

TRUTH COMMUNITY

- TEACHING GOD'S PEOPLE GOD'S WORD -

Are You a Wise Man or a Fool?

Matthew 7:24

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It is admittedly a little bit bittersweet for me to open up the word of God for you this morning because this is going to be my final sermon on the Sermon on the Mount from Matthew chapters 5 through 7—we've just come to the end of it. And part of what you do when you preach is when God is done speaking on a particular topic, you stop speaking as well—you don't continue on.

But this morning, I had some time alone and it was encouraging to me to look back on everything that we have studied in the Sermon on the Mount and what the Lord has done in my own heart during that time.

We come to the final passage. Jesus is wrapping up this sermon as we come to Matthew chapter 7, verse 24. He is bringing it to a pointed conclusion and He is pointing out the reality of eternal hope and eternal destruction.

What is it that Jesus has taught us through this sermon beginning back in Matthew chapter 5, verse 3? Preeminently, as we have said so many times, preeminently Jesus has taught us in this sermon what the redeemed life looks like. He has shown us the path and the nature of true repentance. As I have said many times, before this sermon was even preached, in Matthew chapter 4, verse 17—I invite you to turn there because we need to set the overarching context to have the full impact of what Jesus says here in the passage that is before us this morning.

In Matthew 4:17, Matthew records a summary statement that would characterize the thrust of Jesus' teaching throughout His ministry. He says:

From that time, Jesus began to preach and say "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

That is a summary statement and just within a few short verses, Matthew records the Sermon on the Mount. And in Matthew chapter 5, verse 3, He says: "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." And that phrase, "the kingdom of heaven" is a verbal link between those two passages that forms an interpretive link for understanding the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount explains what true repentance looks like.

Now with that little statement said that I've said so many times over the past two or three years, let's get something clear in our thinking right from the start. Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount makes a great emphasis on the ethical nature of the Christian life and of what the true spiritual life in the kingdom of God looks like. But understand, beloved, that He is not teaching us in this sermon that we can save ourselves by the merit of our own good works—that is not His point in this passage at all. The Sermon on the Mount starts with recognition of our own spiritual bankruptcy; that we have no spiritual good of our own to commend ourselves to God. The Sermon on the Mount starts with the person of the Beatitudes who is mourning over sin; who is hungering and thirsting for righteousness; hungering and thirsting for that which you do not have in your own self. That's the starting point of this entire sermon; it is someone who is broken over sin; broken over his spiritual lack. And so Jesus doesn't come into someone in that condition and say, "Okay, now here's how you can work your way into heaven."—that would be ridiculous.

No—He is teaching us something different; He is teaching us what repentance looks like and what the life is that flows from that person who repents while he is mourning over sin because true repentance results in a true life change. And the Sermon on the Mount shows us what that life change looks like.

Now just to emphasize this point just a little bit more and see it even in the context of the Sermon on the Mount, in the model prayer that Jesus gave to His disciples in Matthew 6:12 (look there), this is not talking about attaining a spiritual perfection through your own works because imbedded in the model prayer that Jesus gives to His disciples, He teaches us to confess our sins. He says pray this way and He says:

Father, forgive us our debts; as we have also forgiven our debtors.

As an ongoing matter, we are confessing sin and confessing our spiritual lack. And so this is not about how to work your way into heaven—that can't be said often enough; particularly in light of the passage that we are going to consider this morning.

Elsewhere in the Bible as you know, God teaches us in His word that salvation does not come from our own works. For example, in 2 Timothy 1:9, the apostle Paul said:

God has saved us and called us with a holy calling; not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted in Christ Jesus from all eternity.

So, we do not, we cannot save ourselves with good works that somehow merit favor with God. He saves us by His grace; He imputes the righteousness of Christ to our account when we turn from our sins and put our trust in Christ who bore the wrath of God against our sins when He died on the cross. The Bible is clear about that; Jesus is not contradicting that in what He is about to say to us this morning.

But with that basic principle about salvation firmly entrenched in our minds; at the same time, the Bible teaches that true salvation transforms the life. God gives us a new nature when He saves us. He gives us a new heart with new desires and that new nature expresses itself in a life change. And that life change can be recognized by the spiritual characteristics of the Sermon on the Mount—that's the idea.

Now get this, because this is where we are starting to zero in on where Jesus is going in this passage. That life change is inevitable for someone who is truly redeemed. The spiritual characteristics of the Sermon on the Mount will manifest themselves in one degree or another in every person who is truly saved. And the absence of that change (this is a pivot point in the sermon), the absence of that change is the mark of someone who has not yet come to true faith no matter what they say about Jesus.

I like to say that if a person's lips say one thing and affirm Christ and their life says something else, you always listen to what their life is saying not what their lips are saying. In Luke chapter 6, verse 46, Jesus said:

Why do you call me Lord, Lord and do not do what I say?

What is it that the Bible would say to someone like that, someone with this hypocrisy, who is mocking the name of Christ?

In the book of James, James chapter 1, verse 22, it says:

Prove yourselves doers of the word and not merely hearers who delude themselves; who are self-deceived.

The epistle of 1 John 2, verse 4, it says:

The one who says, 'I have come to know Him' and does not keep his commandments is a liar and the truth is not in him.

He is lying when he says "I have come to know Christ" and has a life that mocks the commandments of God.

And so the Bible is very clear about that and against that backdrop that I have spent the past few minutes developing, Jesus closes the Sermon on the Mount with a warning, a very sobering warning against empty professions of faith. He warns us against the consequences of false faith so that we could be assured that we, ourselves are on the narrow path that leads to heaven. With those things in mind, turn to Matthew chapter 7, verse 24 to verse 27. As one of Jesus' greatest sermons comes to a brilliant climax, in verse 24 Jesus says:

Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them (in Greek does them), may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. 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. 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. 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 word of final warning as Jesus closes this message and yet, at the same time, He gives this warning as an expression of His grace. He warns people in order that they might check themselves and be able to examine whether they are truly in the faith. He gives us this last opportunity before He closes this sermon to examine ourselves to see whether we are self-deceived or not and to prove the reality of our faith. This is a final warning in a series of closing warnings about how to find your way to the narrow gate; how to avoid the dangers that would keep you from entering the narrow gate. In verses 15 to 20 He said

Beware of the false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing.

He is giving us a warning about a threat to entering the narrow gate or finding true salvation. He says beware of these false teachers and turn away from them lest they lead you away from the narrow gate. It is a word of warning that's designed to help us as we seek to understand Christ; as we seek to follow Him; as we seek to secure the eternal blessing of our eternal soul. He warns us about the immortal threats for that seeking.

Then in verses 21 to 23, after He has warned against false teachers, He warns us against self-deception and false peace. "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not do...'" all of this stuff and He will say, "I never knew you; depart from me you who practice lawlessness." He says there will be many people, who have known nothing but an empty false peace; who never truly knew Christ. And through His word, He says to you today, be careful that you are not one of those; be aware of this danger and turn away from it because many people will be surprised when God turns them away from heaven and ah, the awful tragedy it would be if one of you were counted among that number—among that awful number; those whose fates are worse than death. Jesus in His grace warns us that these things are happening; that self-deception is a very real threat and it is in that context that today's passage comes, conveying a final warning.

Jesus here in this passage that I just read is warning you against taking God's judgment lightly. He is warning you against hearing His words but not obeying them. He is warning you against having an empty faith that does not produce a life change. He is warning you that kind of empty faith leads to eternal hell and the destruction in the ruin of a soul that is in that condition is great; it is unspeakably great. There is a boom at the end of this sermon that says the fall was great; and then Jesus is done. The last words that are left ringing in your ears at the end of this sermon is that the fall of this foolish man was great and He warns us to help us.

Now what He does in this passage is He draws a contrast between a wise man and a foolish man; a wise man and a foolish man that have certain things, many things actually, in common. They both built a house and they built it in a common location. We know

that it was in a common location because it was the same storm that hit both houses. And what He does here is He uses the pivot point of the contrast; He describes a storm that comes. And what He is describing here is a typical storm in the local climate of that time, in a fairly dry region. But yet there would be those times where high winds would come; torrential rains would fall and ravines that previously have been dry would suddenly turn into a flooding river with much power; with a force of water that carried away almost everything in its path. Jesus uses that picture that would have been common and familiar to His hearers to describe a spiritual reality; the most serious spiritual reality. And the comparison that He is drawing is this; God will test everyone who hears the gospel in His judgment. There is a coming appointment with the judgment of God that every man is going to face; that includes you and me—we've talked about that in the past and I can only allude to those CDs in passing here.

But the comparison that Jesus is making here, by way of summary introduction, was this; the wise man, in the face of that reality; in the face of the reality of the coming judgment of God; the wise man is the one who submits to Christ in such a way that it actually transforms his life. That kind of man will pass through the judgment of God into eternal life. He will be rescued from the wrath that is to come. His hairs will not be singed by the wrath of God as it were; he will come out safe on the other side when the storms of judgment come; the storm is a picture of God's judgment—that's the wise man.

The foolish man is the one who only pays lip service to Jesus; the one who hears, but not obey. That man, Jesus says, will meet with unspeakably great and eternal ruin. You remember back in verse 13 of Matthew chapter 7 that He said there is a broad way that leads to destruction. And when we went through that passage a few weeks ago, we said Jesus is talking about eternal destruction; eternal condemnation; eternal hell. And now what follows because the eternal consequences of everything He said in this sermon are so vast and so great, He gives a series of warnings lest anyone think He was kidding; lest anyone think that He was not serious; lest anyone be deluded into thinking that Jesus was not teaching for keeps. Jesus is speaking with the utmost sobriety here and He intends us to take His words seriously and that's why He delivers these warnings at the end.

It is interesting; this sermon really doesn't end on a very great note of comfort, does it? It ends with a warning and so that's the atmosphere in which we are looking at this passage today. The question for you today; really the only question that matters in all of life; in light of what Jesus is saying here; are you a wise man or a fool? Nothing else matters. That is the singular point that Jesus drives to at the end of this sermon—are you a wise man or a fool? Your eternal destiny; your eternity would be different depending on the answer to that question. And so Jesus wants us to take it seriously.

So we are going to look at this contrast in detail and the sequence that Jesus gives to us. The first thing we are going to look at; we are going to contrast wisdom that leads to heaven and the foolishness that leads to hell; the wisdom that leads to heaven contrasted with the foolishness that leads to hell.

The first thing that we consider is:

1. The Wisdom that Leads to Heaven.

Look at verse 24 with me again so we can really cement it in our mind as we contemplate it in these brief moments together. Jesus says:

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. 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.

Now that opening word, “therefore” connect this conclusion to the prior statements He had made in the sermon. Basically, the flow of the thought; the train of Jesus’ thought here is this. He says, because the gate to eternal life is narrow; and few people find it; because false teachers abound who will lead you into eternal destruction; because self-deception and false peace are such threats to the well-being of your soul; therefore, in light of those realities that I had just been talking about, Jesus says, therefore, whoever hears my words and does them will be considered a wise man. In light of these eternal unseen realities; if you hear my words and follow them and obey them and take them to heart, then Jesus says, you are a wise man and let me show you what it is like; and that’s what He proceeds to do.

We could say that the wise man is a sensible man; he is a prudent man. In the picture that Jesus uses here, this wise man wants his house to last. He wants to build a structure that will survive the test of time; that will survive the test of the elements that are inevitably to come in his region. He understands the danger of future storms; of future floods; and he plans for them. He makes accommodation now before the threat has presented itself. He makes plans while he has time and he goes to the extra effort to excavate and to build his house deep on the bedrock. That’s just the essence of wisdom in building a house; you build it on a firm foundation so that it can stand against the elements and the test of time that are sure to come.

Now, with that simple illustration that all of us can understand, Jesus shows how a prudent person should respond to His words. He takes that which we all can obviously commend and say, yes, of course, that’s what you do when you build a house. But apparently, we as fallen men are too dense to quickly understand the reality of applying Jesus’ words to our own situation. We are careless and so Jesus is warning us and commending to us the wisdom of the man that would know the truth of what Jesus says; recognize His authority; understand its eternal implications; and act upon it.

This wise man in the spiritual realm that Jesus is describing hears Jesus’ words and obeys them. The wise man in this picture is someone who actually repents and believes in Christ. He actually ceases to do evil and learns to do good. He actually loves Christ and wants to be like Him—that’s the wise man; that’s the picture.

And in verse 25 Jesus says, that wise man who hears my words and acts on them is going to see a similar result to the wise man who built his house on the rock. When the storm of God's judgment comes, he is going to survive the test. This wise person will pass through God's judgment safely as represented by the house that did not fall in the illustration. This man believes in Christ will stand the test; God's holy judgment will not destroy him; Christ Himself will be the shield that protects and upholds him—that's the wise man; that's the picture. The house is the symbol of the building of his spiritual life. The storm is the picture of God's judgment. And the house built on a sincere faith in Christ that produces and results in a life transformation will stand even in the fury of that storm—that's the picture that Jesus is giving us. That is the wisdom that leads to heaven the one who takes the words of Christ seriously and acts upon them.

Now by way of contrast, let's consider the foolish man. Let's consider secondly:

2. The Foolishness that Leads to Hell

Look at verse 26. Jesus says:

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. The rain fell; and the floods came; and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell.

Literally in the Greek the closing words are, “and its fall was great; it was great. The final word indicating the last word that is meant to reverberate in your mind; the last word that you are to carry away from this; the last word that should cause you to step back; put your hand over your mouth; and say, “whoa—this is serious” because the fall of this man is great; it is irrecoverable; it is irredeemable; it is final in its severity—that's the thought here.

Now the word for the foolish man here in verses 26 to 27 is derived from the same word from which we get the word moron; this man is a moron; this man is so totally foolish. It refers to an absence or a lack of that common prudence that is necessary to provide for your own security. And I'll say that again. This foolish man is marked by an absence of common prudence; common diligence that is necessary to provide for his own security. What you see in this picture is Jesus giving us an illustration of the foolish man building his house on sand. What you see is the picture of the man who is in a hurry. He wants quick results and he doesn't listen to instruction. He neglects the time tested basic principles of the construction of a house that says you build a good foundation before you raise up the structure. He doesn't contemplate the future. He doesn't think about his surroundings. He doesn't think about the inevitable nature of the storm that is to come. He just follows his own opinion and is content in that.

Now here is where the real threat of that comes where that self-deception becomes such a threat. The problem is that (get this please), the problem is this; the danger is not realized immediately. The danger does not come to pass right away. He gets away with his poorly constructed house for a time. There is a window of time where he almost looks

like the wise man. He looks like he was the one who was wise because with less effort, he got a similar house up and is living in it while the wise man went through all that effort. The foolish man would look at that wise man and think, “Pity the fool; I’ve got a house and things are well.” But as is obvious in Jesus’ words here, that foolish man is living with a false sense of security. The fact that the storm has not come yet; the fact that the house still standing today says nothing about what is going to happen tomorrow—it says nothing about that. And a wise man; someone who is not a fool, looks beyond today and says, tomorrow is not necessarily going to be like today. What’s the environment like here? You know what, there are storms that come and floods that come and the outcome is utterly predictable; it is just a matter of time that that house on sand is going to collapse in total ruin. For a short window of time, he enjoys the fruits of his own stupidity.

But eventually, there is a price to pay; beloved there is a price to pay. The same storm came upon that foolish man’s house and it was all different from the wise man. The foundation was swept away. The sand couldn’t stand in the face of the force of the water and the house falls in one mighty crash and leaves somber silence in its wake; the great boom followed by a terrifying silence.

Beloved, what is the spiritual lesson that Jesus wants us to learn from this foolish man? Because in so many ways, he looks like the wise man, but beneath the appearances of their spiritual lives is a fundamental difference. The foolish man professes Christ but does not obey Him. He doesn’t really want to know Christ. He does not truly hunger and thirst for righteousness. Sunday to Sunday in a place like Grace Community Church; in a place like GraceLife; men may not see the difference. From outward appearances it looks the same. But rest assured beloved; bank on this as much as you bank on anything else; more than anything else; rest assured that that kind of hypocrisy will be exposed in the end. There is no escaping that reality. There is absolutely no way around that reality. God will expose the hypocrite in the end.

God is not mocked. Whatever a man sows, this also he will reap. And the life that pays lip service to Jesus without obeying Him is a life that is going to be most severely judged. Hebrews says, how much severer judgment will he deserve who has mocked the blood of Christ (I’m paraphrasing). But he who has trampled under foot the precious Son of God; paying lip service; how much greater is his judgment going to be? It is going to be far more severe than the pagan who has never heard about Christ. The hearing of the gospel; sitting in a room like this; under the teaching of the word of God is something that brings greater accountability to you all.

In discussing this foolish man, J.C. Ryle said this—this is his description of the foolish man:

He never really breaks off from sin and casts aside the spirit of the world. He never really lays hold on Christ. He never really takes up his cross. He is a hearer of the truth, but nothing more. A Christianity which costs us nothing and

consists in nothing but hearing sermons will always prove at last to be a useless thing.

This foolish man has been warned of his incalculable risk to his eternal well-being and he fails to respond. There is nothing more a preacher can do for him. Ultimately, beloved, you and your own life; you and your own heart; have to appropriate these things for yourself and act upon them. Don't be deceived by sitting in this room; this means nothing if it is not followed by life obedience when you walk out of the door. And if it is not followed by life obedience when it walks out the door, God's blessing is not hanging over your head as you go out; God's cloud of wrath is hanging upon you as you go out that you would mock the word of God and mock Christ by hearing His word and not responding in obedience—that's foolish; it is profoundly serious.

This foolish man lives for the moment; content with deceptive appearances to those around him and he will reap eternal condemnation as a result because the outside forces like the storm upon the house; the outside force of God's judgment will eventually come upon him. He will not stand the test; he will miss salvation and he will be pressed into utter destruction.

Beloved, I really don't want that for any of you. That's part of the reason why Jesus gives this word; He doesn't; He warns us against those consequences as well. He means us to take this with soul-shaking seriousness and to examine ourselves and for you to examine yourself to see if you are really in the faith in light of the awful consequences of being deceived.

Now, with that basic summary of the wisdom that leads to heaven and the foolishness that leads to hell, what is it that Jesus wants us to take away from this? What is it that you should walk away with thinking about this morning? This may be by way of recapitulation, but that's okay.

The similarity of the houses in this passage points to the fact that there were similarities between true and false Christians who both hear the words of Jesus. This reminds us of the fact that there are weeds and there are tares and you can't always tell the difference at the moment; in the depths of the self-examination of your own heart, it is possible to know. The whole point that Jesus gives this is so that we could see this and understand it now. If this was only a threat that is going to be revealed at the final judgment, this passage wouldn't be helpful at all; because when judgment comes, it is too late. What can we know from this passage now as we seek to examine our hearts? Understand this that there are similarities between true and false Christians; they operate in the same sphere; they listen to the same sermons. There were wise men and foolish men under the teaching of Jesus at the time that He gave this sermon. The great comfort to me as the preacher of the word of God is to know that even foolish men heard Jesus' words and didn't respond. That wasn't the failure of Jesus; and if you fail to respond to a much lesser preaching and exposition of the word of God, that's still on your head not mine. This is your responsibility beloved; this is your accountability; this is your soul before God. All I can do is present this to you and have you evaluate yourselves.

But these true and false Christians are similar. Listen to this; a false Christian, someone who is not truly saved can have the same desires as a true Christian. You don't have to be a Christian to have a desire for forgiveness. You don't have to be a Christian to want comfort in your trials. You don't have to be a Christian to want guidance as you go through life. You don't have to be a Christian to want a good life. You don't have to be a Christian to want spiritual power. You don't have to be a Christian to want to go to heaven. You don't have to be a Christian to believe that your soul is saved. Foolish men can want all of those things and believe all of those things and still end up in hell.

Now, as true Christians, we want those things; we want forgiveness; we want comfort; we want God's guidance; we want power to live a Christian life; we want to go to heaven—there is an overlap. It is not the similarities that are defining the difference here. There are similarities between the true Christian and the false Christian. You can't always distinguish based on those kinds of desire, beloved.

So what? Are we just left in darkness here? Hardly. When you consider the totality of the Sermon on the Mount (I wish there was some way that I could encapsulate the last three and a half years that we've been studying this in 30 seconds so that it would all come to bear on your conscience right now, but I can't do that), but when you consider the entirety of the Sermon on the Mount, you can distinguish the real from the false at least as you examine your own heart. Because here is the difference beloved, the wise man is someone who is sincerely and truly devoted to the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He truly loves Christ; he loves Him enough to obey Him. "If you are truly disciples of mine, you will keep my commandments" Jesus said; he loves Him enough to obey Him. This wise man; and these are the questions that you ask yourself; these are the things by which you test yourself; they all center on the person of Christ and what He taught. This wise man takes seriously the reality of coming judgment and he lives in light of it; he lives in light of the fact that he is going to be accountable before God. This wise man is careful about his spiritual life and (get this), he submits; he subordinates the way he lives to the person and authority of Jesus Christ. He is trying to bring every thought captive to Christ. His motives; his words; his actions; his attitudes; he wants all of that to live in conformity with the authority and the person and character of Christ Himself.

Is that the way you live beloved? That's the test. Now, understanding what I have said; remembering what I have said earlier; we are not teaching salvation by works here. We are talking about the fruit of a truly redeemed life so that you can say (and this is where I came out thinking about this even this morning as I was driving in here), we are all conscious that we fall short and your speaker today is no exception to the fact that we all fall short of the glory of God—we understand that. But the true Christian can look at his life and say, "I'm not all that I should be; I'm not all that I'm going to be. But praise God, I am not what I was." That's what a true Christian can say when he looks at his life.

It is not about perfection. We are talking about what is the direction of your life. When you have those holy affections that distinguish the wise man; you love this Christ enough to amerce yourself in His word and say, "I want to be like that. Oh, God, I hunger and

thirst for that kind of righteousness; I know I fall short, but God, I plead with you to make me like what Jesus describes in this sermon. Oh, God, if you gave me nothing else but gave me that, I would be the man most richly blessed.” Where is your heart, beloved—where is it?

The foolish man; the false Christian; is fatally different. He may show up on Sunday. She may have the name of Jesus on her lips. He may know the lingo. But beloved, week after week, month after month, year after year, there is no true change. The foolish man chooses his own convenience; chooses his own desires over the commands of Christ. The foolish man tries to externalize the rich internal teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount and leaves his heart unchanged because the heart work is not something he wants to begin with. The foolish man has no real interest in the deep spiritual transformation that Jesus describes in the Sermon on the Mount. The foolish man is careless; he is unwilling to be truly instructed and to submit to the counsel of God’s word. The foolish man is indifferent and ignores the certain reality that judgment is coming.

This passage teaches us that that foolish man will give an account for the way his life has mocked what his lips say he believes. That’s the distinction that we are talking about today beloved. Every professing Christian should examine himself in light of what Jesus says here. Understand that Jesus says there are wise men. He intends for us to know whether we are counted among those wise men; that we don’t trifle with the examination because no one can truly claim the name of Christ who is not interested in the righteousness of His kingdom—that’s the bottom line beloved.

He blesses those who hunger and thirst for righteousness; the righteousness; practical righteousness; manifested in your life imperfectly now; reached in perfection in glory when God brings us fully into His kingdom—that’s the test.

Stated differently, the question is whether the lordship of Jesus Christ is the dominant reality in your daily life or not—that’s the question that you have to answer in the throne room of your conscience. Now if it is, beloved, you say, “You know, I know I’m imperfect, but I do love Christ and I do want to follow Him.” If that is true of you, beloved, take heart—oh, please, take heart and take comfort in what Jesus says here; because your devotion to Christ is not in vain. Judgment holds no fear for you. You will stand because the shed blood of Jesus Christ and His righteousness are able to make you stand. His shed blood and His righteousness fit you for heaven perfectly.

And you can look at future judgment and say, “I see it coming, but I’m ready; my house is built on the rock.”

But if you are the hypocrite, content to live on appearances without a corresponding life reality, Jesus warns you gravely. Judgment is coming and it will be a greater force than you can possibly imagine. And your imaginary Christianity will collapse to the utter destruction and eternal damnation of your soul—that’s it.

Jesus has just defined spiritual reality for us. It is on that sobering note that He closes this great sermon. Throughout the colossal greatness of this sermon, HE has shown us our spiritual bankruptcy; the threat of God's eternal judgment; and HE has pointed to Himself as the only sure way of salvation.

How did the audience of His day respond? Look at verse 28:

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

The audience that heard Jesus on that day, they were thunderstruck. They were astonished; they were absolutely overwhelmed to the point of speechlessness at Jesus' teaching. They were particularly amazed at His authority. They were used to the scribes who always quoted somebody else when they were teaching to prop up what they were saying. They had never heard a man teaching like Jesus taught because Jesus spoke on His own authority. Remember what He said throughout Matthew 5; He says, "You have heard that it was said... but I say to you; those who hear my words..." He made His own words the standard of judgment and the crowd did well to recognize it.

But beloved, Matthew's description of the crowd in these two verses leaves an important question unanswered. He doesn't say whether they obeyed it; he doesn't say whether they acted upon it.

See beloved, you can admire a preaching; be moved by it, but still remain in unbelief. We don't know what the final nature of their response was. That open question ultimately forces the issue to you, and you, and you. You have seen the authority of Christ. He calls you to trust Him alone for the forgiveness of sin and to joyfully respond to Him in the life of obedience. He calls you to move beyond hearing to doing. Now, you have to answer. Are you a wise man or a fool?

Let's pray

Father, as we close this magnificent sermon, we, too, are thunderstruck with the authority of Christ. And Father, we take to heart the sober realities that Jesus has spoken here. Your word is not a matter of fun and games; no, it is far more searching and far more serious than that. Your word deals with eternal realities that each one of us will have to come to grips with either now or when we stand before you.

Father, I pray for each one that is here; for each one that will hear this message in the future; I pray that they would proof forth the wisdom that leads to heaven and that you would deliver them from the foolishness that leads to hell.

Grant us the grace, Father, to examine ourselves. Grant us the grace to examine ourselves rightly and grant us the grace to respond rightly once that has been made clear to us. Father, for those of us who would examine ourselves and find, "Yes I am truly in Christ," we give you our deepest and most humble thanks and gratitude. And we thank

you that you have delivered us from eternal judgment and hell and that we can live in confidence even though that day is coming.

Father, for those who have been fools up to this point, Father, would you gravely pierce their hearts and expose their hypocrisy and may be their self-deception that they might truly repent and enter into eternal life and avoid that awful calamity where the fall is great.

In Jesus name we pray. Amen