

Matthew 7:24-29 "Choose this Day Your Foundation"

We have come to the end of the sermon on the mount. What have we heard? How then shall we live? One of the ways we can reflect on whether or not we are hearing Jesus rightly is to ask – am I responding the way those first listeners responded?

Read Matthew 7:24-29

The first listeners were astonished, and the more and more they reflected on Jesus' words the more astonished they became. They were astonished because Jesus spoke with authority (Greek Exousia – out of being). This means that Jesus' words resonated with the way life was meant to be lived, ringing with the really real, congruent with the way humanity was meant to live.

1. Does this response resonate with what was going on in your heart as you listened to the sermon unpacked these past months? Why or why not?

This is simply a personal reflection question. As a leader the tone of these questions can be set beautifully by you. The more honest you are, vulnerable you are, the more honesty and vulnerability you will get from your group. As this is simply a reflection question, perhaps keep responses brief, hear from everyone and then move on.

Read Proverbs 10:25 as you reflect on vs. 24-27. This image is taken right out of the book of proverbs. The wise are those who live in step with the fabric that God has knit into creation. The foolish are those who live out of step with the fabric that God has knit into creation. As a result the wise flourish and the foolish flounder.

2. It is often assumed that Jesus in speaking of the wise and the foolish is comparing those who root their lives in Jesus, and those who do not. If that were the case however, we should see evidence of that in the sermon itself, but we do not. Who then is Jesus comparing in the sermon that finds it's final expression here?

In the sermon Jesus is comparing those who are seeking to live in step with God's law – as you do don't do it this way – do it that way.

In the sermon Jesus is comparing those who are fasting, praying, giving. When you fast, pray, give don't do it that way do it this way.

Jesus then is not comparing those who are faithful followers of Jesus with those who are not, but rather two different kinds of people within the community of Jesus followers.

Read Matthew 7:21-23 How do these verses confirm your reflections on the sermon as a whole as to who Jesus is comparing in the wise and foolish builders?

Jesus is speaking to those who are theologically sound. They speak of Jesus as Lord – the Greek word that translates Adonai – God.

Jesus is speaking to those who are passionate for him. They don't just say Lord, but Lord Lord, a semitic tool of repetition to express passion.

Jesus is speaking to those who are engaged in the life of the kingdom. Did we not prophesy in your name? Cast out demons in your name? Yet Jesus says depart from me I never knew you.

Both then are committed followers of Jesus, committed to his words.

As Dale Brunner puts it the foolish are those who know Jesus' words are important enough to hear but not realistic enough to live.

3. What conclusions can we draw given that the storm hits the house of both the wise and the foolish builder? How is it that a storm exposes our foundation?

The storm will come regardless. The follower of Jesus is not immune to the storms of life - death – broken relationship – illness – job loss - financial loss – conflict – will come regardless. Every storm that is common to our humanity has and will come upon the follower of Jesus. It can't be staved off by theological conviction, sincerity or obedience, it will come regardless.

This must be said plainly because for far too long the Christian church has said something other than that. We've said that coming to Jesus would free you from pain and suffering, could help you realize all of your hopes and dreams for life. We held up testimonies of those with very clear before and afters - my life was like this this before Jesus – now that I know Jesus – peace love joy and groovy feelings – spouse kids great job health and financial security. Many have bought into such a lie and then the storm came and it was the undoing of everything they believed in...

When we are hit with a storm we will fall back onto what we most rely on. A storm then will likely reveal your foundation. For if in the storm we do not do what Jesus asks us to do, we do not trust him above all else, then something else is our foundation, something else is our Lord. It may be money / things – self-sufficiency – comfort – reputation – if in the storm we do not do what Jesus asks us to do – something else is Lord – something else our foundation

In the sermon Tim gave an illustration to bring the image to life. If in the face of hurt you respond out of step with the fabric that God has knit into humanity, the fabric of love and forgiveness and instead take the path of the retaliation anger and bitterness you become less than human.

4. Pick a couple of Jesus' teachings in the sermon to compare what life looks like when you live in step with Jesus' words vs. out of step with his words. Discuss.

This is an unedited section of the sermon where I gave this illustration. Perhaps you may just begin by reflecting on it, and then move from here to other aspects of the sermon – for example 1) don't root your security on money or things for they are passing away but rather root your security in God's love and give generously 2) speak plainly and faithfully – let your yes be yes your no be no 3) don't judge – speak truth in love. Again as a leader if you have prepared a few preliminary thoughts on a few of the threads in the sermon it'll spark conversation.

Now let me give an example – one I think we can all relate to – someone wrongs you – deeply wrongs you – with words – with action - inaction – diminishing you – taking something from you – the storm has come – a storm that will reveal your foundation – for that storm lays a choice before you – will you take the path of retaliation – resentment – unforgiveness – or will you do what Jesus asks you to do – forgive – love - pray

For Jesus' words ring with authority – with exousia – with out of being – they resonate with the way life is meant to be lived – consistent with the fabric that God has knit into creation - into our humanity – the wise will live in step with that fabric and flourish – the foolish will live out of step with that fabric and flounder.

We know this don't we – living out of step with the fabric of forgiveness and love diminishes us - we will become less than human - it is said that the one who chooses a path of retaliation and vengeance should dig two graves – for good reason - holding onto that hurt will leave you controlled by what the other has done - sowing the seeds of bitterness and resentment - souring every other relationship - every other aspect of life – choosing not to forgive is to drink poison and think it'll kill the one who harmed you.

But – but – to live in step with the fabric of forgiveness and love – will leave you standing in the midst of the storm – for to forgive is to set a prisoner free and then to discover that the prisoner was you – to respond in prayer is to recreate God's heart in you – to respond in love the only force that is able to bring true change.

You see the image is not a threat of judgement – be a doer of Jesus' words or else – its simply reflecting on reality – if in the face of the storm you live in step with the fabric that God has knit into creation you will flourish – if you do not you'll be diminished – become less than human.

5. This last image comes down to a question of functional trust. Do we trust Jesus enough to do what he asks us to do. The crisis of the sermon on the mount comes down to who is this Jesus. How do we answer that question from vs. 21-29? How does who he is, help us to do what he is asking us to do?

Here is an unedited section of the sermon that should help give some direction to this question.

Strikingly there is quite a shift in Jesus' conclusion – all of a sudden he begins to draw attention to himself – the use of personal pronouns comes quickly – repetitively – I – me – my – not everyone who says to me – whoever does the will of my father – on that day many will say to me – and I will declare to them – anyone who hears and does these words of mine – all of a sudden he is drawing attention to himself – it makes central a question – who is the teacher on the mount – the one who calls God my father – the one who equates his words with the will of the father – the one who claims to be our final judge – who is this one who claims to know the fabric that God has knit into creation – who is this one?

That question has come to the crowd – and they're astonished – amazed – thunderstruck – shocked to their senses – and the more they thought about Jesus' words – the more astounded they became – Why? because Jesus spoke with authority – with exousia – with out of being – his words resonating with the way life is to be lived – ringing with the really real – congruent with the way humanity was meant to be

Why – for he is the one in whom and through whom all things were created – in him the fabric of creation was knit.

Every other foundation other than him will fail you – for all things change – decay – diminish – pass away – not Jesus – he's deternal – unchanging – faithful to the end.

No other foundation will love you – forgive you – extend grace and mercy to you – only Jesus.

As we come to him – as we know his love grace and power – as we found our life in him and upon him – we find that his commands are promises – that we can do what he asks us to do – because he is who he says he is.