

Part Twelve
The House on the Rock
Matthew 7:24-27

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.”

STUDY

1) READ

- a) What are “these words of mine” that Jesus is referring to?
- b) There are two types of people in this example. How are they alike? How do they differ?
- c) How do their differences become evident?

2) MEANING

- a) What is the sole criterion that distinguishes the wise man from the foolish man – the solid v. weak foundation?
- b) What might be examples of the metaphorical rain, floods, and winds that Jesus describes?
- c) What might be the characteristics of a fallen house?

3) APPLY

- a) What would be examples of building on sand?
- b) How can we possibly obey the kingdom standards that Jesus put forth in the Sermon on the Mount, many of which seem humanly impossible?
- c) Jesus covered many topics in the Sermon on the Mount. Which do you find particularly challenging?

NOTES ON THE PASSAGE

v. 24 Having just described people who “say” Jesus is their Lord, (v. 21) He now turns His attention to those who “hear” His words (v. 24 and v. 26). The two passages teach the same lesson.

COMMENTS

These are Jesus' final words of the Sermon on the Mount. He is no longer raising moral standards, nor further exposing hypocrisy. Rather, He is calling for a radical decision: will His listeners obey His words, or not? He graphically describes the stakes.

An outside observer can look at two identical houses and be unable to discern the quality of their foundations, since they are hidden from plain view. It is only when storms, floods, wind (or in our case earthquakes) come that the structural integrity of a house becomes evident. Jesus' final metaphor is powerful and starkly plain: our obedience to His words will determine whether our house will stand or fall when we face the inevitable challenges of life, as well as the future judgment.

This passage summons us to look back at "these words of mine", the entire Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon begins with the Beatitudes, which focus first on our relationship with God, then our relationship with our fellow man. He then calls us to be "salt" and "light" in the world. He goes on to radically raise moral standards across a wide range of behaviors: anger, lust, marital sanctity, truthfulness, revenge, and treatment of our enemies. He warns against hypocrisy and self-serving motives in our religious practices: giving to the poor, prayer and fasting. He gives us a shockingly concise, powerful model prayer ("The Lord's Prayer"). He confronts our values and priorities, our "treasures". He challenges us to trust God with our worries and anxieties. He commands us to constructively help others rather than hypocritically judge them. He invites us to "ask, knock, and seek" for God's provision and will in our lives. Finally, he calls us to critical decisions: Which gate will we enter? Which influencers will we follow? What foundation will we build our lives on? Jesus brings it all down to obedience, for both "sayers" and "hearers".

The obedience Jesus demands cannot come from our own human efforts. It can only come from true faith in Christ as our personal Savior. We are saved by grace, through faith, but true faith shows itself in good works. Obedience is the result, not the cause, of God's grace. (Ephesians 2:1-10)

We can see this in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus makes it clear that God's moral standards are humanly unachievable. After calling us to love our enemies, Jesus' moral standards reach a pinnacle in Matt 5:48: "*You therefore must be perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect*". Our inability to meet this standard smacks us in the face with our spiritual poverty ("*Blessed are the Poor in Spirit*") and should drive us to repentance ("*Blessed are those Who Mourn*"). Accepting God's grace and forgiveness requires profound humility to admit we cannot earn God's favor apart from Christ's atoning sacrifice ("*Blessed are the Meek*"). Through His work on the cross we are made parties to "The Great Exchange" by which Jesus takes the penalty for our sin and we are given His righteousness, His perfection (Romans 3:21-25). Then, out of gratefulness for God's mercy, we seek to obey Him through the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit ("*Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness*"). This obedience plays out in how we deal with others, as described in the remaining Beatitudes: showing mercy, acting with pure hearts, making peace, and enduring opposition and persecution.

In conclusion, the Sermon on the Mount is astoundingly eloquent, cohesive, and challenging. Jesus calls us to forego the "easy road" of our world's standards and priorities, and instead build our foundation on Him, the "Cornerstone" described in both the Old and New Testaments. No wonder then, that Matthew 7 closes with: "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.*"