

Gospel Reading: Matthew 7:24-27

²⁴ “Therefore, everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵ The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

Preaching notes:

This is the sixth and final week of our preaching series on Matthew chapter 7. The Sermon on the Mount is regarded as the pinnacle of Jesus’ teaching. John Donne the 17th century poet and scholar (well know for “no man is an island”) famously said of the Sermon on the Mount: “all of our Christian articles of faith, everything we believe as followers of Christ” are within these three chapters of Matthew. So, when we hear Jesus saying: therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine **AND** acts on them...” (my emphasis) He is sweeping up all that He has said from the moment he began at the start of chapter 5.

One of my favourite Bible translations is where the words of Jesus are in red print, other than the introductory two verses of chapter 5 “he began to speak...” and the concluding two verses of chapter 7 “everyone was astounded at His teaching” every word throughout these three chapters is in red, it is all teaching direct from the mouth of Jesus and must not be missed, read selectively or in any way diminished or revised. Within chapters 5, 6 and 7 lies a complete explanation on what it means to live a life as a follower of Jesus, a Christian - a version of Christ. Jesus does not make any of this teaching optional and when He says “everyone” He means every person who hears -or for us reads- “these words of mine”. Therefore, to read them, as expounded by some commentators, could be considered as dangerous, once you know what is expected of you there is no excuse.

William Barclay, the great Bible commentator, draws out from the passage that Jesus is a practical, hands on carpenter, a man who may have built houses so when he speaks of proper foundations he knows what he is talking about. What may appear at first sight to be safe ground and a good place to build may require preparation and testing to ensure that the foundation is solid and can go deep enough. Jesus uses a “house” as an illustration for our life’s and clearly demonstrates the consequences of not putting His teaching into practice. Both “houses” (or life’s) of the wise and foolish will have storms come against them (trials, sickness, loss, rejection) but only the wise – having built his/her life on the teachings of Jesus will withstand and not fall.

“Many thousands (perhaps hundreds of thousands) listen to the teachings of Jesus every Sunday, they have a reasonable knowledge of what Jesus taught and yet make little or no attempt to put it into practice” (William Barclay). “I know what the Bible teaches but...” are common phrase from many church pews or “yes, but did Jesus really teach that...” offer many people a perceived way out of following what Jesus actually said. The difficulty is that Jesus did not leave any room for confused, mixed, luke-warm or muddled thinking, it is either broad or narrow, wise or foolish, obedient or disobedient.

Take a look back at our earlier prayers of confession and the verses from 1 John (New Testament) and 2 Chronicles (Old Testament), each begins with “if”, it is our choice -to follow or not follow, to be a hearer and doer of Jesus’ teaching or just a hearer with no or just partial acting.

As we conclude; today is a good day for a reassessment of our lives, do we have the full teaching of Jesus, active and real as our life’s foundation or only a partial or patchy application? Ask any builder or engineer, a partial or patchy foundation is just as bad -if not worse-than no foundation because when the storm comes -as it will- that is that worst point for the house to fall.

Jesus tells us that “the fall will be great”, not to condemn us or scare us into action but to lovingly bring us into His household of faith -His church, as those who are both hearers and doers of all of His teaching.

Amen