



What is Your Foundation?

Summary and Goal

Today's passage brings the Sermon on the Mount to a close. Jesus gave an invitation to respond to His truth through the parable of the wise and foolish builder. The Scribes asked Jesus by what authority He taught. The same question will be asked of us. On what authority are you building your life? That choice determines if you'll be able to survive the storm. Commit to building your life on the words of Jesus and no one else.

Main Passages

Matthew 7:15-28

Session Outline

1. Be On Guard (Matt. 7:15)
2. Watch the Fruit (Matt. 7:16-23)
3. Build on God's Word (Matt. 7:24-29)

Theological Theme

The final verses in the Sermon on the Mount have to do with the sufficiency of God's Word in the life of the believer. The doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture has implications for the Christian's ability to discern false teaching from true teaching as well as their sanctification and perseverance in the faith.

Christ Connection

Paul wrote to the Colossians, "Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you" (Col. 3:16). Christians feed upon the Word of Christ and they build their lives upon it.

Missional Application

Those who build their lives upon the rock of Jesus' teaching do so with the gospel on their lips and their feet ready to cross borders, streets, and cultures.

Historical Context of Matthew

Purpose

Matthew probably wrote his Gospel in order to preserve written eyewitness testimony about the ministry of Jesus. Matthew's Gospel emphasizes certain theological truths. First, Jesus is the Messiah, the long-awaited King of God's people. Second, Jesus is the new Abraham, the founder of a new spiritual Israel consisting of all people who choose to follow him. This new Israel will consist of both Jews and Gentiles. Third, Jesus is the new Moses, the deliverer and instructor of God's people. Fourth, Jesus is the Immanuel, the virgin-born Son of God who fulfills the promises of the OT.

Author

The author did not identify himself in the text. However, the title that ascribes this Gospel to Matthew appears in the earliest manuscripts and is possibly original. Titles became necessary to distinguish one Gospel from another when the four Gospels began to circulate as a single collection. Many early church fathers (Papias, Irenaeus, Pantaeus, and Origen) acknowledged Matthew as the author. Papias also contended that Matthew first wrote in Hebrew, implying that this Gospel was later translated into Greek.

Setting

Determining the date of composition of Matthew's Gospel depends largely on the relationship of the Gospels to one another. Most scholars believe that Matthew utilized Mark's Gospel in writing his own gospel. If this is correct, Matthew's Gospel must postdate Mark's. However, the date of Mark's Gospel is also shrouded in mystery. Irenaeus (ca AD 180) seems to claim that Mark wrote his Gospel after Peter's death in the mid-60s. However, Clement of Alexandria, who wrote only twenty years after Irenaeus, claimed that Mark wrote his Gospel while Peter was still alive. Given the ambiguity of the historical evidence, a decision must be based on other factors.

Special Features

This Gospel was written from a strong Jewish perspective to show that Jesus is the Messiah promised in the Old Testament.

9

Session Plan

What is Your Foundation?

Introduction

- ? Since we as humans can't read the heart of someone, what are some other ways that we try to determine what is going on inside of a person?
- ? What do we look for when we want to discern the motivation and condition of a person's heart?

Jesus closed out the Sermon on the Mount with a call to obey God's Word. Those who are "blessed" are the ones on the Narrow Road. And the ones on the Narrow Road are those who hear and obey the Word of God. Obedience to the Word of God is the good fruit that is produced by those who know and love God. While other fruit may seem tempting (prophecy, miracles, exorcisms), these can be smokescreens and snares set by the devil to lead Christians from the Narrow Way.

1. Be on Guard (Matt. 7:15)

The problem with false teachers is that they often have the appearance of true teachers. They use deception to gain trust and infiltrate fellowship in order to spread their teaching and lead sheep off of the difficult road that leads to the narrow gate. The danger here is great. This is a Trojan horse full of enemy soldiers bent upon the destruction of the city.

- ? What is the command found in verse 15?
- ? What is so nefarious about this threat to followers of Jesus?
- ? Application: Have you ever heard false teaching? What was the setting? How did you respond? Have you ever been fooled by false teaching? What made it so appealing?

2. Watch the Fruit (Matt. 7:16-23)

Thankfully, Christians aren't left to their own as they seek to discern false prophets from true prophets. Jesus explained that just because someone comes into the midst of the church, claims the name of Christ, and even does sensational things doesn't mean that they are faithful teachers. Jesus

said, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven” (v. 21). The way to judge a teacher is to look closely at the person’s doctrine and life and measure it against the will of God the Father. What that means for Christians is that they measure the life and doctrine of a teacher against the Scriptures. This, of course implies a Christian must know the Scriptures, otherwise they have no measuring tape.

- ❓ According to Christ, how can His disciples recognize false teachers?
- ❓ What do Christians have at their disposal by which to measure fruit? What are some ways to spot a fake product in other areas of life?
- ❓ Application: How have you examined the fruit (doctrine and life) of teachers who you accept? How does it measure up against God’s Word?

3. Build on God’s Word (Matt. 7:24-29)

The command to be on guard ,and Jesus’ explanation of how to discern false teaching from faithful teachers, culminated with a parable that ought to be understood as a controlling motif for the entire Sermon on the Mount. In other words, the parable of the wise and foolish builders serves as an overarching theme that holds all of the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount together.

- ❓ What was the theme of the parable of the wise and foolish builder? What was the meaning of this parable?
- ❓ Read John 8:31-32. What did Jesus say about His word? How is this connected to building one’s life on the rock of Christ’s Word?
- ❓ Application: How do you seek to cling to Christ by clinging to His Word? What habits and commitments do you have that show your love and esteem for the Scriptures?

Conclusion

- ❓ What are some safeguards that you have up for yourself and your family against the influence of false teachers? If you don’t have these things in place, how might you seek to be on guard in the future?
- ❓ Who is God calling you to share the truth of the gospel with, so that they might build their life on the rock of Christ and not the sinking sand of any other foundation?

❓ For Further Discussion

How might you evaluate the teaching of others by assessing the fruit of their lives? How do you need to assess the fruit of your own life? Why is this an equally important practice?



Expanded Session Content

What is Your Foundation?

Introduction

- ? Since we as humans can't read the heart of someone, what are some other ways that we try to determine what is going on inside of a person?
- ? What do we look for when we want to discern the motivation and condition of a person's heart?

Often we will look at a person's words, actions, and emotional expressions in a moment and make an assessment. There are two problems with this approach. The first is that a person's immediate response and emotional expression to something doesn't necessarily indicate the long-term condition of someone's heart. For example, you may feel compassion and mercy toward a homeless person on the side of the road. You may even give him or her some spare change. However, it is doubtful that you will go sell your home and goods and cash out your retirement and give it to the poor. This same principle holds true with a person's spiritual condition. Thomas Manton said it like this: "We do not judge of men's complexions by the color they have when they sit before the fire. Just so, we cannot judge of a man by the emotions which he has when he is under the influence of a compelling sermon."

The second problem has to do with our standard of judgment. We need a measuring stick to hold up against a person's life in order to discern true inner condition. Sadly, what tends to grab our attention is sensational, overt expressions of what we deem as super-spirituality. Jesus referred to prophecy, exorcism, and miracles in this passage. He called on His disciples to be careful not to be fooled by those who claim to be of Christ and use this sort of evidence as proof. It's not proof at all. Jesus would go on in this passage to explain the true measuring stick of devotion to Him.

Session Summary

Jesus closed out the Sermon on the Mount with a call to obey God's Word. Those who are "blessed" are the ones on the Narrow Road. And the ones on the Narrow Road are those who hear and obey the Word of God. Obedience to the Word of God is the good fruit that is produced by those

who know and love God. While other fruit may seem tempting (prophecy, miracles, exorcisms), these can be smokescreens and snares set by the devil to lead Christians from the Narrow Way.

1. Be on Guard (Matt. 7:15)

The Sermon on the Mount, up until this point, is a blueprint for souls that have been given new life by Christ. Jesus' teaching served to encourage and instruct His disciples as well as expose and convict those who were not following Him. Now, in the final verses, Jesus sums up His teaching in one overarching command in the form of a parable. Before we get to this crucial lesson, however, we need to understand the runway leading up to it and how the two parts fit together.

- ❓ What is the command found in verse 15?
- ❓ What is so nefarious about this threat to followers of Jesus?

Jesus told His disciples to be on guard. It's interesting that He didn't say to be on guard against the influence of the world, the temptations of the flesh, or the snares of the devil. Jesus told them to watch out for "false prophets." He explained that they would come in sheep's clothing, but were actually violent, dangerous wolves.

The problem with false teachers is that they often have the appearance of true teachers. They use deception to gain trust and infiltrate fellowship in order to spread their teaching and lead sheep off of the difficult road that leads to the narrow gate. The danger here is great. This is a Trojan horse full of enemy soldiers bent upon the destruction of the city.

In Kenya, dairy farmers will often add water to the milk to keep their levels up, which will keep their income up. The false teachers Jesus referenced are like these dairy farmers, except they don't add water; they add poison. They present something that appears to be nourishing, but it is actually soul-killing.

Jesus' warning wasn't unfounded. Very soon after the gospel spread into the Gentile world from Jerusalem, this very problem arose. That's why Paul wrote the letter to the Galatian church. This was also what Jesus had against the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira (Rev. 2). Paul had traveled to Galatia to share the gospel. This was a different culture than Israel, but the gospel found fertile soil there. Many people came to Christ and churches were formed. After Paul left, another group of "Christians" came in and began to teach the churches that in order to be saved, they had to place their faith in Jesus and follow the Law of Moses. Many believers accepted this false teaching. Paul was deeply distraught due to this turn

of events. Jesus was equally concerned with what was happening in the churches of Pergamum and Thyatira because souls were at stake.

Souls are still at stake. False teachers have infiltrated many churches across the United States and the world. This is a critical problem today and must be addressed. That's why this passage is so very important and relevant.

In response, Christians should be on their guard against wolves, and be careful to not let their guards down. They should be careful not to accept any and all teaching that they come into contact with. They should be diligent to test all teaching that they are exposed to before trusting it. Finally, Christians should get their primary nourishment from the pastors and teachers in their local assembly and personal times of Bible study.

- ❓ Application: Have you ever heard false teaching? What was the setting? How did you respond? Have you ever been fooled by false teaching? What made it so appealing?

2. Watch the Fruit (Matt. 7:16-23)


The early church faced two threats. The first was persecution from without. These attacks only served to strengthen the church and spread the gospel. The second attack was false teaching from within. This threat was far more dangerous and effective. It still is today. The fundamental issue is how a Christian can discern between false teachers and faithful teachers.

- ❓ According to Christ, how can His disciples recognize false teachers?
- ❓ What do Christians have at their disposal by which to measure fruit? What are some ways to spot a fake product in other areas of life?

“You'll recognize them by their fruit” (v. 15). Christians can determine truth from lies by looking closely at the products that these teachers produce. Consider how to tell a fake among products with which you are familiar. There is an abundance of counterfeits out there. We don't see them as often in the United States, but if you have spent any time in the developing world and have visited a market, then you've seen them. Were you fooled? Brands that you wouldn't think of purchasing in the U.S. can be quite economical in other countries. Don't be deceived, however. These aren't genuine products. They are fakes. The quality isn't there. The craftsmanship doesn't compare. These are not authorized products; they are a poor copy of the real thing. If examined closely, the fruit doesn't hold up. It's one thing to be fooled by a pair of Nikes. It's quite another to take the bait on a false message of salvation.


If Christians were left to their own wisdom and discernment, they'd be in trouble. All people are easily deceived. That's why Jesus gave this warning. He knew that Christians would struggle to stay on the difficult road headed toward the narrow gate as other voices called out to them. Thankfully, Christians aren't left to their own as they seek to discern false prophets from true prophets. Jesus explained that just because someone comes into the midst of the church, claims the name of Christ, and even does sensational things doesn't mean that they are faithful teachers. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (v. 21). The way to judge a teacher is to look closely at the person's doctrine and life and measure it against the will of God the Father. What that means for Christians is that they measure the life and doctrine of a teacher against the Scriptures. This, of course implies a Christian must know the Scriptures, otherwise they have no measuring tape.

Christians must be careful not to be swept up with the excitement of so-called prophecies, exorcisms, healings, or miracles. It's clear from this passage that those things aren't to be sought after or lauded. Rather, Christians should hold in high esteem the biblical fruit of doing the will of God. If you feel unsure about what God's will is, then going back and re-reading the Sermon on the Mount would be an excellent place to start. Furthermore, Christians should never accept and fellowship with false teachers. These ravenous wolves should be exposed for what they are and avoided.

 Application: How have you examined the fruit (doctrine and life) of teachers who you accept? How does it measure up against God's Word?

3. Build on God's Word (Matt. 7:24-29)

The command to be on guard ,and Jesus' explanation of how to discern false teaching from faithful teachers, culminated with a parable that ought to be understood as a controlling motif for the entire Sermon on the Mount. In other words, the parable of the wise and foolish builders serves as an overarching theme that holds all of the teaching in the Sermon on the Mount together.

 What was the theme of the parable of the wise and foolish builder? What was the meaning of this parable?

The theme could be stated as: "Cling to Christ by clinging to His Word." The Christian is a pilgrim making his or her way toward the celestial city. The Christian is journeying down the difficult road toward the narrow

Keep on Doing

The people represented by the two builders share one similarity and one difference. Both “keep on hearing” the words of Jesus. The present tense may imply that both hearers had been exposed to his teachings. In any case, both hearers were now accountable to obey what they had heard. However, the first person “keeps on doing” what Jesus taught, while the second “keeps on not doing” what Jesus taught.

gate. The road is difficult because it is fraught with many dangers. The wise and prudent Christian will be vigilant to heed the word of his or her Master. He or she will cling to the Savior—Christ—and will cherish every word that Christ said.

This parable has everything to do with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Gospel power puts Christians on the narrow way (justification). Gospel power keeps them on the narrow way (preservation). Gospel power transforms Christians along the way (sanctification). Gospel power produces faith in Christians toward the Word of Christ and causes them to cherish it and cling to it. In cherishing and clinging to the Word of Christ, the faithful Christian finds safety and comfort for his or her soul.



Read John 8:31-32. What did Jesus say about His word? How is this connected to building one’s life on the rock of Christ’s Word?

Jesus said, “If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31-32). Christians need to be free, but freedom is only found in knowing the truth. Further, truth is found in its densest, purest form in the Word of God.

Christians need to develop the discipline of telling themselves the truth, against the lies of the world or the devil. They must diligently work to block out false messages and deception from the media, internet, and false teachers. This can only be done when Christians play offense by reading, memorizing, studying, and meditating upon the Word of Christ.

Christians should set aside time each day to take up and read the Scriptures. They must read prayerfully and humbly with thanksgiving and repentance. They must receive the truth of God’s Word with joy and live in accordance with it.

God’s Word is a lamp for Christians’ feet and a light for their paths. Followers of Christ need something to guide them. When they tell themselves the truth of God’s Word, then they have a North Star, an inextinguishable torch that lights the way through the darkest valley and deepest forest. No matter what comes their way in this life, God’s Word is sufficient to guide them and make them complete (2 Tim. 3:16-17).



Application: How do you seek to cling to Christ by clinging to His Word? What habits and commitments do you have that show your love and esteem for the Scriptures?

Conclusion

We learn critical truths in this passage. God has provided His Word for Christians. His Word contains His will that Christians should submit to with joy. Furthermore, God will tell some to depart from Him because He never knew them. We also see that just because someone claims to be spiritual because of their signs and wonders doesn't mean that they are actually following God. In fact, these things are used to deceive people into following false teaching. Christians must be on their guard against false teachers by testing all teaching by the standard of the Scriptures. Finally, Christians should cling to Christ by clinging to His Word. They should cherish and treasure the Scriptures. They should read and practice them with great zeal, joy, and thanksgiving.

- ❓ What are some safeguards that you have up for yourself and your family against the influence of false teachers? If you don't have these things in place, how might you seek to be on guard in the future?
- ❓ How might you evaluate the teaching of others by assessing the fruit of their lives? How do you need to assess the fruit of your own life? Why is this an equally important practice?
- ❓ Who is God calling you to share the truth of the gospel with, so that they might build their life on the rock of Christ and not the sinking sand of any other foundation?

Prayer of Response

Ask God for discernment and wisdom in your own life as you consider which teachers you allow to have influence in your beliefs. Pray also for a love for God's Word and that He would help you to read it, believe it, and obey it. Ask for the grace to cling to Christ by clinging to His Word.

Additional Resources

- *The Truth War* by John MacArthur
- *Saving Truth* by Abdu Murray
- *Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World* by D.A. Carson

For Next Week

Session Title

- The Foundational Image

Main Passages

- Genesis 1:26-27

Session Outline

1. Eavesdropping on a Divine Conversation (Gen. 1:26a)
2. A Holy Job Description (Gen. 1:26b)
3. Male and Female He Created Them (Gen. 1:27)

Memorize

²⁴ *“Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵ The rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn’t collapse, because its foundation was on the rock.*

- Matthew 7:24-25

Extended Commentary

Matthew 7:15-29

7:15-20 False prophets don sheep's clothing to disguise the fact that they are ravaging wolves masquerading as true disciples. However, a prophet's character and behavior (his fruit) indicates whether he is true or false. Other NT texts insist that a teacher's doctrine must also be examined (1Jn 4:2-3). True disciples bear the fruit of good works, and this confirms their identity as Jesus's disciples (Mt 7:21-23). The image of cutting down and burning a bad tree portrays the judgment and eternal punishment of false disciples. The test Jesus gives is not quick and easy but one that proves itself over time.

7:21-23 By referring to himself as Lord and depicting himself as the ultimate judge of humanity, Jesus implied his deity. True disciples affirm Jesus's lordship, submit to his authority, and obey his commands. Jesus insisted that a person is confirmed as a true disciple not by prophecy, exorcism, or working miracles but by living a transformed life made possible by God. The disobedient lifestyles of lawbreakers are inconsistent with genuine discipleship. Jesus's words, I never knew you, show that these were never truly disciples.

7:24-27 The adjectives wise and foolish describe a person's spiritual and moral state, not his intellect. Whether one is considered wise or foolish is determined by his response to Jesus's teaching. Since OT writers described God's wrath using the image of a great storm (Is 28:16-17; Ezk 13:10-13), the storm that destroys the house on the sand is a picture of divine judgment. Hence, the person who hears and acts on Jesus's teaching is prepared for judgment. The one who hears but doesn't act on Jesus's words will be destroyed in the storm of judgment.

7:28-29 Jesus amazed the crowds with an authority that surpassed that of other teachers. First-century Jewish teachers appealed to the authority of their rabbinic predecessors. However, Jesus introduced his teachings with the contrast, "You have heard that it was said . . . but I tell you" (5:21,27,31,33,38,43). By this Jesus made clear that he had the authority to interpret the law independent from and even contrary to the Jewish oral tradition and the most esteemed rabbis. The words when Jesus had finished are important for understanding the structure of Matthew's Gospel. See "Structure" in the Introduction to Matthew.¹

References

1. *CSB Study Bible: Christian Standard Bible*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017.

Author Bio

John MacArthur (The Truth War)

John MacArthur has served as pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, since 1969. His ministry of expository preaching is unparalleled in its breadth and influence. In more than five decades of ministry from the same pulpit, he has preached verse by verse through the entire New Testament and several key sections of the Old Testament. He is Chancellor of the Master's University and Seminary, and can be heard daily on the Grace to You radio broadcast (carried on hundreds of radio stations worldwide). He has authored numerous bestselling books, including *Twelve Ordinary Men* and *One Perfect Life*.

Abdu Murray (Saving Truth)

Abdu Murray (JD, University of Michigan) is North America director of RZIM, a regular speaker at churches and on college campuses, and host of the radio program and podcast *Embrace the Truth with Abdu Murray*. A scholar in residence at the Josh McDowell Institute of Oklahoma Wesleyan University, he is the author of many articles and two books, including *Grand Central Question*.

D.A. Carson (Jesus' Sermon on the Mount and His Confrontation with the World)

D. A. Carson (PhD, University of Cambridge) is research professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School in Deerfield, Illinois, and is the author or editor of more than fifty books, including *The God Who Is There* and *How Long, O Lord?* He is one of the founders of The Gospel Coalition and an active guest lecturer in academic and church settings around the world.