

## INTRODUCTION

Today we read and study the last section of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. The second half of Matthew 7 concludes the sermon with a series of **warnings**. Recall that the Sermon began with the Beatitudes—8 beatitudes that demonstrate Jesus' *tenderness*... Now Matthew brings this series of lessons to a close with a strong measure of *toughness* by warning the reader that this sermon is not a set of suggestions nor is it intellectual musing; it is a call to heed the demands and commands of following Jesus.

Sermon Begins—**8 Beatitudes**—tenderness.  
Sermon Ends—**4 Warnings**—toughness.

‘Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the road is easy that leads to destruction, and there are many who take it. For the gate is narrow and the road is hard that leads to life, and there are few who find it.

‘Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thorns, or figs from thistles? In the same way, every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a bad tree bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus you will know them by their fruits.

‘Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord”, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?”

Then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.”

‘Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!’

Now 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.

This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

## INTRODUCTION

**Two** gates. **Two** trees. **Two** doers. **Two** houses. Each of the four warnings is presented as a set of *pairs*. Did you notice? A right way and a wrong way. Good fruit and bad fruit. True and false discipleship. Wise *and* foolish ways of building a house. Remember my declaration last week that this Sermon is **hard**? Hard to put into practice? Jesus agrees: “*The gate is narrow and the road hard that leads to real life, and very few people find this narrow gate.*” That last statement is sobering. Very few people, according to Jesus, find the narrow gate, the hard road and real life. Life outside loyalty to Jesus Christ, which is the life of the secular world, is a life that seems full of possibilities, tempting options, free without restraint—is *that* not a fuller, richer life than one with lots of do’s and don’ts? Not so according to Jesus.

The contrast of two trees and their fruits is a warning about false prophets. Beware *false prophets* or people who teach false doctrine. Beware because they will look Christian (sheep’s clothing) and may be well-intentioned and perhaps even winsome. But you can recognize them by their fruit, by what is produced. Good trees or good prophets produce good fruit and false prophets produce bad fruit. The letter called First John was written late in the first century to help the church recognize false teaching; John’s “three tests” had to do with how do you see Jesus, how do you treat the brothers & sisters and how you practice Jesus’ commands.

The third warning, the *two doers* warning reflects the distinction between the fruit of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit. It is possible to work for Jesus (even spectacularly) and not to work under Jesus. In the Sermon Jesus calls us to Christian character—Christian service follows Jesus--obedience.

Finally we come to the fourth and final warning. And this warning about two houses is presented in *parable* form.

Jesus or Matthew placed the parable carefully not randomly at the sermon’s end. After all of Jesus’ teaching we read these words: “*Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like...*”

The comparison features seeing what is the **same** and what is **different** in this little narrative. This story-parable features two people who are building a house; what about each builder looks *similar* and then looks *different*?

### SAME

- two *builders*
- storms* (adversity) come for both builders (rains, streams rose, wind blew)
- the buildings are *tested* by storms

### DIFFERENT

- one who puts “words” into *practice* and one who does not

-one builds on *rock* and the other builds on *sand* (foundations)

-one house *stands* and the other house *falls*

-one is called *wise* and one is called *foolish*

Sometimes when we notice a contrast in buildings or construction we think of the architectural style; or we consider the materials used in construction. Can you recall a passage of Scripture that highlights good and bad building materials? See 1 Corinthians chapter 3. Wood, hay and stubble are contrasted with gold, silver and precious stones.

**Example:** sermon in Brazil—the Three Little Pigs story (1982)

But the contrast here is all about the **foundation**. And the material for the foundation! A good foundation corresponds with a wise builder who builds his house on the rock (probably into the rock); and a poor foundation (sand) belongs to the foolish builder.

**Example:** shrink-swell soil in Chesterfield County (Kohl's)

The building analogy with an emphasis on the foundation is employed to talk about hearing AND doing. Jesus has taught the disciples. He speaks his word to the church. It is good to hear these words. “*Beautiful words, wonderful words, wonderful words of life*” goes the hymn.

But Jesus is not content with people admiring his words. He is not especially interested in the Bible as literature. Wise or thoughtful people are the people who take Jesus' words seriously. I say “*seriously*” because wise disciples *try* to practice what Jesus teaches. They attempt to put into their daily, weekly and monthly routines the wisdom Jesus offers.

And I say “*try*” because no one gets it right all the time. This parable is not about being perfect. It is not about law-keeping or legalism. I don't think it is a word about being saved or lost. It is a word for believers, for disciples—a word of warning to keep following, to keep doing. I like the phrase, “*takes it seriously.*” And if you have been studying the Sermon carefully, you know that it is God's grace, His generous way with us that brings us to the point where we want to be responsible; where we respond to God's word with *doing* as well as *hearing*.

If you take God's word seriously you will listen to it and study it and learn it. But not so you can pass a test in biblical literacy. Or be a preacher or teacher. You ultimately learn to **do** this word—to be guided by this body of teaching. The words still must be interpreted and some teachings are harder to understand than others. But they are words of pragmatic advice not merely theoretical wisdom. So the wise builder takes the blueprints and plans seriously and tries to follow them.

The parable ends the sermon. Then there is an editorial comment in verses 28-29. **28** *When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching,* **29** *because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.*

Jesus had “authority” behind what he taught. And we know this Jesus is the One risen from the dead who lives on in his word. His real presence is seen in the sacraments and heard in his word.

Notice that the sermon (and parable) ends on a note of warning and judgment. The last word in the parable is the word “*great*.” And what does “great” refer to? The crash of the house when the storms came. Great was the fall or crash of the house. Pretty tough end to a sermon, yes? Jesus prefers his last word to be a *warning* instead of an *encouragement*.

Yet **grace** shines out in every section of the Sermon. If God is the Creator and Redeemer of this world—if He has the whole world in his hands, then, of course, He knows what works best in this universe. He knows what contributes to life, to health, to peace and to human flourishing. So if God’s Son says that *his* way (including the narrow gate and the hard path) leads to life, and that doing what he commands is a kind of wisdom that survives storms—then warnings to pursue this kind of flourishing are gracious.

This series of warnings reminds me of the challenge of **parenting**.

When you have little kids you have to teach them about dangers and show them good habits before they can understand why this or that is safe or dangerous. *Look before you cross the street! Don’t touch the burner on the stove! Wash your hands!* Why are parents tough on their kids about such habits? Why do we raise our voices to issue warnings? Because disobedience can bring disaster.

*“And great was its fall.”*

**Example:** Bones and doctrine

We are all building houses. That is, each of us is building a life. What teachers shall we heed and what books should we read? What habits and disciplines ought we cultivate? What values should you make your own? And each of our lives rests on some kind of foundation. What is your foundation? What words of wisdom do you take seriously? Let us pray.

Story: Eating a porcupine (Lausanne story)

In a certain country, The Law said, you shall not eat porcupine.

A man was seen *hunting* a porcupine. A friend said, don’t you know the law. Yes, the law says, “Don’t eat a porcupine; it does not say don’t hunt a porcupine.

The man was seen *carrying* a porcupine. Brother don’t you know the law? Yes, the law says you cannot eat a porcupine; it does not say you should not carry a porcupine.

The man was seen *skinning* a porcupine. Don’t you know the law. Oh yes! It says you cannot eat a porcupine. It does not say don’t skin a porcupine.

The man was seen *roasting* a porcupine. Brother, don't you know the law. Yes, it says you cannot eat a porcupine. The law does not say you can't roast a porcupine.

The man was seen *tasting* a porcupine. Don't you know the law. Yes, the law says you cannot eat a porcupine; it does not say don't taste a porcupine.

Unfortunately, he tasted the whole porcupine...

Friends, the law is there to help us. To give us boundaries. Unlike the OT law which condemns us Jesus' commands are given to lead us to life. To show us the will of God.

A similar analogy to the journey is the picture of building a house, building a life. What will your foundation be? Where does Jesus fit?