

**The Greatest Sermon Ever Preached**  
**The Sermon on the Mount Series (Part XV)**  
**“The Rock”**

Liturgical Date: The Resurrection of Our Lord, Easter (Sunrise A)

Primary Text: St. Matthew 7:24-29 (not assigned Gospel text for Easter)

Christ is Risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Grace be unto you, and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ. The primary text for today, Easter Sunday-The Resurrection of our Lord, is the Second Gospel Reading from St. Matthew 7. Our sermon series “The Greatest Sermon Ever Preached: The Sermon on the Mount” concludes today with the fifteenth and final installment. The title of the sermon is “The Rock”.

We have now come to the end of something. If you have been here lately, you know that we have been on a journey, that began in Epiphany, through the greatest sermon ever preached. Today, we look at the final few verses of it. I pray that the words that God has given me to speak have been a blessing to you. And in the Church Year, we have come to the end of the season of Lent. A very important, but more somber and penitent time accompanied by prayer and often fasting. But this morning, we have moved to the joy of Easter. Because sin has been atoned for and Jesus is alive! Somberness is replaced by celebration in proclaiming “Alleluia” and “He is risen.”

The word for this particular Easter Sunday is “rock”. The word “rock” is one that everyone knows. Of course, literal rocks abound-some of them famous. That would include the Rock of Gibraltar on the tip of Europe to Plymouth Rock where the Pilgrims landed. But we also understand “rock” is used to describe things in a

figurative sense. It communicates something. There is the kind of music birthed in the 1950s known as “Rock and Roll”. If people say “that rocks” they mean it in a good way in that something is good or enjoyable. Then there is the “The Rock”, the nickname for the famous Alcatraz prison. Then people can be known as “rock”. Of course, there is Peter from the Bible, which means “rock”, actually describing the confession of Christ that he made as opposed to Peter himself. In more recent times we have had the comedian Chris Rock, the rocker Kid Rock, the actor Rock Hudson, and the movie boxer Rocky Balboa. And who can forget wrestler turned actor Dwayne Johnson, known simply as “The Rock”?

Some people may literally be named “rock”, but it can also be a name that someone purposely adopts-as in the case of the some of the people I just mentioned. Why? Because to be a “rock” communicates strength, power, and toughness. We hear about “building on the rock” today in the Gospel Lesson from St. Matthew 7. And that rock is ultimately not a what, but also a “who”. The wise man builds upon the rock of Jesus Christ. 1 Corinthians 10:4 says, *“And did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.”* This hearkens back to the Israelites in the wilderness whom God provided water for from a rock, so that they would survive in the barren land. Jesus will provide the living water from His ministry. Rocks are prominently in the Scripture. In Psalm 118 we heard, and it is quoted in the New Testament, *“The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone.”* This is the Messiah, Jesus. As we sang just a little while ago, *“On Christ, the solid rock, I stand; All other ground is sinking sand.”*

This Jesus, who we have heard in the Sermon on the Mount call the meek blessed, commands that we turn the other cheek, and that we love and pray for

even our enemies is the strongest man that ever lived. Because He did what no one else could do: live a perfect sinless life, die in our place for the sins of the world, secure eternal salvation, and defeat death itself by rising from the dead. And rocks featured very prominently in the events that we have remembered over the past few days. They made Jesus carry His cross to the place where He would be nailed to that cross and die, a big hill of rock right outside the Jerusalem city walls. It was known as “Golgotha” in Hebrew, or “Calvary” in Latin. Then when He was dead, they placed His lifeless body in the garden tomb, which was hewn out of rock. A huge stone, a rock, was then rolled in front of it. But, praise to be God, when the women came to anoint the body early that first Easter morning, they saw that the stone had been rolled away. Peter goes into the rock of the tomb and sees that it is empty. Yes, the literal rocks were there, but the rock that is Jesus was gone. Mary Magdalene saw Him very much alive!

Now, let’s more specifically look at our text for today. Verse 24 begins with the word “Therefore”. In studying your Bibles, it has been said that when you see “therefore”, want to ask, “what is it therefore there for.?” In this case, it is there because Jesus is drawing this sermon that He has been preaching over the last three chapters to a close. He is bringing it all down to His final point. The Lord has been going through a series of contrasts of the true vs. the false. And the final one is now upon us. The wise man building on the rock and the foolish man building on the sand. It ultimately comes down to this. Jesus is saying, “You have heard everything that I have told you, and there are really only two options for your life. It is not enough for you just to have heard these things and think these are just interesting things to ponder. You must be a doer of the Word, not only a hearer of my Word. You will either build your life, both here and in eternity, on

the rock which is Me and my Word, or you stake your life and future on sand.” And as we have seen before in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus uses natural elements in His illustration to make His point: rock, rain, floods, wind, and sand.

You want to choose wisely. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. The wise person is to build their house upon the rock. Because when the rains descended, the floods came, and the winds blew, and battered the house on the rock, but it still stood. Not so for the foolish person. When the same elements come against it, it falls. Why the difference?

First of all, let me tell you what it wasn't. It wasn't that one of the individuals in the illustration worked and the other did not. This is a very important point. As we have heard over and over again, we are not saved by our works. There is no way that we can reach God's standard of perfection by our own efforts. Both the wise men and the foolish man worked to build a house. It is not that the foolish man sat there and did nothing. But in the end, only the work of the wise man endured.

Why? Because of the foundation. That made all the difference. The foundation of sand could not withstand the battering elements. A building may look great above ground, but if its foundation is weak, it is only a matter of time before it comes down. The house with the foundation of rock may not even look as good to the eye as the one built on sand, but it is the one that will endure. Your foundation must be God. It must be the solid rock of Christ. It must be the very Word of the God and the salvation it proclaims. Without the foundation of Christ and His work, all of our efforts come to naught.

Because the storms of life will come. We sang, *“In every high and stormy gale My anchor holds within the veil”* and *“Support me in this raging flood; When*

*earthly prop gives way, He then is all my hope and stay.*” Faith in Christ makes us endure all of life’s rainy and windy storms. And not just endure, but overcome. To remain standing in the face of all odds. Financial pressures, health challenges, family disputes, wars and violence, poverty, and on and on-we stand on the solid rock of Christ, anchored and secure. The storms will not be easy, we may be shaken, but in God we are not moved to destruction. And not only in the challenges of this earthly life, but ultimately if these earthly challenges require our very life-we have eternal life. We have the glorious Gospel. As the Epistle from 1 Corinthians 15 told us, *“and by which you are being saved, if you hold fast to the word I preached to you”*. Christ died for our sins and was raised on the third day, thus we too will rise and live eternally with Him.

Therefore, Jesus ended the Sermon on the Mount with the contrast between the wise man who built his house on the rock of Christ and the foolish man who built his house on the sand of his *own* life, devotion, and good intentions. Only one stood. The one who was humbly “poor in spirit”, trusted not in himself, but God. The correct option is obvious. Build your life trusting in God, following in obedience what He has told you in His Word.

All of chapters 5-7 in St. Matthew’s Gospel are “red letters” meaning that they were all directly spoken by Jesus in an audible way but for 4 verses, the first two verses of Chapter 5 and the last 2 verses of Chapter 7. Every verse in the Word of God is important, the final two verses of 28-29 are no exception. Here we see the reaction of the people that heard this sermon. Jesus’ immediate audience was the 12 Disciples, but many more had come to hear Him. Verse 28 tells us the reaction of the crowds and verse 29 why they had the reaction that they did.

*“The people were astonished at his doctrine”*, or teaching. No wonder, they had just heard the greatest sermon ever preached! As we have heard over these past weeks, Jesus said so many incredible and astonishing things. He has given us some challenging things to ponder and to do. Many of the things that He has taught challenged not only the convention wisdom of His times, but ours as well. This was, and is, a sermon like no other.

Jesus had preached this sermon, delivered this teaching, in the typical posture of a rabbi, seated with the hearers listening at his feet. But this message was not delivered in a synagogue, but in the open air to a massive crowd. And the content of what Jesus delivered was unique. As verse 29 said they were astonished because, *“For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.*

You see, the scribes taught *by* authority, but Jesus teaches *with* authority. When the scribes of the day taught, they often quoted the rabbis and traditional sources. They would say something is true or this way because someone else had taught it. But Jesus takes a different approach. He had not supported what He said with referencing the religious teachers, when He mentions what the other rabbis are teaching the people it is to point out their errors. What was Jesus’ authority to make the claims that He did, then? It was Himself. Because Jesus was not only a human rabbi, but was God Himself. When Jesus spoke, the people were literally hearing from God Himself.

In claiming to be the Messiah, the Son of God, God in the flesh among them- this is a bold and big claim. But Jesus has proven it. He is the fulfillment of all of the Old Testament prophecies about the Messiah. He does incredible miracles. He even tells people that their sins are forgiven, something only God can do. And

this is where we once again return to the resurrection, which we joyfully celebrate this day. This is the ultimate proof. Jesus died and rose again. The grave could not hold Him, death could not defeat Him. His resurrection shows that the sacrifice on the cross was accepted by the Father. The resurrection is fact, as 1 Corinthians 15 chronicled that Jesus was seen by so many after His resurrection. This makes Jesus unique. Every religious teacher that the scribes and Pharisees could cite was either dead or would die. Every other religion in the world today was founded by someone who is either dead or will die. But this is not the case for us disciples of Jesus. Because Jesus is alive. We serve the one true and living God. The God that took on death itself and emerged from the tomb very much alive and victorious. And with faith in Him, we too live eternally as God's forgiven children. He is the true rock, the Rock of our Salvation.

In closing this sermon and the whole series, I give one more quote from Luther's commentary on the Sermon on the Mount, "That whoever has Christ, has everything."

Christ is Risen!

He is risen indeed! Alleluia!

Amen.