

LESSONS FROM HEAVEN FOR LIFE ON EARTH - The Parables - Pt 17
Sunday, November 21st, 2021, 6:30 p.m. - Teaching # 2146
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A STEADFAST HEART IN THE FACE OF THE STORM

Matthew 7:21-28 - “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." [28] And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching....”

We've been looking very specifically at the teaching of Jesus in this series on the parables. **He** told the parables. They are **His** words in the strictest sense. They show the ideas and thoughts that were closest to His heart. They give, in picture form, the truths we most need to remember, and, perhaps, are most likely to forget.

This story of the two builders and their two houses comes at the close of what many would call Jesus' most famous sermon - the Sermon on the Mount. It's a marvelous sermon. You can read it over in fifteen minutes, yet it covers everything from murder to divorce, from keeping promises to sexual purity, from the Beatitudes to how to have your prayers answered.

Now, what do you say at the close of such a sermon? How do you wrap it all up? Strangely, Jesus ***doesn't*** close His message with ***encouragement*** or ***comfort***. He closes His message with ***warning***. He warns His listeners about ***the consequences of poor listening - Matthew 7:27*** - ***“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.”***

Apparently, in Jesus' mind, there were ***two*** great dangers facing the church.

First, there was the constant danger of ***false teaching***. He warned about false prophets and leaders in this very sermon - ***Matthew 7:15-16*** - ***“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. [16] You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles?”***

Then, **second**, there was the danger of **false hearing** - **Matthew 7:26** - **“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.”** People could, quite literally, listen to His words in such a way that caused their lives to fall apart - **Matthew 7:27** - **“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.”**

No question about it, how you grasp and apply the message of this single parable may be the most important ingredient in determining the strength of your life when storms come. This parable deals with the **outcomes** of our life and faith. And nothing is more important than that.

1) **YOUR LIFE IS YOUR HOUSE AND, WHATEVER THE QUALITY OF CONSTRUCTION, YOU HAVE TO LIVE IN IT**

What is the most important thing about being a person? What is it that **most determines** how any given life will turn out? Certainly **education** is very important. Parents will spend a lot of money getting the best education and training possible for their children.

A good **standard of living** is very important. We want the best for our families. We don't want them to have to do without. We want a certain level of comfort. We certainly want to see that their needs are met.

And who could question the importance of a **good environment?**

We want them making the right friends. We don't want them influenced by the wrong crowd. The Bible says **bad company corrupts good manners (1 Corinthians 15:33)**.

We'd also like them to become established in **good careers**. We want them to enjoy the future they carve out for themselves. We want them to be fruitful and productive in their life's pursuits.

But what is the **most** important ingredient in determining the permanent shape and destiny of a life? What is it that **most** guarantees a solid, fruitful, safe future? **That's** the question Jesus answers in this parable.

Your life is your house. Your actions **take you somewhere**. They **create you**. Eventually, you must **live in** the house you build. And that house, to be anchored properly, must be built on only **one foundation**. Not two, or three - **just one foundation**. The strength of any life - the **future** of any life - is anchored on faithful obedience to the words of Jesus.

We need to think this through. Consider just one verse with me to make this point vivid: **Matthew 28:18-20** - “**And Jesus came and said to them, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. [19] Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."**

Those are haunting words - “***....teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you....***” Never mind the teaching part, for now. Do you even ***know*** all the commands of Jesus? Can you start reciting them? Do you know where to find them?

I’m not asking that question to condemn anyone. According to our parable today the issue isn’t condemnation. The issue is building a ***good house to live in!*** If you spend more time with video games and Netflix than pondering and memorizing and praying through the commands of Jesus you’re ***moving your life into the slums.*** It’s your own ***house*** you’re building. This isn’t religious legalism Jesus is hammering out here. It’s ***quality of life.***

So, whatever opinions people have about the New Testament, Jesus is underscoring the **relevance** of His words to real living. His words are not just the centerpiece to a very impressive world religion. They are the foundation to a strong life. In other words, Jesus is saying His words aren't just of **theological** interest. You only get one life to live on this earth. **Eventually it will fall apart if Jesus' words are unapplied to any segment of it.**

2) JESUS DIVIDES HEARERS OF THE WORD INTO TWO CROWDS

We would probably find it annoying to recount the number of times Jesus divided His followers into two, and **only** two, groups. Even in this sermon on the mount He's already talked about **two ways and two gates (7:13-14)**, **two trees (7:15-20)**, **two professing followers on judgement day (7:21-23)**, and now, **two builders.**

We look at the visible church - the crowd gathered in this or any other church on any given Sunday - and we see **one crowd.** Jesus always sees **two.** Here's the dividing point in Jesus' mind: while everybody who comes to church feels the Word is important enough to **hear**, not everyone feels it is important enough to **obey.**

I think we all recognize the reality of this division. We live in a culture that **admires** Jesus very much. Religion is quite popular and acceptable. On a certain level, **everyone** loves goodness, faith, and virtue. Most people equate the Christian faith with those things. Atheists send their kids to Christian Schools. Almost all are agreed exposure to the principles and words of Jesus is a good thing.

But while the words of Jesus are important enough to **hear** they aren't always deemed important enough to **live**. Perhaps they aren't **practical enough** for fast-lane executives, or **flexible enough** for the lifestyle of the crowd. Perhaps the words of Jesus are just considered **too difficult** to obey in this world of compromise and temptation.

For whatever reason, frequently the words of Jesus are heard but left on the night table when we go to the office - nice enough on the whole, but **inconvenient** if taken too seriously.

All of this leads to the third point:

3) **ONLY OBEDIENCE TO JESUS WILL HOLD YOUR LIFE TOGETHER**

Surely this is the whole point of the parable. I must never rest my life - my future - on anything less than absolute, thoughtful, thorough obedience to everything I know from the words of Jesus.

Your **feelings** aren't a reliable foundation for your life. Your **wealth and success** are just sand. They will not hold you or your family up on a secure foundation. Your **past experiences** in God's grace aren't, in themselves, enough to give you strength for the future. Even your **knowledge** of the promises of God's Word won't, in itself, do the trick. Only complete, current **obedience** is strong enough to hold up the structure of your life today.

This was such an important point of understanding in the mind of Jesus He instructed His followers to constantly pray they wouldn't forget it. He instructed all His disciples to pray the Father's will be "**done on earth as it is in heaven.**" Not **known** on earth, but **done** on earth. Anything short of this **doing** of the Word and will of Father God is simply a **deceptive waste of time.**

Imagine, spending all the time and money to build a whole house - and to build it on nothing but sand! We're meant to see the blindness and futility of the whole enterprise.

4) **EVERY HOUSE MUST FACE THE STORM OF GOD'S JUDGEMENT**

Matthew 7:25 and 27 - “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....[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.”

A lot of people express different opinions about just what these storms are. Preachers use this text to talk about building a life that can stand up to the trials that befall us in this world - sickness, bankruptcy, and bereavement. And the Bible **does** have much to say about how God will strengthen and keep the faithful through these kinds of trials.

But I don't think that is what **this** text is about. I think the context of Jesus words forces another interpretation:

Matthew 7:21-24 - “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.”

The whole parable is cast in the time frame of the last judgement. People will stand before Jesus. All sorts of **words** will be said at that time. People - **all** people - will be anxious to be on good terms with Jesus at that time. But their **words** won't make any difference. Jesus won't be listening to words at that time. He's going to look at the life - the house that was built - by **doing the things He said**.

And at that time some houses - houses that **looked fine from the outside** - are going to topple. Nothing else will hold them up. Nothing else will be available at that time to save them. Other lives will stand up just fine. Other people will feel no fear or shame. John talks about faithful followers who **love the appearing of Jesus**.

This is not a new concept in the Scriptures. The Psalmist described the very same idea: **Psalm 1:5-6** - **“Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous; [6] for the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.”**

The fundamental feature of the ungodly, according to David, is actually worded in the same language Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount. The wicked man - the one who refused to do the will of God as revealed in the Word - ***“will not stand in the judgement.”*** We know what that means. If he doesn't ***stand***, he ***falls - just like the house in Jesus parable - “And great was its fall”***(Matthew 7:27).

So this is a truly wonderful parable. It contains the ***building codes*** for putting a life together. It's the best way to close any sermon. Here's all I know about the Christian life - all I know about how to live a life that will stand the coming storm. ***Find out what Jesus wants you to do. Never argue with Him. Do His will right away, regardless how difficult or unpopular. Your life will stand. And you will be joyfully ready when He comes again.***

Who but Jesus could close His teaching session with the crowd in such direct, simple, cautious, and yet hope filled terms?