

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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BUILD YOUR HOUSE UPON THE ROCK

Matthew 7:24-27

In our previous lesson, we studied Matthew 7:21-23 where Jesus warns us about the danger of confessing Him as Lord only with our lips. A confession that is merely verbal is inadequate. Jesus expects that we submit to Him as Lord. He wants us to give Him the loyalty and the obedience that His lordship requires. 'Don't expect to enter into the kingdom of heaven just because you say that I am your Lord. You have to do the will of my Father.' The contrast in Matthew 7:21-23 is between saying and doing.

A contrast between hearing and doing

In the following passage, from v. 24 to v. 27, the contrast is between hearing and doing. Let us read what Jesus teaches.

*Matthew 7:24. "Therefore whoever **hears** these sayings of Mine, and **does** them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock:*

25 "and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

*26 "But everyone who **hears** these sayings of Mine, and **does not do** them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand:*

27 "and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall."

Here, the warning is this. As important as hearing the word of God is, the Christian should not fool himself into believing that hearing good sermons or attending Bible classes is all by itself the whole doing of the will of the Father. God's will is that His word be heard in such a way that it be done. His word should so penetrate our ears that it becomes the foundation of our lives, reaching the deepest parts of our hearts.

The wise and foolish builder

In order to stress this point, the Lord Jesus speaks about this well-known parable of the two house builders. One is wise and the other one is foolish. Both of them are building a house. The life that we are living now is like building a house. Every person has a house, a life, to build. How he builds his life will determine his destiny, not just for this life on earth but for also eternity.

Outwardly, these two persons look similar. There is no big difference in the kind of house they are building. Perhaps they used the same kind of material. Both houses seem nice and attractive. But

inwardly, they are very different. The fundamental difference between them is the foundation on which they built their houses. However you can't see the foundation. It is hidden.

The difference will be revealed only when a storm comes. During the rainy season in Palestine, storms with sweeping floods can suddenly hit the villages. The house built on the rock will stand firm whereas the house built on the sand will be destroyed.

What is this rock? Paul points out in 1Corinthians 3:11 that this rock, this foundation, is Christ. *For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* This foundation, the person, the blood and the righteousness of Christ, is firm and strong. You can rely on it. You can be sure that it will never give way. If you build your life on Christ, your life will stand safe and sure. You will be saved. What does it mean to build on Christ? It means that you live a life of total dependence on Christ. Just as a house rests on a foundation, your life rests on Christ. And you cannot really make Him the foundation of your life unless you also obey His teaching.

Every man is put into one of two categories by Jesus. There is the category of men called 'wise' and there is the category of men called 'foolish.' How a person builds his life determines in which category he will be placed. The foolish man is the one who builds his house on a shifting foundation. He is likened to the person who hears Jesus' words but does not put them in practice. The wise man is the one who builds his house upon a rock. He is likened to the person who not only hears Jesus' words but also puts them in practice. Therefore the difference between the two men is likened to the difference between the foundation of their house, between obedience and disobedience. That is the main factor that determines whether a man is wise or foolish.

Two professing Christians

Notice that both house builders are professing Christians. They are familiar with the Bible. They both hear regularly the teachings of Jesus. When you look at them in church, you can't really tell the difference. They talk like Christians, they behave like Christians, and they do all the Christian things. In some sense, they are building their Christian lives on the teaching of Jesus, or they appear to be.

The warning in vv. 21-23 is connected with the warning in vv. 24-27 by the word 'therefore' in v. 24. *21 Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven... 24 **Therefore** everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock.* The two positions in the first passage can be likened to the two house builders. There are people who call Jesus 'Lord' but they will not enter the kingdom. There are people who build their house on the sand; their house will not stand when a storm comes. On the other hand, there are people who call Jesus 'Lord' and they will enter His kingdom. There are people who build their house on rock; their house will stand firm when a storm comes.

So it is important to understand that the contrast in the parable of the two foundations is not between Christians and non-Christians, but between professing Christians whose house is built on sand and professing Christians whose house is built upon the rock. So both come to church. They listen to Christian messages. They read their Bible. You can't tell the difference because the deep foundations of their lives are hidden. So the real issue to consider here is not whether they hear the truth and they know the truth, but whether they do what they hear. This is what is going to determine our destiny for eternity.

Only a storm will differentiate between a true disciple and a false one. The storm symbolizes the pressures of life like sickness, failures, losses, etc. The true nature of a Christian is revealed in moments of crisis. They show what manner of person we are. When the trials of this life come, the

foundation of one's life will be uncovered. If it doesn't happen in this life, it will certainly be revealed by the storm of the day of judgment. In the OT, the storm is used as a symbol for God's judgment, especially His final judgment. On that day, only those whose life was built on Jesus Christ will withstand the ultimate test of God's judgment.

Building for long term

Being a carpenter, Jesus knew how to build houses. He knows that when we build a house, we cannot think only about today and tomorrow. We are building something that will last a long time and we must take the time to count the cost. And this is also the meaning of the Lord's teaching here.

The foolish man is the person who only thinks about the present. He has no vision concerning the future. He just wants to build his house quickly and enjoy it now. What happens today is all that counts. And if you are building just for a short time, why waste the energy and pay the cost of building your house on a foundation. Just build it anywhere you want. Just build it on the sand. 'But what is going to happen if there is a storm? Well, it won't happen. Just enjoy your house while you have it.' This is his foolishness. He knows that during a storm, the floods will wear away the sandy foundation of his house. He knows that he should build it on the rock. He hears God's word, but he deliberately ignores the instructions and the warnings.

The wise man does not think like that. He thinks about the future, right through to eternity. When he builds, he builds for long term. And therefore, he builds his house on the rock. He knows that one day, a storm will come. He wants to make sure that his house will not be swept away. He hears God's word, and he acts upon it. But the wise man knows also that building upon the rock takes time, commitment, and energy. We see here the difference between the easy road, and the hard and costly road. Building on the sand is quick and easy. Building on the rock is hard and time consuming.

Digging down deep: making contact with Jesus

No life can be founded upon Christ's teaching unless it is also founded upon faith and trust in His personality. And for this, we must dig deep. This notion of digging through topsoil before laying a foundation on the rock appears in the parallel passage of the gospel of Luke. This detail has its importance, as we shall see. I think it is worthwhile to read Luke's account of Jesus' parable. Observe especially the actions of the builders.

*Luke 6:46. " But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things which I say?
47 "Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like:
48 "He is like a man building a house, who **dug deep** and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock.
49 "But he who heard and did nothing is like a man who built a house on the earth without a foundation, against which the stream beat vehemently; and immediately it fell. And the ruin of that house was great."*

Did you notice what the wise man was doing? He was looking for a rock on which he was going to build his house. He had to spend a lot of energy digging. So he dug and dug until one day, he hit something hard below. He knew that it was a rock. At first, he cleared the little patch on the rock. Then he continued digging. Gradually he saw more and more of the rock. He continued to dig until he could start building his house on that rock.

Do you get the picture? The action of digging down simply means to do whatever Jesus tells you to do. An important spiritual principle emerges here and it is this: it is in doing His will that you will be able to know Christ, to make contact with Him.

Think about this parable again. Before you can reach the rock, there is sand and mud. This soil represents the material world that is separating us from the Lord Jesus. But even if you are willing to build on this rock, you don't make instant contact with the rock. You have to take the time to dig deep to get to that rock. Both men wanted to build their house, their life. Both were willing to listen to the word of God. But only one was willing to do what the Lord says. The other one did not want. One was willing to dig; the other one did not want. So the principle is this: those who are willing to dig through that mud, to do God's will, to carry out the teaching of the Lord Jesus, these are the people who will make contact with Him.

But think of the man who is digging down. How does he know there is rock underneath? In those days, they couldn't rely on any electronic devices. You just don't know how long it is going to take before you can find a rock. In a sense, the digging itself is an act of faith, isn't it? You dig with the confidence that you will find rock underneath, that you will make contact with Jesus.

The obedience of faith

Paul has an interesting term to describe the doing of God's will by faith. He speaks about the 'obedience of faith.' This expression is found twice in the book of Romans. In fact, Romans begins and ends with the expression 'obedience of faith.'

*Romans 1:5. Through whom we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the **obedience of faith** among all the Gentiles.*

*Romans 16:26. But now is manifested, and by the Scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the eternal God, has been made known to all the nations, leading to **obedience of faith**.*

For Paul, there is no way you can separate faith and obedience. There is no true faith without obedience. We know that we are saved by faith. But that faith will not save us if it is not the kind of faith that finds expression in practical daily obedience to God. The letter of James tells us that an intellectual faith can never save sinners. Only a faith that is expressed in works can save. That is why James urges us not just to be hearers of the word but also doers of God's commandments. *But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a **forgetful hearer** but an **effectual doer**, this man shall be blessed in what he does* (James 1:25). This verse echoes the teaching of Jesus. The wise man is the one who hears Jesus' teaching and acts upon it.

Jesus also speaks about this obedience of faith but He uses different words. He says that it is through this obedience of faith that we will make contact with Him. Listen to His own words.

*John 14:21. "He who has My commandments and **keeps them**, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.*

Jesus says that He will reveal Himself to us. To whom exactly? 'To those who obey Me, who keep My commandments.' There is the obedience of faith. It is through the obedience of faith that Jesus will manifest Himself to us. And we see the same thing in v. 23.

*John 14:23. "If anyone loves Me, he will **keep My word**; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him.*

Jesus is going to live with us and fellowship with us all the time. He is going to make His home with whom exactly? With those who do His word. It is through the obedience of faith that we have a living contact with Jesus.

That is why some Christians express their faith with such assurance. True biblical assurance comes from doing the will of God. The man who says, 'Lord, whatever you say, I will do,' walks with conviction with the Lord. The spiritual world is as real to him as the material world. Paul came to know God in a very special way. He said, *I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision* (Acts 26:19). Jesus was so real to him that he could not disobey His commands.

A terrible fall

The Lord Jesus concludes His message with a stern warning. In the last sentence of His sermon, Jesus says, *And great was its fall* (Matthew 7:27), the fall of the house built on the sand, the fall of the false Christian of course. This is interesting. In our human thinking, we like to conclude everything on a nice note. Every speaker prefers to close his message with a comforting point that the hearers can take home with them. But here, the Lord Jesus prefers the last sentence of His sermon to be a warning rather than an encouragement.

In fact, He has been giving warnings since Matthew 7:13. He said that those who travel the broad way will be destroyed. This was followed by a warning about the divine judgment. A tree that does not produce good fruit will be thrown into the fire (vv. 15-20). Then there is a warning against verbal profession alone. Jesus will not accept those who address Him as Lord but do not do what He says (vv. 21-23). And finally we have this warning against intellectual knowledge alone. The person who hears Jesus' teaching but does not act upon it will not withstand the storms of life and judgment.

Why does Jesus issue all these threats at the end of His sermon? Because He loves us. He loves us so much that in a sense, He is trying to frighten us into His kingdom. Not everyone will enter the kingdom of heaven. Our life and our eternal destiny depend on how we respond to the teaching of Jesus.

The last part of His sermon stresses two themes. The first is that there are only two ways: one leads to heaven and the other leads to hell where body and soul are destroyed. The second theme is that the citizens of heaven are characterized by their obedience to God. The Bible tells us again and again that God does not desire anyone to perish. God has no pleasure in sending anyone to the judgment. When someone decides not to enter by the narrow gate, it hurts God's heart. I think of Jesus' words when He lamented over Jerusalem. *O Jerusalem, Jerusalem... How often I have longed to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing* (Matthew 23:37). 'Why do you choose to die? I have set before you the way of life and the way of death. Why do you choose the way of death? O Jerusalem. I don't want to send you to the judgment. But you give Me no alternative.'

Don't make the same mistake as the foolish man. He built his house on the sand because he was sure that the storm will never come. The floods came and he was swept away. So the choice is left before us: are we going to follow Jesus and do what he calls us to do? If we really perceive what is at stake (i.e. our destiny for eternity), the choice should not be difficult to make.