

Wheelersburg Baptist Church 10/24/2021
Matthew 7:24-29 “The Wise Man Builds His House On the Rock”**
Series: *The Sermon on the Mount: Kingdom Living 101*

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Main Idea: According to what Jesus says in Matthew 7:24-29, we can respond to His words in one of two ways.

I. We can respond like the wise man (24-25).

- A. He hears and obeys.
- B. He faces storms.
- C. He does not fall.
- D. He has a firm foundation.

II. We can respond like the foolish man (26-27).

- A. He hears and does not obey.
- B. He faces storms.
- C. He falls.
- D. He lacks a firm foundation.

Afterward: We’re told how the first listeners responded (28-29).

- A. They were astonished.
- B. They were impressed by His authority.

Take Inventory: How am I responding to Jesus?

- 1. Am I hearing His Word?
- 2. Am I obeying what I hear?
- 3. Am I preparing for the storm that’s coming?

There is no one like Jesus, and today we’ve come to the final passage in His most famous sermon, the sermon on the mount. What a journey this has been (we began in April 2019, and with a couple of breaks along the way, we now finish after 29 messages)! What a privilege we’ve had to ponder these words carefully! Everything Jesus has said is significant, but what He says at the end is perhaps the highlight. He makes it perfectly clear *how to respond* to this sermon.

Scripture Reading: Matthew 7:24-29

What do you think about Jesus, my friend? What kind of person was He? Many would say things like... Loving. Kind. He cared for the poor and needy. He did miracles. He ultimately died on the cross in the place of sinners. He conquered death. All true.

But do you know what stood out about Jesus to those who actually met Him? Something we tend to forget about Him, namely this. He spoke with *authority*. Notice the afterward in the sermon on the mount.

Afterward: We’re told how the first listeners responded (28-29).

Notice verses 28-29, “And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, ²⁹ for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.” So the effect of Jesus’s sermon was twofold.

A. They were astonished.

B. They were impressed by His authority.

Jesus did not give suggestions in this sermon. He did not offer speculations that you can take or leave. He didn’t tell inspiring stories. He didn’t offer platitudes to make listeners feel good about themselves. Rather, He gives commands.

Jesus gives *many* commands in the sermon on the mount. I’ve counted them. There are fifty-four direct commands, and eighteen functional commands (that is, Jesus

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

said something that is not grammatically an imperative verb, but holds the weight of an imperative) in Matthew 5-7. Let's look back at His sermon, and you'll see what I mean.

Look at the eight beatitudes in 5:3-12. They are functional commands in which Jesus is telling us what we should be. He says in verse 3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit." Therefore, be poor in spirit. He says in verse 4, "Blessed are those who mourn," therefore, mourn. And so on. Be meek. Hunger and thirst for righteousness. Be merciful. Be pure in heart. Be peacemakers. Rejoice and be glad when you are persecuted.

Then He gives direct commands in 5:12, "Rejoice and be glad." When? When people revile us, persecute us, and say all kinds of evil against us. In every situation? No, when they say it "falsely", and "on my account," says Jesus. Why? Because our reward is great in heaven.

His next set of commands pertain to how we are to live in this world. He says in 5:13, "You are the salt of the earth." This is another functional command. Therefore, be salty. Then in 5:14, "You are the light of the world." This too is a functional command (be lighty?), but Jesus follows with an explicit command in 5:16, "Let your light shine before men." And what does this mean? He clarifies by saying "so that they may see your good works." And what must be our goal as we obey this command to be light? Not our glory, but so people "give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

Jesus' next command pertains to how we view His relationship to the OT Law. He says in 5:17, "Do not think." Think what? "That I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets." Why might someone think that? Because His actions didn't fit the distorted version of the Law and Prophets some had created.

Then Jesus gives functional commands that pertain to how His followers relate to the OT Law. He says in 5:19, "Whoever relaxes one of the least of these commands..." Therefore, don't relax them! And in 5:20, "Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees..." Therefore, make sure it does!

And the commands keep coming. Jesus next gives several admonitions pertaining to personal and interpersonal issues. Regarding anger, He says in 5:24-25, "Leave your gift before the altar... First, be reconciled to your brother... Then come and offer your gift. Come to terms quickly with your accuser..."

Regarding lust, He says in 5:29, "Tear it out and throw it away... Cut it off and throw it away." Regarding divorce, He gives a functional command in 5:32, "Everyone who divorces his wife causes her to commit adultery." Therefore, don't divorce, except on the grounds of sexual immorality.

Regarding oaths, He says in 5:34-36, "Do not take an oath at all... Do not take an oath by your head... Let what you say be 'Yes' or 'No.'"

Regarding retaliation, He says in 5:39-41, "Do not resist the one who is evil... Turn the other cheek as well... Let him have your cloak as well... Go with him two miles... Give to the one who begs from you... do not refuse the one who would borrow from you."

I want us to feel the weight of this sermon. Jesus isn't giving a pep-talk. He's a king speaking with authority. Regarding the way we relate to our enemies, He says in 5:44-48, "Love your enemies... pray for those who persecute you... Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Regarding prayer, He says in 6:1, "Beware of practicing your righteousness before other people... Sound no trumpet... Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing." Then He says in 6:6-9, "Go into your room... shut the door... pray to your

Father...do not heap up empty phrases...Do not be like them [Gentiles]...Pray like this..."

Regarding fasting, still more commands. He says in 6:16, "Do not look gloomy...Anoint your head and wash your face."

Regarding treasures, He gives this charge in 6:19-24, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth...Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven." And then two functional commands in verse 24, "No one can serve two masters," and "You cannot serve God and money." So don't serve God AND money.

Then regarding anxiety, He says in 6:25-34, "Don't! Do not be anxious about your life...Look at the birds...Consider the lilies...Do not be anxious...Seek first the kingdom of God...Do not be anxious about tomorrow..."

Then He moves to the subject of judging others and says in 7:1-6, "Judge not...First take the log out of your own eye...Do not give dogs what is holy...Do not throw your pearls before pigs..."

By this point in the sermon, His commands are producing a very intended effect on us. We hear what He's telling us to do, that this is how we must live if we are to please God. And we know He's right. And we also know He's exposing our biggest problem. We can't do what we ought to do. We can't keep the commands of our Creator, not from a pure heart, as He emphasizes.

So what can we do? Is there any hope for command-breakers like us, like all of us, who have fallen short of God's holy standard? And the King, by His grace, says, "Yes, there is hope!" Jesus the King gives a command for that, too. He tells us what we must do in 7:7. Ask. It's that simple. "Ask, and it will be given you." So here's how we enter His kingdom, not on the basis of our merit, but simply by asking. We ask, and He graciously gives us what we need, starting with a new heart, forgiveness, and a forever place in the family of God. And then we keep living that way too, by asking, and receiving the ability to keep His commands, all on the basis of His gracious character.

It's stunning when you stop and think about it. Jesus gave a lot of commands in the sermon on the mount! Keep that in mind if you're contemplating following Him. He is not a ticket out of hell, but the Lord who directs your life once He rescues you from hell.

And Jesus doesn't stop giving commands once the sermon on the mount ends. I went through Matthew's gospel and counted every command of Jesus I could find¹ There are 215 of them, and another 65 or so functional commands.² Isn't that odd, a Savior who keeps telling us what to do? No, not at all. Why wouldn't He command us? He is The King. And the fact that The King who gave these commands also gave His life as a ransom payment for us should help us see that His commands are not burdensome, but provide the path to our fullest experience of freedom and joy.

It's worth pointing out that the very last thing Jesus did before returning to heaven is to give another command. In fact, it's a command regarding His commands! Listen to His familiar words in Matthew 28:19-20, "Go therefore and **make disciples of all nations** [that's a command], baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and

¹ Earlier this year we did a Wednesday evening Bible study entitled, "*Jesus' Commands, The Disciples' Concern—Finding Freedom and Joy in Obedience to Our King.*"

² The number could vary slightly because at times it's subjective when determining whether a statement by Jesus holds the status of a functional command.

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.”

So when it comes to our mission, what we do with Jesus’ commands is vital. But herein lies a problem. We don’t talk much about Jesus’ commands. His example as a servant? Yes. His promises? Yes. His atoning sacrifice? Yes, and rightly so. But His commands? Not so much.

Frankly, we don’t like commands. We don’t like a person who commands us to do things, do we? This is true in life in general. We don’t want people telling us what to do. We have rights, we insist.

And this carries over to our view of Christianity. We don’t mind a Jesus that meets our needs, that fulfills us, that rescues us from hell, that protects us from evil, that does things *for us*. But a Jesus who *commands* us?

Yet this is the inescapable reality. The true Jesus is a commanding Jesus. And this brings us to the question of the morning. What’s the right way to respond to Jesus, and specifically, to His commands? Jesus Himself does not assume that we know the answer, for He addresses that question in His final words of the sermon on the mount.

Jesus finishes his sermon with a story (Matthew 7:24-29), a story about two individuals building their houses. We’re very familiar with the story. One builder is a wise builder. The other is a foolish builder. The point of the story? According to Jesus, we can respond to His words in one of two ways.

I. We can respond like the wise man (24-25).

Verses 24, “Everyone then who hears these words of mine [which you have just done as you’ve listened to His sermon on the mount] and does them [that is, obeys what He has just commanded] will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

Notice the phrase “like a wise man.” Jesus is not giving us instructions on how to build a house. He’s giving an illustration of what He wants us to do with His sermon. If we are wise, we will be like the wise man in the story in four ways. Here’s how the wise person responds to the teaching of Jesus.

A. He hears and obeys. It’s not enough merely to hear the words of Jesus. Hell is filled with people who *heard* what Jesus said. We must hear *and obey*. “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only,” says James 1:22.

So Jesus just said that we are to be poor in spirit. Are you? Do you see yourself as one who is spiritually bankrupt? And what are you doing about it? Are you mourning over your sin, as He said we should? Are you dealing with your lust, and lying, and your need to forgive people, and everything else He just said we need to do? And are you dealing with it by asking, by asking Him to do what you cannot do, but He came to do, went to the cross to do, and will do for you now, if only you ask?

My friend, are you hearing *and obeying*? This is the response of the wise man in the story. He hears *and obeys*.

B. He faces storms. Notice what happens to the house in verse 25, “And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house...” The house represents the hearer. What happens to the person who hears and resolves to obey the words of Jesus? He faces storms. In fact, the storms of life may intensify once a person hears and resolves to obey Jesus’ words in this world. But what effect do the storms have on the one who hears and obeys?

C. He does not fall. Notice what Jesus says about the house in the very next phrase. “But it did not fall.” So the storm hit, and it hit hard, but the house didn’t fall.

And neither does what the house represents in Jesus' story. The person doesn't fall. Or to put it positively, He stands. He endures. He remains in place. And why?

D. He has a firm foundation. Jesus says at the end of verse 25, "...because it had been founded on the rock."

What's Jesus teaching? What is this firm foundation? It's the proper response to His words, to His commands. The person who hears and obeys what He has said will indeed face storms, but when that happens, he will not fall, for he has a firm foundation that will enable him to stand.

This is how the wise person responds to Jesus, and what happens as a result. He hears and obeys. He faces storms. He does not fall. He has a firm foundation.

As a pastor I have a front-row seat on this first response. It gives me great joy to see it in this church family. Every week I see you, my brothers and sisters, gather on the Lord's Day to hear the words of Jesus with a resolve to obey them. And then I see what happens during the week, when the storms hit your lives. And I see you stand, not because you are strong, but because He is your foundation. You ask, and He gives, and on the next Lord's Day, we gather together and give Him thanks and glory. This is the rhythm of life for those who respond to Jesus like the wise man.

Unfortunately, there's a second potential response, and Jesus tells us what it is.

II. We can respond like the foolish man (26-27).

Verses 26-27, "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."

Again, Jesus is not telling us how to build a house. He's illustrating what He wants us to do with His sermon. We have seen the wise person's response, now the foolish person's response. The foolish person responds to the teaching of Jesus in four ways.

A. He hears and does not obey. So based on Jesus' definition, a person can have a high IQ and be a fool. The difference between a wise person and a fool is not mere knowledge, but what the person does with the knowledge, and specifically, the knowledge about Jesus. A foolish person can hear the words of Jesus. He may even be able to recite these words. He may have degrees after his name indicating he has studied these words in depth. But he does not do them.

He does not agree with Jesus' assessment that he is poor in spirit, that he has a heart problem, that he needs the salvation that Jesus has come to give. He tells himself that he's okay, better than most in fact, a good person, a religious person, that surely God is pleased with him. He comes to these conclusions even though he has *heard* the words of Jesus. His problem? He hears and does not obey.

B. He faces storms. "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house."

In Jesus' story, there are similarities between the two builders. Each man builds a house. He puts up walls, puts on a roof, decorates the house, and so forth. Each man's house looks good, at least when the weather is good. Each man's house encounters a storm, and as a result of the storms, in both cases, the rain falls, the floods come, and the winds blow and beat against the house.

But there is one seemingly insignificant difference. What was it? The

foundation. The casual observer would probably not even notice any difference between the two houses. Frankly, foundations don't attract much attention. Until they do.

Several years ago we noticed a gap developing in the back wall of our house. The problem wasn't the wall. According to the structural engineer's assessment, the problem was the foundation, and the underground springs that were causing a slow, shifting of the superstructure.

We're told the first builder built his house upon a foundation of rock. In Luke's gospel, we're informed that the wise man dug deep to build his foundation on the firm rock (Luke 6:48). But the second builder built his house upon the sand. Why? Because it was easier, cheaper, quicker. And as long as the weather was nice, both houses looked equally beautiful.

I'll say it again. Foundations don't attract much attention. Until they do. Until the storms come. And what happens to the person who hears but does not obey?

C. He falls. In Jesus' story, the second builder's choice of a sandy foundation proved to be tragic. Everything looked great until the storm hit. In Israel, dry wadis can turn into raging torrents overnight. It's the storms that reveal the quality of the work of the two builders. When the storm has passed, only one house stood tall. It stood because it was "founded upon a rock," says Jesus (25). What happened to the other house?

"And it fell," says Jesus in verse 27, "and great was the fall of it." Why? What was the problem with the house? The same problem that plagues the person who hears yet does not obey.

D. He lacks a firm foundation. The house with the faulty foundation crumbled to the ground. The life of the person with the faulty foundation eventually crumbles too. So says Jesus to His hearers.

I find it interesting that Jesus' sermon on the mount ends, not on a note of joy, with the sound of a crash. Why is that? What does a crash do? It gets your attention, doesn't it? It startles you. It jolts you. It raises you out of your slumber.

What is the point of Jesus' final illustration? He's talking to people about the most significant of subjects, the kingdom of heaven. He's told them what they must do to enter His kingdom, and how to live as recipients of His kingdom. What a gracious offer from the King of kings!

But now what? That's the question. That's the question that must be asked every time the Word of God is proclaimed. Now what? What are we going to do with what we have just heard?

Dear friend, know this. Hearing is not the same as obeying. The wise person hears and obeys. The foolish person hears but not obey.

Yes, it's a privilege to hear the Word of God, as Jesus' listeners did, as we have just done. But it's dangerous too. It's dangerous to hear the Word of God and not do it. A wise person delights not only in hearing the Word, but in putting the Word into practice in his or her life, for it is the Word which gives stability in life.

Do you need incentive to hear and obey? Then listen to Jesus. The storms are coming. If you resolve to hear and obey the teaching of Jesus, you will not escape the storms of life. But you will be able to stand strong in them, for He will give you the strength. You will experience what W. C Martin expressed in his song, "My Anchor Holds."

*Tho' the angry surges roll
On my tempest-driven soul,
I am peaceful, for I know,*

*Wildly though the winds may blow,
I've an anchor safe and sure,
That can evermore endure.*

Refrain:

*And it holds, my anchor holds:
Blow your wildest, then, O gale,
On my bark so small and frail;
By His grace I shall not fail,
For my anchor holds, my anchor holds.*

But, dear friend, if you do not obey the teaching of Jesus, the storms will hit, and you will fall. This is the declaration of The King.

At this point, according to Matthew, Jesus ended his instruction. But the effect of His teaching did not end. What effect did His words have on that crowd so long ago?

Afterward: We're told how the first listeners responded (28-29).

A. They were astonished.

B. They were impressed by His authority.

What they just heard confirmed that Jesus was different from the other religious leaders and teachers of the day. The rabbis spoke by the authority of others. Jesus spoke by His own authority. The scribes spoke by authority. Jesus spoke with authority. There was life-changing power and relevance in what He said. The religious leaders gave the people man's traditions and opinions, but that was subject to change. Jesus spoke the unchanging truth of God. His teaching was reliable and powerful.

And the crowds were impressed. They liked what they heard. Yet something's missing, isn't it? Their astonishment says nothing about their own heart commitment. That was as far as it went—astonishment, curiosity, intrigue, applause. But what about commitment? In a couple of years, there will be a day when there will be no applause, no astonishment, but instead, hatred and rejection, and another crowd will demand His crucifixion.

So what is our response to the person and teaching of Jesus? This is the question. Perhaps we're impressed by what Jesus said, but are we willing to do what He said? Are we willing to acknowledge that He is the Savior, and place our total trust in Him, that He is the King, and give our absolute allegiance to Him?

I speak from the heart. Lives are falling apart all around us. Perhaps your life is falling apart. Why? Jesus just told us. When we refuse to hear *and obey*, we fall when the storm hits.

Let's bring this a little closer to home. According to Jesus' story, two people can profess to be Christians, and they may look alike, and act alike. Both may go to church. Both may read their Bibles. In Jesus' illustration, both men hear. But the real question is: Are they *doing* what they what heard? The storm reveals the truth.

So what is it that needs to happen in your life today? Look back at Jesus' sermon. What is the King saying to you today? What command stands out?

The fierce storms hit the houses of both the wise and the foolish man in Jesus' story. Obedience to Jesus' words does not protect us from troubles, but obedience does protect us in troubles. We may pretend to have faith in Christ, and we may fool people into thinking we're committed to Jesus, but when the storms of life come, we'll fool no one, especially God. When the storms come, the foolish man's life crumbles. The superficial disciple will collapse, but the wise man weathers the tempest.

It all boils down to what we do with what we have heard. Listen to Psalm 1:1-4, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; ² but his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. ³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers. ⁴ The wicked are not so, but are like chaff that the wind drives away. ⁵ 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.”

There's little sense going to a doctor if we're not going to do what he or she says. And yet thousands listen to Jesus' teaching every Sunday. They have a good knowledge of what Jesus taught. And yet they fail to put it into practice.

The prophet Ezekiel ministered to a difficult group of people. They were intrigued by the Word of God. They loved to hear the Word. But God told Ezekiel that they had a serious problem. Listen to Ezekiel 33:31-32 (NIV), "My people come to you, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice."

The people wanted to be entertained by the Word, but not to get right down to where the rubber meets the road and obey it. What about us?

Take Inventory: How am I responding to Jesus?

1. *Am I hearing His Word?*
2. *Am I obeying what I hear?*
3. *Am I preparing for the storm that's coming?*

Closing Song: #275 “How Firm a Foundation” (all four verses)

Community Group Discussion:

1. This morning's message from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount was entitled, “*The Wise Man Builds His House on the Rock.*” Take time as a group to re-read Matthew 7:24-29. What stands out to you from this familiar passage?
2. Jesus says that we can respond to His word in one of two ways. He compares one to a wise builder and the other to a foolish builder. What happens to the wise builder in Jesus' story? What happens to the foolish builder?
3. What is the primary difference between the wise hearer and the foolish hearer?
4. What can we do to make sure we are wise whenever we listen to (or read) God's Word? Share with your group some of the practical things you do to be a good listener.
5. In Jesus' story, both houses are hit by a storm. What does this teach us about the life of a disciple? Take time as a group to develop a theology of storms.