**Be a Wise Builder in His Kingdom**

September 2, 2018

Matthew 7:13-29

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.”

Have you seen the Leaning Tower of Pisa? They constructed the tower in 1178. But they built on a mere three-meter foundation, set in weak, unstable subsoil. The one who built the tower was a foolish man. Today Jesus said that those who hear his words but do not put them into practice are such foolish builders. There is an old saying, “Everybody talking about heaven ain’t going there.” There are millions of people who claim to believe in Jesus, who use his name, who call him “Lord,” who say they believe in him, expecting heaven, but will find at the end that they were wrong. One megachurch boasted that in one year they had 28,000 conversions on paper, baptized 9,600 people, and had 123 added to the church. Do you see something wrong here? There were not 28,000 people saved if there was only 123 added to the church. Many church leaders lament how difficult it is to follow up new converts. But the problem is not the difficulty of follow-up. It is the difficulty of conversion. Today we come to the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus’ invitation forces anyone and everyone who reads his Sermon on the Mount to choose. It is a very sharply-defined contrast between false faith and true faith; non-saving faith and saving faith. Two paths, two ways.

There really are only two religions in the world. There is the religion of human achievement, and that is all religions in the world that offers heaven for good works, morality, religious ceremonies, rituals. On the other hand, there is the religion of divine accomplishment, which offers heaven to those who admit there is nothing they can do to earn it, but trust in Jesus Christ. One comes by the way of good works, and religious ceremonies, and ritual, and ends up in hell. And the true way is by faith and grace in Jesus Christ. The first way involves what we do, and the true way involves what God has done in Jesus Christ. There are two gates: Wide and narrow. There are two ways: Broad and narrow. There are two destinies: Destruction and life. There are two crowds: Many and few. There are even two trees: Good and bad; two fruits: Good and bad; two behaviors: Saying and doing; two builders: Wise and foolish; two foundations: Rock and sand; two houses: One stood and one fell. It is a very simple contrast. They both promise heaven. Note that no one is selling hell. No one is saying, “Come our way to hell with us.” And by the way, the broad road that is marked “heaven” ends up in hell. But the people on it don’t know that. So you are offered two paths to heaven. One is an easy broad road and goes to hell. The other is a difficult narrow road and goes to heaven. Make your choice. So let’s look at this contrast and begin with the two gates.

Look at verses 13-14. “Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.” Both roads are religious. We are not talking about religion as opposed to atheism. We are simply talking about two religious roads promising, “this is the way God wants you to go, it ends up in heaven.” Both roads promise heaven, but only one gets there. Now you have a command in verse 13, “Enter through the narrow gate.” That is a command. Firstly, you must enter. The true way to heaven is spelled out clearly. It is the narrow way. And you must enter. Not enough to look. Not enough to admire. Not enough to study. Listen, hell is full of people who admire Jesus. Hell is full of people who even admired the sermon on the mount. Hell is full of people who belong to Christian churches and organizations. But they never entered. They admired. They looked. They analyzed. But you must enter. You must come all the way in.

Secondly, you must enter this gate, this narrow gate. Why is it a narrow gate? Because there is only one way in. It is a narrow gate because it is through Christ and Christ alone. Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father except through me.” There is no other way. There is not salvation in any other than the Lord Jesus Christ. You have to enter through him, believing in him. Acts 4:12 says, “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

Thirdly, you must enter this gate alone. It is a narrow gate. It is not a group event. You leave the crowd behind. When you come through this gate, it is a very narrow gate. Think of it as a turnstile, one at a time. It is exclusive. It is intensely personal. This admits one person at a time. The kingdom of God advances one person at a time. One soul at a time. You come alone. You have to deny yourself, your family, your friends, your life, reject everything you have ever known, perhaps everyone you have ever known, and come all alone. For the first time in your life, you stop rushing with the crowd. You stop floating with the mass crowd and you come alone.

Fourthly, you must enter this gate alone with difficulty. You say, “Why is it difficult?” The end of verse 14 says, “Only a few find it.” Why is it hard to find the gate? One reason is because of false prophets who call people to the other gate. Also once you find it, you enter with great difficulty. In Luke 13:24 Jesus said, “Make every effort to enter by the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to.” The Greek word for “make every effort,” is “agnizomai” which is an intense struggle, pain. Why is it so hard? Because it demands total repentance and self-denial. Jeremiah 29:13 says, “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.” It is a challenge to find the narrow gate, and once you find it, it is an agonizing experience to go in because you have to leave everything you have ever known outside. You don’t bring your self-righteousness. You don’t bring your own achievements. You really come with a beatitude attitude. At the beginning of the sermon Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.” When you understand your moral, spiritual bankruptcy, you are not bringing on any of your achievements, any of your religious performance.

Look at verse 15. “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.” One of the reasons that so many people are deceived is because there are so many deceivers...so many false prophets, false preachers. They say, “It is easy to be a Christian. Just pray this prayer. God will make you rich and successful and happy.” It is very easy to be a self-deceived Christian. You cannot enter the kingdom of heaven by praying a little formula prayer. False prophets do not wear T-shirts which says, “I am a false prophet!” They are like sheep who are very humble, gentle. But inwardly, they are greedy and ferocious. They want to take advantage of God’s people for their own gain. However, it is hard to discern that they are false prophets. How can we discern? Jesus said, “By their fruit you will recognize them.” A good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Even though false prophets talk and act like good sheep, they cannot hide their inner nature. Their teachings are attractive. They emphasize health, wealth and success. They say, “Follow your heart,” “Have confidence in yourself!” They never say “deny yourself,” “take your cross.” We should not only examine the teachings of false prophets, but also their lifestyle and influence. In the end, God will judge them by their fruit.

On the broad road, there are many people. It is the many in verse 22 who say, “Lord, Lord, it’s us. It’s us.” They speak empty words out of empty hearts. No real repentance. No real faith. No real love. No real obedience. They say, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons, and in your name perform many miracles?” They talk about these wonders. They don’t talk about, “Did we not repent in your name? Did we not obey in your name?” Three times in verse 22, “In your name, in your name, in your name.” You can throw the name of Jesus all you want. They think the proof that they are his is in their prophecies, their driving out demons, and their miracles. The Lord says, “I never knew You.” Literally, in the Greek he says, “I have never known you.” It is not that I once knew you and we grew apart.

Look at verse 21. “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 who is in heaven.” What does it mean to do the will of God? Jesus said in John 6:29, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.” You can drive out demons, prophesy and perform many miracles without believing in Jesus Christ. For example, in Acts 19:13-16, some Jews were driving out evil spirits by the name of Jesus. They would say, “In the name of the Jesus whom Paul preaches, I command you to come out.” One day the evil spirit answered them, “Jesus I know, and Paul I know about, but who are you?” Then the man who had the evil spirit jumped on them and overpowered them all. He gave them such a beating that they ran out of the house naked and bleeding.

Two gates, two ways, two destinies, two crowds, and then there are two foundations. Look at verses 24-27. “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who build his house on the rock. 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 foundations on the rock. 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.” This is talking about the final judgment. These houses are built in the same location, in the same place, and externally they look the same. You can look at a house. You can’t tell if it has a foundation. But there is coming a judgment. Two people built a house, a religious edifice, and they are basically indistinguishable. They go to church, and they engage in religious activities, and they use the name Jesus, and they put up their walls, and their windows, and their doors, and the roof, and they put up the structure of their religious activities. Both built a house in the same place. It is hard to tell the difference on the outside. But there is huge difference: One is on rock. The other is on sand.

Only those who build their houses on the rock of Jesus are wise. Those who build their houses on sand of their achievements are foolish ones. Those who put Jesus’ words into practice are those who are living forward to God’s judgment. Those who think about God’s judgment build their house on rocks even though it is costly and takes more time. In Luke 6:47-48, Jesus said, “This man dug down deep.” So he put the pillars down to even anchor the foundation.

Why would anyone build their houses on sand? Because it is easier. It is fast and cheap. The foolish builder must have laughed at the wise builder, saying, “You silly guy! Why are you wasting your time and energy?” For a time being things seemed to be okay. But one day a violent storm came and crushed his house completely. This represents the person who enjoys hearing Jesus’ words, but does not put them into practice. His Bible study is superficial. After hearing a message, he goes out and forgets about it. He ignores his foundation because it is unseen. He is only concerned about appearances. He remains in his own way of thinking; his lifestyle does not change based on God's word; he never repents but always justifies himself. It is all emotion, swept up in the crowd, shortcuts, quick fix, no time for the painful agonies of repentance. No time to build a true sense of sin, a true understanding of holiness, no real striving after Christ. And when the storm of judgment - final judgment - comes, the house on the sand, it is gone. And the judgment will reveal the true condition.

The following poem is engraved on the wall of an 800 year-old church in Lubeck, Germany. It summarizes today’s passage perfectly:

THUS speaketh Christ our Lord to us:

You call me Master, and obey me not;

You call me Light, and see me not;

You call me the Way, and follow me not;

You call me life, and desire me not;

You call me rich and ask me not;

You call me eternal, and seek me not;

You call me mighty, and honor me not;

You call me just, and fear me not;

If I condemn you; blame me not.

I love the hymn, “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame, but holy lean on Jesus’ name. On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.” I pray that we may build our house on the solid rock, on Jesus Christ so that on the day of the final judgment, our house may remain standing in the kingdom of heaven.