

week #31



SMALL GROUPS

False or Firm Foundation?

"It is only the person who "hears these words of Jesus and puts them into practice" (v. 24) who is wise in God's eyes."

Study

Open It

Explore It

Get It

"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." (vv. 24-25). Matthew 7:24-29

False or Firm Foundation?

In Book I of his allegorical work of Christian pilgrimage, *The Faerie Queene*, poet Edmund Spenser has his hero, the Red Cross Knight, encounter a series of challenges and obstacles to faith. In one episode, the Knight visits the House of Pride. At first, the House appears to be grand and beautiful – a shining gold castle with flags waving crisply from the towers. The Red Cross Knight is welcomed and served a fine meal.

But all is not as it seems. The "gold" turns out to be painted on, and peeling off at that. The impressive appearance is only a facade, since the city is largely made up of rotting buildings. Ugly dungeons lie beneath the castle. Most telling, the whole place is built upon a

foundation of sand. Spenser draws this allegorical detail directly from the parable in today's reading. While the two houses in Jesus' story may appear the same at first glance, one is firmly founded on the rock while the other is unstably built on sand.

What the Savior says here is a perfect ending to this great sermon. The tone and general theme of the entire message has been that mere outward works, or the right words, are no substitute for true righteousness. **It is only the person who "hears these words of Jesus and puts them into practice" (v. 24) who is wise in God's eyes.** Jesus' half-brother, the apostle James, said the same thing in memorable terms (James 1:22-25). In the case of these two houses, they

appeared to be the same. No one could tell the difference as they sat on their foundations. The two men may even have used identical building materials. But the foundations of the two houses were radically different. The first was built on the Rock, Jesus Christ Himself (1 Cor. 10:4). Once the storm hit, the true character of these homes was revealed.

As you read this today, it may be that a storm is battering your spiritual house. Fierce storms are always frightening, but if your life is built on the Rock, Jesus assures you that He will not let you be swept away. Today, claim the wonderful promise of God's Word that He will not allow more to come upon you than you are able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13).¹

Open It!

1) Describe your childhood home. What did it look like? What characteristics did you like? Was its construction or layout flawed in any way?



2) What is the worst weather event you have personally experienced?

Read It | Matthew 7:24-29

Read the entire passage before proceeding to the questions below.

Explore It

1. What two things must all believers do when it comes to the teaching of Jesus in order to be called wise?



(Continued)

2. According to the text, what two different foundations do the builders use? What happened to each of them when the storms came?

3. What was the crowd's response to the Sermon on the Mount? What caused such a response?

Get It

If a person lives according to the principles of the Sermon on the Mount, the world calls him a fool; Jesus calls him a **wise** man. The world considers a wise man to be someone who lives by sight, who lives for the present, and who lives for self; Jesus calls such a person a **fool**.²

1. How do verses 24-29 provide a fitting conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount?

2. What is the difference between the two spiritual builders? Why would this make one wise and one foolish?

Both "builders" hear His Word, and both build houses that ostensibly exhibit no differences in structure and quality, so that each house looks quite secure in good weather. However the land of Israel is known for sudden, torrential rains that can almost instantly turned dry wadis (ravines) into potentially devastating raging torrents. It is the storm which tests the quality of the house, and specifically the nature of the foundation the builder built his or her house upon.

These "hearers" bring their bodies to the house of prayer but not their souls; they worship with their mouths, but not "in spirit and in truth."

They are sticklers for immersion or early morning communion, yet take no thought about keeping their hearts with all diligence. They boast of their orthodoxy; but disregard the precepts of Christ. Multitudes of professing Christians abstain from external acts of violence, yet hesitate not to rob their neighbors of a good name by spreading evil reports against them. They contribute regularly to the "pastor's salary," but shrink not from misrepresenting their goods and cheating their customers, persuading themselves that "business is business." They have more regard for the laws of man than those of God, for His fear is not before their eyes.³

3. Is it possible to be a doer of the word without first hearing it? What ways are you hearing the word on a weekly basis? In what ways does that hearing of the word directly impact what you do for Christ?
4. What is it about the storms of life that reveal the "real heart" of a person? In what ways have you seen life's storms bring out the good or bad in people?
5. Why does God allow us to face storms of adversity? What do such storms reveal about our faith? (In addition to these verses, see Romans 5:1-5; James 1:2-4.)
6. Why is it that so many are content with being hearers of the words but not doers? How do churches today make this an acceptable practice?
7. Why is it often difficult to tell the difference between genuine Christians and counterfeits?
8. What things can a church do to promote a culture of this hearing-doing relationship with God?

The crowds had never heard such comprehensive, insightful words of wisdom, depth, insight, and profundity. They had never heard such straightforward and fearless denunciation of the scribes and Pharisees or such a black and white presentation of the way of salvation. They had never heard such a fearful warning about the consequences of turning away from God. They had never heard such a powerful and demanding description of true righteousness or such a relentless description and condemnation of self-righteousness.⁴

9. The crowds were amazed at Jesus' teaching, because He taught as One who had authority (vss.28-29). In what ways was Jesus' authority demonstrated in His sermon?
10. Why is preaching and teaching with authority so important in churches today? Why is authoritative preaching and teaching unpopular even among evangelical churches today?

Conclude It – Upside Down Kingdom Series Review

11. What aspect(s) of the Sermon on the Mount were you not living out prior to our study of this series? What kept you from doing that?
12. What new insights did you learn from this year's study of the Sermon on the Mount? How have these new insights drawn you to a more vibrant Christianity?
13. Jesus divided this sermon into four focuses of the Christian life. When it comes to your attitudes, actions, affections, and aspirations, which one is Jesus calling you to evaluate and reorder in the days to come? What practical steps can you take to address it this week?

¹Today in the Word

²MacDonald, W., & Farstad, A., Believer's Bible Commentary: Old and New Testaments (Nashville, Thomas Nelson)

³AW Pink, Sermon on the Mount

⁴MacArthur, J., Matthew 1-7 Macarthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press)