

Matthew 7:24-27—Build Wisely

Two men are building houses. Both seem to have some skills. Once the final coat of paint is on and the last nail is driven home, people can't help but notice these are nice, beautiful homes. As time goes by, both builders experience some terrible weather. It's one of the storms that make you realize how tiny you are and how little you have in control. The wind rages ripping trees out of the ground. The rain falls in sheets so you can't see a thing. The rivers rise and break the banks; nothing can stop the flood waters. It's traumatizing.

But the one man is okay. His house is built on a solid foundation. So, when the rain comes and the rivers flood and the wind blows, he doesn't worry. Weather? What weather? It was a bit breezy, I guess...In all honesty it was hard and rough during the storm. At the same time, he rests securely on the rock on which he wisely built.

Then there's the other guy. His top concern was making sure the house was built. He knew he wanted to have a good house and so he got right to it. He figured what he had was good enough. He had been told it would hold up. But then when the rain comes and the rivers flood and the wind blows, his house is ripped to shreds and falls down with a mighty fall. He built his house without a solid foundation; he built on sand. How foolish could he be? How could he be so stupid? Sounds harsh. At the same time, isn't that what we think after we watch a building come crashing down and learn it was due to faulty engineering or failure to keep up with building codes? It's sad really. It's not just about putting up a building. You need to build wisely.

What Jesus says in Matthew 7 isn't earth shattering. You don't need an engineering degree to get it. Of course, he's not giving us a lesson on best building practices either. He says: **“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. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash”** (Matthew 7:24-27).

The wise one, the sensible man, the thoughtful man is everyone who hears these words of Jesus and does them. Such a person doesn't allow himself to be swayed and duped by the empty promises this world offers. Oh, he hears them. How couldn't you? The temptation is real too. It's always in your face. You want to do your best with what you have. You want to do what is best for your children. You want them to have a better life than you lived. You want to set yourself up for life.

We see and hear all sorts of suggestions and promises to do just that as long as you do *this* or *that*. There's the promise that comes with working hard and making sure to have a good

job and career. With this you can be financially stable, independent, while also enjoying various experiences along the way. There's the need for extra-curricular activities to learn good life lessons along with good grades to get into the good school while maintaining a proper balance of personal, family, and social life. The key is sometimes more about reputation, connections; who you know rather than what you know. You dare not forget about accomplishments along the way and current projects that have your attention. Having stuff going on, being busy, working a lot just feels like you have it figured out. Then there's family—your support system. If it's not any of those, it's fighting for this cause or supporting this group—be part of something bigger than yourself!

By no means is this an exhaustive list. Many of them are fine things, good things, blessings to have and enjoy. But if any of those are your foundation for life, it's building on sand. You can build a beautiful life on it. If you are lucky, someone might notice and comment about it. But when the storms of life coming howling in, when the extra-curricular activities are a distant memory, when you are not able to work any longer, when your dream job isn't what you thought it would be, when life's plans and goals fall through, when the hard work doesn't seem to pay off, when no one remembers your successes or cares, no one seems to appreciate all the hours you put in or pays attention to your projects, when the family disappoints and frustrates, then what? What happens when the rains of trouble—the cancer, the financial distress, the addictions, the depression, life—blinds you so have hard time seeing any good coming your way? What do you do when those things you tried to build your life upon are the very things flooding you with anxiety and frustration? Eventually it all comes crashing down with a mighty fall. It's building on sand. Foolishness.

You know this. That's why you are here. That's why we have this church. That's why we have that school. We understand, know, and believe that the most important thing for our lives is the rock-solid foundation that is Christ and His Word. You want this for yourself. You want this for your children and grandchildren. You want this for your friends. We want more to know about it. That's why you give the offerings, make the plans, send your prayers on behalf of this church and school because you know the only real foundation is Jesus. Everything else fades, spoils, doesn't last, and fails—it's trying to build on sand. Jesus and his Word endure forever. And by God's grace, it's yours. He is your refuge and strength, your ever-present help and protection from the howling winds of this world. The same powerful Lord who spoke and set this world's foundation is your foundation and on your side. Where we can feel so lonely, He will never leave you or forsake you. He's with you always—there's nowhere and no situation you might face that he is not with you. This foundation does not crack or wear down with time. He is your changeless Jesus who is the same yesterday, today, tomorrow. When the storms of life come crashing down and the demands and responsibilities threaten to drown us and the pelting accusations, troubles,

distractions of this world work so hard to pull you away, rest securely on the foundation of Jesus. He has the words of everlasting life who gives that life to you. Since that life is already yours through him, it's going to be okay. This is Jesus' promise.

But what are you doing with it? That's the difference between the wise man and the foolish one. Both build houses. Both endure storms. Both hear Jesus' words. Only one does them.

And that's where the sneaky devil gets you. You know the words. You've heard them. God's Word is powerful and effective after all. As long as I put my time in church, have the devotions, everything should be right between God and me, right? As long as I'm physically present in this building, I'm at least hearing the words even if my mind is off in who-knows-what land. We can treat God's Word like another academic exercise. You know this stuff already. You've studied it. You've memorized it. You've been confirmed! You know what you are supposed to do; if you say it enough times maybe that should count for something...

But if Jesus' words are nothing more than words, it's hard to hear them over all the other words, promises, noise in life. The foundation starts to look like just another fact you learn in school and another thing you can forget along with so much else you've forgotten since 8th grade. If we just hear the words, then they seem so tiny and small; rather insignificant. What Jesus says doesn't seem real enough, relevant enough, secure enough, worth the effort to try and build upon in this current day and age. It's all too easy to treat Jesus' words like another instruction manual that you read through, put into the junk drawer, and forget about as you go about with everything else.

Then all too soon the next storm of life blows in and, "I know what Jesus says, but..." "I know what Jesus promises, but what if..." You see other people's lives and they seem to be doing better, more successful, more like you want. We have this terrible power and capability that we can pick up our homes that were built on the solid foundation and move them. We may try to build our lives on something else that seems to be working better or has more visible results. But what happens if we move our foundation onto something else? Look at the foolish man in Matthew 7. What you thought would give you security comes crashing down. One might try and blame the storms and difficulties—if that didn't happen, then life wouldn't be like this. You can try and blame the foundation—if only Jesus did *this*, then I wouldn't be acting like *that*. But the real fault lies in our own foolishness of just hearing the words and not doing them.

"So that must mean I need to do more, right? That means I should do nothing else except devote my time, life, and study of Jesus' words. I just need to work harder at it, right?"

That's not what Jesus is saying either. The wise builder rests on Jesus' words seeing that everything he does not only relies on the foundation but comes from it too. Jesus already

set apart all those works for him to do before the creation of the world and he brings the wise builder along for the ride. The wise one does not need to worry about doing enough. In Jesus, everything is right between him and God.

She recognizes that she cannot control this world and its storms. She doesn't need to. Jesus, her foundation, is Lord of lords. All rule and authority belongs to him. He's working out everything for good, including for her. He's got this. So she goes about doing her various callings whether she is a student or a spouse or a teacher or a daughter, whatever they might be.

He daily confesses that he has failed one way or another. He's a sinner. But when the waves of guilt and shame threaten to drown him he rests in those baptismal waters where that Old Man of sin was already drowned. It's there where God marked him with the cross and declared him God's child in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He rests in a Savior who resisted all temptation for him and whose blood pouring off of that cross washes him of every sin. Daily a new man of faith rises from the waters of baptism desiring to do Jesus' words. He approaches the table, takes and eats, takes and drink the Savior who said, "Do this; this body and blood is for you and the forgiveness of your sins."

When the wise builder looks at this world falling apart around him, he rests securely in the one who lived, died, and rose again for him and who promises that nothing in all of creation can separate him from Jesus' forgiving love. He believes it because the Holy Spirit worked faith in his heart that believes and latches onto the rock. He rests securely because he also knows and believes that it's not about his own strength of faith; no, it's the rock that holds onto him. This faith hears Jesus' words and cannot help but do what it says. It doesn't need to be coerced or obligated to do; faith already does before asking if there's good works to do. At the same time, he continues to go back to God's Word to hear Jesus' words again of God's grace and Jesus' love because he also knows how easily and quickly he can forget.

This is for you. When the winds of life beat you up, when the responsibilities and demands threaten to drown you, when temptations pelt you, be at peace. Your foundation Jesus lives. The storms inevitably will come; by no means are they easy. But it's okay because your foundation is Jesus. Hear his words. Put them into practice. Build wisely on the Rock. Amen.