

Be a Wise Builder

Matthew 7:13-29

Key Verse: 7:24

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

As Jesus began his Messianic ministry, he taught his disciples the Sermon on the Mount, which contains many pearls of divine wisdom that enrich our lives greatly. Jesus gave his disciples direction from the very beginning as to what kind of people they should be and how they should grow into the fullness of God’s image. Jesus wanted them to become very influential men of God who could be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Jesus’ words give us joy, delight, hope, and clear spiritual direction.

The problem is that Jesus’ standard is very high. No one can imagine practicing his words. So some strange Bible scholars say that the Sermon on the Mount does not apply in our time; it only applies when we get to heaven. Jesus knew people’s tendency to just enjoy hearing his teaching without practicing it. Hearing Jesus’ words is one thing; practicing them is another. For example, in the previous message we heard the golden rule: **“Do to others as you would have them do to you.”** It was wonderful to hear. But it is not easy to practice, even in solving a minor problem between husband and wife. Yet when we practice it, by denying ourselves and by the power of prayer, we experience heavenly joy and peace and victory. Then our love relationships grow more and more. In this passage, as a conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus encouraged us to practice his teachings.

Jesus begins by revealing that his disciples must choose between two ways and roads. Each of the two ways has a certain outcome. One way leads to life, the other way leads to destruction. Jesus urges us to make a right decision. Then, we must discern and avoid the teachings of false prophets and the influence of false disciples. Finally we can build our lives on a right foundation. Today let’s learn how to be wise builders of our lives.

I. Enter through the narrow gate (13-14)

Look at verses 13-14. **“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”** The word “enter” in verse 13 comes from the Greek "εισελθατε" which is

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a command form. Jesus emphasized to “enter the narrow gate.” It is a mandate, not a suggestion. It is a matter of life and death. It requires a decision. In the context of the previous passage, it means to live according to Jesus’ teachings in the Sermon on the Mount. Ultimately, the narrow gate refers to Jesus himself. In John 10:7 and 9, Jesus said, **“I am the gate for the sheep,”** and, **“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. They will come in and go out and find pasture.”** In John 14:6 Jesus said, **“I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** The narrow gate is the way to God through Jesus Christ. So we can say that entering the narrow gate is to follow Jesus and learn of Jesus. How can we follow Jesus? Jesus said, **“If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me”** (Mk 8:34). This is not a temporary or occasional decision, but a lifelong commitment. Many people don’t like the word “commitment,” especially, “lifelong commitment.” So this is surely a narrow gate.

The narrow gate and road are not popular. They are exclusive and lonely. It is the way of the cross. However, it is also the way of glory and the way of life. Even though the gate is small and the road is narrow, it leads to eternal life in the kingdom of God. This gives us true joy, which the world does not know or understand.

On the other hand, the wide gate and broad road are very popular. Many people go this way. It is not lonely or exclusive. It seems to be the way of fun and lots of freedom. Ephesians 2:3 says, **“All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts.”** The motto of those who follow this way is, **“Let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die”** (1 Cor 15:32). Some modern people might say, “Life is like a video game. You can enjoy for a while and then die and that’s it.” But life is not a game. If we live according to our flesh desires, we will produce a lot of bad fruit: sexual immorality, idolatry, violence, hatred, and the like. Finally it leads us to destruction. Many people live according to their own desires, not thinking about the consequences. But we have to consider the consequences of what we think, say, and do. Ecclesiastes 11:9 says, **“You who are young, be happy while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment,”** and, 12:1 says, **“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, ‘I find no pleasure in them....’”** Young people have a lot of potential to grow, but are also vulnerable to many temptations. Many want to experience everything in the world, good or bad, and to sample

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every kind of pleasure without missing one. That seems good and many will do as they like. But we need to know that there will be an evaluation. Sometimes people's evaluation is painful. How much more will God's evaluation be unbearable. So we have to consider carefully what decisions to make and how we should live even from a young age.

The prophet Daniel encountered a national crisis while he was just a youth. His country was devastated by the invasion of the Babylonian Empire. He was taken captive to Babylon. Fortunately, he was not forced into manual slave labor, but was given the opportunity to study Babylonian language and culture and then serve as a high official in the king's court. He had a full scholarship. He could have enjoyed gourmet food, fully aged fine wine, beautiful palace girls, a six-figure income, and the respect and honor of many people. But therein lay a great danger to lose his identity as one of God's chosen people. So he faced an identity crisis, as well as a national crisis. If he just surrendered to the situation, he could live an indulgent life. But he made a small decision to live differently by refusing to eat palace food, and instead ate only vegetables. This small decision challenged the Babylonian culture. It required faith. It was his entry into the narrow gate. He could do so because he believed God is the sovereign Ruler of nations, as well as his own life. God blessed him with great wisdom and exalted him as a prophet for his own people and for the Babylonians as well. So Daniel 12:3 says, **“Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.”** Later this month, Hannah Rarick is going to U. Wisconsin at Milwaukee as a freshman. She experienced God's deep love and grace while in Korea this summer. Based on this grace, she decided to write daily bread every day and feed one of Jesus' sheep in her dorm. She is entering the narrow gate. Jesus said, **“Enter through the narrow gate.”** It is a narrow way, but it leads to life.

II. Watch out for false prophets and false disciples (15-23)

In the first part we thought about the importance of entering through the narrow gate by making a decision to follow Jesus and live according to his teachings. In this part, Jesus warns his people about false prophets and false disciples who may entice them to go the broad way.

Look at verse 15. **“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.”** False prophets do not wear t-shirts which say, “I am a false prophet.” Instead they approach like sheep who are very humble and gentle and naive. But inwardly they are greedy and

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ferocious. They want to take advantage of God's people for their own gain. Though they are so dangerous, it is hard to discern that they are false prophets. How can we recognize them? Jesus said, **"By their fruit you will recognize them"** (16a,20). Their fruit is produced according to their nature. Jesus explained this by allegory: **"Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit"** (16b-18). As trees bear fruit according to their kind, so people bear fruit according to their inner nature. Though false prophets talk and act like good sheep, they cannot hide their inner nature. Their teachings are attractive. They emphasize health, wealth, and success. They say, "Follow your heart," "Have confidence in yourself!" They never say "deny yourself," "take your cross," "you are a sinner-repent," or "God judges." People who hear them are not led to Jesus and his way. Instead, they become greedier and more selfish. The nature of a thing is important. If we want to bear good fruit we have to have a good nature. The only way to have a good nature is to receive Jesus and be transformed by his grace. We should not only examine the teachings of false prophets, but also their lifestyle and influence. In the end, God will judge them by their fruit (19).

Jesus continued to warn his people, this time about false disciples. Look at verse 21. **"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."** These people say with their mouths, **"Lord, Lord,"** but do not accept Jesus as Lord in their hearts. Maybe only their lips will go to heaven. They live by their own will, and for their own glory. They use Jesus' name to prophesy, drive out demons and perform miracles. However, they do not honor Jesus from their hearts, or obey God's will.

In verse 23 Jesus says to them: **"I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"** In spite of their claims, they did not have a personal relationship with Jesus. Here we learn that having a personal relationship with Jesus is more important than doing many great works. This is what Jesus really wants with us. In Revelation 3:20 Jesus says, **"Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him and he with me."** Jesus wants us to hear his voice and open our hearts, not just one time, but every day. When we do so, we can have an intimate relationship with Jesus. In essence, this is a love relationship. When we have a love relationship with Jesus we can obey his commands willingly, not reluctantly. In John 14:23 Jesus says, **"Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them."** When we have a

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love relationship with Jesus, we want to please him and are ready to listen to his word and do what he wants us to do. Love enables us to do what Jesus wants us to do. That's why Jesus asked Peter, **“Do you love me?”** and then said, **“Feed my sheep.”** Jesus wants us to feed his sheep based on our personal love relationship with Jesus. We should not be influenced by false disciples. We should seek to know Jesus personally more and more. Then we can stay on the narrow road that leads to life.

III. Be a wise builder (24-29)

Jesus concludes with an interesting story about builders. In verse 24, the word “therefore” connects this story with verses 21-23. Those who do not know Jesus and live by his words will be cast out of his presence. Jesus does not want this to happen to us. So he explained how we should live. This summarizes how we should respond to the entire Sermon on the Mount.

Verses 24-27 contain the story of the wise and foolish builders, which illustrates the importance of putting Jesus' words into practice. First, let's consider the wise builder. Look at verses 24-25. **“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.”** In building a house, a wise person knows the importance of the foundation. So he digs down deep and lays the foundation on rock. In order to do that he invests a lot of time, energy and money. In building the UIC Bible house, we discovered that the underground was mostly sediment; it was not stable. In order to lay the foundation on rock we had to dig two feet deeper than planned and put in expensive shoring which cost \$120,000. We also had to deal with many inspections by the Board of Underground which delayed the project considerably. For this, Dr. Paul Chung gave two years of his life. Now the UIC Bible house is on solid rock and will last for over 100 years. Practically speaking, what kind of person is the wise man? He is the one who puts Jesus' word into practice when he studies the Bible. He does not just enjoy hearing the word, but receives the word of God with a pure heart. He examines his own life in light of the word and tries to live according to it. He loves Jesus and his word more than anything else. He tries to imitate Jesus. For example, when we studied **“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness,”** the wise man would take it to heart and makes decisions to give priority to Jesus and his kingdom. In this way he lays a firm foundation on the rock of Jesus' word. Such people can endure the storms of life and grow continually into spiritual giants who can be a blessing to many people. In Chicago

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UBF, there are three godly women who have had severe health issues for the past year. Yet they have never complained, or sought the sympathy of others. They have come to God in prayer and have been thankful and joyful. They have encouraged others. They have done their best to serve God. They are surely wise builders among us.

Now let's consider the foolish builder. Look at verses 26-27. **“But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”** On the outside the foolish man's house looks like the wise man's house. But there is an extreme difference that is hidden from sight. The foolish man did not build his foundation on rock, but on sand. It seemed to be easy and fast and very cheap. He must have laughed at the wise builder, saying, "You silly guy! What are you doing?" For a time things seemed to be okay. But one day a violent storm came and crushed his house completely. This represents the person who enjoys hearing Jesus' words, but does not put them into practice. His Bible study is superficial. After hearing a message, he goes out and forgets about it. He ignores his foundation because it is unseen. He is only concerned about appearances. He remains in his own way of thinking; his lifestyle does not change based on God's word; he never repents but always justifies himself.

Here we learn the importance of laying a right foundation. During the sunny days when everything goes well, it seems unnecessary to labor hard to lay a right foundation. But life is not always full of sunny days. Sooner or later, storms of disease, accidents, broken relationships, unemployment, financial crises, and the like will come. More than that, judgment will come. In verses 13, 19, 23, and 27, Jesus clearly talks about judgment. **Everyone will stand before the judgment seat of Christ so that each of us may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body--whether good or bad (2 Cor 5:10).** This will happen in one of two ways: at the time of death, or when Jesus comes again. Hebrews 9:27 says, **“Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment....”** Death is coming. Jesus is coming. That is the reason we should not live randomly according to our feelings, but according to the word of God with a sincere heart.

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught them as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law (28-29).

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Through this passage we realize that life is like building a house. Every day we are building our house of life. Our decisions guide our actions, our actions become habits, and habits form our character. Jesus urges us to lay a good foundation. Jesus is the foundation that endures forever (1 Cor 3:11). When we lay a firm foundation on Jesus we will never be put to shame (1 Pe 2:6). Let's be wise builders by putting Jesus' words into practice.