

Building on the Rock

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Today's scripture reading is from the Gospel according to Matthew, chapter 7, verses 13 to 29, as printed in the liturgy.

A reading from the Gospel according to Matthew. Enter through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.

But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. Watch out for false prophets.

They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles?

[1 : 1 5] Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.

Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons, and in your name perform many miracles?

Then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers. 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.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the wind blew, and beat against that house. Yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock.

[2 : 3 5] But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew, and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law.

This is the Gospel of the Lord. Thanks be to you. Good morning, Christ Church. We are exploring again today the Gospel of Matthew.

And here at the beginning of this Gospel in chapters 5, 6, and 7 is what we call the Sermon on the Mount. And Jesus has technically finished the body of his sermon.

And so now in these verses, he's rounding it off. He's landing the plane. He's applying. He's exhorting. He's urging on his listeners the importance and the necessity of practicing and implementing the Sermon on the Mount in their daily lives.

[3 : 52] And basically what he's said so far, and you can open up your pew Bible if you like, Matthew 5, 6, and 7. You can double check what I'm saying here. But Jesus basically has said, I'm the Son of God.

I've come down from heaven to earth to establish this alternative kingdom. I've come in the midst of all the kingdoms of this world. And I've come to call out a people to myself.

And I've come to form that people into the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of light. And you people that I'm calling out into this kingdom are to be entirely different, utterly unique, right?

Noticeably set apart from everybody else in your thinking and in your living. And he begins that sermon, you know, with that portrait of the nature and the character of the Christian and what we call the Beatitudes.

And he says, you know, people that have experienced the grace of God in their lives, they are poor in spirit. And they mourn over their sin and their selfishness.

[5 : 02] And they have about themselves a meekness and a lowliness and a humility of heart. And they hunger and thirst for something that they don't have, which is the righteousness that only God can give.

And out of that, they treat other people with mercy, the way that God has been merciful to them. And they have a pure heart that wants only really one thing.

And they're peacemakers. And Jesus says, these kinds of people that are in my kingdom, the world is going to treat you like they treated me.

Blessed are you when you're persecuted because of righteousness. But Jesus says, just because they're treating you poorly, don't run away. Don't escape. Don't retreat. Jesus says, I want you to live in the world as salt that holds back the decay of this world.

And I want you to live as light that pushes back the darkness of this world. And then Jesus tells us how to be Christians who live out the moral law of God.

[6 : 08] He basically says, I want you to be righteous. I want your righteousness to be obvious and noticeable. And so he gives us in Matthew 5, 6, and 7 these detailed instructions for how to be righteous people in relationship with God and righteous people in relationship with others.

And basically, if you read this whole Sermon on the Mount in one sitting, you experience it like this giant searchlight. Right? A hundred thousand lumens just shining into your soul, shining onto your life.

And if you really let it shine on you, you'll cry out and say, I am poor in spirit. And I really, really need a Savior.

That's what the Sermon on the Mount does to you. But Jesus, now he gets to the very end of the sermon. And how does it end? Well, he says this.

He paints four little pictures for us. And he says, look, there are two roads. One leads to destruction and one leads to life. And there are two trees.

[7 : 18] One is good and it produces healthy fruit. And the other is bad and it produces diseased fruit. And so that tree has to be cut down. And thrown into the fire.

And he says there's two different kinds of people who call themselves Christians. One that does the will of God. And one that does their own will. And that person who does their own will is going to hear me say one day, depart from me.

I never knew you. And then he says there are two kind of houses. There's one that's built on the rock and it stands in the test. And the other that's built on sand and it falls.

And one of the last words of this greatest sermon ever preached, Jesus says, it fell with a great crash.

And then he drops the mic and walks off the stage. Imagine if I said to you, hey, I'm going to go swim in the ocean today.

[8 : 16] And you, because you're such a good friend, you said, hey, I don't think that's such a great idea. Because these waters are actually shark infested waters. And there's an incredible riptide today.

It's already killed multiple people. So I don't really think you should go and swim. Is that friend trying to ruin my fun? Is that a friend who's trying to manipulate me and scare me?

Or is this a friend who's trying to give me a loving warning? A friend who's trying to save me and give me life? And I think that's what Jesus is in this sermon.

The Apostle Paul, when he's preaching to the greatest intellectuals of the day in Athens, in Acts 17, he says, For God has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed.

He has given proof of this to everyone by raising him from the dead. And Paul goes on in one of his other letters, 2 Corinthians 5, he says, For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due for us, for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad.

[9 : 26] And here's Jesus, the most loving person who's ever existed. And he's standing here as the judge of all people, the judge we're going to meet on judgment day.

And he says, Here's what's going to be on the final exam. I'm telling you now. There's no guessing. This is the final exam.

So, you ready to listen? Jesus judges our road, our fruit, our will, and our foundation. That's what Matthew 7 tells us.

Jesus judges our road, fruit, will, and foundation. First of all, Jesus judges our road. He says in verse 13, The Lord Jesus gets to the end of the Sermon on the Mount, and he asks us, What is the point?

What's the most important thing of all that I've said? What's the one principle above all the others that you really need to grasp? What's the most outstanding characteristic of the life to which I'm calling all Christians?

[10 : 42] In the Sermon on the Mount, and Jesus says it's narrowness. It's a narrow gate, and it's a narrow road, and it's a narrow life.

And we say, Well, wait a second, Jesus. I think you got that backwards. Don't you really mean to say that the way that leads to life is one of wideness and one of broadness?

And didn't you mean to say that many people are going to find the path to life? Because the way you just said it, Jesus, sounds kind of exclusive. And I think you really want to be more inclusive.

And Jesus, don't you really want to appeal to more people and accommodate all of our needs? And do you really want to sum up your Sermon on the Mount with this word, narrow?

And Jesus says, Jonathan, thank you so much for trying to help me be the Son of God, but yes, I meant narrow. I meant narrow.

[11 : 44] Standing before you are two gates, and you have to make a decision. On your left hand is this wide gate that has a great crowd of people that's entering in simultaneously.

And on the right, you have this small gate that only takes one person at a time. On your left, you have this broad road where the masses of people are surging along it like a six-lane highway.

And on the right, you have this small gate, and it leads to a narrow, single-track path, and only a few people are walking along it. And Jesus says, that's what the Sermon on the Mount is all about.

That's the way I want you to walk. And only there on that path, that narrow road, are you going to find me walking before you. And notice that the Christianity Jesus describes is narrow from the beginning.

It's not like, you know, at first it's broad, and then it gets more and more narrow. Jesus says that the gate, the point of entry, is narrow, and it's hard to squeeze through.

[12 : 50] Right? There's only one gate. Jesus says it like this in John 14. He doesn't say, I'm a way, a truth, a life. He says, I am the way, the truth, and the life.

And then what does he say? No one comes to the Father except through me. So when Jesus says, enter through the narrow gate, he's saying, convert to me.

Submit to me. Call me your Lord. Now, if you've ever been through a really tight security turnstile that's tall and metal, you know, you can't even get through one of those things with a backpack on.

And I think that's kind of what Jesus is describing. There's some things at this gate that you have to leave outside. Some things you've got to leave behind. And what must we leave at this gate?

Jesus says, well, first of all, you've got to leave the crowd. You've got to leave the majority. Right? You've got to leave behind the way of the world and your need to be popular because what I'm calling you to is different and it's strange and it's uncool.

[13 : 59] Because the world says, hey, if somebody slaps you, slap them back. And, hate your enemies and curse those who curse you.

But what I'm telling you is if somebody slaps you, turn them to the other cheek and let them slap that one as well. And what I'm telling you is love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you.

And if somebody curses you, I want you to bless them back. How in the world do we do that? Jesus says, well, if you're going to leave, you've got to leave the world behind and if you're going to do these things I'm calling you to do, you've got to leave yourself behind.

Right? We heard it earlier. If anyone wants to be my disciple, you must deny yourself and take up your cross and follow me. And what's the first thing he says?

You've got to renounce yourself. You've got to renounce your old self. For that's the road that all of us are born on. Right? Is the way of the self. The way in which this wide and broad way that's completely centered on the self.

[15 : 08] And Jesus says that way ultimately will destroy you. Because if you're centered on yourself, you can't be centered on God. And you can't be centered on other people. And what you're going to be left with at the end of your life is just this small, pitiful, little ego self.

And you're going to be on your deathbed and all that's awaiting you, Jesus says, is destruction. Irreversible, eternal destruction.

But the good news is Jesus says I came that you might have life. Verse 14, small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life and only a few find it.

You know, if you've been a Christian for a while, you can attest that from the outside the way of Jesus seems narrow and constraining. But once you get on the inside, it's quite spacious and liberating.

And Jesus is basically saying here, look, if you go through the gate where you have to renounce yourself to even get through and if you walk with me on this narrow road where you love God and you love other people more than you love yourself, not only are you going to be on that way with the one who calls himself the resurrection into life, but what you're going to get at the very end is the life of God himself.

[16 : 30] So Jesus says, which road are you on? Which road are you on? Jesus judges our road, but he also judges our fruit.

And so he says next in verse 15, he says, watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them.

Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes or figs from thistles? Now why does Jesus bring up false and true prophets at this point? Why is he talking about their fruit and the difference between the outward appearance and the inward substance?

Because there's a danger that confronts us as we stand before this narrow gate and this narrow road and Jesus says the danger that is confronting you are people who claim to have a new prophetic message.

These are people who are inside the church, they look like sheep, but they're trying to dissuade you from listening to the true prophecy of the Sermon on the Mountain and the true prophetic words of the apostles' teaching in the New Testament.

[17 : 42] Right? A false prophet says, you know, you don't really need to enter through the one gate of Jesus. In fact, there are many gates. They're all equally valid and they all lead to the same place, really.

And a false prophet says, you know, you don't really need to renounce yourself. You don't need to walk this narrow road. In fact, if you interpret the Bible in this new, cool way that I have to show you, then you'll find this broad and wide moral permissiveness and just sort of an ethical salad bar and buffet that you can pick and choose the things in the New Testament that you like and just have a God of grace, he doesn't really care about obedience.

You can just do whatever pleases you. If you read church history for the past 2,000 years, it's just so utterly simple. False prophets want to take the cross out of the gospel and they want to take the cost out of discipleship and they want to take this high, glorious life of the Sermon on the Mount and they want to bring the bar way down here and say, you know, it's actually pretty easy.

There's really nothing hard, there's nothing difficult about Christianity. A false prophet is known more often by what they do not say and what they leave out of their message.

They talk about the gospel as if there's absolutely nothing offensive in it. There's no narrowness here. Humanity is not on the road to destruction.

[19 : 20] In fact, all people are going to get life in the end without judgment. And friends, I hope you know that it is impossible to square that with the teachings of Jesus or with the things that he trained and sent and commissioned his apostles to write.

you just can't make it say that. This is not just a New Testament thing, it's an Old Testament thing as well. This is the prophet Isaiah chapter 30.

The people of God said, give us no more visions of what is right. Tell us pleasant things. Prophecy illusions. In Jeremiah 6, they said, he says, they dress the wound, they, the false prophets, dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious.

Peace, peace, they say, when there is no peace. You see, a false prophet is a comforting preacher that will tell you pleasant things and say, well, there's not really much wrong and there's nothing to really be concerned about.

And definitely don't listen to Isaiah and Jeremiah and all their talk about the holiness of God and the justice of God. Those guys are so serious, they're so intense, they're so narrow, God is a God of love.

[20 : 42] There's no justice in his love, there's no judgment in his love. Wide is the gate that leads to salvation. Broad is the road that leads to life.

Doesn't that sound nice? Doesn't it look sheep-like? Kind of feels soft and woolly and warm. But what does Jesus call that?

He says it's wolfish. It's like a ravenous wolf that would tear the flock of sheep to shreds. And then Jesus changes this metaphor, he says a false prophet is somebody who bears bad fruit because it's growing on a bad tree.

Any of you ever see a shiny, red, delicious apple and it looks so good on the outside and you think, I should take a bite of that.

and then what happens when you take a bite? It's just horrible. It's tough skin, it's mealy flesh. I was disappointed in so many lunches in my childhood and I finally got to a day where I was like never again.

[21 : 51] I'm an adult now. Like nobody can feed me this stuff. It turns out the selective breeding over time it improved the look but destroyed the taste of the red, delicious apple.

And Jesus is saying be careful not to eat the red, delicious apple and be really careful and be sure that you are not a red, delicious apple.

He says in verse 18, a good tree cannot bear bad fruit and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

Two trees, they're both in church. They look exactly the same on the outside but they have a different nature, a different life on the inside and so they bear a different fruit.

And Jesus is telling us that a Christian is somebody who's received a new nature, a new life, a new DNA on the inside from God above.

[22 : 54] That their old nature of thorns and thistles has been done away with and that new nature that produces luscious grapes and delicious figs has come in.

And Jesus is asking us, do you have that new life? Do you have real life? And you say, well how do I know I have that life?

Well here's a test. How do you feel when you look up at the holiness of God and you look inside of yourself at the sinfulness of your heart and you look ahead at your impending death and you look at the just judgment of Christ that's going to come to you, how do you feel about yourself?

Do you feel proud? Do you feel confident? Do you feel like, man I got this? Or do you say, I'm poor in spirit. I'm mourning over all of my self-centeredness.

I feel so meek and lowly before God. I'm just hungering and thirsting and crying out for a righteousness that only God can give me. I am desperate and I am utterly dependent on Christ and Christ crucified to reconcile me to this God.

[24 : 12] That's how you know you have that new life in you. Jesus, he judges our road, he judges our fruit and he also judges our will.

He judges our will. He's examining us and he's saying, are you a true Christian? Are you a false Christian? Right? And now he comes to this third picture, this most serious and solemn warning yet and it's given again to Christians who are people who profess to be Christians who are conscious of the fact that they're going to stand before God in the final judgment and here's what he says.

Verse 21, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven but only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles and then I will tell them plainly, I never knew you apart from me, you evildoers.

Jesus warns us of the terrible danger of self-deception and he says that on judgment day there's going to be many surprises so be careful not to rely on false evidences because it's possible to think that you're a Christian, to think that you've received salvation from God, to do so much and to go so far and then to get to the very end and realize that you were altogether wrong.

And so he says the first evidence not to rely on is orthodox doctrine and correct belief. Right? You can call Jesus your Lord. You can have all the right truths about his person and his work.

[25 : 54] You can say all the right things. Right? That Jesus is the eternal preexistent son of God, that he came from heaven to earth, that he endured the bitter shame and agony and cruelty of the cross to save us from our sins and reconcile us to God, that he was bodily raised from death to life and that he's now sitting on God's throne ruling over all.

You can say all those things, Jesus says, but still not have entered the kingdom of God. Don't get me wrong. Orthodox doctrine, correct belief is essential.

No one enters the kingdom of God without saying all those things, but not everyone who says those things will enter in. And so Jesus warns us that intellectual assent to the truth is insufficient.

There's a vast difference between knowledge about Christ and knowledge of Christ. And Jesus also says it's not just orthodoxy, it's orthopathy that's not enough.

Orthodoxy is right belief, orthopathy is right feeling. You not just say Jesus is Lord, but he's Lord, Lord. I'm fervent. I'm enthusiastic.

[27 : 10] I'm excited about Jesus. And Jesus says it's not just orthodoxy and orthopathy, but orthopraxy, right action. You can give great spiritual messages.

Not that this one's great, but you can do that. You can prophesy in my name. You can do wonderful works. You can deliver people from spiritual bondage. You can heal the sick.

You can do it all in my name, Jesus says, but where in the Sermon on the Mount did I ask you to do any of those things? I'm not asking you to work for me. I'm asking you to live under me.

To live under me. Because what really matters in the end is whether or not I know you or I never knew you.

And I know all things. So what I'm talking about is whether or not I knew you in a personal relationship. Not that you use my name, but that I knew you by name.

[28 : 14] And how can we know that we're in a relationship with Christ? Jesus says, it's not people who say to me, Lord, Lord, but those who do the will of my Father in heaven. Have you renounced your will?

To do the will of God instead. Jesus, the judge of all people, says that on that day, many people who've been busy in my name are going to be shown to have been doers of evil.

Workers of lawlessness is what it says. And why is that? Because those people have been active, very active to impress other people in my name.

They've been very active to please themselves in my name. They've been very active to do their own will for their own glory. But what I'm after is people who want to do my Father's will and do it for His glory.

And Jesus is saying to us, friends, where's your heart? Do I know you? Do you really belong to me? Have you renounced yourself and your will to embrace the holy and righteous will of my Father as I taught it to you in the Sermon on the Mount?

[29 : 31] If you've not done that, then Jesus says, you're in great danger of hearing these awful words away from me. Be apart from me.

And if I'm the light, that means you're going to be in the darkness. And if I'm the light, that means you're going to be in death. Oh, I do not want you to experience the miserable end of going into the darkness and into death, Jesus says.

So Jesus judges our road, our fruit, our will, and finally He judges our foundation. And now He comes to the final and the sharpest warning of all.

In verse 24, He says, therefore anyone who hears these words of mine, puts them into practice, is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, the winds blew, and beat against that house, yet it did not fall because it had its foundation on the rock.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, the winds blew, and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

[30 : 44] Jesus' chief concern in this fourth and final picture is addressed again to people who are professing Christians. They like listening to the Sermon on the Mount. They like listening to the teaching of Jesus.

They're members of the church. They claim to be disciples. And Jesus' question to us is, are we seeking and are we desiring only the benefits and the blessings of salvation?

Do we just want the house and the family in the house so that we can be at ease and enjoy ourselves, or do we really want to do the hard work of digging down to bedrock?

Both of these people say they're Christians. They're building on the same locale, same landscape, same weather conditions. They build the same kind of house, and these houses are put to the same test and the same stresses.

And there's no difference between them except what lies beneath the surface. And Jesus, in his teaching on this in Luke chapter 6, he helps us because he says that the wise man, he dug down deep and laid foundations on the rock.

[31 : 56] But the foolish man, he built his house just right on the ground without a foundation. This foolish man, we don't know why he chose not to dig at all.

Maybe he was just in a hurry. Maybe he was impatient. Maybe he just needed to take some shortcuts and get quick results. Couldn't be troubled to listen to guidance.

Couldn't pay attention to the rules that govern the construction of a durable edifice. Maybe he said to himself, you know, my ideas are the best, and I don't have anything to learn from anybody else.

But Jesus' point here is that foundation work is costly. How many of us want to spend our money on a foundation? It's not fun to, it's not fun to spend your time on a foundation?

I mean, we can easily think it's hidden. It's out of the way. I can't see it. It's beneath the surface. It must not be that significant or that necessary.

[33 : 01] And Jesus says, oh, it's the most vital, the most important thing of all, because if your foundation is wrong, everything is wrong. you will not endure the unavoidable tests that are going to come to you in this life, and you certainly won't be able to endure the test on that day when you stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

And so Jesus is saying, build your life on the rock. Build it on me. Build it on my life, my death, my crucifixion. Build it on the sermon on the mount.

I won't, if you do that, I'm not going to spare you the rain and the floods and the wind, but I will support you. And if you build your life on me, I'm not going to cause your house to glow in the dark or expand into some amazing mansion, but I will cause your house to stand.

And some of us today might be saying, gosh, I think maybe I've built my life on the sand. What if I built my life on the sand? Well, if you're poor in spirit, you'll cry out and say, God, I need a savior.

Jesus, who embodied this sermon on the mount, who lived beautifully and perfectly the life that we should have lived, and he died the death we should have died, he went up on his cross, and when he did that, he was putting himself on that broad road that leads to destruction.

[34 : 38] Right? When Jesus mounted his cross, he became that bad tree that was cut down and thrown into the fire. Jesus was the one on his cross. He heard those terrible words, away from me.

And that's why he was crying out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Jesus on his cross felt the wrath of God raining down on him.

And that the floods of human sin pouring in on him, and the winds of evil blowing and beating against him, and what happened to Jesus' house on the cross, it fell with a great crash.

Why? Why did he do that? Because Jesus said, I came to take all the curses, all the hell, all the separation from God, that you might get all the blessings, that you might have heaven, that you might have life with God forever.

And so he's saying, build your life on the rock. Build your life on this firm foundation in which you can never, ever, ever, even in the final day of judgment, ever be shaken.

[35 : 57] Friends, let's build on this rock in the name of Christ. Amen. Amen. Thank you.