



Part 4 of the Ignite Series

Rock and Sand

Matthew 7:24-27

UNDERSTANDING

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DISCUSSION

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UNDERSTANDING

WHAT DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT THIS PASSAGE?

Read Matthew 7:24-27

The Big Picture

Jesus says that the man who builds his life on His teaching will stand firm. Those who reject Christ and His teaching, however, are like those who build their houses on sand.

Jesus tells us of a man who built his house on rock and a man who built his house on sand. When storms came, the house built on rock stood firm, but the house built on sand was destroyed. Christ tells us that He is our Rock. With God as our firm foundation, the storms life cannot defeat us.

A Shaky Seaside Situation

Just a couple dozen miles north of Oregon lies Cape Shoalwater, Washington. Along with its sandy beaches and ocean-view cliffsides, Cape Shoalwater has a problem: The land along the sea has been eroding an average of 100 feet every year for more than a century. Because of this, it has earned the nickname Washaway Beach. In 2010, windstorms began to threaten vacation homes that had been

in families for decades. Rather than eating up the typical 100 feet of land, the winds swept away miles of coast. Homes that once had been a fifteenminute walk from the shore were now toppling into the sea. The families had dreamed of cabins by the shore; they just didn't mean to be so close.

Solid Rock: Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 7:24)

In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus is concluding His most famous teaching, the Sermon on the Mount. He had just given His listeners:

- the Beatitudes as guidelines for growing in holiness (Matthew 5:1-12)
- teachings on anger and lust (5:21-30)
- commands to turn the other cheek and to love our enemies (5:38-48)
- the charge to do to others what we would have them do to us (7:12)
- instructions on how to pray, including the "Our Father," and how to fast (6:5-18)

To conclude the Sermon, Jesus tells the story of the two men who had built homes they intended to last. The one who listens to and obeys the teachings He had just given will be like a wise man who builds his house on the rock. When storms come and the winds blow, his house will not fall. But the one who ignores Christ's teachings will be like a foolish man who builds his house on the sand. When storms come, his house will fall with a great crash. Jesus is urging His listeners to build their houses, their lives, on His teaching. With Him as their foundation, they will be able to remain firm, no matter what comes along.

Application to Jesus

In giving the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus set forth strong teaching on following God. Jesus proclaims that He is the Rock on which we are to build our lives. His teaching is our sure foundation.

A Firm Foundation?

Jesus promises that those who build their lives on Him will be secure. He knew that there are many other options in the world we could use, other things we could choose to build our lives on. Some place all their hopes on childhood dreams, spending their whole lives aiming for fame and fortune. Some make their jobs their security. Others depend entirely on family and friends. Some set their store in revolutionaries, others in politicians. Some place their hope in humanitarians and do-gooders, or in pastors and teachers. Some place every ounce of their trust in science, or philosophy, or the arts. Some define their lives by liberal ideals, some by conservative ideals. Still others trust only in themselves.

However, none of these foundations will remain firm. Friends and family will let us down. Jobs will be lost. Revolutionaries, politicians, pastors, and teachers will all disappoint. Science and philosophy will fail to answer the longings of the human heart, and the arts will fail to express our deepest desires. Ideals will leave us empty. And we will often fail to live up to our own standards.

God, however, remains the same forever. "Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed," He says, "yet my unfailling love for you will not be shaken" (Isaiah 54:10). St. Teresa of Avila wrote, "Let nothing disturb you. Let nothing frighten you. All things are passing.

God never changes. Patience attains all things. He who has God finds he lacks nothing. God alone suffices." God is the only foundation that provides perfect stability. Unlike the many options suggested by the world, He is the only one that will not leave us floundering. He alone remains firm and solid under our feet. Architects know that the tallest buildings always have the deepest foundations. The deeper our foundation in Christ, the higher we can build our houses. The Christian walk is never over. We must always be striving to build our houses and to strengthen our reliance on Christ, our Rock.

"When the Rains Came..." (Matthew 7:25-27)

It is important to note that, although God and His teaching are trustworthy and unmoving beneath our feet, it does not mean that we will never find our houses shaken. Jesus doesn't say "if the rain came down," "if the streams rose," and "if the winds blew and beat against the house"; He says "when." Trials and troubles are going to come no matter what. We are going to experience heartbreak, struggle, disappointment, confusion, doubt, sorrow, and grief. We may even feel as though we are utterly alone. But God is Truth, is Life, is Love. He is our firm and unmovable foundation. No matter what, no matter how we may feel, we can trust that God is always there. When the storms of life rage, He will reach out His hand to save us from drowning (Matthew 14:25-33). He will command the winds to cease and the waves to be calm (Matthew 8:23-27, Mark 4:35-41, Luke 8:22-25, and John 6:16-31). To each one of us, God's promise remains unchanged: "I will never leave you nor forsake you...Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go," (Joshua 1: 5, 9). If we build our lives on His teachings and trust in His promises, we will not be destroyed but will remain safe upon the Rock.

Going Deeper: Solomon's Temple and the Temple of the Holy Spirit

To the Jews listening to Jesus, this encouragement to be like the wise man who built his house on the rock would have had special meaning. It would have immediately made them think about Israel's greatest king, Solomon, and the house for God he built on the massive Foundation Stone in Jerusalem. God had made a promise to King David that his son would be the one to "build a house for my Name" (2 Samuel 7:13). After his father David's death, King Solomon built the Jerusalem Temple, a magnificent and unparalleled house for God. The temple was important because it was where the very presence of God dwelt among His people. King Solomon had also been given wisdom by God Himself, who promised that Solomon would be wiser than any other man in all of history. So to the Jews, the image of a wise man building his house on solid rock would have reminded them of God's temple, God's house, built by Solomon.

With Jesus' coming, this promise of the temple of God is fulfilled in a new and surprising way. When we choose to make Jesus the foundation of our lives, He gives us each His Holy Spirit as a seal of His love. His Spirit helps us to follow God and transforms us little by little to make us holy. St. Paul wrote, "Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?" (1 Corinthians 3:16). Like the Jerusalem Temple, we can become the house where God's Spirit comes to dwell by making Jesus the foundation of our lives and allowing His Spirit to work within us.

Application to Our Lives

Where will we build our foundation? What will happen to our lives when trials come?

DISCUSSION

DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR YOUR BIBLE STUDY

Matthew 7:24-27

STEP 1: OPENER

Share the story about “Washaway Beach” from “What Is This Passage All About?” Why do you think someone would stay there? What would you say to them if they wanted to stay?

STEP 2: BACKGROUND

Jesus tells us of a man who built his house on rock and a man who built his house on sand. What do we build our foundations on? What happens when storms come? This passage will help us wrestle with these questions.

STEP 3: PASSAGE

Read Matthew 7:24-27 together.

STEP 4: EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Note that answers appear in italics.

EXPLORATION: QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

1. In Matthew 7:24, Jesus says, “Everyone then who hears these words of mine...” What words are these? What is the context for this passage?

Answer: The Sermon on the Mount

2. What does Jesus teach in the Sermon on the Mount?

Answer: Some of the topics are listed in the section “Solid Rock: Jesus and the Sermon on the Mount” in “What Is This Passage All About?”

3. What is the sand on which many people today build their lives?

Answer: the world and the various things on which we choose to build our lives: fame, jobs, political leaders, intellectual pursuits, society, friends, ourselves, etc.

4. What is the sand on which we as college students often try to build our houses?

Answer: Popularity, relationships, grades, success, future goals, etc.

5. How have these different foundations let us down in the past?

Allow the group to discuss.

6. What is different about what God promises us?

Answer: He is Truth, Life, and Love itself. He is the ultimate foundation upon which all things are built. He loves us and cares for us. And because God is unchanging and cannot be shaken, all who build their lives on Him find themselves secure.

7. What does having a good foundation in Christ look like and act like?

Allow the group to discuss.

8. What does Jesus say about the coming of storms?

Answer: Storms are inevitable. It is not if they will come, but when.

9. What are some of life's storms we face?

Answer: Loss of a loved one, loneliness, illnesses, failures, confusion, doubt, etc.

10. How have these storms tested your faith?

Allow the group to discuss.

11. What has helped you to build a foundation of faith to face these storms?

Allow the group to discuss.

12. What else can we do to build a deep foundation?

Example responses: Build our lives on the truth. Spend time each day talking to God, and to read the blueprints He gave us—the Bible. Surround ourselves with people who are striving to build their lives on Christ as well, such as good friends and holy advisors. The deeper our foundation in Christ, the higher we can build our houses—that is, the more like Him we can become.

13. What is one specific way to build a foundation that you would like to work on this week?

Allow the group to discuss.

14. Solomon, the wisest man in all of history, was given the task to build God a house on the Foundation Stone in Jerusalem. This Temple was adorned with gold and silver, fine gems, and precious metals. St. Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 3:16 that each believer is themselves a temple of the Holy Spirit. What does it mean for us to be the dwelling place for God?

Answer: We must seek to live the Christian life to the fullest, and to allow the Holy Spirit to purify us. The more we allow Him to work in us, the more the fruits of the Spirit become evident in us. We become more holy, more virtuous, more Christcentered, more prayerful, more joyful. If we ask Him, Christ will grant us these things in His love and mercy.