

“The Parable of the House Built on the Rock,” Sam Ferguson, June 21, 2020.

Key texts | Matt. 7:21-27 (main text); 7:1-5; 7:13-14; 5:43

Sermon Outline & Questions

Opening thoughts—

The Christian life must be built on a foundation of doing: “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them [puts them into practice] will be like a wise man...”

What causes your faith to become one primarily of “lip service”? What does it look like to move away from “lip service” to actively doing Jesus’ commands?

Background—

Jesus offers this passage as a warning at the end of his Sermon on the Mount. People are interested in his teachings and are calling him Lord, so he emphasizes the necessity of doing (i.e. lifestyle).

Jesus is *not* saying, “I will accept you only if you do my will perfectly.” Rather, he’s saying, “I’m the source of living water, and if living water is flowing to you, then you *will* bear fruit.”

Bearing fruit = obeying Jesus, putting into practice his words.

What does your relationship with God look like when your life bears good fruit consistently? Are your daily rhythms, habits, thoughts, or priorities different?

The parable of the **two builders** was a familiar image to his audience.

Jesus’ listeners lived in an arid environment; Jerusalem endured intense rains combined with a rocky landscape, leading to flash floods, erosion, and collapsing foundations.

Environment → parable: If you say you’re a Christian but never put Jesus’ teachings into practice, then your life is like a sandy foundation that erodes, causing the house to collapse.

This is a serious warning, but it’s also an *invitation* to a **sturdy life** → Accept Jesus by putting His teachings into practice. Doing so will give your life a solid foundation.

Sermon Focus | Build Your House on the Rock, Matt. 7:24

Matt. 7:24 | “Therefore everyone who hears these *words of mine* and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”

*Key question—*What are the “words of mine” that Jesus speaks of?

1) Judge not, that you be not judged | Matt. 7:1-5

What does this word look like in practice?

Jesus is not saying it’s wrong to judge. He expects us to judge between right and wrong and speak against injustices. Jesus taught his disciples how to deal with sin in the church (Matt. 18).

Rather, Jesus is exposing our tendency toward hypocrisy. (We are quick to judge the faults in others). Jesus says, “Take the log out of your own eye...” (Matt. 7:5).

Parables and Poetry: Summer 2020

The degree to which we judge others *simultaneously judges us* (Matt. 7:2). Your standards for others become your own standards, too. Judgement is like a **mirror**.

Do you dislike it when people assume the worst of you? Or gossip and slander? Do you expect people to be wise, and competent? These, then, are also standards *for yourself*.

What bothers us, or what we expect from others, ought to be a mirror for us. Are we living in accordance with our standards?

Remember the hypocrisy of the Pharisees as “whitewashed tombs” (Matt. 23:27).

Do you find the Bible’s commands about judgement difficult, or confusing? What would it look like to see judgement as a mirror in daily life? How might this shape your prayers?

How does it lead to a sturdy life?

Seeing judgement as a mirror **cultivates character**. We can use what bothers us as a means of reflection, prompting us to ask: “How might Jesus need to work on my character?”

We must allow the mirror of the law to prick us and drive us to the grace of Jesus.

Cultivating character leads to a firm foundation both in this life (i.e., our daily lives on earth) and our standing before the Father (i.e., our eternal standing).

What happens when we apply the “mirror” of judgement” separately from God’s grace? Or what happens when we neglect self-reflection about the standards we hold others to?

2) The Narrow Gate | Matt. 7:13-14

What does this word look like in practice?

“Do not exchange a truly rich life for that which is immediately gratifying or expedient.”

Following Jesus is not easy. It means self-sacrifice and suffering, but it leads to *true life*.

People want life, and they want it abundantly. Good! We were *designed* for abundant life. But Jesus tell us that the path to abundant life is difficult.

What does choosing the “narrow gate” look like in your life today? How might you be choosing what’s gratifying or expedient over the “narrow gate” right now?

How does it lead to a sturdy life?

If we live by the “narrow way,” then our life will have a Christ-centered focus. Our **priorities** and **daily habits** will reflect that we are on a quest to know and follow God.

The “narrow way” is like two river banks. (Narrow river banks provide strong currents and deep waters.) There are two river banks in our lives: (1) God’s ways, (2) God’s love. We must funnel everything through these river banks, thereby giving our lives **deepness** and strong **purpose**.

The “narrow way” makes us fit for hardship, and the world needs people fit for hardship.

Why does the world need people “fit for hardship”? How has God used hardship (and endurance) in your life to work in redemptive ways in the lives of the people around you?

3) **Love Your Enemies | Matt. 5:43**

What does this word look like in practice?

Jesus is *not* asking his followers to deny injustice, or to “act nice” in the face of evil, or to never feel anger. In fact, the Bible teaches us to call out injustice specifically and with sincere emotion.

Jesus is asking his followers to exhibit **love** in addition to anger.

But how does this work when someone or a group has been grossly mistreated? Consider the recent writings of Esau McCaulley (Wheaton professor/Anglican priest) on race relations:

Esau recently published a *New York Times* article, [“What the Bible Has to Say about Black Anger.”](#) He focuses on Psalm 137 (after Israel was taken into Babylonian captivity).

Psalm 137:9 | “Happy is the one who seizes your infants and dashes them against the rocks.”

Esau wonders: How can wishing such an atrocity be a religious text? What kind of song do you write if you’ve been forced to watch the murder of your family?

When people suffer tragedies on a personal or corporate level, Jesus’ teaching on loving one’s enemies needs to be handled with care and nuance. Our response cannot negate anger of “volcanic intensity,” nor the cries of lament.

In fact, this song (Psalm 137) requires us to remember the trauma that led to the song. *There is no healing if we don’t see reality rightly.*

Yet Esau takes us to beyond volcanic rage, seeing the possibility for peace.

The miracle of the Bible is *not* that it records the rage of the oppressed. The miracle is that it looks to salvation, even of the oppressors (“That my salvation may reach the ends of the earth,” Isa. 49:6).

“Hope is possible if we recognize it does not rule out justice.” Hope is possible *because* God is extending his mercy on a grand scale.

Take 10 minutes to read McCaulley’s article in full. What stands out to you? Was there anything that surprised you, or that you hadn’t thought about before?

How does it lead to a sturdy life?

The Gospel allows for justice *and* reconciliation. It makes way for true peace.

This teaching reminds us that no matter how far we feel we’ve wandered from God, Jesus’ love can find us and bring us back to a place of reconciliation, peace, and redemption.

Additional Questions:

What might Christ be saying to you through this passage, sermon, discussion?

How might you live differently in light of this passage and sermon?