

Teaching

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.

Matthew 7:28-29, NRSV

We live in an age that can feel saturated with information and advice.

From podcasts to self-help books, everyone seems to have suggestions on how to live well. There's nothing wrong with good and helpful ideas. But it's easy to become a consumer of so much that nothing creates a lasting change.

As Jesus concludes his revolutionary Sermon on the Mount, he gives a clear call to a new way of life in the form of a simple, powerful parable. He contrasts two kinds of people, both of whom hear his words: those who act on them, and those who don't. The difference, he says, is not a matter of who hears his teaching, but of faith that leads to action. It's the difference between a life built on a solid rock foundation and one built on shifting sand, and it often takes a storm to reveal which is which.

Now choose a track and then return for...

Hymn Suggestions

1. "My Hope Is Built on Nothing Less" (On Christ the Solid Rock)
2. "How Firm a Foundation"
3. "Trust and Obey"

Closing Prayer

Lord Jesus, our wise master builder,

We confess that we can sometimes be foolish builders. We hear your words, we agree with your words, but we fail to put them into practice.

Forgive us for sometimes building our lives on the sand.

By your Holy Spirit, help us to be doers of your word, and not hearers only.

May our lives be so founded on you, the solid Rock, that we might withstand the storms of life, and stand as a testimony to your wisdom and faithfulness. Amen.



Reflective

Let's read the passage: Matthew 7:24-29.

Jesus has just delivered the most famous sermon ever preached, the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew chapters 5-7). He has taught about blessing, anger, lust, prayer, money, and worry. Now he brings it all to a close. Everything he has said comes down to this.

He presents us with a wise builder. This person hears Jesus' words and, crucially, "puts them into practice". Hearing is not enough. Agreement is not enough. The wisdom is in the doing. This person's life is like a house built on solid rock.

Then Jesus describes the storm. The rain, the floods, the wind – they beat against the house. These storms are not an 'if', but a 'when'. Trials, grief, opposition, and doubt will come to everyone. But the house on the rock stands firm. Its foundation holds it secure.

(Pause for a time of silence. Think about the 'storms' you have faced or are facing. What has kept you standing?)

Now consider the foolish builder. This person hears the very same words from Jesus. They may have enjoyed the sermon, even taken notes. But they do not put the words into practice. Their life is like a house built on sand. On a calm, sunny day, it might look identical to the wise builder's house. But when the storm comes, the result is catastrophic. The house falls "with a great crash". The collapse is total.

(Pause again for a time of silence. The house on the sand looks fine until the storm hits. Be honest with yourself: are there areas of your life you're building more on 'sand' than 'rock'?)

The final verses tell us the crowd's reaction. They were "amazed", because Jesus taught with an authority they had never heard before. He didn't quote other rabbis; he spoke as the source of wisdom itself. His words are not mere advice, they are the rock on which a life can be built.

For quiet reflection

- Can you think of a specific teaching from Jesus (perhaps from the Sermon on the Mount) that you have heard many times but struggle to follow?
- What would it look like to 'put that teaching into practice' in a fresh way this week?
- What are some of the 'sandy' foundations we can be tempted to build our lives on today?

Creative Prayer Response

Find a small stone or pebble. Hold it in your hand and feel its shape and texture, its solidity. As you hold it, pray through these words of the hymn: "On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand." Ask God to show you any 'sinking sand' in your life, and to help you build everything on the rock of Jesus and his wisdom.

Takeaway for this week

Choose one verse from the Sermon on the Mount (e.g., Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers", or Matthew 6:33 "But seek first his kingdom...") and make it your focus for the week. Write it out and put it somewhere you will see it often. Actively look for one opportunity to live it out. For example:

- Pray for someone who has wronged you (Matthew 5:44).
- When you give (time, money, or help), do it secretly without seeking praise (Matthew 6:3-4).
- Consciously refuse to worry about tomorrow, and instead give your anxieties to God (Matthew 6:34).

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer



Digging Deeper

Read Matthew 7:24-29

Discussion Starters:

1. This parable is the conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount (**Matthew 5-7**). How does it function as a capstone for all the teaching that has come before it?
2. What is the key difference between the wise and foolish builders? Is it their intelligence, their understanding, or something else?
3. Is Jesus teaching that we are saved by our obedience? How do we square this passage with the doctrine of salvation by grace (e.g., **Ephesians 2:8-9**)? (Hint: think about the difference between the root of salvation and the fruit of salvation).
4. Verse 29 says that Jesus taught "as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law". What was the typical method of teaching used by the Scribes and Pharisees? What was different about Jesus' approach?
5. What kind of 'storms' do you think Jesus has in mind?
6. In what way is Jesus the embodiment of God's wisdom, fulfilling the Old Testament wisdom tradition?

Applying this to our lives

- How can we as a church community move beyond being mere 'hearers' of the word to becoming 'doers'? What could help with this?
- What are the biggest 'storms' facing us today? How does building on the rock of Christ's teaching equip us to face them?
- How can we cultivate a sense of Jesus as the one bringing God's wisdom, so that his words carry more weight than the thousands of other voices we hear each day?

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FAMILIES & ALL-AGE

Matthew 7:24-29 - The wise and foolish builders (at the end of the Sermon on the Mount)

Helpful Resources

- Lego or some other type of building material
- A tray that has a solid base and another tray with something wobbly and soft
- Watering can

INTRODUCTION ACTIVITY

Ask everyone if they enjoy building sand castles, and when the last time was that they built one? What did it look like? What features did they include? Would they like to go back next time they're at the same beach to see it again? Why not? Why won't it still be there? But other castles like Arundel are still there, what's the difference with castles built on sand?

Interactive Story

!DURING THIS STORY EVERY TIME YOU HEAR THE WORD 'ROCK' YOU HAVE TO STAY STRONG AND STILL. WHEN YOU HEAR 'SAND' YOU HAVE TO WIGGLE AND WOBBLE, 'STORM' - BLOW, 'CRASH' - FALL FLAT!!

One day Jesus went up a mountain to teach about lots of different things, and how to live like him. At the end, he told a parable, which is a short story with a special meaning. This parable is about two builders.

The first builder thought very carefully about where to build, and what material to build on. When he decided to build a house, he didn't just build it anywhere. He dug and dug and dug until he found a big, strong **ROCK!** That was a lot of hard work, but he knew it was important. He built his house right on top of that solid **ROCK.** The house had a roof, and windows, and a door, and it was beautiful!

Then, a big **STORM** came. The rain came pouring down, and the wind howled and blew. A flood of water rushed toward the house and pushed against it. But because the house was built on the solid **ROCK,** it didn't move! The rain and wind couldn't knock it down. It stayed safe and strong. **!DO THE FIRST BUILD ON SOMETHING SOLID AND STRONG, SEE BELOW!**

The second builder was a bit silly. He was in a hurry and didn't want to do all the hard work of digging. He just built his house right on top of the soft, squishy **SAND.** It was a pretty house, too, with windows and a door, but it was sitting on a very weak foundation.

Then, the big **STORM** came. The rain poured down, the wind howled, and the flood of water rushed toward the house. The water washed away the **SAND** underneath the house. Whoosh! Because the house was built on the **SAND,** it couldn't stand up to the **STORM.** It wobbled and tumbled and fell down with a big **CRASH!**

!BUILD AGAIN BUT THIS TIME ON A SOFT AND WOBBLY SURFACE, SEE BELOW - MAKE SURE THE BUILDINGS FALL DOWN!!

Jesus said that we can be a bit like those builders in the way we live our lives. If we listen to His words and trust him, we are like the smart builder who built his house on the **ROCK.** When things get hard or scary, we can stay strong because we are listening to Jesus. But if we hear what Jesus says and don't do it, we are like the silly builder who built on the **SAND.** When things get tough, it might feel like our lives are wiggling and wobbling.

!PLAY A GAME OF MUSICAL STATUES!

Jesus wants us all to trust him and to build our lives on his wisdom (good advice).

GAME AND ACTIVITY SUGGESTIONS

- **Song:** "The Wise Man Built His House Upon the Rock", can be sung without music or play a version from Youtube.
- **Game:** when the music is playing you have to wiggle and wobble like the house on the sand. When the music stops, try and stay still and strong like the house on the rock.
- **Activity:** Have a tray of sand, and another with something solid like a large flat stone. Ask everyone to try and build a small lego house and place it on the surfaces. Then, pour water over them both from a watering can, so that the sand moves and the houses become unsteady.

TALKING POINTS

- What was the difference between the people in Jesus' story?
- And what did he say it meant to be like the wise builder?
- Do you think Jesus will forgive us when we sometimes mess things up?

Now return to the first page for Hymn suggestions and a closing prayer