

The Sermon On The Mount

The Beautiful Tune We Love So Well And Play So Poorly

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
(Matthew 5:3 ESV)*

*“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.”
(Matthew 7:24–25 ESV)*

The Wise And Foolish Builders

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Matthew 7:24-29

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Introduction:

Good morning everyone! If you have your Bible with you, I would love for you to open it now to Matthew 7:24-29. Today we are coming to the end of our long, slow journey through the Sermon on the Mount. In this concluding section Jesus has been talking to us in URGENT, even BINARY terms. He has spoken about TWO ROADS, he has talked about TWO TREES or the TWO types of PROPHET we are likely to encounter along the road, and now here in this last paragraph he is talking to us about TWO HOUSES or two types of builder. There is the WISE BUILDER and there is THE FOOLISH BUILDER – the one whose house will not survive the crisis that is coming.

Hopefully you have your bible open now to Matthew 7. I'll be reading from verse 24 through to verse 29. Hear now the Word of the Lord.

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷ And the rain

fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.”

²⁸ And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, ²⁹ for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. (Matthew 7:24–29 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

In order to understand this passage and respond to it the way we should, the first question we need to answer, obviously, has got to be this:

Who does Jesus think that he is?

Jesus is making some pretty incredible claims here. Imagine if a respected or popular teacher today made these kind of claims. Imagine if Jordan Peterson – followed by millions and millions of people on YouTube – imagine if Jordan Peterson said: “You’ve got to build your life on ME and MY TEACHINGS. If you build your life on anything other than me, eventually your entire existence will crumble into ruins.”

I don’t think that would go over well – boy, I hope that wouldn’t go over well – because no human being should talk like that – and yet Jesus talked exactly like that – which as I said, begs the question, who in the world did Jesus think he was?

Well over the course of the Sermon on the Mount it has been made abundantly clear to us that Jesus understands himself as:

1. The author and arbiter of Holy Scripture

Think how many times he said:

“You have heard that it was said But I say to you...” (Matthew 5:21–22 ESV)

Jesus is saying here, basically, that “Only I understand the essence and substance of the law. Only I understand what the Bible is really all about.”

That’s an incredible claim! If a pastor makes that kind of claim, you should fire him. By and large you don’t want your pastor saying anything about the Bible that other pastors haven’t been saying for hundreds of years. If I ever get up into this pulpit and say: “Faithful pastors and preachers have been saying for generations But I say to you” – you need to TASER ME immediately. I’m giving you permission to do that, because that’s now how pastors are supposed to talk. But that’s how Jesus talked.

Why?

Because Jesus wasn’t a pastor – or at least, Jesus wasn’t MERELY a pastor. He wasn’t A SHEPHERD – he was THE SHEPHERD. And Jesus wasn’t just A PREACHER – he was THE PREACHER.

That’s what amazed the people who heard him preach. Matthew ends his summary of the Sermon on the Mount by saying:

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching,²⁹ for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.
(Matthew 7:28–29 ESV)

Now Matthew told us at the start that Jesus WITHDREW from the crowds so as to speak TO the disciples – but here he says that the crowds were listening in – and they were astonished! They were flabbergasted! Because Jesus didn’t speak like a scribe or a Pharisee – he didn’t just say, “The Word of God says so and so which I think means such and such” – Jesus talked as if HE WERE SPEAKING the very WORD OF GOD!

Isn’t that incredible?

Who does that?

Jesus does that – and he does that because he understands himself as the AUTHOR and ARBITER of Holy Scripture. He is the ultimate originator, and he is its authoritative interpreter. He is THE WORD OF GOD.

So that's a big reason why he can say things like he is saying here, but there is something else too that we need to see. Jesus understands himself as the Word of God – but he also understands himself as the CORNERSTONE of the eternal building of God.

2. The Cornerstone of the eternal building of God

Remember, Jesus is saying here: “You need to build your life on me if you want to survive the coming storm.” Again – that's a really weird thing to say, unless you understand yourself as the SINGLE REMAINING foundation stone in the HOUSE and BUILDING of the Lord – which Jesus did.

Later in Matthew's Gospel he will tell a story about the absolutely AWFUL conduct and behaviour of Israel's leaders – it is known to most of us as the Parable of the Vineyard. The parable is saying that God planted his covenant community in the earth expecting a harvest of righteousness – but he never received that, largely because of the corruption and wickedness of the leadership. He sent them prophets to get them back on the right track – but they killed the prophets! He even sent them his own Son and they killed him too. Jesus asks the crowd what they think God will do to those terrible leaders and they say:

⁴¹ He will put those wretches to a miserable death and let out the vineyard to other tenants who will give him the fruits in their seasons.”

⁴² Jesus said to them, “Have you never read in the Scriptures: ““The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes”? (Matthew 21:41–42 ESV)

Wow! That's quite an ending! Jesus says, in essence, that God is going to GRIND the covenant community down to a single stone – HIM – he will be all that is left of Israel. He will inherit all the promises made to Israel. And then FROM HIM – ON HIM – God will raise up a new house made from stones gathered from Israel and from every tribe, tongue and nation on planet earth.

That's why the Apostles – the first hearers of this Sermon said to their people:

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and⁵ like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

⁶ For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." (1 Peter 2:4–6 NRSV)

That's what is going on here. Jesus understands himself as that NEW AND LIVING STONE – the CORNERSTONE prophesied in the Old Testament Scriptures. The Old Testament prophets SAID that God was going to grind Israel down to a single stone and then build up again from there – and Jesus, here in the Sermon on the Mount is saying: unless your life is built on ME – on this STONE – then you will not survive the coming crisis and you will not be included in the eternal kingdom of God.

So that's who Jesus thinks that he is – the author and arbiter of Scripture AND the cornerstone of the new and eternal building of God. That leads us to our second question:

What does Jesus think is coming?

This entire section is rather ominous. Last Sunday Ryan walked us through what I have called before the most alarming passage in all the Bible. He talks about how there is going to be a great separation coming between those who think they are saved and those who actually are. That's got to rattle you. If I were to ask you today – "Do you think you are saved?" How many hands are going up? I hope all of them are. But Matthew 7:21-23 seems to be saying a great many of you

are wrong! You think you are saved but you are not! You LOOK saved, but you are not. And a storm is coming that is going to divide the visible church down the middle.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones says here:

“These words are obviously addressed to members of churches, to those who make the claim of being Christian, who profess discipleship, and who are seeking the benefits and blessings of salvation. Everything about the picture emphasizes that, and we see that it, again, is meant to show us the difference between the false and the true profession of Christianity; the difference between the Christian and the seeming Christian; between the man who really is born again and is a child of God, and the man who only thinks he is.”¹

So that’s the picture: Jesus is saying that not everyone HERE is really ROOTED. And a storm is coming – a flood is coming that will serve to sort one kind of person from the other.

What kind of storm are we talking about here?

Well, that’s the benefit of a metaphor, you can be talking about a couple of things at once, and I think that’s the case here. I think by this storm, this FLOOD, Jesus is talking most immediately about personal difficulties.

1. Difficulties

Jesus didn’t promise anybody an easy road. On the contrary, he said:

“In the world you will have **tribulation**.” (John 16:33 ESV)

That word translated as “tribulation” means:

*“pressure, compression; met. affliction, distress of mind, 2 Cor. 2:4; distressing circumstances, trial, affliction”*²

¹ D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 547.

²MGD, s.v. “θλίψις,” paragraph 6999.

Not to over cite MLJ here – as if that were even possible – but he says here, interpreting the metaphor of the rains that are coming:

“I think he means things like illness, loss or disappointment, something going wrong in your life; ... grievous disappointment, a sudden change for the worse in your circumstances, or overwhelming grief and bereavement. ... These things come for us all. But finally, of course, certain and inevitable, comes death itself.”³

So – hard stuff!! Hard stuff is coming for you and if you are not truly ROOTED in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you will not survive. You will be washed away.

I read an interesting article the other day from churchanswers.com. The article claims that the median worship service size in America has shrunk by 18% from 2020 – 2022⁴. Meaning the STORM of COVID19 washed away nearly 1 in 5 professed followers of Jesus Christ. Which ought to be very concerning – because was that even a serious storm, historically speaking? Or was that a warmup act for greater difficulties still to come?

A friend of mine⁵ said in the bad old days of the pandemic – “when we emerge from this crisis the church will be smaller at the edges and stronger at the core” – and boy, has that ever proved to be prophetic.

There are more rains to come my friends, making this teaching from Jesus, all the more urgent.

So we’re talking about difficulties, but then I also think we are talking about:

2. Persecutions

³ D. Martyn Lloyd Jones, *Studies In The Sermon On The Mount* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), 568-570.

⁴ <https://churchanswers.com/blog/churches-before-and-after-the-quarantine-five-surprising-metrics/>

⁵ Pastor Rick Buck.

Jesus spoke to the disciples about that all the time. In John's Gospel he is recorded as saying:

“If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. ¹⁹ If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.” (John 15:18–19 ESV)

The world HATES the disciples of Jesus because they walk and sound like Jesus – which of course alerts us to the fact that the more CONCENTRATED the church gets as a result of the refining work of these rains, the more INTENSE will be the reaction of the world toward us – resulting it seems in a great flood and crisis toward the end – Jesus spoke about that in the Olivet Discourse. He said:

“you will be hated by all nations for my name's sake. ¹⁰ And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved. ¹⁴ And this gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.” (Matthew 24:9–14 ESV)

Are you seeing the pattern? Each downpouring of rain serves to CONCENTRATE the church as FALSE BELIEVERS are washed away. This INTENSIFIES our resemblance to Christ, and therefore AMPLIFIES the hostility of the world. Resulting in further persecution, which leads to further apostasy and washing out – but the one who endures to the end will be saved. And this Gospel of the Kingdom be preached throughout the whole world, and then the end will come.

And that leads to our third understanding of what Jesus is communicating with this flood imagery. I think he is talking about difficulties, I think he is talking about persecutions and I think he is talking about the eschatological crisis.

3. Eschatological crisis

The word “eschatological” simply means “concerning the end”. There is A CRISIS prophesied – Old Testament and New – at the END of the human story, and it is often described using the imagery of a flood. Jesus in Matthew 24 says:

“For as were the days of Noah, so will be the coming of the Son of Man. ³⁸ For as in those days before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, ³⁹ and they were unaware until **the flood came and swept them all away**, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.” (Matthew 24:37–39 ESV)

The Coming of the Son of Man is everywhere described as occurring during a time of unparalleled crisis. The Old Testament prophets often drew upon the terrible sieges endured by Jerusalem as imagery to depict the great and final crisis still to come. Zechariah for example, speaks about the people of God being surrounded and despoiled – their possessions seized, their families scattered and dispersed. He says:

Half of the city shall go out into exile, but the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. ³ Then the LORD will go out and fight against those nations as when he fights on a day of battle. ⁴ On that day his feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives that lies before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall be split in two from east to west by a very wide valley, so that one half of the Mount shall move northward, and the other half southward. (Zechariah 14:2–4 ESV)

Are you hearing that? Before the Lord returns – with his feet descending to the Mount of Olives – he permits his people to undergo a last and terrible scourge. There is one last purifying storm. And it washes away fully HALF of the people into exile.

THEN the Lord will go out and fight against those who have been fighting against us.

THEN.

After HALF have been washed away.

Why were they washed away? Why did they not endure to the end and so be saved?

Because they were foolish builders. They built their house upon the sand. They listened too closely to the wisdom of the culture. They were far too affected by the spirit of the age.

So, obviously the most important question for us to consider then is this:

What does it mean to build your house upon the ROCK?

That's a metaphor obviously, but a metaphor for WHAT? Given the stakes that appear to be involved here, this would seem to be the most urgent question we could ever consider. What does it mean to BUILD OUR HOUSE upon the rock?

I think it means first and foundationally to be connected to the person and work of Christ.

1. It means to be connected to the person and work of Christ

I cited earlier from Peter's epistle to the Christians in Bithynia Pontus – remember Peter was one of the original HEARERS of this sermon so we are very interested in what these metaphors meant to him. He told his people:

Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and⁵ like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

⁶ For it stands in scripture: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." (1 Peter 2:4–6 NRSV)

Peter says: you've got to come to Jesus to be JOINED into this work. You have to be STRUCTURALLY connected to Jesus. Ok, that's the WHAT, but what is the HOW? HOW do we get structurally connected to Jesus? Again Peter is helpful here. In his sermon on the Day of

Pentecost – the first sermon ever preached in the Christian church, so probably on an important theme – Peter talked about how Jesus was the fulfilment of all the Old Testament promises. Many people were convicted and believed what Peter was saying, and they asked him: What should we do? And Peter replied:

“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹ For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.” (Acts 2:38–39 ESV)

Repent and be baptized!

REPENT and BE BAPTIZED! That’s the how! Not MERE baptism – not baptism as a religious ritual but BAPTISM IN FAITH – BAPTISM as an expression of repentance. That IS how you become STRUCTURALLY connected to the person and work of Christ. In 1 Peter 3, after talking about Noah’s flood as a metaphor for coming Judgment Peter said:

“Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²² who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, with angels, authorities, and powers having been subjected to him.” (1 Peter 3:21–22 ESV)

So BAPTISM that is an appeal to God in faith – not mere ritualism, not mere washing with water – but real faith baptism – SAVES YOU, Peter says. It puts you in structural relationship with Jesus Christ. It PUTS YOU ON THE ARK you might say, so that you can be safe from the FLOOD WATERS that are coming. That’s what Peter says. Peter was THERE when Jesus preached this sermon and used these metaphors and he was filled with the Holy Spirit and he gave this counsel to the churches under his care – so I think that should matter to us.

One of the things I understand LEAST about the evangelical tradition that I have grown up in is the cavalier attitude so many people have toward baptism. “As long as I believe in Jesus in my heart, that will save me. Baptism is just a ritual and rituals don’t save.”

That's TRUE and at the same time incredibly arrogant and false. It is TRUE that MERE rituals don't save you – Peter says that in 1 Peter 3:21 – but it is also true that a RITUAL DONE in faith – and in obedience to a command given by Jesus – IS SAVING, that's literally what Peter is saying here. So it BOGGLES the mind that people don't take that seriously. Now maybe the problem is that we just don't understand what baptism is. The word that is most commonly used to describe baptism – SACRAMENT – is actually a Latin word borrowed from the Roman Military. A sacrament was a pledge of allegiance made by the soldier to his unit. That's what this is! It is you dying to self and RISING TO CHRIST AS LORD. It is a declaration of surrender and submission.

That's what Jesus is calling for here. Don't SAY, he says, SUBMIT.

And that takes us to the second thing we need to say here. To build your house on the rock means to be entirely submitted to the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

2. It means to be entirely submitted to the Lordship of Christ

Baptism is the beginning of a journey – not the end. In baptism you DIE to yourself and RISE to the Lordship of Christ and that is a lifelong commitment. D.A. Carson says helpfully here:

“The sermon ends with what has been implicit throughout it – the demand for radical submission to the exclusive lordship of Jesus, who fulfils the Law and the Prophets and warns the disobedient that the alternative to total obedience, true righteousness, and life in the kingdom is rebellion, self-centredness, and eternal damnation.”⁶

Do you see? It is not about slavish obedience to the law but it is about genuine submission to Christ. That's what makes you a Christian. Not KNOWING some stuff and not SAYING some stuff. It is GENUINE WHOLE LIFE SUBMISSION to the person, to the work, to the WORD

⁶ D.A. Carson, *Matthew Chapters 1 Through 12* in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1995), 194.

and to the leadership of Jesus Christ! It means to SINK YOUR ROOTS into the cornerstone, it means to grab on tight to the back of the Shepherd's robe, it means to live your life under the sound of his voice, it means to carry your sins to the foot of his cross. It means to drink from the well of his Holy Spirit, it means to walk in the power of his enabling grace.

A house like that will stand the test of time. A house like that can laugh at wind and wave. A house like that will shine with the light of the Son in the kingdom of our Father FOREVER – O God, help! Let's pray together.