

The Beautiful Life - Building Strong Foundations, Jesus Lifestyle 18, Matthew 7, v24-29.
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Father send your Holy Spirit, to teach us, as we dive into the Bible would you awaken our hearts, expand our minds and shape my identities and lives today. We want to live a Jesus shaped life ... Amen.

The Beautiful Life - Building Strong Foundations

‘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. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

This is an amazing image, well known to many, we have heard it in Sundays School, perhaps we have the tune already in our head of a children’s song. It is a powerful image, where as Jesus comes to a close in his sermon, he says, looking back at all he has said so far – as well as what he will say later - it is possible to hear and do what he said.

Does this sound like a dream to us?

Or have we embraced consumer Christianity – so all out engagement with Jesus is seen as just one option that can be taken if people want it, it is something priests, missionaries, monks or holy people do, or something young people do, or we did in the good old days but then life got complicated...

A Good Life, a Beautiful Life.

Life on the Rock must be a good way to live! Thinking of Jesus’s words...

Wouldn’t you want to be a person who knows how to live a rich and unshakeable life as storms crash and bang? Someone who is free from loneliness, fear, anxiety and filled with peace and joy?

Would you like to love your neighbours as you do yourself and be free of envy, greed, lust, and vengeful anger?

Would you like to have no need for others to praise you and would you like not to be paralysed or humiliated by their dislike or even condemnation?

All sounds pretty good so far?

Now as we hear this list, we have a mixture of feelings maybe.

There is a big YES, I want that – this all sounds like abundance of life, which Jesus seems to have lived, a life he promised in John 10.

But other parts of this list sounds like obedience – a choice to do what we would otherwise choose differently – a choice which may spoil our plans...

So *do I want really* to give up all the options, that would disappear from my toolbox, if I become the person described – the wise person who builds his or her house on the rock.

The truth is – *obedience to Jesus is about abundance*. A greater life. A beautiful Life. That is what Jesus has been introducing us to, in this words in Matthew. A Jesus Shaped Life. And

Jesus believes we can grow in Christlikeness in this life, not simply in the life to come.

A question is: We who have committed our lives to King Jesus, how would we train ourselves to ‘learn from Jesus, how to live our life as he would live it, if he were us?’

Think of how we learned how to ride a bike. We teach our kids to ride a bicycle or to swim. They actually usually do ride a bike or swim on appropriate occasions. We don’t teach them that they ‘ought’ to ride bicycles and leave it like that; we do not teach that it is ‘good’ to ride bikes and leave it like that, or they should be *ashamed* if they do not.

It is about teaching ourselves and others to, for example to bless those who curse them, and they actually do bless those who curse them, even when loved ones.

Imagine you are driving by a church that has a large sign in front which says: “We teach all who seriously commit themselves to Jesus, how to do everything he said to do.”

You may think ‘well of course, that is what Jesus, the founder of the church, told us to do.’

But your second thought may be: ‘Can that be right?’
‘That is so arrogant for a church, no one can do that?’
Can it be real?

So how do we progress?

Not more information

When we thinking of teaching, this is not about communicating or collecting information. Our challenge is usually NOT about informing the disciple about things Jesus believed, taught and practiced. Usually that has already been done. We – the students of Jesus – already hold almost all of the correct information.

Don’t get me wrong, information on what Jesus believed, taught and practiced, and the rest of the scriptural teachings is essential. By such information students have confidence in Jesus. Yet while that is important, there is a risk that the information we may have, *does not form part of our real life*. In our bodily actions, our thought patterns and social lives, we continue to be ready to live and act *as though it were not true*, even if we verbally affirm it or accept it.

This is instead about getting the answers right *and believing them* as Willard says.

Jesus asking of us, to come to a point where we actually believe all the things we have actually heard. The task – to transform our right answers into automatic responses to real life situations. This, is, when we think about it, is what Paul teaches in the armor of God, we take up the armour, we believe.

We need to ask ourselves. Is there a chance, that we are unable to believe our theology, that we are unable to believe it in the way, we genuinely do believe multitudes of things in our 'real' life.

To believe something is to act as if it is so.

To believe that 2 plus 2 equals four is to act, behave, accordingly when try to find out how many euros, or how many eggs we have in the house. The advantage of believing it, is not that we can pass tests in maths; it is that we can deal much more successfully with reality.

From an audio book I am listening to. When American forces were in Eastern Afghanistan in Nuristan, they were working closely with Afghan forces. Those forces were paid. Yet the money which kept being transported to them always short.

The soldiers never understood what they were meant to receive or how much. They just believed what their commander said. So an American officer decided to teach these Afghan soldiers how to count and basic maths. So they understood how much they were meant to get and that they knew when they would not get it. They believed 2 plus 2 equaled 4, and it helped them live.

The advantage of believing, for example, in the death of Jesus is that we then live, as if the death of Jesus is real and did what it did. We put our feet on the rock as Jesus says, than build on sand.

For some of us, our next step as disciples, it is not about getting more information, it is about you and I believing with our whole being the information we already have as a Christian.

Soak and Smell

CS Lewis talking about books – how they should take you on a journey, up and down and around and become part of you. Instead of simply A to B. Book done. We spend time with the book. It is similarly allowing the information to soak inside us, we chew over it, listen to the podcast, read the book again...

It may mean a change to our habits, as social media may have changed us...We know how it is.

We wait for a bus, on the toilet or in the middle of a meal, we all look down at a screen, scrolling through the flow of social media. Cat videos, advertisements, Star Wars memes and selfies. It all flickers past at a furious pace, seemingly with no purpose or afterthought. But can our faith information become like that – the song, the podcast, the bible reading – speed, with

no after thought, and no possibility to soak inside us... there is no after thought, or in fact we run with the latest thought we read about, but then next week it will be another thought...

Secondly what simply occupies our mind often governs what we do. It sets the emotions out of which our actions flow, it becomes the compass pointing the way for the possible ways of action. We seek that our mind becomes increasingly directed towards God.

There is a saying 'take time to smell the roses'. It means to enjoy the rose you have, to focus upon it, bring the rose as fully before our senses and mind as possible. To smell a rose you must get close, you must take time, when you do so, you delight in it, we love it. To take time to smell the roses can leave lasting impressions.

If we simply are to love God, and have our life filled with that love, to stand on the foundation, Jesus in all his glorious reality must be brought into the mind and kept there in such a way that it takes root and stays fixed there. It may be the reality and beauty of what he is saying, or simply he cares about such things. It is about taking time regularly within your weekday, not just on a Sunday, to bring the reality of Jesus into our minds, and his words and the beauty of what he is asking before us.

We are all disciples. To become a disciple of Jesus, a person must believe in him. In order to develop, grow as a disciple, one must increasingly, progressively come to believe what he Jesus knew to be true.

To enter his kingdom we believe in him. To be at home in his kingdom, to have that increasingly Jesus shaped life, we must share his beliefs.

Hence his story – two men, two houses, two foundations, two results, two responses to Jesus.

Two Men and Two Houses.

So two men, two houses. Both the wise man and the foolish man built a house. They both planned to live in it, it was to be of long lasting significance. Our lives are like houses – we look at the long term. This is about how we are living for the rest of our days...

The houses built looked very different from the outside. Like IKEA flatpacks. At this stage, looking from the outside, no one could have told them apart. Similarly two lives can look very similar. Superficially they may be the same, but the difference will be evident when the challenge comes. In both cases 'the rain came down, the steams rose and the winds blew and beat against the house.'

All of us sooner or later, Jesus says, will face the pressure of life. The challenges come in many ways – misunderstandings, unfulfilled longings, disappointments, doubts, trials, temptations, satanic attacks – the day of evil as Paul describes it. Success can be a test too. We can face the

challenges of pressure, set back, suffering, sickness, bereavement, trauma, tragedy, persecution, failure, virus pandemic.

But Jesus says, indirectly, we do not need to live in fear, though the storm is real and strong and loud. It is not easy but there is a way, Jesus says, to be sure, that when the foundations of our houses are shaken, tested, they stand the test. It is possible to know that the future is ultimately secure.

Two foundations.

The difference between the two houses –
it is the foundations.

It is not clear if Jesus speaks about a difference in location or in depth.

The wise man goes on looking until he finds rock on which to build.

The foolish man chooses an attractive piece of sand, not realizing it is a dry wadi, which in the winter rains will become a raging river.

Or it could be that the foolish man builds on the sand; but the wise man digs until he find the rock beneath.

Jesus teachings he says are to be foundational. You know before I became a Christian, you would perhaps have said I looked like a Christian, looking at me. I was baptized, confirmed, I went to church, my parents were Christians. Yet you know when the pressure came as I faced important exams which would determine if I could go to university or not, you know I had nothing to rely upon. All that knowledge. It was sand. Head only.

Now later, when facing stress and challenges, and I still can get stressed – just ask my family! – but I know the one I am trying to lean on, have my foundation upon. When I became a Christian at university, I began to learn the difference between having Jesus teachings as foundational instead of nice interesting ideas, that I could quote...

Two Results.

Because the foundations of the houses were so different, the results are equally different. So when “²⁵The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.” But the on sand ‘it fell with a great crash.’ This is again Jesus not threatening people. He loves us and so he warns us.

Over 30 years ago, on Wednesday 13th March 1991, there was a terrible accident on the M4 motorway, involving 51 vehicles. Ten people died, 25 people were injured on a foggy day in one of Britains’ worse road accidents. One man, Alan Bateman, was hailed as hero, after he climbed out of his damaged car and rang along the central reservation to try to warn oncoming vehicles of the wreckage ahead. Some drivers sounded their horns at him, however, and drove on towards the crash...

Jesus warns us, not in order to frighten us, but because he loves us and wants us to avoid the crash. He wants us to be like the wise man whose house 'did not fall' but stood the test. The amazing promise Jesus gives is that a house built on the rock – who hear and put into practice, who truly believe what he says – will be a house which withstands the storms of life.

As Nicky Gumbel says: "A life founded on obedience to Jesus is safe, no matter what the storms of life may bring." The 19th century evangelist DL Moody, wrote in his Bible, alongside this verse we have read: "build on the rock and fear no shock."

Two Responses to Jesus.

Jesus has pointed clearly to the key difference, which is where we began. The wise man not only hears the words of Jesus but he 'puts them into practice.' The foolish man, he hears them, but he does not put them into practice. To be clear in case of confusion, Jesus is not saying that we earn our way into the kingdom of God by our good works. That would be clearly against his teaching across the gospels, as well as across the NT.

Secondly, note Jesus is not saying – the person who puts his words into practice will lead a sinless life. John reminds us – if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.' As Paul reminds us in Galatian 5, our sinful nature waging against the desires of the Holy Spirit within us.

Jesus simply teaching what we see repeated across the NT. Listening is not enough. Hearing leads to action.

Conclusion: Jesus has been describing the Jesus shaped life

Jesus has been describing the Jesus shaped life. He knows we have an enemy who will seek to lead us astray. He knows we also have the resources of the kingdom – the Holy Spirit available to help us.

A Jesus shaped life is about as we have seen, being a child of God, living a life of blessing, being peacemakers, being pure in heart, having the fullness of life, living in right relationships with God and with each other.

It will be seen in how we live – as salt of the earth and bright lights in a dark world. It will be seen in our righteous lives, instead of nursing anger, seeking revenge, we seek reconciliation; in following his radical teaching on faithfulness in relationships, not being a slave to sexual desire, but upholding sanctity in marriage. It will be seen in complete integrity, going the extra mile, loving our enemies, even those who persecute us, and being part of God's part to redeem and transform the world.

It will be made evident by our secret life of giving generously, being a loving community who prays and not consumed by unforgiveness, but forgiving one another, loving each other even if we cannot see the person as a friend.

It will show itself in the fact that we store up treasures in heaven and not on earth, not being dominated by worries and fears or obsessed by money, but seeking and keep on seeking God's kingdom.

It will be revealed in our relationships that we are not judgmental about others, but instead we seek God with all our hearts and minds, we pray for others, not condemning or throwing 'our' wisdom towards them, we do to others what we would have them do to us.

Finally a Jesus shaped life, will show itself in our commitment to enter through the narrow gate and to build our lives upon the rock.

Shall we pray...

Lord Jesus, I fix my eyes on you,
the author and perfecter of my faith.

Today I choose and desire that I would believe your words and they would shape how I live.

Fill me again with your Holy Spirit.

Help me to resist the temptations of in one ear, out the other.

Help me to know you more clearly, love you more dearly
and follow you more nearly, each and every day.

I want to live the beautiful life, the Jesus shaped you offer.

Amen.