

Title: Be Obedient

Biblical Text: Matthew 7:24-29

Teaching Series: Kingdom Being

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Matthew 7:24-29

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 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. 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. 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.” 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.

Jesus concludes his sermon today. He's got one more illustration. It's a metaphor that captures the fullness of his message and instructs his readers to live differently as a result of everything he's been talking about. As there are two roads, two trees, and two prophets ... so there are two houses. Jesus' final instruction is all about how we're supposed to build our lives. Dorothy Day, activist and author, once explained that "*Christians are commanded to live in a way that doesn't make sense unless God exists*" (referenced in David Brooks' *Second Mountain*, 223). Central aspects

of your life should make no sense if God's not real. We should appear quite foolish and other worldly to a lot of people.

You might think, *come on, no ... people in a pluralistic society like Chicago are really accepting of all kinds of view points and ideas. We won't look foolish.* Let's be real ... you and I believe that all of human history and all of human hope is based upon the teaching of a first-century Palestinian carpenter who was executed by the government and came back to life in three days. Not only so, but we think his death pays for our sinfulness and his resurrection restores righteousness and the order of cosmos. What's more, we now think he is at the right hand of his Father (even though he and his Father are one being but they are still distinct and share divinity with someone else who's called the Holy Spirit) ... that man, that God-man ... is currently at the Father's right side ruling and reigning as king over the universe and is making a plan to come back and fix the world. Some day.

That's what we think.

That's what the Bible teaches.

Kinda crazy. *Right?*

Jesus doesn't make sense.

Until he does.

Today Jesus is going to tell us about the foundation of a life that makes no earthly sense. So that's what I want to talk about. I want to talk about the foundation of our lives. Jesus talks about two houses. One house that's built or founded on the rock and one that's built on sand. The house on sand made sense at first. The house on

rock didn't. After all, the house on sand has easy access to the beach. It's quicker to build and more cost effective because you don't have to go down as deep. The house on the rock takes time and money. And it's removed from the comfortable proximity to summertime pleasure. Yet, in the end Jesus is going to tell us ... the house that at first makes no sense is the only house that can withstand the storms of life. The difference is all about the foundation.

Here's how we'll organize our time together ...

- The *substance* of the foundation. *What's the life Jesus is talking about made of?*
- The *test* of the foundation. *What storms does Jesus have in mind?*
- The *authority* of the foundation. *What gives Jesus the right to tell us how to live?*

[Prayer]

Movement 1: The Substance of the Foundation

(vv.24-26, 21,23, Luke 6:46)

What do you think makes a good life? What makes your life secure and durable? Money? A good job? Marriage? Kids? Free time? Hobbies? Emotional and mental health? No matter how we might answer these questions it's pretty clear from the way we build our lives that work and money are central to our foundations. And, they're becoming more so.

In David Brooks' column a couple weeks ago he wrote about this by comparing our changing views of marriage and career (*To Be Happy, Marriage Matters More Than Career*, 8/17/23). While we generally know that Americans are marrying later and later in life, it's important to note that this isn't merely a change in behaviors, but a change in values. Professor Brad Wilcox of the University of Virginia has done extensive research on marriage, specifically how we view marriage within our overall vision of the good life. Recently he reported that 75 percent of people 18-40 think that work is vital to building a good life, while only 32 percent of the same said marriage was crucial. Not only so, but Pew Research Center talked with parents about similar ideas. Pew found that nearly 90 percent of parents think a good job and financial independence are central to their kids' well being ... while only 20 percent of parents think marriage is. Sociologist Andrew Cherlin even uses Jesus' building motif explaining that American society no longer sees marriage as a *cornerstone* to life, but a *capstone*.

Now, of course marriage isn't necessary for a good and flourishing life. That's a message for another day, but the Bible is clear that marriage is neither necessary nor for everyone. But what this research seems to suggest is, on the whole, we think money and work give us a stronger foundation in life than relational intimacy and family. This paints a picture of a seismic shift in western society. While in the eastern view family has been and continues to be the cornerstone of life, western people are building their life on something new. Jesus calls it Mammon.

So, what's that mean for us; Chicagoans, modern city-dwellers who follow a middle-eastern-born Savior?

What's Jesus say about the foundation of a good life?

Well, he begins his answer with a transition. Notice he says in v.24, "**Everyone then ...**" That word *then* in some of your translations of the Bible is really the word *therefore*. So, as in previous passages what Jesus is about to say is grounded in what he has just said. So, *what's he just said?* He said that a bunch of people who say "Lord, Lord" and do many great works "in his name" are in fact not building their lives on him. And so in v.23 he says, **Read Matthew 7:23 ... And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'** Even though this group of people spoke mightily and performed mightily, something was missing. We're in Matthew, but Luke also records Jesus' sermon and his recollection gives us some insight about what's missing. **Read Luke 6:46 ... "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?"** Okay, this is fantastic. These dudes ... who were saying "Lord, Lord" and such ... we're prophesying in Jesus name, but Jesus never told them to prophesy ... they were casting out demons in Jesus' name, but Jesus didn't tell them to do that ... they were doing things for God and in God's name, but it was not God's will. *Are you with me?* The kingdom of heaven, the foundation of a good life, Jesus says, is for ... look at Matthew 7:21 ... **Read Matthew 7:21 ... "the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."** Just because you do something in Jesus name does not make it Jesus' will.

So, the foundation of the good life is doing the will of God.

It's hearing the words of Jesus and obeying them.

And very often, his words don't make sense. Until they do.

That's what Jesus is saying as we move into this final pericope. *Read Matthew 7:24-26 ... "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 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. 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."* You see? Jesus, as before, is juxtaposing two things. In this case two houses. Metaphors for two different lives. One life is built on it's own words and works. One life is built upon the words of Jesus. Not just listening to them, but obeying them. Notice, he says one does them (that's the house on the rock) and one does not do them (that's the house on the sand).

Therefore, in our final consideration of Jesus' sermon we should look back through his teaching and ask this simple question: *are we doing them? Are we obeying the words of Jesus?*

- He opened his address by inviting us to a way of life that is counterintuitive; it's a world where the poor receive a kingdom, mourners find comfort, the meek inherit glory, those who long for righteousness are satisfied, the merciful receive mercy, the pure see God, the peacemakers get sonship and daughterhood, the persecuted are rewarded and vindicated. *Are you building your life on this ethic? This kingdom? This foundation?*
- Jesus told us we're salt and light. We're called to live lives that embrace love and truth, and refuse to choose one over the other. *Have you embraced the harmony of love and truth? Is that your foundation?*

- Then he explained that he is the point ... the culmination ... the kept word ... the fulfillment of all the promises of God. *He is your hope? If all your dreams are left unmet, is God's kept word in Christ enough? Is he your foundation?*
- He walked us through the fracture of our emotions, brokenness of our bodies, and the division of our spirit. Jesus makes us whole. *Are you seeking wholeness in him daily? Or are you trying to find healing in your own strength?*
- He showed us how praying and giving and fasting can be about our egos and not his glory and the good of our neighbor. *Are you obeying that word? Is your righteousness more foundational to your life than his righteousness?*
- We learned that Mammon has grips our hearts. We can't love money and God. We can't build our life in this world and expect residency in the new world that's breaking into this one. *Are you obeying that word? Who has your heart? Money or the Lord?*
- Jesus then told us three times *do not be anxious*. Remember, Mammon makes us anxious. When Mammon is our foundation we forget what life's about, we forget our value, our Father, and our neighbor. When Jesus is our foundation, we get our memory back.

- Next we battled hypocrisy and our tendency to judge others. A life build on sand has to judge others to make ourselves feel better and more secure. Fortunately, Jesus is our good big brother who takes the planks out of our eyes. *Is this true of your life? Are you open to Jesus pointing out the sin and brokenness and need in your life so he can make you well? So he can help you see clearly?*
- Jesus explains when we're anchored in his will, anything and everything we ask will be given, whatever we seek we'll find, and every door will be opened. Which takes us down two roads ... to hear two prophets ... and investigate two trees ... and two types of fruit. All of which helps us to discern the difference between the truth and a lie. You see, when our lives are built on the words of Jesus we see the truth clearly. *Have you heard this word? Are you doing this word? Is Jesus your foundation?*

These are the words we should build our life upon. To be sure there are others, but Jesus lays out for us his interim vision between his first and second coming. It's the basis for our lives. Jesus' sermon is our foundation. Jesus' word is our foundation. Jesus is our foundation.

That's the *substance* of our foundation. Building our lives on Jesus, is building our lives on his words. And, yes ... life in the way of Jesus may not make much sense to a lot of people. That is, it won't make sense until it does.

Movement 2: The Test of the Foundation (vv.24-28, Matthew 16:16-18)

Jesus doesn't simply compare two foundations: a rock and sand. He also compares what happens to these two houses when storms comes. After all, it's when the rain comes and the wind starts blowing that the true stability and reliability of a foundation is exposed. *Read Matthew 7:24-28 ... "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 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. 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. 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."*

The value of a foundation is about it's ability to keep a house standing. It's not about how cheap it is. It's not about how nice it looks. It's not about how it makes you feel. The value of a foundation is all about it's ability to keep a house standing. *You see?* Taking the extra time and extra money and extra effort and sacrifice and surrender and faith of building your life on the Rock may not make much sense ... until the rain comes, until the floods rise, until the winds blow ... and your house is still standing.

Jesus doesn't make sense.

Until he does.

What really we're having to contend with in this passage is what Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones calls "*the danger of self-deception*" (565). To put it bluntly, usually we

don't do what Jesus says because we don't think it will matter. We don't build our house on the rock because we don't think a storm will come. We listen to false prophets because we don't think the wide road will actually lead to destruction. We don't ask, seek, and knock ... we don't pray because we don't think it matters. We don't take the speck out of our eye first because we don't think it will be for our good. We're anxious and worry about tomorrow because we think no one else is or will or can. We love Mammon because we don't think it will really hurt but only help us. We fast and give and pray to be seen because we don't really believe anyone else sees us. We don't seek healing and wholeness from Jesus because we think he's the one who has caused the fracture. We don't join Jesus in the renewal of all things as salt and light because we don't think that's really effective. We don't mourn and seek righteousness and mercy and poorness of spirit because we don't think that leads to the good life. *Are you with me?*

We don't think a storm is going to come. Or if it does, we think our sandy foundations are strong enough. But we are deceived. We're self-deceived. This is a happy elusion. Because storms come. They always come. Spiritual doubt creeps in. Trauma won't go away. A marriage seems beyond rescue. Or divorce steals your preferred future. Children are increasingly out of control. Work and money are lost or no longer fulfilling. Cancer shows up. Death changes the composition of family. Addiction seems relentless. Wind and water are pummeling the foundation of our lives ... We think we can build a good, stable, and flourishing life without God's word, without obedience ... without trusting Jesus. And Jesus is saying that life will be washed away just like a house built on sand in a hurricane. Because it's not build upon something enduring ... something grounded in a higher joy and deeper reality that chaos and suffering can't touch.

- You see, work can give you purpose and money ... but it can't give you value.
- Marriage can give you intimacy and children ... but it can't secure your future.
- Cancer can take away your body ... but it can't touch a soul hidden in Christ.
- Death can fracture your family ... but in Christ our family is not part of this world.

Later in Matthew, Jesus walks his disciples into a place called Caesarea Philippi. And he asks them a question. Meet me in Matthew 16:13. Jesus asks, *who do people say that I am? What's my reputation? What are people saying about me?*

Here's how the Apostle Peter responds. ***Read Matthew 16:16-18... Simon Peter replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah! For flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.***

Peter has realized Jesus' identity. But Jesus takes that confession and helps him to see that it's the very foundation of our life together as the Church, the people of God. Jesus is the rock. Jesus is our foundation ... and when the gates of hell come with its wind and rain and floods ... Jesus promises, it shall not prevail.

Now, in order to be established upon this rock we must first admit and confess that we have all failed the test. We have all been self-deceived by sin and hubris. Many of us have already seen our houses over and over again washed away by the storms of life, and yet we keep on rebuilding with the same blueprint. But this is our

gospel hope ... When the storm of sin wiped out our lives, Jesus stepped into our storm. He endured the storm with us. He died on a cross and received Satan, sin, and death's harshest blows. And yes, he did fall ... just like a sandy house. But he did not stay in the grave. He rose from the dead and now we can build our lives on the rock of our salvation, Jesus Christ who can never be touched by death again. In him we can pass every test this world throws at us because Jesus has already passed the test. He is a sure foundation.

Movement 3: The Authority of the Foundation

(vv.28-29, Luke 2:47-48)

Jesus' words and very self are our foundation. And he alone can and has passed the test of life's worst and most devastating tests. But this idea may still feel like sand paper against our view of life. Many of us are fine with someone saying that the story of Jesus is a good grounding for the moral life. That believing and following and even obeying him is fine for some people. But, *what gives him the right to tell me or us how to live our lives?* Well, I think that's the very thing which his first listeners were wrestling with as he closed his sermon. ***Read Matthew 7:28-29 ...***

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.

When we look back to the start of Jesus' sermon we see him move away from the crowd (5:1). And yet, by the end of the sermon the crowd has gathered around him again. They've been drawn in. And, *what's their response?*

Astonishment. Astonishment is the first reaction to the Sermon on the Mount.

Remember the whole message, Jesus has been reframing righteousness around the heart. This is the message they hear over and over again. And they're astonished.

That word astonished in the original language ... is *ekplesso*. It means to be *greatly amazed* or *astounded*.

When Jesus was a young boy his parents lost him for three days. He was twelve. When they finally found him, he was in the temple. He was with the teachers, asking questions and listening to them and engaging with the things of God. The writer Luke explains, *Read Luke 2:47-48 ... "And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers. And when his parents saw him, they were astonished. And his mother said to him, "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold, your father and I have been searching for you in great distress."*

Everyone is astonished. When Jesus teaches, people are astounded. His words are amazing. But, *why? Why are the crowds on the hillside and the temple, and Jesus own parents ekplesso?* Look again at Matthew 7:29. *Read Matthew 7:29 ... for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.* As a twelve year old, on into his public ministry, Jesus was an atypical rabbi or teacher. You see, scribes and teachers of Jesus' day interpreted God's words. They did not speak on their own authority, but rather they possessed only borrowed authority. They talk about what God has authoritatively spoken but Jesus ... Jesus was reframing the righteousness upon his own authority. *Remember how through chapter 5 Jesus was saying ... you've heard it said ... but I say to you? He's speaking on his own authority.* It's unadulterated, uninterpreted direct revelation and truth. That's astonishing. That's *ekplesso*.

They are astonished because he was leaving them no wiggle room. He was speaking as God. He was speaking as the foundation of the world or love or truth

and the meaning of life. They are astonished by his authority. We should be too. C.S. Lewis famously explains this in his book, *Mere Christianity*.

“I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept his claim to be God. That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic — on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg — or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God, or else a madman or something worse. You can shut him up for a fool, you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God, but let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

Friends, *is Jesus your foundation? Are you taking him at his word?* He alone enables us to endure the tests of this life because he has already secured for us the life, joy, and hope of the next.