

WEATHERING THE STORMS OF LIFE

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Scripture: Matthew 7:24-27

Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and burst against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and burst against that house; and it fell – and great was its fall.

Will you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, these are the words of Your Son while He sojourned here on earth, speaking to crowds and disciples, bringing truth into their midst. We ask that that same truth will now come to us under the inspiration of Your Holy Spirit. So Lord, let Your Spirit move into every place in this room, and to every room where these words are being listened to, speak through Your Spirit that we may be able to find out what it is that You have for us today, so that we can walk in that way. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

The Sermon on the Mount is familiar territory in many ways. Over the years, we've learnt that it is one of the most written about portions of scripture. It is the longest teaching of Jesus recorded in scripture. We've learnt that, not only is it among the most well-known sections of scripture, but it is also misunderstood in many ways. We don't want to get into those misrepresentations or times when it has been misconstrued or taken in different ways to make it into something that it is not. It has had its fair share of controversy as well. But we do know that as we look at the Sermon on the Mount, that three points kind of immediately fall into our scope.

1. This was part of Jesus' message about the Good News of the kingdom of God. It had everything to do about God's kingdom, and here Jesus has been expounding chs. 5, 6 and 7 of Matthew, talking about the values and the principles of the kingdom of God.
2. We see that true righteousness is a matter of the heart.
3. Jesus was teaching us that this is how we ought to be as disciples. We've looked a bit at discipleship in the last couple of weeks. Here Jesus is saying, "If you want to be My disciple, these are things that need to be a part of who you are." Disciples must have these principles. Disciples must abide by these values. As we live as citizens of God's kingdom, then these are principles that we need to adhere to.

Now we come to this final section where Jesus draws all these themes to a close with a powerful brief and compelling story about two builders and their houses. Jesus is talking about people who hear His words and act upon them – they are compared to wise men who built their house on a rock. And then the rains came, the floods came and the winds blew; but the house stood firm. Then He said, "There were people who heard these words of Mine and did not act upon them. And to them also, the rains came, the floods rose, the winds blew and the house fell flat."

Now, there are some similarities and there are some differences as well in this brief passage.

Similarities:

- Both types of people – the wise and the foolish – both heard the voice and the words of Jesus.

v. 24 “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts upon them – the wise.”

v. 26 “Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act upon them.”

So, both types of people heard the words of Jesus.

- Both built houses, one built it on the rock and the other built it on sand.
- Both houses were tested by rain, floods and winds.

Here’s an interesting point. He’s telling us that the same kind of trials come to both, the wise and the foolish. Both of them had rain, both of them had floods, and both of them had winds. So, one of the things we ought to learn from this is that you’re not exempt from the trials of life if your house is on the rock. It does not mean that if you’re a Christian, nothing bad is going to happen to you. Quite honestly, most of you have already figured out by now that, as a Christian, you do get sick, you do have problems with your job, your marriage, relationships or kids; you still have rains and floods and wind. There are challenges for everyone whether your house is built on the rock or on the sand. The storms of life are common to us all.

We have many examples of storms coming to the lives of Christians. Remember Joni Erikson Tada, and what she went through. Quadriplegic for so many years. Let’s come down to our congregation. All of us have gone through difficult times – lost a job, fell sick, lost a loved one, got Covid. All of these have come to you and me who may have thought that we are Christian and so should be saved from it. Yet, as we look at this passage, we see that the storms of life come to both, the wise and the foolish; those who have built their houses on the rock and those who have built it on the sand.

Differences:

- But when you do experience these challenges, you will have a peace and a strength, and you will be able to stand and not fall if you have built your house upon the rock. The difference is not that you don’t have storms as a Christian. The difference is that, as a Christian, you have a foundation that holds you up through the storms.
- One put Jesus’ words into practice, the other didn’t.
- One was a wise man, the other foolish.
- One built on the rock, the other on sand.
- One house fell and the other stood.

Taking an analysis of these verses, there are three points that basically jump out at us.

1. The foundation is Jesus and His words, and putting those words into action. Not just being hearers of the word, but doers of the word.
2. The house is the life that we are living.
3. The rain, the floods and the winds are all of life’s adversities, challenges and threats.

1. FOUNDATION

v. 24 “Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts upon them, may be compared to a man who built his house upon the rock.”

Compared. In other words, He’s saying, “This is an illustration. The man who built his house on the rock is an illustration of the person who hears these words of mine and acts upon them. I think this is very important. This is twofold; it has to do with hearing and it has to do with acting – hearing the words of Jesus and then putting those words into actions. He says, “The man who built his house on the sand is a picture of a man who hears these words of mine and does not act upon them as opposed to the person who put it into practice and built it on the rock.”

So, the difference is not that one man listened to Jesus and the other didn’t. Or one went to church and the other didn’t. Both men heard, but only one did what Jesus said. Building your/my life on the rock means that we do the things that we hear from Jesus.

James 1:22 says, "But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves."

How is a person hearing the word deluding himself? Because the one who hears the word often thinks they have done what they're supposed to do. "I heard the word," and so it's complete because they've just listened to it. The truth is that it is not enough. You have to do what the word says.

Let me give you an illustration that brings out his important point. Herod, the wicked king who lived during the time of Jesus and John the Baptist, was committing adultery with his brother's wife. He had John the Baptist arrested because John preached against what Herod was doing. But interestingly enough, Mark 6:20 tells us that Herod "used to enjoy listening to him." This wicked king, living in open adultery, enjoyed listening to God's word.

Sometimes, we think that when we read the word, when we hear a bible study or a sermon or a podcast, and we get the words coming into us, that it is sufficient. That we've done what it takes. And while that is so important, because you can't really act on words that you haven't heard, so we have to read the bible, we have to listen to and attend services and sermons and worship Him and all the rest of it. All of these things are a must. However, it is only a beginning. Even though we may read three or four chapters of the bible every day, read through the bible in a year, listen to many sermons or podcasts, bible reading plans, it is not enough. It is not enough because the foolish man also heard the words of Jesus, and it wasn't sufficient. Mary gave the servants at the wedding at Cana (John 2:5). She said to them, "Whatever He says to you, do it." And that must be how we also look at the words of Jesus, that as we hear and imbibe all that He is saying, we begin to put those words into practice, into action, into behavior in our life. that is what it means to build our life on the rock.

2. THE HOUSE:

Let's look at the house or the life that we are living, and the question we must ask is this: Are we living the life we should live in accordance to the words of Jesus? Let's get a little specific here. When was the last time that you intentionally changed something in your life, did something different that you were going to do, because of what you read or heard in the word of God? That the word of God said something to you and you changed what you were going to say, or do, or be? when was the last time somebody did or said something offensive to you and you were really going to give it to them, but you read what God's word said in Proverbs, "A gentle answer turns away wrath," and so you didn't do it?

Or when was the last time you prayed differently because you used the outlines that Jesus has given us in Matthew ch. 6? Or God directed you to pray for somebody and you ended up praying in a very specific way because of that leading? Or when was the last time you didn't feel like forgiving someone, but you did because you read that Jesus commanded us to do it? And He will only forgive when we forgive others. Or when was the last time that you didn't watch a TV show or look at a certain website because you read where Psalm 101:3 says, "I will set no worthless thing before my eyes."?

So beloved, are we building our lives on Christ and His teachings? Are you on sand or are you on the rock? Are you sinking or standing firm? Sometimes, we don't know. It's been a long haul of difficult days and you come up for air, and then down you go again. No time to think.

3. THE RAINS, THE FLOODS AND THE WINDS:

The area of challenges and difficulties. The storm, the floods, the winds that come into our lives in the way of difficult situations, souring relationships, broken marriages, difficult job settings,

reconciliations, all of that come and try to take away our well-being and our purpose and our peace. The question here is: How are we negotiating them? How are we coping with them? The way we handle life's challenges tells us actually whether we are standing on the rock or we are on the sand. Whether we are going to stand firm or whether we are going to get knocked down. And to use Jesus' very harsh assessment – whether we are wise or foolish people.

FOUNDATION ON THE SAND: You keep getting knocked down. every time there's some difficulty that comes, it knocks you down. what happens when you get knocked down? you stop praying, you get angry with God, you're disconnected, you stop reading the bible. Then you withdraw from prayer groups maybe, and bible studies. You disconnect from Christian activities. Maybe stop giving to the church. Then you stay angry with God because you blame them for everything that is going on in your life. basically what happens is that you are living with a very, very weakened faith.

FOUNDATION ON THE ROCK: but when you have your foundation on the rock, you keep bouncing back. There is resilience that is built up. It's like that clown that we used to get as kids – you keep hitting it on the nose and it'll go down and come back up again. Good way to get all the extra energy out of children. But that's how it is. When we are built on the rock, then we come back again; we're not down. And we believe that while things are going so badly around us, God is still in control. So we continue to pray and read the word. We allow them to be avenues of peace and joy. We continue to stay active so that the blessings flow. As we keep a good communion with God, it opens up a beautiful place for the blessings to flow into our lives. we continue to give. Sometimes it is just the widow's mite. We may be in a dry place, not getting salaries. But we continue to give and we keep trusting God. What happens? Our faith gets strengthened.

You also notice that when we're on shaky ground, sometimes we ask for prayer from others and rarely go to the Lord ourselves in prayer. In a way, we're telling people all the difficult things that are going on in our lives. Asking for prayer, but we ourselves have stopped praying. That's not a healthy place for a Christian. It's not the place that you and I need to be. We need to be anchored solidly in Jesus, so that when the winds of uncertainty, adversity, and the floods come, the winds blow, we will stand firm. Our faith will stand firm.

Priscilla Owens, around the turn of the last century, posed this question in a hymn.

Will your anchor hold in the storms of life?
When the clouds unfold their wings of strife?
When the strong tides lift, and the cables strain,
Will your anchor drift, or firm remain?

Then she answers that question by saying:

We have an anchor that keeps the soul
Steadfast and sure while the billows roll;
Fastened to the Rock (Jesus) which cannot move,
Grounded firm and deep in the Savior's love.

Beloved, are you standing firm? Or as you listen today, are you thinking, "I need to reinforce my foundation. It's not as strong as I thought it was." Maybe you need to hand over the reins to Him. Maybe you need to start applying His words. And you probably know them all, heard them for long, but stopped short of applying them. Maybe you place yourself in a position to hear and read His word – but that's stopped. Maybe it is to just put down a very stubborn will and yield to His divine

will. Or maybe today, to call out to Him as Peter did and say, "Lord, save me!" because maybe today, you're just floundering in the midst of storms, floods and howling waves.

The song, "Will your anchor hold?" was sung outside the door of another dying hymn-writer, Mary Fowler Maude. And as she heard this choir singing this song outside her room, as she was sinking, she sent her singers this message, "Tell them that it does not fail; it holds. The anchor is holding strong."

Can we answer in that same way? And if we cannot, maybe it's time to turn to the Lord and say, "Lord, I've pulled away. I've pulled out. I've stopped speaking to You. I'm angry with You and I need to get my foundation right. Lord, show me the words that I have only heard and not put into practice. Show me the words that haven't reflected in my behavior. Show me the words that I've stopped short of putting into action in my life. Lord, I need to get onto solid firm ground today."

Beloved, if God is calling you, if the Holy Spirit is speaking to you, then will you align your thoughts with mine as we look to the Lord and say, "Lord, show us the places where we stop short of putting Your words into practice, or action." Or maybe you're in a place where you aren't even listening to His words. Maybe you need to say, "Lord, I want to hear You again first." Then beloved, we can say as scripture says, "Down came the rain and up came the floods, while the winds blew and roared upon that house. And it did not fall because its foundations were on the rock. It did not fall because its foundations were on the Rock.

Shall we pray together?

O heavenly Father, even as we have looked at Your word, we have seen the many areas in which our foundation is shaky. Lord, I pray for each one who is responding in like manner and saying, "I'm getting knocked down too many times because the foundation is not right." Lord, lift these up, hold them, show them what needs to be done, and inspire them to put into action Your words so that together we can stand firm on solid ground while the winds of adversity come our way. Lord, we are not deterred because we look to You, the Lighthouse, and know that You will keep us safe. In Your name, Lord Jesus, we pray. Amen.