

Understanding The Two Houses and Foundations
Matthew 7:24-27
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The Sermon on the Mount is the first of five extensive messages delivered by Christ in the Gospel of Matthew, covering chapters 5-7. The sermon corrects the teaching of the religious leaders (chapter 5) and the practice of the religious leaders (chapter 6). The first half of chapter 7 guides our ministry to others and the second half of the chapter involves the most important aspect of life, our eternal destiny.

In Matthew 7:13-27, we see a repetition of contrasts. Each contrast regards the eternal destinies of mankind. Specifically, there is a progression that moves from the path to life to the characteristics of those on the path to life.

- The two gates and paths (Matthew 7:13-14)
- The two trees and fruit (Matthew 7:15-20)
- The two claims and practices (Matthew 7:21-23)
- The two houses and foundations (Matthew 7:24-27)

Matthew 7:13-14 commands us to “*enter by the narrow gate.*” There are only two eternal destinies and we must go the way of the few unto eternal life rather than the way of the many unto eternal destruction. Matthew 7:15-20 teaches that false prophets will arise to thwart people entering by the narrow gate. Jesus commanded His disciples to beware of them since they come in sheep’s clothing but are actually dangerous wolves.

Where Matthew 7:15-20 describes the false prophets, Matthew 7:21-23 describes the false followers of Jesus. While Matthew 7:21-23 speaks of false followers who profess faith but practice something contrary to the will of God, Matthew 7:24-27 speaks of those who hear the word but fail to act upon what they hear. While 7:21-23 contrasts saying vs. doing, 7:24-27 contrasts those hearing vs. doing.

Matthew 7:24-27 concludes the Sermon on the Mount by returning to the authority of Jesus’s words. The words that are heard are “*these words of Mine*” which places Jesus in the position of authority. In Matthew 5, Jesus spoke authoritatively over the meaning of the Law and here the response to His words determine the destiny of the hearers.

The similarities between the wise and the foolish builder

It is possible that Jesus would have had personal experience with home construction through his trade as a carpenter (cf. Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3).

House building is a metaphor that was used in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 28:30 Psalm 127:1; Proverbs 10:25; 12:7; 14:11; 24:3; Jeremiah 22:13-14). Ezekiel 13:8-16 even describes the false prophets as building a defective wall that is destroyed by a storm. Paul uses the analogy of a builder laying a foundation for a building when describing the rewards of the believer (1 Corinthians 3:10-15).

This section poses a stark comparison. There is an equivalence and an antithesis between each of the two builders. The purpose of the analogy to builders is to highlight the great difference between everyone who hears the word and acts upon the word and everyone who hears the words of Jesus and does not act upon them.

One similarity is that both the wise and the foolish build a house. Both houses stand until certain natural events occurred. These houses would be lived in and people would not recognize any difference between them.

This is similar to Matthew 7:15, where the false prophets come in sheep's clothing. They appear to be true but inwardly are ravenous wolves. This is also similar to those who give an earnest profession of Christ and perform many miracles but their profession is insincere. They appear genuine until the final judgment.

Another similarity is that *"the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house"* (7:25, 27). Both builders suffered the same natural calamities with even equal intensity. The vividness of the description of the storm would be familiar to residents of Israel. In desert climates, flash floods come upon people suddenly and without much warning.

The reference to the house in the first similarity is clearer as everyone who hears the words of Jesus is like a person building a house. Everyone's house is the life that they have been granted by the Lord. We are all building our lives, but the foundation for our lives is the issue.

The reference to the storms is seen by some as the trials that we face in this present life. Thus when great difficulties arise, those with true faith will endure. They will not be dismayed but will overcome hardship based upon Christ.

A more likely understanding is that the storm represents the final judgment. While no one faces the same trials of life and some face far, far greater difficulties than others, we all will see a day of reckoning. *“And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment”* (Hebrews 9:27).

The introductory word “therefore” in Matthew 7:24 directly ties this section to the prior verses. The two gates and paths (Matthew 7:13-14) show the end as either eternal life or eternal destruction. The two trees and fruit describe the *“tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire”* (Matthew 7:16-20). Jesus says, *“not everyone who says to Me, “Lord, Lord” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father will enter”* (Matthew 7:21). Clearly each of the other three contrasts in this section involve one’s eternal destiny. We should conclude the storm is the divine judgment upon all of mankind.

The contrasts between the wise and the foolish builder

Now we will look at the differences between the wise builder and the foolish builder. Both the section on the wise builder (7:24-25) and the section on the foolish builder (7:26-27) begin with the meaning of the analogy. The imagery is given to show the different destinies between those who hear the word and act upon it and those who do not.

The comparison of the analogy of those who hear the word of Jesus and act versus those who hear the word and do not act upon it is the foundation of the house. The one who acted upon the word has built his house on the rock and the one who did not act upon the word has built his house upon the sand.

Sand is notably porous and provides little stability for a house. Luke’s account describes the house that was ruined by the flood as built *“on the ground without any foundation”* (Luke 6:49). To build a house upon sand is essentially building without a foundation at all. The house is only stable without adverse conditions.

Those who do not act upon the words of Jesus are destined for destruction, just as the house built upon the sand *“fell—and great was its fall.”* The gravity and the suddenness of the final judgment is evident in this analogy. The fall was great and the ruin of the house was total. If the builder had been wise enough to plan for this coming event he would have not built the house upon the sand. Likewise, those who hear the words of Jesus and fail to respond to them are destined for greater, eternal destruction.

Note that hearing the words of Jesus is woefully inadequate to protect against the coming judgment. As with those who profess Jesus as their Lord but do not do the will of God (Matthew 7:21), those who hear the words of Jesus but do not do the will of God will be destroyed. From the teaching of Jesus about eternal life, we know that the essential step of deliverance from destruction is to respond to His words in faith.

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who believes has eternal life” (John 6:47).

“Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life” (John 5:24).

Indeed, for someone to continue to hear the words of Jesus and to fail to respond is truly bringing additional destruction upon the person. Jesus taught that everyone who has been given much, much will be required.

“And that slave who knew his master’s will and did not get ready or act in accord with his will, will receive many lashes, but the one who did not know it, and committed deeds worthy of a flogging, will receive but few. From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more” (Luke 12:47-48).

“Then He began to denounce the cities in which most of His [u]miracles were done, because they did not repent. “Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the [v]miracles had occurred in Tyre and Sidon which occurred in you, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. Nevertheless I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the [w]miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you”” (Matthew 11:20-24).

Conclusion

Everyone is building their house but few are building upon the firm foundation of Jesus Christ. Those who respond to Jesus demonstrate their sincere faith and are destined for eternal life. Those who listen but do not act demonstrate their unbelief and are destined for destruction, and great will be that eternal destruction.