

THE WISE MAN
Matthew 7:15-29
Key Verse: 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 passage concludes Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount has been called the constitution of the kingdom of heaven. It reveals the beautiful kingdom where God reigns. It is a kingdom without sin—without lust, jealousy, greed, vengeance, or condemnation. It is a kingdom where God’s love rules every heart and God’s glory is revealed in all things. It is a kingdom where people truly love one another. This picture captures our minds. We feel happy and hopeful. We want Jesus to bring about this glorious kingdom right now, in an instant. Today Jesus teaches us not to sit around dreaming about the kingdom. We must speed its coming by putting his teachings into practice. Only those who practice Jesus’ teachings will enter the kingdom of heaven. Let’s practice Jesus’ teachings and be wise people.

First, watch out for false prophets (15-20).

As we have studied, Jesus teaches us to take the narrow road (13-14). By faith we choose to do so; not because it seems reasonable, or because it appeals to our senses, but because Jesus tells us that it leads to life. Though we make a wise decision to take the narrow road, there is still a danger we must watch out for. Look at verse 15a. Jesus says, “Watch out for false prophets.” False prophets claim to be from God, but they are not. They claim to bring God’s message, but they do not; they lie, like their father the devil. They are very deceptive. Jesus says in verse 15b, “They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.” They look gentle and humble, like sheep. But inwardly they are aggressive, and keen to others’ vulnerability, like wolves. Such was the white witch in “The Chronicles of Narnia,” who seduced naive Edmond with Turkish delights. They use God’s people for evil purposes and their own selfish gain. They are indeed dangerous.

In Jeremiah’s time, God’s judgment upon Judea was imminent because of their idol worship. Jeremiah warned them, preaching a message of repentance. His persistent repentant message made Jewish leaders so angry that they threw him into a cistern (Jer 38:6). When they did not like God’s word of truth, they became vulnerable to false prophets. Jeremiah warned in 23:16, “This is what the Lord Almighty says: ‘Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of the Lord.’” False prophets give false hope. They make people feel better through psychological persuasion without leading them to repent and accept the word of God. They lead suffering people astray. One false prophet even led a UBF missionary astray. The missionary was an excellent Genesis Bible teacher. But when his son became rebellious, he became vulnerable. The false prophet foretold that his son would be a great man of God, and then foretold that Jesus would come again on a certain day. Deceived, the missionary abandoned the narrow way of disciple raising and joined the false prophet’s group. He gave sacrificially of his time and money to serve the group. But his son did not improve, nor did Jesus appear as foretold. Soon, the false prophet disappeared with a lot of offering money.

We must watch out for false prophets who tempt us to leave the narrow road. In our time, false prophets appeal to easygoing mentality. They make going to heaven seem as simple as going through a drive-thru window, or waiting for a space ship to come and beam them up to heaven. They speak well, soothing emotions. They promise wealth and romance to anyone who supports their group financially. They may look very successful, with many followers. They may dazzle with impressive presentations, using the latest technology. They may be famous and well-connected. But we should not be deceived by these things. We must remember Jesus. Jesus is the good shepherd who laid down his life for the sheep. Jesus suffered much and shed his blood to save people from their sins. Jesus taught his disciples to follow him. Jesus said, “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me” (Lk 9:23). The Apostle Paul followed Jesus. He suffered much to carry out his first missionary journey. Once he was stoned and left for dead. But he got up and continued his mission. Afterward he said, “We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God” (Ac 14:22). The way to the kingdom of God is the way of the cross. It is not an easy way. We must watch out for false prophets who teach us that there is an easy way.

How then can we recognize false prophets? Look at verse 16a. "By their fruit you will recognize them." We must look beyond appearances. We must see the fruit. Look at verses 16b-18. "Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit." Those who are evil inside are like thornbushes or thistles. No matter how nice they appear, they cannot edify others; they scratch and hurt others. They cause degeneration. We must be alert to things that make us lazy, proud, selfish, or morally carefree. Though something may tickle our senses, we must consider its affect on our spirit, on our love for God, and on our love for others. We must recognize false prophets and reject their teaching. Ultimately, God will deal with them. God will send them to the fiery lake of burning sulfur (Rev 19:20). Those under their influence will join them. Let's be wise people who recognize and reject false prophets.

Second, Jesus will recognize only obedience to the Father (21-23).

Just as there are false prophets, there are also fake disciples. Look at verse 21. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Confessing that Jesus is Lord is important in our Christian faith. Romans 10:9 says, "That if you confess with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." God promises us in the Bible that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Joel 2:28-32). Both Peter and Paul quoted this promise in their gospel messages (Acts 2:17-21; Ro 10:13). However, as Jesus says, not everyone who calls him "Lord" will enter the kingdom of heaven. Some people call Jesus "Lord" with their mouths, but do not obey him in practice. It is contradictory and it is hypocritical. Jesus will not be fooled.

Jesus clearly teaches us that those who enter the kingdom of heaven are those who obey the will of God. What is God's will? That's a good question. We can know God's will through deep Bible study (Rom 12:2). The Bible defines God's will specifically in many ways. For example, 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified." 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus." It is God's will for a man to work hard and support his family (1 Ti 5:8). It is God's will for a student to study hard, doing their best. They should get straight A's. It is God's will to establish godly families. It is God's will for children to obey their parents (Eph 6:1).

On a broad scale, God's will is to establish his kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. God's will is to save men from their sins, restoring them as his children (Jn 6:40). For this, God sent his one and only Son Jesus to die on the cross as the ransom for our sins. For this, God calls people to participate in his work. God's calling is personal. God called Abraham to leave his country and people and father's household and to go to a new land. Jesus called his disciples by name to follow him. Paul says that all Christians have received grace and apostleship, that is, calling to serve God in his holy mission. As we grow in grace and the love of God, he makes his calling plain to us. Then we must accept it from our hearts. God knows who accepts his calling and who avoids it. There are some very clever people who behave very well in Christian culture, but evade God's personal calling. These escape artists know how to use the name of Jesus without making a personal commitment to him. Look at verse 22. "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 perform many miracles?'" Their impressive works will not get them into heaven. Impersonal association with Jesus will not get them into heaven. Jesus says in verse 23, "Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" Those who do not obey Jesus do not know Jesus. No matter how many fantastic things they do, they will not pass his final exam and they will not enter heaven. In Jesus' eyes they are evildoers, worse than counterfeiters. It is not wise to misuse Jesus' name. It is wise to obey the will of God.

Third, a wise man put Jesus' words into practice (24-29).

After warning against false prophets and fake disciples, Jesus teaches us how to be genuine disciples and wise people. Look at verse 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." Jesus wants us to hear his words and put them into practice. Jesus compares this to building a house on the rock. It is hard work. It requires digging down deep, spending much time and energy. We experienced this while building the UIC Bible house. The original plans, approved by the city, called for an adequate foundation. However, due to a quirk in the system, the Chicago Board of Underground became involved in the project. They insisted that we put iron shoring around the foundation. The end result was that the foundation became twice as thick as originally planned. This required much more time and money.

Missionary Paul Chung had to arrange the sewer lines, water lines, gas lines, and power lines, and to satisfy all the building codes, sweating a lot. It was great training in patience and persistence. But in the end, it produced a strong foundation, strong enough to last 300 years. Some neighbors commented that it would make a great bomb shelter. We learned that God likes the foundation of his building to be rock solid.

In the same way, Jesus wants us to build our lives on a solid foundation, though it takes much time and effort. The solid foundation is Jesus Christ. We can build on Jesus when we hear Jesus' words and put them into practice. In this high-tech and fast-paced society, it is not easy to hear Jesus' words. So many other voices compete for our attention. We must make a deliberate effort to hear Jesus' words. We must get up a little earlier to hear Jesus' words. We must spend Friday nights sharing testimonies instead of pursuing worldly fun. It is hard work and we may not see quick results. But we must let Jesus' word work in us until it changes us on a fundamental level. We Americans naturally value human freedom. We are willing to fight to the death for human rights. But we must subdue our human rights before the word of God. One young lady made a decision to listen to her Bible teacher this year, even when she doesn't like it. She wants to yield her human rights and honor God's word. This is what Jesus wants. To build a right foundation, we must uproot innate pride and learn Jesus' humbleness. We must uproot selfishness and learn sacrificial love for God and others. In the end, only those who build on Jesus Christ will last. Look at verse 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."

Matthew was once a most selfish man, Levi, the tax collector. He was the kind of person who could eat delicious food all by himself while those around him were all malnourished. This kind of selfishness is not changed easily. Matthew struggled hard to "Seek first God's kingdom" and to "Do to others what you would have them do to you" (Mt 6:33; 7:12). In the end, he was changed into a most Christlike person who wrote this Sermon on the Mount. Peter was a smelly fisherman, yet he was bold and self-confident. To him, inner pride was strong. He rebuked Jesus for teaching the way of the cross (Mt 16:22). Once, he rejected Jesus' prediction that he would deny him, claiming that he would lay down his life for Jesus (Mt 26:35). Peter failed completely. His human pride and self-confidence were broken. He learned to depend on Jesus alone. Then he was changed into a humble spiritual leader who guided the early church through a time of persecution (1 Pe 4:13).

Great change in our inner person does not usually happen all at once. It happens step by step as we struggle to put Jesus' words into practice. We must learn to make small beginnings. Shepherd Michael Mark just turned 24. He has been studying the Bible in UBF for ten years, since he was a freshman in high school. Slowly and steadily, he has been laying his life foundation on Jesus' words. Recently, he put Matthew 6:33 into practice. Jesus said, "But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Last month, Michael had an important job interview to prepare for. But he gave first priority to serving the Young Disciples' Conference and the HBF Winter Retreat. He designed wonderful web pages for them both, spending a lot of time. As he gave his heart to God, he had inner joy and peace. Then the interview came. He could have felt unprepared. But when asked to describe his best achievement, he was inspired to talk about the web pages he had just designed. The interviewer was so impressed by his creativity and enthusiasm that he offered the job right away. Michael has struggled to practice Jesus' teachings word by word. Now he has something substantial on his heavenly resume.

On the other hand, there are those who hear Jesus' words and do not put them into practice. Look at verses 26-27. "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." There is more to human life than blue skies and sunshine. Inevitably storms come along. The house on the rock withstands the storm. The house on sand falls with a great crash. Judas Iscariot heard so many of Jesus' teachings. But he never accepted one word of Jesus as God's absolute truth. He did not put Jesus' word into practice with personal faith. He crashed badly (Mt 26:24).

Jesus teaches us the importance of practicing the Sermon on the Mount. Only when we practice Jesus' words can we build our lives on a solid foundation. This foundation will stand the test of time, the storms of life, and even God's judgment. As a fruit of studying the Sermon on the Mount, let's take one word of Jesus and put it into practice.

Look at verses 28-29. "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law." Jesus taught with authority because he is the Judge who will decide the eternal destiny of all men. The standard he uses is not arbitrary. It is

clearly given to us in the Sermon on the Mount. Let's practice Jesus' teachings from our hearts. Then we will be truly wise people.