

Two Types of Builders

Matthew 7:24-27

Introduction

What is this final paragraph in Jesus' Sermon on the Mount about? Is it about two foundations or is it about two types of builders? Some who have preached on this passage, emphasized the foundations that the builders used to build their houses on. However, it seems to me that if we are going to consider these verses within the context of the three sets of comparisons that precede it, this final paragraph in our Lord's sermon appears to be about two types of people who have heard and listened to Jesus' sermon and what they did with what they heard.

I want you to think about something: The comparison of the narrow gate verses the wide gate is really about two types of people and their response to Jesus (vv. 13-14). The comparison of the good tree verses the diseased tree is really about recognizing whose teaching is from God and what you do with it (vv. 15-20). The comparison of the false Christian verses the true Christian is really about the person who knows Jesus as Lord as opposed to the so-called Christian who calls Jesus "Lord." And now we come to verses 24-27, which are really about the person who builds his life upon the words of Jesus and "does" them. At the end of each of these comparisons, we who have heard the words of Jesus are asked to examine if we are truly on the narrow way, if we are truly receiving the word of God, if we truly know Jesus as Lord, and if our lives are truly built upon the life and teachings of Jesus.

I do not want to make too much of this, but what I find interesting with the way Jesus concludes his sermon is that the number four has significant meaning in the Bible, for when it is used it is used to symbolize completeness. On the fourth day, God completed the material universe with the creation of the sun, moon, and stars (Gen. 1:14-19), and in many places on earth there exists four seasons. In the Garden of Eden there were four rivers (Gen. 2:10). In heaven there are four living creatures around the throne of God who never cease to say, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come" (Rev. 6:6-8)! Also, who can forget the four horsemen of the apocalypse in Revelation 6:2-8. Frequently throughout the Bible the earth is referred to as having four corners, which again is symbolic of completeness (see Isa. 11:12; Rev. 7:1). So, I think it would be negligent of me if I did not at least point out that Jesus closed with four series of twos to complete his Sermon on the Mount, and each of his series of twos has to do with the way one responds to his words.

Before we look at the two builders, permit to show you what it at stake with each of the builders. Since the day I first read Matthew 7:24-27, I assumed that the storm that fell upon each house that the builders built served as a metaphor for life: "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house..." which resulted in one house surviving and the other falling in such a way that Jesus described: "...and great was the fall of it." I want you to see something that preparing this sermon forced me to consider:

1. Of the many people who enter through the wide gate, Jesus said that that road, “leads to destruction.” (v. 13)
2. The diseased and unfruitful tree will be, “...cut down and thrown into the fire.” (v. 19)
3. Jesus will declare to many who call him “Lord, Lord”: “I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” (v. 22)
4. Of those who hears Jesus’ words and DO NOT DO THEM, Jesus says of such a person: “...the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” (v. 27).

The first three comparisons result in a final judgment that is cataclysmic and terrible. The question I was forced to ask while preparing my sermon on Matthew 7:24-27 is, “Why would this passage be describing a fate of the person who does not do the words of Jesus any differently than the three previous examples of people who did not listen to and obey the words of Jesus?” The reality is that the rain, floods, and winds are a description of judgment that will not end well for one of the builders. I also think that it is appropriate to conclude that a foundation built on the rock of Jesus’ words will keep you from shipwrecking your faith.

What the Builders Have in Common

I believe that for us to appreciate this final contrast Jesus gives us, we need to consider what these builders have in common. For me, what these builders have in common is the most sobering part of Jesus’ words.

Both builders heard the same message.

The “everyone” Jesus is referring to are those who have heard Jesus’ words. Daniel Doraini observes from these verses that, “...when we listen to the Sermon on the Mount, we do not simply hear Jesus’ *words*. We hear *Jesus*.”¹ He continues, “Jesus’ words perfectly express his character, his mind, his will. He never deceives, never changes his mind, never misspeaks. He never has to say, ‘Do as I say, not as I do.’ This world has all too many obese gym teachers, divorced marriage counselors, and debt-ridden financial planners. Not so with Jesus. He does what he says. He *is* what he says. Every word perfectly reflects his character, and his actions.”²

Jesus did not misspeak when he singled out what the builders have in common: “**Everyone who hears these words of mine...**” Think about what Jesus is saying here. Both builders are individuals who heard Jesus and his words, which means that they were within the community of people who were most influenced by Jesus. These builders are not all that dissimilar to the two types of Christians referred to in the previous description of those who say Jesus is Lord verses those who know Jesus as Lord. In other words, these are not unreached people groups.... both builders are individuals who believe they are Christians.

¹ Daniel M. Doraini. *Reformed Expository Commentary: Matthew Vol. I* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing; 2008); p. 308.

² *Ibid.* pp. 308-09.

Both builders built a house

Secondly, these builders both built a house. There is no distinction between the two houses except for the foundation they were built on. The houses look the same. They look like they have been taken care of. They have similar windows, they are nicely painted, and have everything you would expect a newly built house to have. The homes that belonged to the builders is a metaphor of their religious lives. There does not appear to be any real visible distinction between the two men Jesus is referring to. Both builders attend the same church, they sing the same songs every Sunday, they attend the same church gatherings, they participate in the same Life Group, they both love the men's breakfasts their church puts together. From the outside, they seem identical.

Both builders believed they were safe.

The final similarity we see with the two builders is that they both believed the house they built was safe, and thereby believed they were safe. The same material went into the frame of the house, the same furniture, fixtures, and art decorated their respective homes. It is also worth noting that because Jesus only made one distinction between the two houses built, that the houses were virtually identical in appearance as Martyn Lloyd Jones observed,

... We deduce that from the fact that our Lord makes it clear that there was no difference between these two houses except in the foundation. Looked at externally and on the surface there was no difference.... The two houses were apparently identical apart from just this one difference beneath the surface. So we are entitled to deduce that these two men like the same kind of house. Not only did each want a house; they wanted the same kind of house. Their ideas on the subject were absolutely identical. They had much in common.³

It is what these builders had in common that is frightening. It is possible to go through your entire life doing the same things other Christians are doing such as reading the Bible, participating in the worship service of a church, serving in church, tithing a portion of your income to a church, and so many other things, while assuming that you are eternally safe when in reality, you are not.

How the Builders are Different

Although the builders look alike, they are very different. What is different is what is not seen. What is different is what is below the surface. What is different is what each builder really believes is most important and needed. What is different is that although the houses looked alike, one was much easier to build while the other took more time in preparation to build.

Each of the Builders Listened to Jesus' Words Very Differently

Although each builder was able to hear Jesus' words, only one acted upon what he heard. Please do not let the significance of how the builders responded to the words of Jesus pass you by. What do you think of Jesus' words? When I ask this question, do not assume that the rest of the Word of God is exempt, for Jesus himself said at the beginning of his sermon: **“Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them”** (Matt. 5:17).

³ D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones. *Studies in the Sermon on the Mount* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans; 1976), p. 548.

You have heard that the God known as Elohim, Yahweh, and Adonai created all things out of nothing, keeps covenants he makes, and never gets frustrated because he is the Sovereign One, but do you take his words seriously? His word declares that you bear his image and that he formed you in the womb of your mother: **“For you formed my inwards parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb. I praise you for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; my soul knows it very well”** (Ps. 139:13-14). If he is the creator, then there is purpose and design behind your existence, and you were designed and made to know and worship Him. God does not exist for you; you exist for God. Since when did the lump of clay that is creation ever gain the right to protest the hands that have shaped it? Here is both God’s truth and your truth echoed in the pages of ancient scripture: **“Who is like you, O LORD, among the gods? Who is like you, glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders”** (Exod. 15:11). So, the question for you dear Christian is, “How is the truth of His word shaping your life?”

If you are a Christian, Jesus said that you are the salt of the earth and the light of the world (Matt. 5:13-16). What do you taste like to the world? How is your light shining in a dark world? Is there any real distinction between what is seen and experienced by those around you verses what is in the world?

Jesus said, **“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven”** (v.20). He also said, **“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied”** (5:6). Who or what are you hungering for and thirsting for? Whose glory are you really after? From what source are you seeking your righteousness?

If you are really hungering and thirsting for a righteousness that only Jesus can provide, then what does that look like in your daily living? Are you truly hungering after the one who said when you are angry with your brother, to go and **“be reconciled to your brother or sister...”** (vv. 21-26). Are you truly thirsting after the one who said that we must take radical steps in addressing our sin (vv. 28-30)? Considering what Jesus said about marriage and divorce, what are you doing to save your marriage (vv. 31-32)?

Do you, Christian, want to know Jesus in such a way that you long for the same thing the apostle Paul longed for: **“...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead”** (Phil. 3:10-11)? How is that kind of knowing affecting your character? When it comes to oaths and promises, are you becoming the kind of person Jesus told you to be when he said, **“Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’...”** (Matt. 5:33-37)?

The One who, **“was despised and rejected by men.... Who borne our griefs and carried our sorrows...”** He who, while facing a cross we deserved... of whom the scriptures testify, **“...was oppressed, and was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that is before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth”** (Isa. 53:3-7)... is he the one you want to know in such a way that you, **“share in his sufferings”**? What are you going to do with what he said about responding to the one who slaps your check, sues you for the coat off your back, or treats you unfairly (Matt. 5:38-42)?

Do you really want to know Christ in such a way that you are becoming like him in his death? How seriously are you to take what he said about your enemies: **“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you...”** (Matthew 5:43–45).

Jesus modeled how we are to pray, and at the heart of that prayer he modeled is a plea that God’s name be hallowed in all things. Do you long for his name to be hallowed and his kingdom to expand in and through your life (see 6:1-13)? The question I am really asking you is the one that we are all forced to ask after hearing the Sermon on the Mount: “Do we really take Jesus’ words seriously and what are we willing to do in response to his words?”

Do you believe what Jesus said about money and the stuff of this world to be true, and if so, how has that affected the way you use your money (see vv. 19-24)? Jesus said not to be anxious about tomorrow and to, **“seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness...”** (vv. 25-34); considering all that he has said, do you trust him?

Jesus said that our heavenly Father will not turn us away when we go to him (vv. 7-11), do you believe his words to be true? Throughout his sermon, Jesus has shown us that our dependency upon him is what is needed if we are going to hear his words and do them. He is the righteousness that will satisfy our souls! The question before us is simply this: “Do we really take Jesus’ words seriously and how are we obeying him?”

Which leads me to a simple but profound truth concerning what sets the one builder apart from the other.

Each of the Builders Responded to Jesus’ Words Very Differently

What sets the one builder apart from the other is simply this: One of the builders took Jesus’ words seriously enough to obey him while the other builder only listened to his words. One of the builders built his house on sand because he thought it was just too much to both listen to Jesus and obey him.

For the builder who built his house on the sand, to build on the foundation of Jesus’ words was not comfortable. To build on the rock was too narrow. To build on the rock was not fair. To build on the rock was asking him to give up too much. To build on the rock would cause too much friction within the family. To build on the rock would mean he would have to say no to certain temptations. To build on the rock would be to go against the advice and recommendation of those closest to him. To build on the rock would be too costly, for he would lose too much in this world and he did not think it was worth it. Jesus said of this person that the, **“...rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it”** (v. 27). Consider what Charles Spurgeon said of the foolish builder:

Yet though he was industrious, he was foolish.... The crash was terrible; the sound was heard afar.... The overflow was final and irretrievable. Many heard the fall, and many more saw the ruins as they remained a perpetual memorial of the results of that folly which is satisfied with hearing, and neglects doing.⁴

⁴ Daniel L. Akin. *Christ-Centered Exposition: The Sermon on the Mount* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference; 2019); p. 153.

What will be the nature of the storm? How serious will it be? The storm is the judgment of God, and it is the place the wide road leads, the place the diseased tree will be burned, and the place the one Jesus does not know will hear, "I never knew you," and the place where the foolish builder will be destroyed. We are warned of this judgment in Revelation 20:11-15,

Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev. 20:11–15)

What is it that will keep the one on the narrow road safe? What will prevent the fruitful tree from the axe? Why will the one who knows Jesus as Lord not be turned away on that day? What will keep the wise builder safe on the Day of God's judgment? It is the cross of Christ. Jesus was forsaken on the cross so that those who trust in him will never be turned away by a holy God. The axe of God's wrath came upon him while he hung on that tree (Gal. 3:13); that is why all who cling to His cross are safe. Jesus is the foundation, his words are our rock, his life is our house, therefore if you know him as Lord, you are safe!

Released from my chains I'm a pris'ner no more
My shame was a ransom He faithfully bore
He cancelled my debt and He called me His friend
When death was arrested and my life began

Our Savior displayed on a criminal's cross
Darkness rejoiced as though Heaven had lost
But then Jesus arose with our freedom in hand
That's when death was arrested and my life began

So, my dear friends, I leave you with five questions we are all forced to ask in the wake of our Savior's Sermon:

"Do I believe Jesus' words to be true?"
"Do I take Jesus seriously?"
"Do I know him?"
"Do I trust him enough to obey him?"
"Who am I?"