

## Parable of two builders

The house built on the rock vs. the house built on sand

**Matthew 7:24-29**

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Here is the parable as we find it in Matthew's Gospel:



"Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. 26 "Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. 27 The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew

and slammed against that house; and it fell — and great was its fall."

28 "When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; 29 for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes."<sup>1</sup>

See also a parallel passage in Luke 6:47-49. [Photo credit: a house destroyed by wind with thanks to Australia's Emergency Management Agency, [www.ema.gov.au](http://www.ema.gov.au)]

### Context:

Here we have a compact and instructive presentation by our Lord, illustrating for us a distinct likeness of two sorts of people, both of whom pay at least some attention to what Jesus says. The context of this parable is that of a true disciple vs. one that is false. The contrast is given in three ways in Matthew 7: First we see two trees (Matthew 7: 15-20). "The good tree produces good fruit but the bad tree produces bad fruit." Next we see the contrast of two claims of true discipleship. "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father in heaven will enter" (Matthew 7:21-23). And finally, there is the subject of the parable itself (vs. 24-27), the wise man builds his house on the rock while the foolish builds his house on the sand.

### Overall Message:

In this parable we find that hearing the words of our Lord is not the same as doing them. In His *Sermon on the Mount* (Matthew 5-7), Jesus had just preached the best sermon anyone could hope to hear, but now what? After all, merely hearing the Word can be dangerous business if not accompanied by doing. The Pharisees, after all, were listening, but instead of *doing*, they were *scoffing*. In the parable of the Unrighteous Steward we find Jesus cautioning his readers about

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture references are from the New American Standard Updated version, used with permission.

the chief opponent of our heart desire to love God, namely the love of money. “No servant can serve two masters,” He said, “for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth.” But the words were not kindly received by the Pharisees who were scoffing: “Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, were listening to all these things and were scoffing at Him. And He said to them, ‘You are those who justify yourselves in the sight of men, but God knows your hearts; for that which is highly esteemed among men is detestable in the sight of God’” (Luke 16:14-15).



And so how shall we respond to the best sermon ever preached (or any of Jesus’ words for that matter)? The uncomfortable truth is this: Only those who actually do what He says are the true disciples, while those who hear without doing, and still imagine that they are building to survive the storms, are only deceiving themselves.

[Photo credit: The Jesus Film Project. Jesus teaches from a boat in Galilee (see Matthew 13: 1-2.)]

Of course, this parable is not the only place in Scripture where the concept of hearing vs. doing is presented. Two of the most notable examples are found in Ezekiel and James:

They come to you as people come, and sit before you as My people and hear your words, but they do not do them, for they do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and their heart goes after their gain. Behold, you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice and plays well on an instrument; for they hear your words but they do not practice them. So when it comes to pass — as surely it will — then they will know that a prophet has been in their midst. Ezekiel 33:31-33

But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. 23 For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; 24 for once he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was. 25 But one who looks intently at the perfect law, the law of liberty, and abides by it, not having become a forgetful hearer but an effectual doer, this man will be blessed in what he does. James 1:22-25

### **Elements of the parable:**

First we will look at the **builders** themselves, beginning with the wise man. Who is he and what are his characteristics? The Greek for “wise man” is φρονίμω [phronimoo]. The meaning is this: a thoughtful, sagacious and discrete person. Such a man or woman longs to hear Jesus’ words and through the conviction of the Holy Spirit, is pricked to the heart at any inconsistency between his own life and Jesus’ royal way. Like the son in Proverbs 23 he is willing to “listen

and be wise.” Such a person carefully builds his life (his thoughts, his words, and his actions) on the only sure foundation: Jesus Christ. In so doing he builds to withstand any of the storms of life that might come his way. Undoubtedly the storms will come his way. Being a wise builder means that a man acknowledges that there will be storms, and preparing a house that will withstand them. His commitment to this building project and to the foundation is whole-hearted and not tentative, off and on, or lukewarm.

Who, then, is the foolish builder and what are his characteristics? The Greek root for “foolish man” is  $\mu\omega\rho\omicron\varsigma$  [moros]. Our English root “moron” is derived from this root. The foolish man here may actually be a very well-educated person, but in terms of what will matter for eternity, he is (according to the actual definition of  $\mu\omega\rho\omicron\varsigma$ ), dull, sluggish and stupid. He hears the word, but his commitment to it is intellectual; not from the heart. Such persons make a stab at putting Jesus’ words into practice, but if everything does not immediately fall into place for them, they quickly abandon the changes in life practice that His words require. This foolish builder is not carefully examining the soil and choosing the best place to build. Any philosophy will suit him, and though he may really like listening to Jesus speak, in the end he will build on whatever soil is easiest. The hard truths of the Bible will not suit his purposes very long until he will give up, seeing a more yielding philosophy upon which to base his thoughts, words and actions.

The lives of wise and foolish builders are brought into clear focus when lived side by side. When this occurs, the contrast is indeed stark. Consider, for example, the lives of Ahab vs. Elijah, or John the Baptist vs. Herod. Such men are not both about the business of examining foundation materials, the one conscientiously choosing sand over rock. Rather one man is truly seeking to build his life on a good foundation. The other is consumed with the affairs of this world, oblivious to the shortness of our days and largely unaware of the life to come. He is haphazard and careless, careening through life without much thought beyond his own pleasures.

Both builders, however, are about the business of building houses. In fact, everyone in this world is building something. To live is to build. We are building for the life which is to come, even if we do not know it.

The foundation for a solid structure in this life and in the life to come has been provided for us. A rock has been reserved for us to build upon, and that Rock is Christ.

For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, 13 each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work (1 Corinthians 3:11-14.)

Thus we are all building. All construction will be tested, either by flame or flood. If our work is not built on a solid foundation, it certainly will not stand.

## The houses:

From the outside, both houses might look the same. The house with a faulty foundation might even look better than a house with a rock-solid footing. Both seem to be secure as long as the weather is good. The quality and durability of the house cannot be judged before the storm strikes; only after. Consider for a moment these Scriptures:

Behold, I am laying in Zion a stone, a tested stone,  
A costly cornerstone for the foundation, firmly placed.  
He who believes in it will not be disturbed.  
17 I will make justice the measuring line  
And righteousness the level;  
Then hail will sweep away the refuge of lies  
And the waters will overflow the secret place.  
Isaiah 28:16-17

Only the costly and tested foundation of the Lord Jesus Christ will suffice to see daylight after the flood sweeps away all lies (all other systems and philosophies and religions). Even the so called deep magic, the Satanic arts performed in secret places will be destroyed. In the end, only the life built on Jesus will stand.

So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints, and are of God's household, 20 having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus Himself being the corner stone, 21 in whom the whole building, being fitted together, is growing into a holy temple in the Lord, 22 in whom you also are being built together into a dwelling of God in the Spirit.  
Ephesians 2:19-22

Therefore the foundation of rock is secure from the storm, while the foundation of sand is very movable. “The rain fell and the floods came and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.” This is a complete collapse. Nothing is left; nothing is salvageable or repairable.

## The storm



[Photo credit: [www.wunderground.com](http://www.wunderground.com). Hurricane Rita deepens into a Category V hurricane on September 20, 2005, barely missing the Florida Keys.]

The backdrop for the Sermon on the Mount is the shore of Lake Kinneret, (The Sea of Galilee), to the north and west of that beautiful body of water. About 60 miles to the south, one encounters the Dead Sea. Immediately to the west of that foul and now vanishing salt-soaked water is the wilderness

of Judea. This area, as well as Galilee, are noted for their violent storms. One moment it can be clear and sunny, clouds only about the size of a man's hand. The next one might be lashed mercilessly with violent winds and drenching rains. When such storms come, there is no time to prepare anything. The wadis fill to overflowing and seemingly instantly the once peaceful landscape is transformed by raging rivers, violently pounding anything in their paths.

The storm itself has three components that make it most devastating. The rain falls from above, the floods burst from beneath and the wind lashes from the side. There is no need to engage in allegory here. The meaning is clear: the storm is complete and violent, striking the house from all angles. The passage notes that the storm "slammed against" the house. The Greek root is προσχόπτω [proskopto], meaning to violently strike or surge against.

But to the wise builder, the type or kind of storm does not matter at all. The wise man builds to withstand all storms. Indeed, the right foundation, the rock, by its very nature is capable of withstanding all storms. Lives founded on Jesus, doing and not just hearing his word, are in the same way capable of withstanding anything; even death itself.

The wicked are overthrown and are no more,  
But the house of the righteous will stand.  
Proverbs 12:7

Even though hyper-allegory applied to any of the parables is inappropriate, we do no violence to this text by noting that a great end-time storm is coming. But besides that final cataclysm, we do well to build for any of the storms of life. The house built on the Rock will withstand all storms from the great tribulation to the more mundane daily opposition of our adversary the devil.

Conclusion:

When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; 29 for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes. Matthew 7:28-29

The scribes were learned, but not spiritual men. Of them Jesus says:

But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men. Matthew 15:9

The crowds were accustomed to their hypocrisy and no doubt had rather low expectations of how the Sermon on the Mount might affect them personally. Thus we are informed at the conclusion of His great teaching in Galilee that they were "amazed." The Greek root for amazed is ἐχπλήσσω [ekplesso], and means to strike with astonishment. The Greek verb literally means they "were struck out of themselves." That is good, of course. To be derailed by His gracious words is favorable. No one ever spoke as this man did. No source speaks to us today as does the Word of God, the Bible. He still astonishes us and amazes us. But for all that, astonishment and amazement are really not what builds our lives on the rock. Being amazed and doing are not the same. And that is the whole point Jesus makes here. "Therefore anyone who hears these words

of mine and *acts*<sup>2</sup> on them, He says. Putting His teaching into practice, line upon line, precept upon precept, that is what builds lives on the foundation.

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<sup>2</sup> Emphasis mine  
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