The Constitution of the Kingdom

A 33-Session Journey through the Sermon on the Mount & the Sermon on the Plain

SESSION THIRTY-ONE — The Two Houses

Part Six: The Two Ways · Texts: Matthew 7:24–29; Luke 6:47–49

The Texts

> **Matthew 7:24–27** *Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock… And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand… and great was its fall!*
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> **Matthew 7:28–29** *Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.*

The Sermon's Last Word

We have reached the end. After the blessings and the salt and the light, after the six great contrasts and the practices, the treasure and the worry, the narrow gate and the wolves and the hard saying — after thirty sessions climbing this mountain — Jesus comes to his final word. And a great preacher's last word is never an afterthought. It is the thing he most wants left ringing in your ears when everything else has faded. So listen closely to what Jesus chose to leave us with.

He leaves us with a picture of two builders. Two people, two houses, and one storm that comes for them both. "Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them," he says, "will be like a wise man who built his house on rock… and everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand." It is the whole Sermon, gathered up and handed back to us as a single, urgent question: not "did you hear this?" but "will you build on it?"[1]

Let's search the Scriptures together — one last time.

One Word of Difference

Look closely at the two builders, because Jesus has made them almost identical on purpose. Both of them build a house — they are equally busy, equally invested, equally hard at work. Both of them, and this is the crucial word, hear these same words of Jesus. Neither is an outsider; both have sat at the feet of the same teacher and heard the same Sermon. Both houses, from the outside, may look exactly the same on a clear day. There is only one difference between them in the whole parable, and everything hangs on it: one hears and does,

[1]Unless noted, Scripture is quoted from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVue), the base translation for this course. Matthew 7:24–29, with a parallel at Luke 6:47–49, which closes the Sermon on the Plain. This is the final of the Sermon's two-ways contrasts and its concluding image; the note on the crowds' astonishment (7:28–29) is Matthew's formal close to the Sermon.

and the other hears and does not do. That is all. That is the entire distinction between the wise and the foolish — not what they heard, not how much they knew, not how the house looked in fair weather, but whether the hearing ever became a doing.[2]

Do you feel how personally this lands on us, sitting here at the end of thirty sessions? We have heard these words — all of them, slowly, carefully, for a long time. We have understood a great deal. And Jesus, with his very last breath in this Sermon, says: understanding was never the point. Admiring was never the point. Even agreeing was never the point. The point was always to build — to take these words down off the shelf of the mind and lay them, one by one, into the foundation of an actual life. The foolish builder is not the person who rejected the Sermon. The foolish builder is the person who loved the Sermon, and nodded at every line, and then went home and did not change a thing.

The Storm Comes for Both

Then comes the storm — and here we must read very carefully, because this is where the parable is most often misheard. "The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house." Notice: on that house, and on the other one too. The storm does not single out the foolish builder. The very same rain, the very same flood, the very same wind fall on both houses alike. Jesus is not promising that if you build wisely, the storms will pass you by and your life will be spared all trouble. He promises no such thing — and it would be a lie if he did, for the wisest, most faithful people you know have wept in their share of floods.[3]

Hear this, because it is a mercy: the storm is not the punishment of the foolish. It is the common lot of every human life. Grief comes. Loss comes. Hardship, illness, betrayal, the slow erosions and the sudden collapses — they come for the house on the rock as surely as for the house on the sand. So never let anyone tell you that your suffering is proof of a bad foundation. The parable says the opposite. The difference the foundation makes is not that you are spared the storm; it is that you are held through it. Two houses face the same flood — and one stands, and one falls. And here is the sobering part: you cannot tell which is which until the storm comes. On a calm day the two houses look the same. It is only the flood that reveals what each was built on all along.

What Is the Rock?

So what is the rock — the foundation that holds when everything is shaking? Jesus could not be plainer: it is these words of mine, heard and done. It is a life actually built on the Sermon — on mercy really practiced, on enemies really loved, on treasure really relocated, on the log really removed, on the Father really trusted. That is bedrock. A life laid, plank by plank and

[2]The single variable in the parable is hearing-and-doing versus hearing-and-not-doing (7:24, 26). Both build; both hear; both face the storm. The Sermon's entire drumbeat lands here: it is not enough to admire these words or even to understand them—they must be built upon, enacted, obeyed (compare James 1:22–25, "be doers of the word, and not merely hearers").

[3]The storm ("rain… floods… winds") falls on both houses alike; adversity is not the punishment of the foolish but the common lot of all. The parable does not promise the wise a life without storms—only a house that stands through them. Suffering, therefore, is never proof of a poor foundation; the difference the foundation makes is revealed precisely in the storm, not spared it.

choice by choice, onto the words of Jesus does not collapse when the flood hits, because it is anchored to something deeper than the shifting sand of circumstance.

And notice, quietly, what Jesus is claiming here at the very end. He does not say, "build on good principles," or "build on wise ideas." He says, "build on these words of mine." To build your life on the Sermon is, in the end, to build it on him. The rock is not a philosophy; it is a Person, and the words are the way we lay our lives onto him. Everything else — wealth, reputation, achievement, the approval of the crowd, the securities we spend our lives piling up — all of it is sand. It feels solid on a sunny day. It will not hold in the flood.

"As One Having Authority"

And then Matthew closes the whole Sermon with a single, telling observation about the crowd. "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes." The scribes, the learned teachers, taught by citing the authorities before them — "Rabbi so-and-so said, and Rabbi such-and-such replied." But Jesus, all through this Sermon, has done something no scribe would dare: "you have heard it said… but I say to you." He has spoken on his own authority, as though the words were his to give.[4]

And that is exactly why the parable ends where it does. The one whose words you are to build your entire life upon is not merely a wise teacher among many, whose insights you might file alongside others. He speaks as one having authority — because he is the rock. The Sermon does not end with a set of principles to consider. It ends with a Person to build on, standing before the astonished crowd, having just laid out the whole architecture of the Kingdom, and asking each of us the only question that finally matters: now that you have heard — will you build?

Freedom for Others

Put it to our thread, one final time, because the whole Sermon we are being asked to build on has been, from first to last, a summons to love. Every word of it bent outward: blessed are the poor, be reconciled, love your enemy, give in secret, do to others as you would have them do to you. So to build your house on this rock is simply to build a life of freedom-for-others — and to build it on sand is to keep the words as beautiful ideas while your actual life stays curved in on itself. The storm will show the difference. When the flood of a real crisis comes, the life built on these words holds and keeps loving; the life that only admired them has nothing to stand on. So ask with me, at the end of all these sessions: which of these words has stayed an idea in my head that has not yet become a plank in my house? *Freedom for others may cost us the comfort of admiring the Sermon without living it — what can we lay down, and build?*

Around the Table — For Discussion

[4] "As one having authority, and not as their scribes" (7:29): Matthew closes by noting the crowds' astonishment. The scribes taught by citing earlier authorities; Jesus taught on his own—"but I say to you." The final claim of the Sermon is implicit but total: to build one's life on these words is to build on Jesus himself (compare 1 Corinthians 3:11).

- The two builders are nearly identical — both build, both hear. The one difference is doing. Where have you been hearing these words for weeks without yet building on them?
- The storm falls on both houses. Why does it matter that Jesus does not promise the wise a life without floods?
- "You cannot tell which house is which until the storm comes." What have your own storms revealed about what you were built on?
- Jesus says build on "these words of mine" — on him. What "sand" have you been quietly trusting to hold you instead?
- Freedom for others may cost us something. Name one word of this Sermon you will move, this week, from idea to foundation.

This Week — A Practice

One movement this week, and let it be the movement of the whole Sermon: build. Look back over these thirty-one sessions — the beatitudes, the contrasts, the prayer, the treasure, the golden rule, all of it — and name the one teaching that has most persistently knocked on your heart and that you have most persistently left as an idea. Then, this week, lay it as a plank. Do it. Not admire it, not understand it more deeply, not intend to get to it someday — do it, once, concretely, in your actual life. Take that single word of Jesus off the shelf of your mind and set it into the foundation of how you live. Then bring back what you found. This Kingdom, from first to last, is learned in the doing.

Looking Ahead

The Sermon itself has ended — but our journey has two sessions left, and they are the ones that turn hearing into a way of life together. Next session, we will step back and take in the whole Sermon at once, from the mountain to the two houses, and ask what it all adds up to: the Constitution of the Kingdom, entire, and how a community actually lives it. And then, in our final session, we will do what the crowds on the hillside had to do — come down the mountain, and go home, and begin to build. A synthesis, and a sending.

Benediction

So go from this table and build. You have heard these words now — all of them; do not let them stay words. Take them down into the foundations of your one life, plank by plank, mercy by mercy, enemy by enemy, choice by choice, and build a house that can stand. The storms will come; they come for every house, the wise and the foolish alike, and no faith spares you the flood. But a life built on these words, and so on the One who spoke them, will not fall — for it is anchored to the Rock that outlasts every storm. Blessed are those who hear and do, for when the rain descends and the floods come and the winds beat against the house, they will still be standing — and so will everyone their love has sheltered.

Love, practiced — not just professed — reveals the Kingdom among us.

Blessings,
Pastor Mick Finch

SESSION THIRTY-ONE

Introduction Video Script

Single presenter, to camera · target 5–6 minutes · warm, steady, unhurried

[Begin still.]

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[One difference.]

Look closely at the two builders, because Jesus made them almost identical on purpose. Both build a house — equally busy, equally invested, equally hard at work. Both, and this is the crucial word, hear these same words of Jesus. Neither's an outsider — both sat at the feet of the same teacher and heard the same Sermon. From the outside, on a clear day, the two houses may look exactly alike. There's only one difference in the whole parable, and everything hangs on it: one hears and does, and the other hears and does not do. That's all. That's the entire distinction between wise and foolish — not what they heard, not how much they knew, not how the house looked in fair weather — but whether the hearing ever became a doing.

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[The storm — careful.]

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[What is the rock.]

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[The authority.]

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[The thread and practice.]

So here's our question this week — freedom for others, one last time. The whole Sermon we're asked to build on has been, first to last, a summons to love — blessed are the poor, be reconciled, love your enemy, give in secret, do to others as you'd have them do to you. To build your house on this rock is simply to build a life of freedom-for-others. To build on sand is to keep the words as beautiful ideas while your actual life stays curved in on itself. The storm will show the difference. So ask, at the end of all these sessions: which of these words has stayed an idea in my head that hasn't yet become a plank in my house?

And one thing to practice — let it be the movement of the whole Sermon: build. Name the one teaching that's most persistently knocked on your heart and that you've most persistently left as an idea. And this week, lay it as a plank. Do it — not admire it, not understand it more deeply, not intend to get to it someday. Do it, once, concretely, in your actual life. Take that single word of Jesus off the shelf and set it into your foundation.

Our journey has two sessions left. Next time we'll step back and take in the whole Sermon at once — the Constitution of the Kingdom, entire. And then, in our final session, we'll do what the crowds on the hillside had to do — come down the mountain, go home, and begin to build. A synthesis, and a sending.

[Slow. Land it.]

For now, go from this table and build. You've heard these words now — all of them; don't let them stay words. Take them down into the foundations of your one life, plank by plank, mercy by mercy, enemy by enemy, choice by choice, and build a house that can stand. The storms will come; they come for every house, wise and foolish alike, and no faith spares you the flood. But a life built on these words, and so on the One who spoke them, will not fall — for it's anchored to the Rock that outlasts every storm.

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