

Series: The Sermon on the Mount, Part 30

Title: The Firm Foundation of Obedience

Text: Matthew 7:24-27

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Verse 24

Jesus provided a final metaphor for his conclusion by speaking of two different men who built two different houses on two different types of foundations. He began his metaphorical comparison by saying, “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matthew 7:24). Matthew 7:24-29 constitutes the final words of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. The verses also serve as the fourth section in the conclusion to Jesus’ sermon. He had begun his conclusion in verse 13 by saying, “Enter the narrow gate.” In concluding his sermon, Jesus used several different comparisons. He had previously spoken of gates and ways (verses 13-14), sheep and wolves (verses 15-20), fruit and figs (verses 15-20), and genuine professions and false professions (verses 22-13). Now he used the foundation of a home as a metaphor (verses 24-27).

The word “then” in verse 24 was significant. It connected verse 24 to verses 21-23. Based on the coming judgment of the Lord (verse 23) on all who neglect and obscure God’s Word (verses 21-22), one would be wise to hear God’s Word and make it a foundation for his or her life (verses 24-27). Obedience to the teaching of Jesus is wise. Disobedience is foolish.

The phrase “these words” contained a demonstrative pronoun. The pronoun referred specifically to Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount.¹ All of Jesus’ teaching is inspired of God and authoritative for the life of the believer. However, in Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus intended to give special focus to the power and priority of obeying his teaching from the Sermon on the Mount. To do so, he used a final metaphor in his conclusion — the foundation of a home.

Jesus’ final metaphor was a memorable one. Matthew 7:24-27 constitute some of the most vivid words from the Sermon on the Mount. To this day, even unbelievers make reference to Jesus’ metaphors within the passage. The rock musician Jimi Hendrix once had a hit song that sang of the way “Castles made of sand fall in the sea eventually.”

In every era of human society, the foundation of one’s home has been of great importance. Jesus used such things to teach about the importance of obeying his teaching. People living in first-century Galilee would have been familiar with the meaning of his metaphor. The Mediterranean Sea, the Sea of Galilee, and the mountains to the East of Galilee made the region especially susceptible to violent storms. Matthew would speak of one such storm later in his gospel when telling about the miracle through which Jesus calmed storm waters on a sea (Matthew 8:23-27).

Many times, regional storms would lead to flash floods in Galilee.² Such floods could sweep ancient dwelling places away in an instant. To protect their homes against such storms, wise people would build their homes on a sure foundation. In the ancient Near East, people would often search and dig for underground rock. Once they found such rock, they would anchor the framing of their house into it. Luke made an allusion to such things in his account of Jesus’ teaching. He depicted Jesus as saying, “...he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock” (Luke 6:48).

¹ Quarles, Charles. *Sermon on the Mount: Restoring Christ’s Message to the Modern Church*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 2011), 343.

² Blomberg, Craig L. *The New American Commentary: Matthew, Volume 22*. (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing Group, 1992), 134.

The Greek word “pás” underlies the English word “everyone.” As used by Jesus, the term indicated that each and every one of his hearers had opportunity to respond to his teaching.³ Jesus’ method of preaching revealed that a gospel preacher never has the right to distinguish or make distinctions concerning who can hear and respond to the gospel. From the gospel preacher’s point of view, the gospel should be preached to all without distinction. The Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20) mandates that the Christian teacher should have a “whoever” mentality in preaching (John 3:16).

The phrase “these words of mine” referred specifically to Jesus’ words in the Sermon on the Mount. Interestingly, the phrase also alluded to Jesus’ unique method in teaching. Unlike the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees, whose teaching was comprised of a string of quotations from popular rabbis, Jesus spoke of his own accord. He spoke frankly, directly, creatively, poignantly, practically, and authoritatively. The people recognized Jesus’ unique teaching style. They were struck by it. In providing an afterward to Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount, Matthew would later say, “...And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (Matthew 7:28-29). As the Word of God (John 1:1), Jesus preached God’s Word (2 Timothy 4:2) unlike any who had ever preached.

In speaking of the one who “does” the words of Jesus, Jesus employed the same Greek word he had used earlier in his sermon to speak of obedience to the Word of God (Matthew 5:19; 7:17, 18, 19). According to Jesus, obedience to God’s Word is of paramount importance in the Christian life — “The true Christian puts into practice what he has heard from the Master.”⁴ Earlier in his gospel account, Matthew had promoted the priority of such obedience by telling of how Joseph obeyed God’s instruction through an angel — “When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him: he took his wife, but knew her not until she had given birth to a son. And he called his name Jesus” (Matthew 1:24-25).

Interestingly, the word “does” appeared as a present tense verb in the original Greek of the New Testament. Such verbiage spoke of a continual action. In the context of Matthew 7:24, the word depicted a habitual, pattern-of-life devotion to Jesus’ teaching. Jesus’ language revealed that obedience is to be an ongoing characteristic of the true disciple. Perfection may never be attained on this Earth (1 John 3:1-2); however, the child of God has a direction of life in which they continually apply themselves to the truth of Christ. One commentator has said, “...obedience to Jesus’ teaching characterizes...” the life of a believer. “Although they do not perfectly keep all of the commands of the Sermon on the Mount all the time...their overall pattern of life is marked by submission to Jesus’ teachings.”⁵

To be strong, secure, and satisfied in the faith, one must receive God’s Word and respond to it in faith. To be blessed (Matthew 5:3-12), one must hear God’s Word and take heed to it. James, the half-brother of Jesus, said the following in his New Testament epistle:

But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing (James 1:22-25).

³ Akin, Daniel L. *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount*. (Brentwood, TN: Holman reference, 2019), 150.

⁴ Ferguson, Sinclair B. *The Sermon on the Mount: Kingdom Life in a Fallen World*. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, (2025), 148.

⁵ Quarles, 343.

Interestingly, James 1:22 contained a direct command concerning obedience, as Matthew 7:24 did. Also, James' words invoked Jesus' Great Commandment (Matthew 22:37-40), as Jesus did with his Golden Rule in Matthew 7:12. Note the way James spoke of the Great Commandment as "the law of liberty" (James 1:25). The teaching of both Jesus and James reveals that obedience to God's Law via the Great Commandment is the key to Christian growth, joy, and fruitfulness. Jesus would espouse the priority of obedience in John's gospel, saying, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Concerning the place of obedience in the Christian life, Walter Chantry has said, "Obedience to God's commands is of major importance to true religion. It was in the Old Testament and it is in the New Testament...Obeying commandments and doing good works are vital to Christianity."⁶

The word "wise" is one that referred to one who had "understanding," one who was "practically wise" or "sensible."⁷ The word was different than the typical word (*sophía*) used of wisdom in the New Testament. It was a word (*phronímōs*) that referred to "prudence." Jesus would employ the term later in Matthew's gospel on several occasions (Matthew 10:16; 24:45; 25:2, 4, 8, 9). In doing so, he often used it in the context of eschatological teaching. His contextual use of the word revealed that the word referred to wisdom in light of his return and his future judgment of the world. As used in Matthew 7:24-27, the term reveals that Jesus had eschatological realities in mind when he spoke of rain, storms, floods, and the collapse of houses. Men, women, boys, and girls can prepare for coming judgment by hearing and taking heed to the words of Jesus.

Verse 25

Jesus continued his metaphor concerning houses and foundations by saying, "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" (Matthew 7:25). In the Old Testament, the concept of a storm was used as a sign of divine judgment.⁸ See Jeremiah 23:19; 25:32. Interestingly, Isaiah spoke of a storm of judgment in Isaiah 28:17. In doing so, he also spoke of "a sure foundation" (Isaiah 28:16). Isaiah envisioned security for those who had faith in the "foundation in Zion" (Isaiah 28:16). Those who didn't have such faith would be swept away by storm waters (Isaiah 28:17). Jesus was the Messianic fulfillment of Isaiah's words. In preaching his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus appealed to the words of Isaiah, showing that he was the fulfillment of them and promoting the importance of heartfelt obedience amongst God's people.

One can make application of Jesus' teaching in more than one way. First, the storms of verses 24-27 could be regarded as symbolic of God's future judgment.⁹ The Lord has appointed a day in which each human will stand before God in judgment. The Bible says, "...he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead" (Acts 17:31). At that day, the ungodly will not be able to stand before God because they did not build their lives on the sure foundation of Christ. They will be swept away in a torrent of judgment.

Second, Jesus' metaphor revealed that obedience to Christ's teaching will make a Christian strong and secure when the storms of life come. Oftentimes, believers are emotionally and spiritually weak. They live with conflicted consciences, spiritual insecurity, and moral instability. The reason for such maladies is often nothing more than a neglect of Christ's

⁶ Chantry, Walter. *Call the Sabbath A Delight*. (Edinburgh, UK: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1991), 71.

⁷ Rogers Jr., Cleon and Cleon Rogers III. *The New Linguistic and Exegetical Key to the Greek New Testament*. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1998), 16.

⁸ Akin, 152.

⁹ France, R.T. *Tyndall New Testament Commentaries: Matthew*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1985), 153.

teaching. When one hears Jesus' words and fails to obey them, one invites all sorts of pain upon his or her life.

R.T. France has said that the storms of Matthew 7:24-27 can represent "the pressures of life in this world."¹⁰ Christians who don't follow Jesus by diligently obeying his Word are often swept away when trials, testings, tragedies, and temptations come their way. Their downfall is rooted in their negligence at building their lives on Jesus' teachings. Conversely, Christians who obey God's Word experience a strengthening of their souls. Their lives become like immovable rocks. The storms, setbacks, and struggles of life may assault them, but they remain steadfast and immovable.

The Proverbs often used similar imagery to imagery found in Matthew 7:24-25 to speak of the spiritual strength that comes to a person who obeys God's Word. Proverbs 12:7 said, "The wicked are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous will stand." Proverbs 14:11 said, "The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish." See also Proverbs 9:1-6 and 24:3-4 for imagery that depicted wisdom as house being built.

Disobedience to Christ's commands may seem insignificant at first. However, the problems and pressures of life have a way of pressing on the soul. If a conscience is conflicted and the soul isn't stayed on Christ, the storms of life will make one buckle under pressure. A vicious cycle will then ensue. What seemed like a small, trifling matter at first can grow and snowball into an overwhelming flood of agony and pain. Tears, grief, regret, and untold consequences come to the life of the one who turns a deaf ear to the teaching of Jesus.

Scripture continually teaches that strength and security come to those who hear God's Word and obey it. See Proverbs 1:23 and 33 for an example of such instruction. Similarly, Scripture warns of the instability and insecurity that comes upon those who reject and disobey God's Word. See Proverbs 1:24-28 for an example of such things. Psalm 1 perhaps gives the most foundational teaching on the power of obeying God's Word and the peril of disobeying God's Word. Perhaps Jesus had Psalm 1:1-6 in mind in his closing words of his sermon, just as he had the Psalms in mind in his opening beatitudes (Psalm 1:1-6).

Verse 26

Jesus presented a contrasting scenario in his metaphor by saying, "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" (Matthew 7:26). The word rendered "foolish" was one that meant "unreflecting." It spoke of one plagued by "...a lack of knowledge or the inability to make correct decisions."¹¹ One could translate the word as meaning "stupid."¹² As used by Jesus in Matthew 7:26, the word referred to the state of one's spiritual and moral condition.¹³

The Greek word underlying English translations is one from which the English word "moron" has been derived. Jesus employed the word earlier in his sermon when he said, "But I say to you that everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother will be liable to the council; and whoever says, 'You fool!' will be liable to the hell of fire" (Matthew 5:22). Though one should refrain from calling others a "fool" (Matthew 5:22), one should be aware that a rejection of God's Word makes one a fool (Matthew 7:26).

While wise people build their houses (and lives) on rock, foolish people build their houses and lives on sand. While the rock of verse 24 represented the Lord and his Word, the "sand" of verse 26 represented the world. One commentator has noted the meaning of Jesus' metaphor by saying, "...sand depicts something that is unstable and fragile."¹⁴ Those who build

¹⁰ France, 153.

¹¹ Rogers Jr. and Rogers III, 17.

¹² Quarles, 347.

¹³ Quarles, 347.

¹⁴ Quarles, 347.

their lives on the principles and priorities of the world ultimately build their lives on something that is transitory and untrustworthy. People in Galilee were familiar with the shaky and shifty nature of sand. Some had likely known of houses built near the Sea of Galilee or the Mediterranean Sea. When storms brought flash floods, such homes would have been swept away in an instant.

Verse 27

Jesus described the downfall of those who disobey his teaching by saying, “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” (Matthew 7:27). Jesus’ imagery was rooted in the Wisdom Literature of the Hebrew Scriptures. Storms, and the destruction they often leave in their wake, were often used in both the Psalms and the Proverbs to speak of God’s judgment on the wicked:¹⁵

Our God comes; he does not keep silence; before him is a devouring fire, around him a mighty tempest. He calls to the heavens above and to the earth, that he may judge his people (Psalm 50:3-4).

O my God, make them like whirling dust, like chaff before the wind. As fire consumes the forest, as the flame sets the mountains ablaze, so may you pursue them with your tempest and terrify them with your hurricane! Fill their faces with shame, that they may seek your name, O LORD. Let them be put to shame and dismayed forever; let them perish in disgrace (Psalm 83:13-17).

When the tempest passes, the wicked is no more, but the righteous is established forever (Proverbs 10:25).

Additionally, the Proverbs spoke of the foundation and durability of one’s home to speak of the blessings for righteousness and the consequences for unrighteousness:

The wicked are overthrown and are no more, but the house of the righteous will stand (Proverbs 12:7).

The house of the wicked will be destroyed, but the tent of the upright will flourish (Proverbs 14:11).

In the book of Deuteronomy, God had pronounced that destructive rain would be a curse and consequence for disobedience to his covenant promises:¹⁶

The LORD will make the rain of your land powder. From heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed (Deuteronomy 28:24).

Deuteronomy also promised destruction of the house of the wicked:¹⁷

You shall betroth a wife, but another man shall ravish her. You shall build a house, but you shall not dwell in it. You shall plant a vineyard, but you shall not enjoy its fruit (Deuteronomy 28:30).

¹⁵ Quarles, 346-347.

¹⁶ Quarles, 349.

¹⁷ Quarles, 348.

Jesus picked up on the truth, teaching, and imagery of the Hebrew Scriptures. Since he was God himself, he knew that rain was a symbol for God's judgment on disobedient people. Demolished and uninhabitable houses were a sign of judgment. In concluding his famous sermon, he employed such things to warn his hearers. Throughout the generations of God's dealing with humanity, it has always been necessary for people to hear and obey the Lord. Doing otherwise results in dire consequences.

Imagine the images you've seen of storm damage. Maybe you've seen newscasts from storm-hit areas. The wake of destruction left by a tornado or hurricane can be devastating. According to Jesus, such things provide an image of what one's life is like when one doesn't take heed to God's Word. For many, disobedience may seem like a personal choice, a matter of personal discretion, and something that ultimately has no consequences. Jesus revealed otherwise. He revealed that negligence in regard to his teaching brings great pain, destruction, and loss.

English translations use the same word ("beat") in verses 25 and 27 to speak of the result of storms. However, the Greek of the New Testament utilizes a different word for "beat" in verse 27. It is a more intense word that meant "to pound." It spoke of contact involving "a bruising or violent manner."¹⁸ It seems Jesus meant to say that the storms of life have a way of hitting a person harder when that person isn't living according to his Word. His words serve as a warning for both believers and unbelievers. If Jesus' teaching is neglected in one's life, life will be tougher when the trials, tragedies, and testings of life hit.

¹⁸ Quarles, 348.