

## **The Parables of Jesus Lesson 19**

### **The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders**

This parable contains familiar imagery to many people, one man builds his house on a rock, another builds his house on the sand. The storm comes and one man's house falls, while the other one still stands. This parable can speak on a couple of levels and today we will examine the parable, look at what it meant to the original hearers, and what we can take from it to apply to our lives.

#### **The Text of the Parable**

Matthew 7:21-28 "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. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' <sup>24</sup> "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. <sup>25</sup> 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. <sup>26</sup> 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. <sup>27</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." <sup>28</sup> When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, <sup>29</sup> because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

Luke 6:46-49 "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say? <sup>47</sup> As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. <sup>48</sup> They are like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. <sup>49</sup> But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete."

#### **Background and Context**

The context here in Matthew is the conclusion of Jesus' famous 'Sermon on the Mount' (In Luke, this is the Sermon on the Plain). To help us understand the conclusion of this sermon, we must understand what this sermon is. The sermon seeks to do two things: reveal the true spirit of the law, and to be an indictment against the Pharisees' self-righteous religion.

First of all, this sermon was preached to the Jews under the law. This is Jesus expounding upon the true *spirit* of the law as opposed to the strict *letter* of the law. However, Jesus takes the law and even brings it to a higher standard (anger=murder; lust=adultery, etc.). Jesus is dealing the heart behind the law, not just the behavior.

Secondly, the sermon is meant to contrast the true spirit of the law with the legalism and self-righteousness of the Pharisees. Several times in the sermon, Jesus refers to the 'hypocrites', which is a word he used for the Pharisees. So he contrasts the outward show of giving, praying and fasting of the Pharisees to the humble and secret giving which should be practiced. In the chapter of this parable, Jesus is identifying 'false prophets' which is again referencing the Pharisees.

So this sermon is really a dividing line between those who will follow Jesus and his word, partaking in his kingdom, and those who will not obey Jesus' word and follow him, and will miss out on the kingdom.

The bottom line, even when Jesus is preaching a 'hyper-law' in the sermon is to show Israel their ultimate need for a savior through his grace. That our righteousness or works could never achieve God's righteousness, we need Christ.

## Exegesis of the Parable

For simplicity, we will examine the passage from Matthew's Gospel.

**Matt. 7:15-20:** This passage, along with our next verses, even though not part of the parable helps us set the context for the parable. The context is identifying 'false prophets'; religious leaders who claim to speak for God, who *appear* righteous, yet they lead people astray. This is definitely a reference to the Pharisees who Jesus called 'the blind leading the blind' among other things.

He pictures these false prophets as 'ferocious wolves in sheep's clothing'. They outwardly appear harmless, good and righteous, but they are inwardly corrupt. He then pictures them as a 'bad tree' that does not bear good fruit that will be cut down and thrown into the fire (a picture of judgment). A note that when people often talk about 'fruit' they look at the outward works of a person, but notice here that outwardly the false prophets appear good, they have 'good works' to show, but it's their inward attitude and their unbelief that causes the fruit to be bad.

**Matt. 7:21-23:** Like the previous verses, these verses again help set the context. There are those who would maintain their entrance into the kingdom would be based on their works; the things they did for Jesus (Lord, Lord, have we not...). Luke summarizes these verses in just one verse, '*why do you call me Lord, Lord and not do what I say*' (Lk. 6:46). So entrance into the kingdom is not with 'lip service' nor is it with an outward show of righteousness (Did we not...), but the inward belief and condition of the heart that gains one entrance into the kingdom. Notice the final phrase, "I never knew you, away from me evildoers'. These are unbelievers that Jesus didn't know, and they are evildoers, and it is still in the context of the false prophets, the Pharisees and those of the like, these are not Christians who fear that the Lord will one day say 'depart from me'.

**Matt. 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."

This verse is an encouragement to 'everyone' to not be like the false-prophets and evildoers who hear the word of Christ and reject it, but to hear it and put it into 'practice', or obey it. This is equated with the sower sowing seed into good ground and it producing a harvest. The Pharisees heard the same words of Jesus, but did not receive nor obey them.

The words of Jesus are the words about the Kingdom, the same as John the Baptist's words to 'repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.' The words are also Jesus' words throughout the parable who call the people to a higher form of righteousness than that of the Pharisees. And the words of Jesus are the words about Him and believing that God sent him, that people are to believe on Him (as referenced many times in the Gospel of John). Jesus isn't preaching a legalistic salvation where we enter the kingdom by doing works, but by the ultimate 'work of God' which is to believe. Then, the righteousness of the law will flow from that obedience.

Jesus calls this person a 'wise man' who built his house on 'the rock'. Wisdom is hearing, receiving, believing, and living out Jesus' words. It's submitting and obeying him from a pure heart, not hardening our heart and rejecting Christ. Also here, the rock, is Jesus himself. He is the foundation to which we are to build our lives upon. For the Jews, Jesus is the foundation or cornerstone of a new temple, who the builders (the Pharisees) rejected. The foundation of Jesus is firm, secure, and will endure through the storm.

**Matt. 7:25:** "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."

Here we have an illustration of a storm: rain, streams rising, winds blowing and beating against a house'. There have been a couple of ways the storm as been interpreted.

First, the storm has been interpreted as the trials of life. The crises and things that we go through that test our faith. We are all going to face 'storms' in our lives which we will have to endure, and many people view what Jesus says here as these kinds of storms.

Another way this has been interpreted is the storm is judgment. Judgment will come upon the wicked, and judgement is alluded to all throughout the gospels. It will be these false prophets and evildoers that will not be able to withstand the storm of judgment, and their house will fall.

The verse ends with the result of the wise person's house in the storm, 'yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock'. Obviously, the wise person will endure the storm because they built their house on the rock. They build their life on Christ, they have heard his word, believe it, and it has taken root to produce in their lives.

**Matt. 7:26-27** These verses of the parables illustrate the opposite of what we just read. Just like in proverbs, the wise and foolish are contrasted, it is the same here. The foolish hear the word of Christ, do not believe it, do not put it into practice, building their house upon sand (their own righteousness) therefore their house come crashing down with the storm.

### Interpretation and Application of the Parable

As we noted above, obviously the rock foundation is Jesus and those who build their house (life) on him is considered wise and can withstand the storm.

Below are some key principles of interpretation and application:

**1. Christ as the Foundation** – Notice the emphasis here is not the strength of the house, but the strength of the foundation. A building is only as strong as its foundation, and Jesus is the unmovable rock. When he is our foundation, we may be shaken, but we will not collapse. Faith doesn't guarantee storm-free living, but it does guarantee an storm-proof foundation.

Paul says about foundations: *"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."* (1 Corinthians 3:11). Also, as previously mentioned, Jesus is the cornerstone of the new 'spiritual' temple that God was raising up, therefore Israel was to build their foundation on Him as Messiah. Peter echoes this: Jesus is the *"chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame."* (1 Peter 2:6, quoting Isaiah 28:16).

If your foundation is anything else—career, relationships, money, morality—it will shift like sand. Christ alone is unshakable. Hebrews tells us that we have received a kingdom that cannot be shaken (Heb. 12:28).

**2. True Faith Leading to Heartfelt Obedience** – In this parable there is an emphasis in 'putting the words of Jesus into practice' and not just hearing them. The Pharisees did not do this, they were told to 'bring forth fruit in keeping with repentance' (Matt. 3:7), but there was no good fruit in them, therefore they did not believe Jesus' words. There are two aspects to hearing the word and 'doing' the word.

The first act of obedience to Jesus' words is not an act of 'doing' but of 'believing', we must believe the Gospel to be saved. John 6:28-29 says, *"Then they asked him, 'What must we do to do the works God requires?'"* <sup>29</sup> *Jesus answered, 'The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.'* This is when we receive the word of Christ and have faith in it (not just mental knowledge but firm trust).

Secondly, as believers, we desire to live according to God's word. The scripture tells us that 'faith without works is dead' (James 2:26). All we have then is 'lip service faith' not true, active faith. If we have faith, there will be some form of accompanying good words produced by the Holy Spirit in us. This is also why James calls us to be 'doers of the word, not hearers only' (James 1:22). These works, or obedience, is not the cause of our salvation, but the result of it.

**3. Storms as Judgment** – The first metaphor that the storm can represent is the storm of judgment. The judgment here has been interpreted as the ‘final judgment’ of all humanity, as well as any national judgment upon Israel which is alluded to many times in the Gospels. John the Baptist warned the Pharisees of ‘coming wrath’ and told them to ‘produce fruit in keeping with repentance’ (Matt. 3:7). Jesus prophesies coming judgment when he says of the temple in Jerusalem ‘not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down’ (Matt. 24:2). This also corresponds with judgment upon the false prophets of Israel in Ezekiel 13 where judgment is pictured as rain, hailstones, violent winds which knocks down and destroys the wall that the false prophets have built.

In a longer view of judgment, many people see this as the final judgment of all humanity. In this interpretation, parables such as the wheat and tares, sheep and goats is often seen as a time of ‘separation’ at the time of judgment where the righteous and the wicked are separated, the righteous to life and the wicked to punishment. The ‘separation’ theme certainly can apply to this passage of the wise and foolish. For believers however, this judgment is not something we have to fear because of our righteous standing in Christ.

**John 5:24** – *“Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.”*

**1 John 4:17–18** – *“This is how love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment: In this world we are like Jesus. There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear.”*

The thought of judgment for the believer is a good thing, because our judgment is a judgment of ‘not guilty’ because of the blood of Jesus Christ, therefore we can have confidence on the day of judgment. Jesus bore the judgment we deserved. The storm of the wrath of sin already fell on Him, as Peter said, *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree.”* (1 Peter 2:24).

**4. Storms as Trials** – The second metaphor the storm can represent are the storms of trial and tribulations in this life. Many scriptures refer to God being a shelter and refuge from the storm. Jesus calmed the storm when he and the disciples were in the boat. Jesus said that ‘in the world you will have trouble...’ (John 16:33). Peter says that trials refine our faith and show it’s genuineness (1 Peter 1:6-7). Hebrews 12:2 tells us we can endure trials by ‘fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith’.

Our faith in Christ is our safety in the storms:

**1. Faith reminds us of God’s presence in the storm** – we don’t face storms alone, Christ is with us and in us, giving courage and comfort.

**2. Faith anchors us in God’s promises** – faith clings on to what never changes, God’s word and God’s promises.

**3. Faith gives us a new perspective on suffering** – faith helps reframe trials as opportunities for growth and considers them only ‘light and momentary’ in the view of eternity (2 Cor. 4:17).

**4. Faith allows us to rely on God’s strength, not ours** – in our times of trial and weakness, Christ’s power sustains us. His grace is sufficient for us (2 cor. 12:9), and we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (Phil 4:13).

**5. Faith produces endurance and keeps our hope secure** – according to James, our faith will produce endurance (James 1:3), allowing us to withstand the storm and come through victorious. This hope anchors our soul firm and secure in Christ (Heb. 6:9).

So no matter which interpretation we choose, the message is the same: If Christ is our foundation, we can stand through any and every storm.