

There Are Only Two Options

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Matthew

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A passage of scripture from Matthew 7 that, rest assuredly, I'm sure most of us are amply familiar with, and not only do I appreciate Cade singing that tonight, but I think it just kind of makes it personable. You know, we talk about all the time about our lives built on the rock of Christ Jesus versus this sandy foundation of whatever we so choose to lay. I think sometimes it's one of those what I call flannel board stories. We talk about it in Sunday school, we might preach about it in church, but then the realization of what that really means was just personified in that song this evening. Whether it is our marriages, whether it's our homes, whether it's our jobs, our hobbies, whatever it may be, really at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says there's only two options. You know, when it comes to multiple choice questions we always hope for a third option, do we not? Now do you all remember particularly in grade school when you would have all these multiple choice questions that you would have the option of A or B and then C sometimes would say both A and B and then D would say none of the above. You know, it was kind of one of those trick questions. But tonight when we get to the end of the Sermon on the Mount there is no option C. There is no option D. You can't have both and you can't have neither. Basically, Jesus concludes the most famous sermon he ever preached with saying we only have two options, our lives can be built on a rock or our lives can be built on shifting sand.

Beginning in verse 24 of Matthew 7.

24 Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: 25 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. 26 And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: 27 And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. 28 And it came to pass, when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at his doctrine: 29 For he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Ladies and gentlemen, that is the conclusion of what you and I know as the Sermon on the Mount and this is intriguing because back in chapter 5, this famous message begins with a series of beatitudes, "Blessed are these and blessed are those, " and it begins to go through a dialogue and a discourse of, shall we say, some pretty intense subject matters. We've talked about marriage, we've talked about intimacy, we've talked about family, we've talked about finances, we've talked about trust. There's been a whole lot of things that have been addressed and just from a fleshly perspective, you don't really expect Jesus to conclude with a parable. You don't really expect him to conclude with a visual imagery, but that's exactly what he does. You'll notice the first word in verse 24, "Therefore." Now you know the joke, right? Therefore is there for a reason. This is the conclusion of the matter. What does Jesus Christ do? He lays before us a challenge. He says, whosoever hears these sayings and either does them or does not do them. Now let me remind you, now you may or may not have been a part of our study for the past several opportunities going through the Sermon on the Mount so allow me for those of you that have been with us every step of the way, forgive me while I recap the last few weeks/months. In what we know as the Sermon on the Mount, it is not so much a discourse on what "biblical Christianity" is as much as it is a discourse on the frailty and the actuality of human sinfulness. In other words, in chapter 5 Jesus Christ very much extrapolates for us every single way that you and I can somehow sin against one another whether it is defrauding one another, cheating one another, whether it's taking advantage of one another, whether it's coveting one another. He basically systematically discovers every way that you and I do each other wrong or can be done wrong by somebody else. Then you get into chapter 6 and he kind of elevates the stakes. It's not so much our horizontal infractions toward one another as much as it is our infractions toward God himself. What is the true motive behind our prayer life and our giving? What is our true reason for claiming our faithfulness to the things, the ways, the word, and the will of God? What he exposes is that oftentimes, you and I as individuals, humanity collectively, we find ourselves in some type of religious system where we do either A, because it's a habit, or B, because we somehow think we will gain something on the backside of, but there's no "heart" behind it. Then we get to chapter 7. Jesus made it very clear in spite of these two realities both horizontally and vertically, when it comes to the end of one's life, there's only two paths, there's the straight path, the straight gate which is very narrow, and then there's the way or the the road to destruction which is very broad. Last time we gathered we focused on verse 21 through 23, very scathing expose that talks about there will be those who in their flesh and in their mindset think that they're "good" with God when they're really not. They checked off the boxes. They claim fleshly adherence to rituals, regulations and religiosity but Jesus said at the end, "Depart from me those that work iniquity. I never knew you."

Now push pause for just a moment. I want you to think about the audience that would have been at the Sermon on the Mount. Every single one of those individuals, every one of them, at some level had some adherence to the Jewish system of faith. Whether it be the festivals, the feasts, the sacrifices, the offerings, at some level they were attaining or attempting to attain a right relationship with God. Now you can just imagine, there were times during this famous sermon where they heard an expose about a sinful disposition and I'm sure they nudged their buddy, their spouse or whoever it was and said, "Yeah,

he's talking about you," and I'm sure there were times that they dropped their head and said, "He's talking about me." And by the way, as an aside, I tease all the time that one day, there's a lot of books that when time slows down I'm going to write, one of them is called "View from the Pulpit." I don't know if you know this, but I see everything. Oh, I do. But can I tell you one of the best things to see from this pulpit? It's somebody at the top of their head. You say, "The top of their head. You know that when you see somebody at the top of their head, they're not sleeping, right? In church, when you sleep, you always fall back. I see that all the time. Alright? The top of the head is typically someone who's staring at the ground because the Holy Spirit has them under such conviction about what's taking place. I have a feeling that during the Sermon on the Mount there were a lot of people that were dropping their heads when the Lord Jesus basically exposed them for who they truly were. And then they hear those famous words, "Not everybody that says unto me Lord, Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven." It would be my hope and my desire that the majority of those present would have been shocked and in awe at that statement, realizing their shortcomings and their sinful state.

So in verse 24 when Jesus says "Therefore," he's really giving them hope. "Therefore in light of what I've just shared with you, therefore in light of how you've defrauded one another, how you've manipulated one another, therefore in light of the fact that you've gotten caught up in religiosity and not relationship, you can still have a life that is built on a proper foundation." And so he challenges them. He said, "Whoever hears these words and does or does not do them." And then Jesus makes a very astute observation. It's the observation that I know every single one of you here in person, everybody online is aware of, that life is more often stormy than not. In fact, we talk about in Psalms 23, in the valley of the shadow of death, yet at the same time I think we'd recognize that for most of us the valleys of life often are greater than the mountain peaks of life. The struggles of life oftentimes outnumber, outweigh the successes of life.

So what does Jesus say? He basically says that storms don't just come in life, they're a part of life. I love the description. Not just the words of Jesus, but the song that Cade played and sang. "The rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew." That is a description of the struggles and the difficulties of this thing called life that each and every one of us face on an unfortunately much too regular of a basis. Let me remind us before we get into the details here that in Romans 6 it says the wages of sin is death. The reason that the rains descend, the reason the floods come and the reason the winds blow is the byproduct of humanity's sinfulness, inherent depravity.

But for the sake of illustration tonight, let's talk about some storms of life. Let's talk about some physical storms. How about illness? You know, one of the most despondent and desperate times in life is when you're laying in a hospital bed all alone wondering if anybody or anything will come and visit, not knowing what the diagnosis will be. You know, we have a syndrome in our culture called a white coat syndrome. Y'all know what that is? That when you go to the doctor, your blood pressure naturally elevates. Why? Because last time I checked, when you go to the doctor, they find problems. They make diagnoses. They make discoveries. And oftentimes, it is the illnesses of life that bring on the struggles of life. And I know I jokingly say this tongue in cheek, but for those of you

who are active in a Sunday school class, would you be willing to confess that most of your prayer requests are organ concerts? You're praying for organs. Somebody's lungs, somebody's heart, their organs. A lot of the times the concerns we have are illnesses and the reason is because our bodies are decaying. They are eroding. Every single one of us tonight is closer to death today than we were yesterday. Just a fact of life. The rains descend and the wind blows, we get sick, we experience illness and ultimately death. I know we all know this, but death always comes sooner than we ever dreamed or expected. We always make this, I mean it's amazing how many funerals that I've officiated that when the family off to the side or the friends always say, "Oh but they were just so young." It doesn't matter how old you are, it's still too young, is it not? It doesn't matter. We always desire, we always hope, we always wish for one more day, week, year, decade, whatever it may be. And I know many of you are familiar with this story, so forgive me, but there are some illustrations in life that are just worth hearing more than once. Years ago I had a young man in my church by the name of Maurice. Maurice was 97 years of age. His best friend passed away at 94 and they're standing over the casket. He made this observation. He said, "Pastor, he was just so young at 94 years of age." I would say that from a human fleshly perspective, unless you surpass Methuselah of 969 years, we're still too young, are we not?

Sometimes it's not physical illness or death, but how about the rains, the floods and the winds of the debts of life. Financial debts, physical debts, all types of debt. We have become a culture, whether you know this or not, according to this last week, the headlines are out, that as a society, we owe one trillion dollars in credit card debt. Now I know a lot of people are going, "Oh, how horrible!" Hey man, we're doing good compared to the government. I just thought I'd let you know. I'll let that sink in after a while.

How about the storms of life that reach down to the soul? How about heartache and heartbreak? You ever had one of those experiences in life where maybe it's news of a tragedy or despair, that it hits so hard you can't even stand? You know in Romans 8:26 it talks about there are times in our lives where we seek the Holy Spirit to pray for us because we don't know what to pray. Have you been ever so heartbroken you can't even speak? Have you ever been so upset words cannot come out of your mouth? Have you ever been in such despair that you have nothing to say?

How about disappointment? Now as a casual illustration If you as a husband or as a wife or as a child or as a parent, if there's ever been within the human realm of relationships where an obvious transgression has taken place, and for the sake of illustration, just hypothetically, you're the one who has committed the transgression. How many times when we look in the eyes of those who we've disappointed, we say, "Would you just say something?" But disappointment often leaves us speechless and it's disappointment with others.

How about this one, have you ever been disappointed with God? It's OK. Job was disappointed with God. David was disappointed with God. Abraham was disappointed with God. The Apostle Paul was disappointed with God.

Then there are some spiritual storms. How about the storm of doubt? Have you ever had one of those moments where you just questioned, "God, do you ever even hear my prayers?" Have you ever had a time and a struggle in life where your faith is so fragile you're not even questioning if God hears you? Sometimes you've even questioned whether he exists at all? You see, those are one of the storms in life. Oftentimes that's the by-product of the physical storms or the soulful storms but there's doubt.

How about fear? And I know we can quote Bible verses, 2 Timothy 1 says we've not been given the spirit of fear but of power, love and a sound mind, but I would be lying to you if I haven't experienced fear. And you know what fear does? It paralyzes you. Fearful because of that diagnosis. Fearful because of that disappointment. Fearful because of the potential consequences of what has just taken place as somebody else's decision or yours.

There are times in life that it's not even your storm but somebody else's storm knocks down the walls of your life. You see, storms happen, the storm of temptation, trials, etc. The reality is, you don't have to live in east Alabama to have a daily storm of life. Those of you that are here physically know exactly what I mean. But have you noticed, and I'm not a meteorologist, but have you noticed that the hotter the day, the more dramatic the storm is on the backside. And we can just sense that it's coming. See, storms of life, they're not haphazard, random occurrences. They're regular and they're real and they're tough. And what does Jesus say here, Matthew 7? That in your life, and in my life, it's not a matter of if the storms occur, it's how often and how severe they will be. The rains of life will descend, the winds will blow, and the walls will come crashing down.

Now, I say what I'm about to say tongue-in-cheek, and I know you understand what I mean by that but now that I am where I am in the stage of life, one of the things that I say, and when I say I don't trust, what I mean is I don't trust for wisdom, I don't often trust anybody anymore who hasn't raised a teenager. You know why? Because teenagers specialize in storms. They do. You don't believe me? Physically I've got a fast pass to the orthopedic clinic. I've been there a whole bunch. I have one son who's had three surgeries before he turned 18 years of age. But you know what? I'll trade the physical storms for the emotional ones any day because it's those emotional storms, it's those spiritual storms that test us and try us.

And so, there's only two options and one of them isn't if you're going to have a storm or not. The storms are going to come. The question is, when they do, is your life built on a solid foundation, or as Jesus said, the sand of self-righteousness? So let's talk about that "solid foundation." And Jesus says, "I will liken him," verse 24, "to a wise man who built his house upon a rock. The rain descended, floods came, the winds blew, they beat upon that house, and it fell not, for it was founded upon a rock." Here's Jesus' declaration, that if your life, your "proverbial house" is built upon a rock, you are a wise man.

Now 1 Corinthians 10 as I've alluded on the outline I placed there and that's very strategic and purposeful because you may or may not know this but 1 Corinthians 10 actually chronologically describes for us the first baptism in the Bible. Now I know some of you are Sunday school teachers and you're wise beyond your years. You're thinking, "Well

how is the first baptism in 1 Corinthians 10 because I know Jesus was baptized in the gospels and I know John the Baptist was in the gospels. How's that the first one?" Because it's actually an allusion to Moses and the Old Testament. And there in 1 Corinthians 10 it talks about that the Israelites were "baptized unto Moses," right? That picture of going from being an indentured servant or slave to sin, to the freedom that can only be found within the Lord. But at the end of that, it talks about the "rock." Remember the rock in the story of Moses and the Israelites? The rock was that one that was struck the first time and you remember the second time Moses got in trouble because he struck it a second time because it was only to be spoken to the second time and water was to flow to give nourishment in the midst of the desert in the wilderness. If you go to 1 Corinthians 10:4, you know what it says about that rock? It says that rock was Christ Jesus. In other words, when Jesus Christ makes the statement that a wise man builds his life upon a rock, he's not being overly literal. He's speaking of himself. He basically says, "Here's the option. You can place and build your life upon who I am or anything else. The choice is yours."

Proverbs 9:10 and a host of other places, it says that the wisdom of life is from heeding to the commandments and the things of God. Basically, Jesus declared what he's always declared, that it's his way or any other way. C. S. Lewis summed it up best. He said when it comes to Jesus, he's either a liar, he's a lunatic, or he's the Lord but you cannot have him be both/and. In other words, Jesus, when he said "Blessed is the man who builds his house upon the rock," he was looking at those who had sinned against each other, those that sinned against God himself, and he said, "You've got two choices here. You can be wise and listen to what I'm saying, or you can choose anything that the world is peddling."

What's his designation? A rock is solid and it's immovable. It's that which cannot be obstructed or hindered. Matthew 16, Jesus, and by the way, on a trip to the Holy Land or Israel, is at my favorite spot in the whole journey. He's there at Caesarea Philippi and there he gathers in front of this place where all the religions of the world would have come and sacrificed and worshiped and celebrated and given offerings and such, and he throws out the question, "Who did the world say that I am?" I'm sure you're familiar with the passage. "Some think you're Jeremiah, some think you're a great prophet, some think you're Elijah." Then Jesus says, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter stands up and says, "You're the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus responds by, "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you but my Father which is in heaven." And he goes to describe himself as the rock, as the foundation of the church. You know what Jesus says? That the gates of hell shall not prevail. Now can we put that in perspective of rains descending and winds blowing? If Jesus Christ said not even the gates of hell can destroy our relationship with him, then there's no diagnosis that any doctor or anybody else can ever give us. There's no designation. There's no declaration. There's no distraught. There's no heartache. There's no heartbreak. There's no disappointment in life that can shake the foundation of the rock because not even the gates of hell will prevail.

So let's talk about every other option. What about the "sand of self-righteousness"? And the reason I call it the sand of self-righteousness is because most assuredly there were

people at the Sermon on the Mount who heard what Jesus had to say, heard the illustration about the sand and the rock, and said, "Oh don't worry, I got this. I'm good." You know the most dangerous statement in all southern language, right? "Hey guys, watch this." Right? That's exactly what happened. "I got this. I'm good enough. I'm strong enough. It's not that bad." So what's the declaration that Jesus says? Verse 26, "and everyone that hears these sayings of mine and does them not will be likened unto a foolish man who builds his house upon the sand." One who is called foolish. And by the way, if you want to question what God thinks about the foolish, just read the book of Proverbs and it's not a positive response. But interesting, you know, back in Matthew 16, it was Peter who made this great declaration, "You're the Christ, the Son of the living God." Do you know what happens five verses later? Now, that's an incredible declaration, don't get me wrong, but five verses later, Jesus begins to talk about how he's going to go to the cross, he's going to be crucified, he's going to sacrifice. You know what, Peter says? "Uh-uh, not on my watch." Five verses after he says, "You're the Christ, the Son of the living God," Jesus turns to him and says, "Get behind me, Satan." In other words, whom we know as Peter was pretty much some shifting sand, was he not? In fact, if you'll go back on your own time and look at how Peter begins those two letters that are attributed to him. In 1 Peter 1:1, he says, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus." In 2 Peter 1, he says, "Simon Peter, a servant of Jesus." You say, "What's the difference?" Age, time, wisdom, and maturity. He realized that in his own strength and in his own abilities, he is not near the strength or as strong as he thought he was. And then James 1:8 says a double-minded man is unstable in all of his ways.

So what is Jesus designating here about a life that's built on shifting sin, which means, by the way, any philosophy, any theory, any concept, or any presupposition that it's not Jesus Christ? It doesn't matter how celebrated it is, how touted it is, how many prizes it's won, or how many people with PhDs think it's right. OK? Here's what he says, it's fickle and it lacks stability. If you have ever experienced a house that has had foundation trouble, you know exactly what I mean because a house that does not have a strong, firm foundation, the rains will come, the winds will blow, humidity will rise, there's a host of elements, and over time, the fragility and the instability and the fickleness will take its toll.

So who was it that Jesus spoke these most strong words to? Notice what it says at the end of this passage, "not as the scribes." I don't know if you're aware of this, but Jesus' harshest words were for people who were self-righteous, people who thought they were good enough, people who thought, "Look at me, I am what you should desire to attain in life." In Matthew 23, Jesus does what we call in southern lingo, he shucks the corn. You ever heard that term, "That's a corn-shucking preacher," alright? Basically, Matthew 23, he begins to talk about or discuss these Pharisees, these scribes, and who they are as "shifting sand." Remember what Jesus says about them? "You're whitewashed tombs." You understand that's not positive speech? "You look good on the outside but you're full of dead men's bones." My favorite statement, tongue-in-cheek, that he says, he says, "Your disciples are twice the children of hell as you." Wow, that has nothing to do with winning friends and being popular, does it? But those were his strongest words. Why? Because it was the scribes, it was the self-righteous, it was the people whose houses were

built on shifting sand who walked away from the Sermon on the Mount and said, "Yep, I'm good."

You say, "Well, what did the solid rock foundation look like?" I'll give you a picture. How about in Luke 7 when a woman falls at the feet of Jesus and pours the ointment all upon him. And there's those that come all the time in the life and the ministry of Jesus falling down at his feet and begging just for a little. How about the woman in Mark 5 who chases Jesus down after having an issue of blood and illness for 12 years and the Bible says she's expended all the money she's got. She says, "Oh if I can just touch the hem of his garment." That's not shifting sand, that's a pretty solid foundation and so you see the paradigm here.

So what's the conclusion? There's an interesting pronouncement in verse 28, "They were astonished at his doctrine." You know why? Because outside of Jesus Christ, outside of him, every other religion, every other faith, every system of belief, and every philosophy at its core is the shifting sand of good self-righteous works. "I'm good enough. My good outweighs my bad. At least I haven't done this. Well, look at what I've done. Look at what I've attained. Look at my earthly fleshly according to my system's success." And by the way, the reason that Christianity is not a religion is because religion is doing something to attain a certain inherent acceptance. Christianity is a relationship. It's not a religion. It says they were astonished at his doctrine because basically what Jesus said is, "If you think you can be good enough, if you think the good can outweigh the bad, I hate to tell you but when the rains really come and the winds truly blow, that house is going down." But what was his doctrine? That he was the rock. He was the foundation. He was that which our lives should be built upon.

And finally, the possibility. Notice what it says at the end, "For he taught them as one having authority and not as the scribes." Let me unpack that as we close tonight. Those scribes, those Pharisees, those religious-ites of the day, they had a certain persona to them, they had a certain presentation to them. They were the ones that when they walked down the streets, people emulated, they aspired to be them. When they moved in your neighborhood, your home values increased. And when they moved out, they decreased. Here's the problem, those scribes, those Pharisees, those Sadducees were like every other human being that you've ever met in life. No matter what you see on the surface, if you'll dig just a little bit deeper, deep down inside, what do we find? We are a depraved, sinful bunch. What did Jesus say? "Do not as they say or do as they say but not as they do." In other words, their mouths, their words were "betraying them." And yet Jesus was never found to have iniquity. Jesus was never found in sin. How many times did the scribes come to him and they offered him a question and the Bible says and they desired to trick him? They tempted him. And one of the things that Jesus did so beautifully is he would answer their question with a question that they couldn't answer and they would walk away mesmerized and mystified at what he taught. He had authority unlike the scribes.

So tonight, Sermon on the Mount, it's a very famous passage but it concludes in a very powerful, simplistic way. There's only two options, your life can be built on Christ Jesus. or anything else. And by the way, anything else does include religious fervor, zealously

and adherence. Religiosity is not necessarily Jesus. Unfortunately, it is religion that tends to have, from our perspective, the most stoutly sand. It tends to endure great storms. Oh, but there's one big storm coming, it's called death, and when death occurs and this life ends, outside of Jesus Christ there is no foundation that can or will stand. It's a simple, powerful illustration.

Let's pray with our heads bowed, our eyes closed. Tonight as we draw to a close, I know it's Sunday evening, I know, generally speaking, who we have here in person and those that are watching and being a part of our service online, but maybe, just maybe, if you were to place yourself at the Sermon on the Mount thousands of years ago, maybe you would say, "You know what? I've gotten caught up in that scribe trap. I've gotten caught up in that Pharisee trap." And maybe tonight the sinful state you need to confess is, "I think more of myself than God does." Maybe tonight's the night you call on the Lord. Maybe you've never cried out to him to forgive you and to save you from your sins. Maybe you thought somehow you were good enough. Maybe tonight Jesus made it clear, no, unless your life is built on the rock of him, it will never stand the storms of life or eternity. Or maybe tonight you say, "I've been a believer for years." Some of you would say, "I've been a believer for decades." But can we just confess, the shifting sand is tempting. Why? Because every day it's sold to us in commercials and publication and in our culture, teasing us and tempting us. "Oh, don't build your life on a rock, build it on this." Yet we know it is temporary. We know it is fleeting. And when the rains and the winds come, it cannot stand. Maybe tonight, as one who's already a believer, it's about a reassurance, it's a recommitment, it's a re-understanding that if it's not Jesus, it'll never last.

Lord Jesus, as we come tonight, thank you for the illustration of being a rock. Lord, we confess not only individually but corporately we are so attracted to the shifting sand, we're so attracted to the religiosity and the perspective and the philosophies that man continues to propagate. God, tonight return us back to the rock of our foundation, to the rock of Christ Jesus. May you and you alone be the one whom our lives are built upon. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.