

Reading

This morning our title is Deeper Foundations. And the question is: What are you building your life on?

I'm going to back up a little and also read the bit just before the text printed in your bulletin. So Matthew chapter 7, starting in verse 21.

These are the words of God.

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'

23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

24 "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."

(Matthew 7:21–27)

Intro

A few years ago on the podcast I do with my friend James in England, James asked me a question. He asked me which passage in all of Scripture made me most uncomfortable. Well, this passage in Matthew is the one I picked. I think these words of Jesus are arguably the most chilling words in the whole Bible.

They're the final words of Jesus' famous sermon on the mount. And they function like two enormous flashing danger signs, right at the end of the sermon.

Here are the two warnings Jesus gives, and these will be our headlines this morning.

Firstly, beware of saying without doing

Secondly, beware of building on the wrong foundation

So firstly, beware of saying without doing.

There is a kind of professing Christian who looks good on the outside, but who is spiritually dead on the inside.

In John Bunyan's book, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, there's a cheery character called Talkative.

There's nothing Talkative loves more than to talk about the glorious truths of the gospel: the Father's rightful anger averted, sins forgiven, guilt and shame removed, Christ's righteousness given to us, the inheritance of the new creation.

He talks about the need for repentance and faith, the necessity of the new birth and regeneration, and he talks very clearly about the fact that our good works cannot save us. He knows how to refute false opinions, and instruct others. And he has full assurance that he is heading for heaven.

But he is mistaken. Because talking and doing are two different things. As it says in James 1 v 22:

22 ...be DOERS of the word, and not HEARERS only, deceiving yourselves.
(James 1:22)

What makes Talkative so frightening is that he is absolutely convinced of his own salvation. Talkative has talked such a good talk for so long that he has managed to deceive himself. He has no idea that he is in terrible danger.

Jesus is clear that not everyone who SAYS they're a believer, or THINKS they're a believer, is in fact a believer. Not everyone who gives a verbal profession of faith, not everyone who "prays the prayer", has truly been saved.

Look at Matthew 7 verse 21. Jesus says,

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

So he says, only those who do the will of my Father will enter the kingdom of heaven. The reality of our Christian faith is proved not merely by what we say, but what we do.

The way we educate our kids, the way we relate to our spouses, the way we treat our elderly parents, and a million other ways.

Have you ever been moved by an excellent sermon, an insightful Christian book, or a convicting conversation with a Christian friend— maybe even moved to tears? Have you perhaps even commented about how moving it was, and how convicted you were—and then walked away from it and changed nothing?

Jesus is speaking specifically to that this morning. If we do not actually DO what the Bible tells us to do, we are being foolish, and we are in serious danger. Not that we can obey God's word perfectly all the time, but what Matthew 7 makes graphically clear is that if we make a HABIT of hearing God's word without acting on it, we cannot presume on our safety.

But then Jesus paints a picture of the kind of person who will not enter the kingdom of heaven, and it's incredibly shocking. Because it sounds like he's describing Christians, and these are professing Christians who actually DO stuff. They're not just talkative people who say without doing.

22 On that day ["Jesus is referring here to the day of judgement, the day on which he will be the judge of everyone who has ever lived] On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?'
(Matthew 7:21–22)

So I want us to notice four things about these people.

Firstly, they call Jesus Lord. In fact, they repeat it twice. "Lord, Lord..." In Jewish literature, when a word is repeated like this, it means it's emphatic. It's not cold or reserved. There's passion in these people.

Secondly, notice that they have prophesied in Jesus' name, meaning they have declared the truth about God, they have knowledge and understanding of spiritual things, and they have publicly professed these things.

Thirdly, notice they have cast out demons in Jesus' name, so they clearly had visible, demonstrable, spiritual power.

And fourthly, they have done "*many* mighty works" in Jesus' name, so they are consistently engaged in spectacular, even miraculous ministry in the name of Jesus.

These are the kinds of people, quite frankly, many of us would look at and say, “they put my Christian life to shame! I wish I was like that. They have a teaching ministry I don’t have, a power I don’t have, and a consistency I don’t have.”

And what will Jesus say to them? Verse 23:

23 ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

It is genuinely chilling. Because it clearly takes these people by surprise. It completely blindsides them. They say, “Didn’t we do this in your name, and this, and this...?” And Jesus says, “I never knew you.” Like someone who looks the wrong way when crossing a road, they never see it coming. They really believed they were fine, because - look at the good things we’re doing! It never seems to have occurred to them during their lives that they were on the wrong side of Jesus.

Notice how Jesus’ definition of true Christianity radically differs from the popular view of Christianity. If we were to interview people on the street, I think the average American would say, “To be a Christian, you need to know your Bible, you need to go to church, you need to believe that Jesus is your Lord, and you need to do good things,”

And Jesus says, No. That in itself proves nothing. Many people will have done all of that, and Jesus says on the day of judgement, I will tell them plainly that their eternal home is hell rather than heaven.

So what is it, then? What is the litmus test? What is the difference between the professing Christian who is ready for the Day of Judgement, and the professing Christian who is not?

Well, at this point, Jesus tells a parable to illustrate his meaning: The parable of the wise and the foolish builder.

And the warning is this:

2. Beware of building on the wrong foundation

The implication is that these apparently Christian people who Jesus will reject on the day of Judgement have been building on the wrong foundation. What does that mean?

Jesus begins to explain in verse 24 and verse 26:

24 “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

(Matthew 7:24)

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.

(Matthew 7:26)

Again, Jesus stresses the fact that the wise person, the saved person, is the one who hears Jesus' words and does them. The foolish person - like the people who say “Lord Lord” - is the one who hears Jesus' words but does NOT do them.

But despite that difference between them, in other ways they look almost indistinguishable.

BOTH the wise person AND the foolish person “HEAR Jesus' words”. They're both reading their Bible, they're both going to church, they're both hearing sermons, they're both reading Christian books, they're both hanging out with Christians, and both of them (as Jesus has made clear in the previous verses) both of them would call Jesus their “Lord”.

And both of them have built a house. The house is a picture of what each of us have done with our lives. Every day of their lives, these two people have been building their houses choice by choice, brick by brick.

And if you had been standing there watching the wise and foolish man building, their work would have looked pretty much identical. The roof, the windows, the doors, all present and correct.

If they were sitting here this morning side by side, you couldn't say - aha, there's the true Christian, and there's the fake one. Because on the surface, they both look like genuine believers.

So what is the difference between them? It's the foundation. One builds on rock, and the other builds on sand.

Apparently in the hot summer months, the sand around the Sea of Galilee was hard on the surface. So the sand even LOOKED and FELT like rock. But once a flood comes, you see it for what it really is. By which time it's too late to do anything about it.

In Scripture, of course, the flood is an image of judgement. So Jesus is saying: the foundation on which we have built our entire hope of salvation may only become visible on that Day.

I know that for some of you who live on the coast, this illustration might be a little close to home. Even in the seven years I've lived here, I've watched the coastline being steadily eroded by each big storm that blows through, so that the storms are literally starting to expose the foundations of some of the condos along the beachfront.

You may remember how, on June 24, 2021, in the early hours of the morning, there was that terrible condo collapse in Miami.

Champlain Towers South was a 12-story beachfront condo, and of the 136 units in the building, at least half were destroyed, killing 98 people. The collapse itself was devastatingly quick - it lasted less than 12 seconds.

Now if you had walked along the seafront the day before, and looked at that condo from the outside, it looked no different to the ones around it. So what was the difference?

The foundation. What it was built ON top of. The experts are saying that the reason it collapsed was likely to do with "long-term water erosion of the structural supports in the basement-level parking garage".

But here's the chilling part. They knew the foundation of the building needed remedial work as far back as 2018. Things were noted as having got "much worse" in April 2021, and a \$15 million program of remedial works had been approved before the collapse. But crucially, they hadn't yet acted. Nothing had actually been done. And that was what made the difference between life and death.

Now I'm sure if any of the residents had pointed out the structural problems early in 2021, the owners would've said, "Oh yes, don't worry. We've raised the money. We've got the plans. We know what contractors we're going to use. It's all under control." But it wasn't. Because although they knew what needed to be done, they hadn't yet done it.

But what exactly IS the foundation that Jesus is talking about here? He talks about building on sand, or building on rock - what exactly is he talking about?

Jesus is saying this: you may believe you're saved because you're believing the right things, and saying the right things and even doing outwardly impressive things. But ask yourself, why ARE you doing the apparently good things that you're doing?

Look again at Matthew 7 verse 22. What ARE these people founding their salvation on?

22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' (Matthew 7:22)

Now it's not as obvious in our English translations, but in the original Greek, it's something like this, "But Lord, didn't WE do this, and didn't WE do this, and didn't WE do this..." In other words, their foundation, their motivation for the things they've done, is themselves.

It's significant I think that the three things they talk about having done - prophesying, casting out demons, doing mighty works - are spectacular outward signs that would have attracted the attention and admiration and approval of those around them.

Just like the Pharisees who loved to wear elaborate religious clothing, and pray on street corners so that they would be noticed by others, outwardly they look as if they're all about God's glory, but inwardly their focus is on their own glory. They're most concerned with how they appear to themselves and how they appear to others. Now if you were to ask them, "What is the foundation for all these religious things you do?" They would say, well God, of course. That's my motivation. He's my foundation. I'm doing THIS for him, and THIS for him, and THIS for him. Can't you see all these things I'm doing FOR God?

But are they?

You know, quite often - maybe not so much now - but you will sometimes hear someone say, "I'm basically a good person, I think I'm morally more upright than average, I live my life by the sermon on the mount".

Do you? Do you know what the sermon on the mount says? If you read back a little further into Matthew 5, you'll see Jesus teaching that if you ever get angry with someone, you deserve hell. If you ever look at a woman with lustful intent, you've committed adultery with her in your heart, and therefore again, you deserve hell.

Can I say, if you're trying to LIVE by the sermon on the mount, you will DIE by it. Jesus tells us, in the sermon on the mount itself:

20 ...I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
(Matthew 5:20)

If your response to that is, well then I'd better try harder to be more righteous, then you have missed the point of Jesus' sermon.

He tells us these things about anger and lust and everything else so that we would see the goodness of God's law, admit our inability to meet the demands of it, and then run to the one who said he came to fulfil God's law FOR us.

That's exactly what Jesus says just a moment earlier:

17 "Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.
(Matthew 5:17)

Jesus has come to fulfil God's law FOR you so that you can be saved. That's what he was achieving by living a life of perfect obedience to his Father in heaven. And then, by dying on the cross, he was taking the punishment we deserve for not obeying God's perfect law.

That's what Jesus means by building your house on the rock. It means building your salvation on JESUS, not on your own religious or moral efforts.

Because that word ROCK is really significant. In the Old Testament, the rock is the LORD himself. It says, "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer". "The

LORD is my refuge". Most tellingly, the Lord is described as "the ROCK of my SALVATION".

Well, in the New Testament, who is this Rock of salvation? Paul says in Romans chapter 9:

...as it is written, "Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone of stumbling, and a ROCK of offense; and whoever believes in HIM will not be put to shame."
(Romans 9:33)

The rock is not a what, it's a him. The rock IS Jesus Christ. He's the one we must found our salvation on.

In Ephesians 2, Paul says:

19 ...you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone...
(Ephesians 2:19-20)

The cornerstone is the foundation stone at the base of a building. Which is why Paul says in First Corinthians:

...no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.
(1 Corinthians 3:11)

That means: there IS no foundation that can withstand the coming storm of judgement, except for one.

The picture of the person who builds their house on the rock is a picture of the person who looks solely to Christ for their salvation. Is Christ your foundation? Or is it your own moral performance?

Jesus is saying, unless your foundation is ME, your foundation will be yourself. Unless you understand that your only hope of salvation is me, then your only hope of salvation will be you. Unless you realise that *I* am the one who justifies you, then you will spend your life trying to justify yourSELF. "Didn't *I* do this for you, and this?"

Unless you know that I am the one who perfectly fulfils God's perfect law on your behalf, you will try desperately, and unsuccessfully, to fulfil God's law in your own strength.

Friends, is Christ your foundation? Do you delight in Him, or are you more delighted by the things you've done for Him?

Foundations are meant to be rested on. Are you resting on Him, and Him alone? I love that picture Larry gave us last week of the Apostle John leaning back against Jesus, his head resting on his breast. Is that your posture too?

Jesus didn't come to crush you with demands you cannot possibly meet. He came to fulfil God's law FOR you so that you could gladly rest on him. Is he your foundation?

It's only when you see that, when your heart begins to be transformed by that, and you begin to live out of the wonder and thankfulness and gratitude of that, that you are building your house on the rock.

If you are building it on the things YOU have done for GOD, you're building on sand. If the foundations are shallow, if your Christianity is shallow, it will not stand.

And this has implications not just for individuals, but for whole societies. I was listening to a podcast this week about the danger of shallow Christianity when it infects an entire country, and entire culture. [GO SLOW]

Research has been done asking the question:

What happens to societies when they retain the trappings of Christianity, the external appearance of it, but lose the foundation?

The authors of the research looked at Germany in the 1920s and 30s. Germany was still a "nominally Christian country" at that point. And the researchers plotted what they called "shallow Christianity" against pro-Nazi votes in the 1920s and 30s. And what they found was a remarkable correlation between the two.

Here's their conclusion: "Shallow Christianity is highly correlated with Nazi voting in the 1930s. Where Christian religiosity was only skin-deep, people voted for the Nazis, or joined them, in droves."

Because the culture's view of Christ was so shallow and weak, it made German people susceptible to a strong Messianic figure who ran political rallies as if they were religious crusades, painted himself as the people's "redeemer", and even closed his speeches with the word "Amen".

And with an election coming up, this is critical to understand. If we do not have a deep and experiential embrace of Christ as our only hope of salvation, then we become much more vulnerable to embracing political figures as our hope of salvation instead.

C.S. Lewis said that “Spiritual nature, like bodily nature, will be served; deny it food, and it will gobble poison...”

This is true not just for individuals but entire cultures.

Sometimes people believe that a nominal or cultural Christianity will help people embrace the real thing. That it will be a kind of bridge between the two.

But in fact, the opposite seems to be true. An experience of shallow Christianity tends to drive people away from the real thing.

The sociologist Brad Wilcox has also researched this. He found that committed evangelical men are most loving to their wives, most engaged with their children, least likely to divorce, and have the lowest rates of domestic abuse and violence.

But he also found that nominal evangelical men, those who claim the label but hardly ever show up in church if at all, they are MORE abusive than both committed Christians AND than non-Christians.

“The most violent husbands in America,” says Brad Wilcox, “are nominal evangelical Protestants who attend church infrequently or not at all.”

That is a remarkable finding. That a nominal Christianity - the kind built on sand - is WORSE than no Christianity at all.

Surely, we think, even a nominal belief in Christianity would be better for us, and for our culture, than no Christianity. But the research doesn't point that way. And neither do the words of Jesus here in Matthew.

If we have a shallow Christ, we will be worse off than if we have no Christ at all.

Not only will our lives and characters lack the fruit of true repentance, but we will falsely presume on our spiritual safety.

And on that day Christ will say to us, quite rightly, “I never knew you”.

Let's pray