

What Are You Building Your Life On?

Matthew 7:24-29

In 1174, the Italian architect Bonnano Pisano began work on what would become his most famous project: a separately standing bell tower for the Cathedral of the city of Pisa. The tower was to be eight stories high. That's 185 feet tall.

There was just one "little" problem: the builders quickly discovered that the soil was much softer than they had anticipated, and the foundation was far too shallow to adequately hold the structure. And sure enough, before long the whole structure had begun to tilt ... and it continued to tilt ... until finally the architect and the builders realized that nothing could be done to make the Leaning Tower of Pisa straight again.

It took 176 years to build the Tower of Pisa and during that time many things were done to try and compensate for the tilt. The foundation was shored up. The upper levels were even built at an angle to try to make the top of the tower look straight. Nothing worked. The tower has stood for over 800 years but there are definitely problems.

Not too long ago, after having been closed for almost a dozen years, the Leaning Tower of Pisa was finally reopened to the public. During that 12-year-closure, engineers completed a 25 million dollar renovation project designed to stabilize the tower. They removed 110 tons of dirt, and reduced its famous lean by about sixteen inches.

Why was that necessary? Because the tower has been titling further and further away from vertical for hundreds of years, to the point that the top of tower was seventeen feet further south than the bottom, and Italian authorities were concerned that if nothing was done, it would soon collapse.

What was the problem? Was it bad design? Poor workmanship? An inferior grade of marble? No. The problem was what was underneath. The sandy soil on which the city of Pisa was built was must not stable enough to support a monument of this size. The problems all stem from the foundation.

In Matthew 7 Jesus gives us a story, a tale of two foundations upon which are built two houses. The story is simple and to the point. Even though it may be very familiar, let me encourage you to read it as for the first time. Perhaps you'll see some truths you've never noticed before.

This story comes at the end of the section of the book of Matthew known as The Sermon on the Mount. Beginning in chapter 5 and concluding with this passage, Jesus uttered the greatest sermon ever preached. 5:1 says that after "**seeing the multitudes**" perhaps thousands of people, Jesus "**went up on a mountain**" where He was "**seated**" and then "**He opened His mouth and taught them.**"

He begins with the Beatitudes explaining the "**blessed**" life in His kingdom in vv.3-10. He teaches us to be "**salt**" and "**light**" in the world. He calls us to realize that our righteousness must not be merely superficial. We must not

practice the hypocritical religion of the Pharisees. He said in 5:20, "**For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.**"

He reminds us that adultery takes place in the heart and that God sees marriage as sacred and binding. He compels us to be honest and trustworthy to let our yes be yes and our no be no. We are to go the second mile, to serve above the call of duty.

In chapter 6, the Master teaches us to do good deeds to be seen of God and not men. He teaches us how to pray and principle of prayer and fasting. He points out the folly of making only earthly investments and encourages us to lay up "**treasures in heaven.**" The Lord tells us not to worry and calls us to seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

In chapter 7, Jesus condemns our judgmental attitudes teaching us to "**judge not that you be not judged.**" He motivates us to persistence in our prayers, to keep on asking, seeking and knocking. As He comes to the concluding verses of this magnificent sermon, Jesus draws His hearers to make a decision. He warns of the judgment to come. He pleads that we choose the "**narrow gate**" in vv.13-14. He reminds us that not everyone who calls Him "**Lord, lord**" will enter His kingdom. This last story wraps up that teaching.

Jesus challenges us to examine our lives to see on what are we building. Is it a solid foundation for life, or is it the shifting sand that will give way under pressure? Listen to the story again:

Let me point out four major life truths from Jesus' story:

I. We are all Responsible for what we do with the words of Jesus.

"Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them...But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them,"
(Matthew 7:24,26)

A. Jesus' words call us to make a choice.

Listen to some of the words of Jesus:

1. In v.13, He said, "**Narrow is the gate and difficult is they way which leads to life.**"
2. He said in John 10:9, "**I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved.**"
3. He said in John 14:6, "**I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.**"

B. Everyone will answer the question, "What have I done with Jesus?"

1. In v.24, He describes the person who **"hears these sayings of Mine and does them"** as a **"wise man."** On the other hand, in v.26, He describes **"everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them"** as a **"foolish man."**
 2. Notice that both the **"wise"** and the **"foolish"** heard the words of Jesus. The difference is not in what they heard but what they did.
 3. We will all answer to God about what we have done with Jesus. This is a universal truth.
 - a. Heb.9:27 says, **"And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment."**
 - b. Phil.2:10-11 speaks of future time when **"at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."**
 4. In today's society, we can find excuses for anything. We blame our parents, our teachers, our spouses, and our children. Our courts are full of people involved in lawsuits because no one will accept blame. Mark my words, everyone will stand before God and no one will have an excuse for rejecting Jesus. There will be no free passes or "Get out of hell free" cards.
 - a. In John 15:22, Jesus said of mankind, **"If I had not come and spoken to them, they would have no sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin."**
 - b. Rom.1:20 says, **"For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse."**
- C. You and I are personally responsible to God. You will answer to God about Jesus and His words. What choice will you have made?

II. We all Choose a Foundation for Life.

A. Some build on a firm foundation (v.24).

1. Just as the men build **"houses"** in this story we all build our lives. We all choose what we will believe and not believe. We choose our morals. We choose our values. We choose our priorities. We choose our attitudes. We choose our philosophies. We choose what we will do with the message of Jesus Christ.
2. This first man is called **"wise"** by Jesus. He is **"wise"** because he looked beyond the present to the future. He could envision a day when he would need a strong foundation. He heard what Jesus had to say and obeyed. He entered into the **"narrow gate."**
3. Jesus says that the foundation chosen by this man was **"the rock."** **"Rock"** here comes from the Greek word *petra* which does not mean a stone or even a boulder, but a great outcropping of rock like the side of a mountain. It is solid, stable and unmovable.

4. The Bible refers to Jesus as the petra, "**the Rock.**" He said in Mat.16:18, "**On this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades [hell] shall not prevail against it.**" In many other passages, Jesus is called "**the chief cornerstone.**"

5. I love the words of a hymn we sang a few minutes ago:

My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame but wholly lean on Jesus name.
On Christ, the solid Rock; I stand; all other ground is sinking sand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

6. You can be a "**wise**" person by building your life on Jesus. An old insurance advertisement used to say, "**Get yourself a piece of the rock.**" It referred to financial security. By building on the "Solid Rock" you can have eternal security.

B. Some build on an shifting foundation (v.26a).

1. Jesus very bluntly describes this person as a "**foolish man.**" He has heard the words of Jesus but has not obeyed them. This is the person who has rejected God's call in his life. He has put off or rejected salvation. He's heard the sermons and the Bible lessons. He has listened to friends and family members speak of his need of Christ. He has not responded.

2. You might think Jesus sounded harsh in calling this person a "**foolish man.**"

I want you to close your eyes and imagine with me. Imagine your neighbor's house is on fire. Imagine that everyone in the family makes it outside but the dad. He chooses to sit down in his easy chair even though the house is in flames. People call to him from the front lawn. The doorway is open. The firemen try to drag him out. He won't budge. Wouldn't you call him a "**foolish man.**" This is the person who has not accepted Christ. This is the person who hears God's word, but does not put it into practice.

3. Jesus says that he builds his house on "**the sand.**" "**Sand**" is never stable. It shifts, drifts and blows with the wind.

4. The ways of the world are a lot like "**sand.**" Men's opinions, philosophies, standards, and morals are constantly changing. We live in a day in which the consensus is that there is no absolute right or wrong. This post-Christian culture believes that everything is relative. That's shifting "**sand.**"

5. What type of foundation sounds best to you? Would you rather build on the eternal security of Almighty God or the shifting sands of men's whims?

C. Third, notice that these houses seem similar from the outside.

1. Jesus uses almost identical language in vv.24 and 26. The houses seem to be hit by the same storm. There is little external difference.

2. In the same way there are many that look like genuine Christians, talk like genuine Christians, even act like genuine Christians but in reality have built their lives on shifting sand.

a. In vv. 15-16, Jesus says that there are many **"false prophets"** who are like wolves in sheep's clothing.

b. In vv.17-20, He compares them to **"bad trees"** who bear **"bad fruit"** who are good for nothing but to be **"cut down and thrown into the fire."**

c. In vv.21-23, Jesus says that many will call Him **"Lord, lord"** but He will say to them, **"I never knew you, depart from Me."**

Now, the man who built his house on the sand probably did a lot of things right. For instance, he may have been diligent, energetic, and worked hard to build his house. It's no easy thing to put up a house, and especially not in those days, with no power tools or Home Depot. He had to carry stone, cut wood, and form bricks out of clay. It probably took him weeks and months of backbreaking labor. He didn't quit; he persevered until the structure was complete. Yet in the end, all his hard work was for nothing.

I point this out because we often confuse religious activity with godliness. We assume that if someone is hard-working and energetic, they must be a sincere Christian. They must be close to God if they're doing so much "for the Lord". And so we make ministry involvement the mark of spirituality. But that's a mistake, because all of that activity and service may be built upon a foundation of sand. They could be doing all those things for all the wrong reasons. It may not be obvious what those reasons are; just as it may not be obvious what kind of foundation is underneath a house. But in the end, the true motivation will become apparent. Here's the truth of the gospel, even the most costly service and the most strenuous labors won't save you.

Jesus says up in verse 22, **"Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'"** In other words, they did a lot of religious ministry, all in the name of Jesus. But it was worthless, because they did not have a relationship with Jesus. He said in verse 23, **"And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"** What you claim to have done for Jesus does not matter at all in you don't know Jesus, if you don't have that intimate, personal relationship with Him.

The house built on the sand was a probably good, solid structure; one that to all appearances was well-built. It didn't fall down right away. It wasn't obviously defective. As long as the weather was good, it was perfectly adequate. It wasn't until the heavy rains came that it collapsed.

I want you to know that just as this man's diligence was no sign he was doing the right thing, neither was the apparent success of his labors. Yes, he managed to accomplish something which may have looked impressive and worthwhile. But that didn't mean that he was in good shape. Because underneath it all, just

waiting for the first real storm, was that hidden weakness, that lack of a good foundation.

It is possible to accomplish a great deal in this world without Christ. You can build a business or a career. You can make money. You can have a reasonably good marriage. You can develop a wide circle of friends. You can do good things – give money to charity, coach Little League, be a Big Brother, adopt a third-world baby, do pro-bono legal work for the poor, volunteer at a retirement home. You can have a good time and enjoy life. You can do many big, important, impressive, and admirable things. But eventually, a storm will come along which will bring it all tumbling down.

3. There are people who hear this message who look like, talk like, and act like believers, but in their heart of hearts, they do not know Christ. Be sure of your foundation.

III. We all Face Various Storms.

A. Storms fell on both houses.

1. Vv.25 and 27 are almost identical. He says that "**the rain descended**" and "**the floods came**" and "**the winds blew**."
2. That storms will fall is a certainty. It matters not what foundation we build upon. They storms will come. It makes no difference whether you are a believer or an unbeliever, the storms will come. Following Jesus does not exempt us from life's storms! Jesus is not teaching a parable about how to build our houses in protected areas. There are no storm-free zones! This is a parable about foundations, not avoiding the weather. The outcome is determined by the foundation we're sitting on.

B. We experience different types of storms.

1. There are storms of SICKNESS. Many of us have faced and will face severe health problems either in our own bodies or in those whom we love. Nothing is more frustrating than to deal with a sickness that you cannot control or change.
2. There are storms of FINANCES. Many time we face the pressure of our debts being greater than our bank account.
3. There are storms of DEPRESSION. Sometimes we get to the place where there are no blue skies. All we see is clouds.
4. There are storms of DEATH. All of us will face this most bitter storm. Are you prepared for your death?

Being a Christian does not exempt you from the storms of life. The truth is that you may even face more storms and more intense storms as a Christian than those who are not believers. The good news is that if your life is built on the rock of Jesus Christ, no matter what storms may come, you will be able to stand. God will get you through it all. It may not be easy, but God will be good.

IV. We all Experience the Consequences of our Choices.

A. Building on a solid foundation will stand.

1. Jesus says the "**wise man**," the one who built his house "**on the rock**" experienced all the forces of the storms of life. However, no matter how the storms beat down on his house, Jesus said "**it did not fall for it was founded on the rock.**"

2. When you build your life on Jesus, you can let the storms howl.

3. When your life is built on Jesus, you can even weather the storm of death. Paul said in Phil.1:21, "**For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain.**"

B. Building on a shifting foundation will fall.

1. Jesus says that the "**foolish man**" who built his house on shifting "**sand**" faced the difficult storms of life and his house "**fell.**"

2. I don't know how people face the storms of this world without Christ. As I look back on every crisis, Jesus has been my shield and my comforter.

3. Notice that Jesus not only says that the house "**fell**" but "**great was its fall.**" The great fall of a life not built on Christ is a fall into a Christless eternity, an eternity in hell.

CONCLUSION: **Two Final Thoughts**

1. If you only hear and read truth, but don't live it, you are not prepared for the storms to come.

2. If your foundation is sure, no storm will cause your life to collapse.