

Ruin - or security?

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[0 : 0 0] The first reading today is from Luke chapter 6, starting at verse 20, and can be found on page 1039 of the Bibles. And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples and said, Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.

Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, and revile you, and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man.

Rejoice in that day, and leap for joy, for behold, your reward is great in heaven, for so their fathers did to the prophets. But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.

Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep. Woe to you when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.

But I say to you who hear, love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also.

[1 : 1 5] And from one who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either. Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods, do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.

If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you?

For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.

But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return. And your reward will be great. And you will be sons of the Most High. For he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.

Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful. Judge not, and you will not be judged. Condemn not, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

[2 : 1 6] Give, and it will be given to you. Good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, will be put into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you.

So the second reading is Luke chapter 6, verses 39 to 49, on the same page 1039. He also told them a parable.

Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? A disciple is not above his teacher. But everyone, when he is fully trained, will be like his teacher.

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye, when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye?

You hypocrite. First take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. For no good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit.

[3 : 29] For each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thorn bushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush. The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil.

For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he's like.

He's like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against the house, and could not shake it, because it had been well built.

But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.

Hello, thanks very much for reading. Welcome. Nice to see everyone. Why don't I pray before we look at this passage together. Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like.

[4 : 50] Heavenly Father, we thank you for this reminder this morning of the future, the judgment to come. And we thank you, Heavenly Father, for the great privilege we have of hearing your words.

And we pray, please, would you guard us this morning from the temptation of hearing your words and doing nothing about them. Please help us to take these words of the Lord Jesus to heart and to do them.

And we ask it in his name. Amen. Well, just last week, someone caught my attention as they walked along the pavement.

I'm not quite sure why, but anyway, this guy was on his mobile phone. He was, I guess, as we often are, on our mobile phones, walking around the place. He was in his own little world, in his own little bubble. Not quite sure what he was talking about.

Perhaps he was talking about a business deal or a holiday or his girlfriend. Who knows? Anyway, he was completely oblivious to reality, such that when he came to cross the road, there was just a very brief glance, half a glance over his shoulder, and over he went, into the path of an oncoming bus.

[6 : 05] Now, he was, if you like, a disaster waiting to happen, just living in his own little bubble, unaware, really, of what was coming. And it was only the good reactions of the bus driver that saved him.

Well, this is the last of our talks on Jesus' famous sermon on the plane. Notice, will you, how the sermon begins and ends by speaking about two kinds of people.

Firstly, in verses 20 to 23, there are those who have experienced the forgiveness of sins that Jesus brings. They've received Jesus' forgiveness, they experience opposition as his disciples, and yet they rejoice in the future hope.

Their perspective on life is governed, verse 23, by heaven. Rejoice in that day and leap for joy. For behold, your reward is great in heaven, for so their fathers did to the prophets.

The second group of people, those in verses 24 to 26, who simply live for the now. Verse 25, Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.

[7 : 19] Their perspective on life is simply governed by this world, what they can see around them. They're just living in their own little bubble. And that contrast is then repeated at the end of the sermon in that parable of the two house builders.

Verse 47, Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I'll show you what he's like. He's like a man building a house who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock, and when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it because it had been well built.

But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.

One builds a house with deep foundations because you see his eyes on the future. The other one builds a house, we won't bother about the foundations because he's simply building for the now.

And Jesus is saying, you see it is utterly woeful to live as if this world, just what we can see and experience all around us, is all there is to live for.

[8 : 33] Don't be so absorbed in your own little worlds like that guy on his mobile phone that you are clueless to what is coming. It is, says Jesus, a great act of folly.

And yet, because for those who follow Jesus, because to follow Jesus is so very radical and so very countercultural, those who are his disciples will, verse 22, find themselves being reviled, excluded, spurned, opposed, and so on, on account of him.

And therefore, I think the really big question which this famous sermon of the Lord Jesus answers is how do you live as a disciple of his in a world like that, in a world like ours?

After all, ours is a culture drifting further and further away from its Christian foundations, from Jesus, drowning in materialism, where the pressure to live for the now, just for today, is absolutely enormous.

And where opposition to those who do belong to Jesus seems to be on the rise. So how do you live in a world like that if you're a follower of Jesus? And the two big answers in this sermon are firstly, love, as we saw last week, love others.

[9 : 57] And secondly, today, verses 39 to 49, guard yourself. So both of them are about living distinctively and being obviously Christian. Last week, love others.

This week, guard yourself. And you'll see on the outline there three things we are to guard. Let's look at each one in turn. First of all, verses 39 to 40, guard your eyes.

We are to guard our eyes, verse 39. He also told them a parable. Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit?

A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone, when he is fully trained, will be like his teacher. Now, remember the context, the rejection of Jesus by the religious establishment.

So Jesus has said, look, I am the bridegroom. I've come to rescue my people, to bring the forgiveness of sins. And how have they responded, chapter 6, verse 11, why they are furious.

[10 : 58] They are filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus. They are spiritually blind. They won't listen to the truth about Jesus.

They are in the dark. And so in response, Jesus said, look, we're going to start all over again. We're going to build a new people of God from the foundations upwards.

So chapter 6, verses 12 to 19, he appoints the 12 apostles who will be the foundations of the church. And then in verses 20 to 26, as these huge crowds gather around Jesus from across Israel, it is an enormously significant moment.

moment. A couple of weeks ago, I was at London Bridge Station and there was a blind lady with her white stick being guided through the station by one of the station officials.

She was holding on to his arm and they were chatting and she looked very relaxed and obviously completely confident about where she was being led, presumably to her train on the correct platform.

[12 : 08] But just imagine if that station official had himself been blind. I mean, who knows where she might have ended up, possibly on the wrong train, possibly on the tracks rather than inside the train.

She could have been in great danger. Now, of course, you say, that's never going to happen. She would never entrust herself to a blind guide. But Jesus' point here in verses 39 to 40 is that sadly that does all too easily happen in the spiritual realm.

People do what they'd never considered doing in another area of life when it comes to people they listen to. Because we all too easily, you see, forget the principle of verse 40 that a disciple is not above his teacher.

We underestimate the influence of the Christian leaders that we listen to. If you read the sports pages of the newspapers, you see, why is it that the sports pages are so interested in speculation or once they've been appointed in the fact they have been appointed about the next manager of a football team?

You know, whether it's Sam Allardyce at Everton or Alan Pardew at West Brom, why is there so much kind of interest and excitement about that kind of thing? Well, it's very simple. It is because everyone knows that a team is not going to rise above its manager if the manager doesn't have the skills and the tactics nor the team.

[13 : 43] So just listen to one commentator on this verse. If a man will hear unsound instruction, we cannot expect him to become otherwise than unsound in the faith himself.

A teacher who does not know the way to heaven is not likely to lead his hearers to heaven. The person who hears such a teacher runs a fearful risk of being lost eternally.

We must not believe things merely because ministers say them. Now, I know that some of us have had to learn this the hard way.

I guess it's the kind of mistake that's all too easy to make, perhaps especially when at some stage, and I guess for most of us the point will come at some stage, when we have to move to a different area. Perhaps we haven't really checked out the churches, but we love the house.

And so we say to ourselves, well, we're bound to find a good church there somewhere. Or perhaps it's the school, and there's a fantastic school there, or we've been offered a place in the school for one of our children. And we're not too sure about the church situation, but we kind of imagine and we say to ourselves, well, there's bound to be a good church somewhere.

[14 : 54] Or we say to ourselves, well, actually, it's not a great church, but we've been well taught, and if we get stuck in, then actually we might be able to have an influence on the church, and perhaps even to turn things around in due course.

And the Lord Jesus says so clearly here, doesn't he, who are you kidding? At that point, you are trying to defy gravity. Verse 40, everyone, when he is fully trained, will be like his teacher.

To go to a church with an unconverted or barely converted minister is a great folly. We won't be equipped to do any of the things that we are looking at last week and the week before in the Sermon on the Plain.

We won't be equipped and encouraged to live as disciples of Jesus with our eyes firmly fixed on the heavenly reward. We won't be enabled to keep going, and yes, even to rejoice when there is opposition on account of the Lord Jesus.

Instead, we'll end up living just for today, just like everyone else in the world around us. And when opposition comes along, we'll simply keep our heads down.

[16 : 13] It's the same, of course, if we're here this morning and we are looking on the Christian faith. Be careful who you listen to. Remember, perhaps especially, that here in Luke, it is the religious establishment who are so furious with Jesus.

Indeed, in his second volume, in the book of Acts, Luke records the consistent opposition of the establishment as the early church spreads and as the message of Jesus spreads across the Roman Empire.

Be careful who you listen to. A church where the minister knows and loves the Lord Jesus, where his word, the Bible, is faithfully taught.

Guard your eyes. Secondly, guard your heart, verses 41 to 45. Now, again, we need to remember here who Jesus has in his sights.

It is, in part, the religious establishment, the blind guides, but it's also Jesus' disciples who might be tempted to listen to them. And so Jesus wants his disciples to recognize the fruits that the blind guides produce so they can spot them for what they are, as well as to produce in themselves good fruits so that they can live distinctively as his people.

[17 : 34] Have a look at verse 41. Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye?

You hypocrite. First take the log out of your own eye and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye. Now, it is a deliberately ridiculous picture.

So here's my visual aid. I'm assuming there's some dust on here. Let's pick some up. And you can't see my visual aid, of course. There's probably, in fact, there's probably more than one speck of dust on my finger.

I haven't brought in the other half of my visual aid because actually the word for log here, actually Jesus is talking about the main beam which, you know, might hold up a house.

You know, there's a big beam that holds up the ceiling and it is too big to fit on the back of my bicycle. The point, Jesus is saying, look, understand the hypocrisy of the religious establishment for what it is.

[18 : 43] Remember chapter 6, verses 6 to 11? As on the one hand, the scribes and the Pharisees criticized Jesus for breaking the Sabbath by healing a man on the Sabbath and yet by verse 11 we're told they are discussing what they might do to Jesus which, as Mark's gospel tells us, is the very point that they begin to plot to kill him.

Hypocrisy. Far more concerns with man-made rules and institutions than they are the word of God which says you shall not kill. But, and I think this is the thing to grasp, that actually it's not really an eye issue at all even though in verses 41 to 42 Jesus is speaking about eyes, actually it is really a heart issue and I think that is why Jesus goes on as he does and why verse 43 begins with the word for.

The editors have, I think, unhelpfully put in this little title for us A Tree With Its Fruit which slightly gives the impression doesn't it that now Jesus is going on to talk about something else but actually the four at the beginning of verse 43 makes the link between the two paragraphs very clear.

So, verse 43 For no good tree bears bad fruit nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit for each tree is known by its own fruit for figs are not gathered from thorn bushes nor grapes picked from a bramble bush the good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil for out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.

Now, I guess we tend to think don't we of our heart as being the seat of our emotions emotions you know we talk about having our hearts broken or a heartache but actually that is not what the Bible means by our hearts for Jesus listeners when they heard the word heart they thought in terms of the whole center of our personality the cockpit of our souls if you like the origin of our desires our perceptions our thoughts our affections our reasoning our imagination our purpose and will in other words the thing which really drives who we are hence the picture here see if you have a pear tree in your back garden and the fruit is rotten well it tells you something doesn't it about the fruit about the health of the tree the external fruit that you can see and observe tells you about the internal health of the tree that you cannot observe nearly so easily just as verse 44 the kind of fruit is consistent with the kind of tree raspberries don't grow on hawthorn bushes a person's life reflects what is in their heart it simply cannot be any other way and so

[21 : 49] Jesus is saying you see we shouldn't be surprised by the existence of people in the religious establishment who actually aren't his disciples at all they were around in Jesus day we see them around in the book of Acts at the time of the early church we see them today and the way they speak their teaching the lives they live actually that should not surprise us it is entirely consistent with their unconverted hearts spot them steer clear of them don't listen to them but then I take it the other application here is to Jesus disciples which is to avoid being like them if we are to live obviously and distinctively as Jesus disciples then we need to make sure that our hearts are being transformed by the message of Jesus in other words not some mere sort of superficial behavioural change but a profound change of heart so for example when someone barks at you do you bark back or do you bite your tongue well it depends on the state of your heart when your schedule is too tight and your to-do list is too long do you keep your cool or do you lose it well again it depends on the state of your heart when someone is being unpleasant to you because you're a

Christian will you respond in kind in the same way or will you respond in love well it depends on the state of your heart it's our heart that dictates whether we harbour a grudge or give grace whether we keep on giving and keep on loving to those who are not loving to us or whether we just love those who do love us now of course that's very challenging isn't it and I feel the challenge of that personally and it begs the question well how does this deep change of heart happen well I take it that is why the Lord Jesus finishes his sermon with verses 46 to 49 he wants us to make sure we don't simply hear his words but put them into practice so finally guard your ears verse 46 why do you call me Lord laws and not do what I tell you because the danger you see is simply that we pay lip service to Jesus indeed it's clear that amongst those even who

Jesus is teaching and speaking to it's clear isn't it from verse 46 that there are already those who have shown themselves to be false disciples the point it's all too easy to be content with a kind of superficial knowledge of Christianity a mere profession a nominal profession of faith perhaps being part of the kind of Christians subculture or church subculture rather than real discipleship and real obedience to the Lord Jesus and therefore he tells his parable about the two builders I've called it the Dulwich parable given the number of loft conversions and skips and building projects there seem to be around the place notice really that both men hear Jesus words but only one of them puts them into practice verse 47 everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them

I'll show you what he is like he is like a man building a house who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock and when a flood rose the stream broke against the house who could not shake it because it had been well built but the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without foundation when the stream broke against it immediately it fell and the ruin of that house was great it's a big theming Luke true discipleship is not simply a matter of hearing Jesus words but acting on Jesus words it's why I put those other references there on the outline Luke 8 15 Jesus says as for those in the good soil they are those who hearing the word hold it fast it's meant to be hold it fast in an honest and good heart and bear fruit with patience Luke 8 21 my mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it 11 28 blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it so you see here are two people and they both start in the same place they're both listening to sermons they're both going to their growth group they're both going to jam on

Sunday evenings but actually they end up in very different places don't they one has foundations and the other doesn't well we say what's the flood well I guess it may well be personal sadness or tragedy so often it's the hardships and trials in life which reveal where our treasure really lies whether we have foundations as Jesus disciples or not in some hardship and adversity produces a growing confidence and a wonderful trust in the Lord Jesus in others hardship and adversity produces anger and a gradual hardening of heart I was reminded just last week of Sir Norman Anderson who was one of the foremost Christian leaders in this country in the 1960s and 1970s and yet he suffered intensely in his family life so his three children all died separately as young adults within a few years of each other in tragic circumstances and his wife in later life died of

[27 : 52] Alzheimer's and he had to care for her and yet when once asked whether he was angry with God he simply replied no and that suffering is just a part of life and living in a world which has been torn apart and spoiled by sin he went on to say that his greatest hope was meeting the Lord Jesus in heaven is that not a wonderful thing to be able to say in other words the storms of life you see could not batter his house because he had heard and obeyed the teaching of Jesus now given the context of chapter 6 and what we saw in chapter 6 verse 22 I take it that opposition on account of Jesus may also be the flood in other words the day of hostility and opposition may also be the flood that the Lord Jesus is speaking about and whether you stand on that day or whether you get washed away or not reveals whether there are any foundations but ultimately of course the flood is the final judgment it's what we've seen throughout the sermon how Jesus focus is on the future and of course the world says we are crazy crazy to seek to put

Jesus teaching into practice crazy perhaps even to be here on a Sunday morning and listen to the words of Jesus but then even more crazy to actually want to build your life upon them to make them the foundations for your life just like Noah who was mocked for building an ark Noah it barely ever rains here what do you mean there's going to be a flood how ridiculous mocked perhaps by those in Luke 6 24 to 26 who simply live for the now who cannot see beyond the end of their nose now maybe that some of us even here this morning actually we are we know just as we think about this together we know that actually our life doesn't have the foundations that Jesus is talking about may I say if you've come to that point in your life that is a great thing to realise it is a great place to be in other words to have got to the point in life where yes you may well be well off your life may be full and satisfying in so many ways you may be well thought of by others but actually you are aware of how fragile it all is it's why hardship and trials perhaps losing a job perhaps a long term illness or bereavement or a career that just flat lines actually that can be a great blessing because it's at that point you suddenly realise that the things which seem to be so solid and permanent they just give way and you realise at that point that there is nothing there and it's a great blessing to have come to that point that there is that there is now positively of course the parable shows us doesn't it the enormous power and value of

Jesus' words the power and value of Jesus' words to build the very foundations that he is talking about so how might we make sure that here on a Sunday morning or in a growth group how should we make sure that we do what Jesus tells us to do in this parable that we're not simply listening to Jesus' words but doing them well let me make some suggestions on a Sunday morning or a Saturday night before you come to church why not read the bible passage it's one reason why we produce a program card so we can read through the bible passage beforehand pray about it think about it pray that as you listen to the sermon God's holy spirit will grant you understanding and enable you not just to hear his words but to be doers of it as well why not take notes they don't have to be detailed notes you don't have to take notes about everything that's said but write down the key things that are said the things you want to think about such that your heart is changed and transformed then perhaps the actions and behaviours that might flow out from that after the sermon discuss it with others what might it mean to obey

Jesus' teaching what might it mean to put it into practice what are the ways perhaps in which we naturally tend to avoid this and not do it and why do we avoid it and not do it it's one of the reasons why we have coffee on a Sunday morning to facilitate precisely those kinds of conversations and then why not pray with someone about it again over coffee in other words everyone should be working hard during a sermon okay so I think it's easy to imagine that a sermon is really well there's really one person who's working hard but actually for everyone else we can be a bit passive but no if we are to take Jesus' words seriously here everyone we are all to be active active listeners actively working hard as we hear the words of Jesus explained because you see one of the big mistakes I think we make is that we imagine that the big dividing line if you like is between those who come to church and those who don't in other words between those who hear Jesus' words and those who don't and it's very easy if that's how we think perhaps even subconsciously it's very easy if that's how we think to imagine and to take great comfort from the fact that here we are we are listening to the words of Jesus but actually can we see here the

Lord Jesus is saying the dividing line isn't between those who are out there and those who are in here rather where is the dividing line well it's in this room isn't it it's between those who hear Jesus' words and do nothing and those who hear Jesus' words and act upon them and put them into practice let's have a few moments quiet for reflection and then I shall lead us in prayer why do you call me Lord Lord and not do what I tell you heavenly father we praise you that the Lord Jesus is indeed Lord we praise you that he was Lord on earth as we see him teaching with great authority as we see him Lord over nature and sickness and death and so on we praise you that he is Lord now risen from the dead never to die again praise you that he will be seen to be Lord on the final day of history and we confess heavenly father how easily we hear your word and do nothing about it and we pray for your mercy on us please help us to be those who listen to reliable godly teachers we pray that our hearts will be transformed that our lives will be transformed and we ask it in

[35 : 22] Jesus name Amen