himself through it.

[ 23 : 46 ] And what we think of Jesus will determine whether we think it's worth putting his words into practice or not. I was going to spend some time in this sermon trying to summarize the teaching of the last few chapters so we know what it is Jesus expects us to put into practice.

But I don't think that would actually make that much of a difference. What will make the difference is who you think you are listening to here. If I told you that you needed heart surgery, you would rightly ignore me.

But if the most respected heart surgeon in the world came in here and told you you needed heart surgery, you'd listen to him, wouldn't you? We recognize authority.

We listen to authority. We trust people when we believe that they know what they're talking about. If you don't trust Jesus, it's not that you need to try harder to live out the Sermon on the Mount.

What you need is to better understand who he is. Here's a man standing on a hillside in Galilee, and he's not exactly modest about his place in the world and history, is he?

[ 25 : 06 ] This man says that at the end of our life, he will determine whether we enter the kingdom of heaven or not. Do we believe that he has that authority?

Do we believe he is the Son of God who created and sustains the universe, who is the most loving, good, and righteous, and holy God in all that he does, and all that he says, and all that he is?

If that is who we believe he is, if that is who we really believe he is, we'll do what he says, won't we? Not because we might have something to show for our efforts, but because it is so obviously the best and right and good way to live.

If we know who Jesus is, we will trust him, and if we trust him, we will do what he says, we will put his words into practice.

So Jesus leaves us at the end of this sermon with a choice to make. God, we are we going to build our life on the rock, or are we building our life on sand?

[ 26 : 27 ] If it is the former, rest assured that whatever the short days of this life might hold for you, you will one day stand in Jesus' presence forever. But if it is the latter, know that as good as this life might be at the moment, one day, far sooner than you'd like to think, you are going to fall with a great crash.

And it would be a crash that would send you into an eternal fire with no hope of rescue. know that that is not where Jesus wants you to end up.

That is why he preaches these words, not to preach people into hell, but to show us the danger of the path that we might be on. And so turn to him and put our trust wholly in his person and so put into practice his words.

For that is the only way to life. Let us pray as we close together.