

Wise and Foolish Builders

Question: Is it more important to know something or to do something with what you know?

What if someone you know is a great fisherman told you today that they knew where to go today to catch fish, they had all the right equipment to catch them, and you were invited along to go fishing... Will you catch any fish if you don't go fishing?

Or, you go to the doctor because you don't feel well – diagnoses an infection – prescribes antibiotics – go home and Google the drug on the internet – talk about it with friends. Will the prescription do any good if you don't take it?

How about this one... If you're faced with the reality of building a house in a flood zone area and a master-builder who knows you and the area your building in perfectly tells you how to build the foundation of your house so it can withstand the winds and rains of the storms that come into this area you are building... Are you a wise or a foolish builder if you refuse to do what the master builder has told you to do?

I could go on... but the point is that we can come to know any number of things from any number of sources and some may be the greatest experts on what they've told us. But until we take action – actually do what that person has invited or instructed us to do, we don't really benefit from what we've learned, have we?

And here's another question: what does our action or inaction demonstrate about how much we trust the person who's shared what they know with us? Unless we actually do what someone says to do, can we really claim that we trust them?

Now, the Biblical context for the parable, or story, of Jesus that we're going to look at today is found in Matthew 7:24-27. You may turn there in your Bibles if you have one... There is a parallel version of it found in Luke 6:46-49. Both Matthew and Luke record this story that Jesus told at the end of either a long sermon or a collection of his teachings on how life was to look and be lived as one of his followers. Matthew 5-7 is often called the Sermon on the Mount and Luke 6 is sometimes called the Sermon on the Plain.

One author I read this week said this about the Sermon on the Mount:

"In a way what Jesus gives us in the Sermon on the Mount, as well as throughout the course of all that Jesus said and taught in the gospels, is The Answer (to life's questions). It tells us who Jesus is, tells us who the true God of the universe is, and tells us how to live for that God in Christ in ways that will go with the way God set up this creation, in ways that will affirm the God-given dignity of each person, in ways that will put us on that straight and narrow path that leads to life (as it was always intended). Jesus has given us The Answer and that's precisely why only a fool would receive all of this for information only but not do much if anything to enact it in daily living."

So, at the end of a sermon in which Jesus has invited his listeners to follow him in living life the way God always intended it to be lived in relationship with God himself and all other people and he's given specific instruction on how to live life in God's ways in God's creation, Jesus – who not so coincidentally spent most of his own life as a carpenter – tells this story...

"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. 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. 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. 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

Jesus tells this story to a crowd that is very familiar with the flood plain of the Jordan River Valley. The soils were sandy and when the wind and rain storms that blew up quickly and fiercely at times came, they brought flash flooding and, if the foundations of their houses, though the house might look good from the outside in every way, were not built on rock solid foundations, they would wash away... They had seen it happen. It may have happened to them. We have all seen the devastating results of flooding...

This being the case let me ask a couple of questions...

- Does there seem to be any way of avoiding the storms Jesus is talking about? No, the storms are indiscriminate – rain, streams, and wind buffeting everyone's house – wise or foolish builders alike, right?
- What role do the storms play in this story? Don't the storms reveal who's who in the story – the wise builders are those who survive the storm while the foolish ones are those who don't, right?
- What does Jesus say is the difference maker between the two – foolish and wise? Everyone seems to hear the words of Jesus, but only the wise builders puts them into practice and survives life's storms, right?

Remember Jesus is talking to a mixed crowd of people, many of whom are starting to think they want to be his followers. He's saying there are two kinds of people who claim to be Jesus' followers: the wise and the foolish. From the outside looking in it may be difficult to tell the two apart. Both know about Jesus' words, both have heard the Sermon on the Mount, both might even be able to talk intelligently about this great Sermon. Both appear to have built a pretty sturdy house of faith for themselves such that, on the surface of life, both the wise and the foolish look and sound pretty much the same. Both the wise and foolish were probably sitting next to each other on the hillside – or maybe in our context - maybe sitting in purple chairs next to each other on many Sundays.

But in all of life storms come. Jesus does not specify the nature of these storms...

- It might include the persecution of his followers that he alluded to in Matthew 5 when he predicted people would speak evil of his disciples because of him.
- They may also include some of the normal sufferings and worries of life, which here and there Jesus also mentioned in the course of the Sermon on the Mount.
- Jesus' reference to storms almost certainly refers to the day of judgment that will come at the end of time when Jesus returns to reveal all things – a time when everyone will be revealed as a true follower of Jesus or not

The point is: storms come in life. There will be turbulent periods when everything in life seems hard and difficult, including the maintenance of one's faith in Jesus. True disciples are not promised that they will be spared. Storms are not what make believers either wise or foolish. No, the storms just *reveal* who is who.

According to Jesus: the wise person, who hears his words, trusts in him, and put's his words into practice will weather life's storms, while others will not. BLANK

Let's tease this out a bit... Let's say you're in a spot where you might lose your job, or you have, or you may have to move and don't know where... there's just a lot that you can't see how you're going to make it? Real-life storm stuff? What if you hear Jesus say this?

"So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Matthew 6:31-34

I know there are people in this room today facing very challenging circumstances in life. You and I can't tell whose world may be crashing apart from the outside. Jesus knows what's going on in your heart today, and he says, "Seek me and my kingdom and I've got you taken care of. Take a deep breath. Trust me. I'll get you through this." Will you relax and give him control?

What if you're being hammered by friends or family because the word is getting out that you follow Jesus – they may be laughing or insulting, or threatening, or worse? Will you cave in to the pressure and deny your relationship with Jesus? Jesus again...

"Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you." Matthew 5:10-12

Do we trust Jesus to mean what he says and to do what he promises? Will we crumble under this kind of storm or will they reveal the way we trust Jesus to get us through to our reward?

How do you respond when someone inadvertently or intentionally does you harm – acts like an enemy instead of a friend?

"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." Matthew 5:43-45

Jesus suffered so much at the hands of his enemies – out of love for us all – prayed and sacrificed his life so we might be forgiven. Our response to love and pray for our enemies – those people who hurt us in life – will reveal whether we're children of God or not.

What ultimately reveals whether the lives we are building will withstand the storm of final judgement? I need to venture outside the Sermon on the Mount to John 14:23-24 where Jesus describes how we can know whether we truly love him and belong to his Father in heaven forever...

"Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them. Anyone who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me." John 14:23-24

When we read the teachings of Jesus in all the Gospels, there are several things that become clear:

- Jesus presents himself as the Son of God – the living Word of God become flesh – and the only Way, Truth, and Life that leads to life eternal in God
- Jesus calls every person to repent of their past indifference and/or rebellion against God
- Jesus invites people to trust his life, death, and resurrection as the means of forgiveness and new life in relationships with God and all people
- Jesus promises to provide his Spirit in the life of anyone who will receive him as the empowerment to actually understand and obey Jesus teachings and live the life God intended for his people to live.
- Jesus tells us that life in his "Kingdom" – living life God's way in God's creation – will last forever and we will get to realize the completeness of that Kingdom on his return for final judgment when the foundations of all people will be revealed.

It is interesting in Matthew's account of what that final judgment might look like, the master who returns to evaluate how his servants have lived while he was away says this:

"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!'" Matthew 25:23

The master doesn't say, "Way to listen, study, know, or disseminate my words." He says, Well done! Does the master expect perfection? No! That's what his death, resurrection, and gift of the Spirit are about – forgiveness for sin and power to move from old disobedient habits to new God-honoring ones. But he is talking about being faithful to put into practice what his word and Spirit make known to each of us. It's the trajectory of the heart of a person whose experienced the love and grace of God and obsessed by a life-long commitment to trust and obey Jesus.

Jesus story does anything but soften the end of his message for his listeners on that mountain side over 2000 years ago – or for us today. He left each person with the task of evaluating the foundation of their life. Only by doing what Jesus says to do – trust and follow the leading of his Word and Spirit – will provide us with a life foundation to withstand any and every storm in life that threatens to destroy us...

- **Are you putting into practice what you know about Jesus?**
- **How is the foundation of your life taking shape?**

In closing, Eugene Peterson paraphrases Jesus' words like this for all of us to consider...

"These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life, homeowner improvements to your standard of living. They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a tornado hit—but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock. But if you just use my words in Bible studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who built his house on the sandy beach. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards." Matthew 7:24-27, The Message