

Matthew 7:24-27

A Tale of Two Houses

Context:

- This morning SOTM draws to a close.
- Jesus brings this masterful sermon that he preached many many times to a finale.
- And draws on what he's been saying through chapter 7: there are only 2 ways in life.
- You're either on the hard way that leads to the narrow gate entering into life / on the easy road leading to the massive gate going to destruction.
- You're either a sheep or a wolf / healthy tree or a diseased tree.
- Your confession that Jesus is Lord is either authentic or it's not.
- Here Jesus brings this whole thing to a close and says in a sense, "How are you going to live your life? Where are you going to build your proverbial house?"
- This is decision time.
- Most of you know that I'm not a big fan of altar calls because it often feels like a contrived pressure we put on people to make a decision for Jesus at the end of a service.
- That isn't to say altar calls are sinful - I think many people have been saved through them but they emphasize emotional response in a way I don't think is always helpful.
- Emotions aren't bad when deciding to follow Jesus, but they can't be supreme.
- Jesus tells people to count the cost, to weigh the decision, to calculate a life following him.
- Obviously there will be emotion involved but that's not what drives the decision.
- But listen: a decision does need to be made.
- Jesus doesn't end this masterful sermon and simply say: I am Jesus and I approve this message.
- No, Jesus says given all the eternal blessings of the Kingdom, all the rewards God has promised, and all the condemnation he has threatened: what are you going to do?
- Are you following Jesus or not?
- I'm not anti- calling people to make a decision, because Jesus is here calling people to follow him.
- I am anti- using artificial emotional pressure to do it.
- Here Jesus comes to the conclusion and says: Where are you planting yourself? Where are you going to proverbially build your house? Are you on the rock or on the sand?
- Now listen, most people don't like living in absolutes like this.
- Most people like grey areas, they like things complicated because it makes them feel better.
- Choosing a side is a threat but God has always called us to choose a side.
- If you remember in Stars Wars - that franchise that is the bastion of truth and virtue - it's said that only the Sith (bad guys) speak in absolutes.
- The Jedi - the so-called wise ones - live in this constant state of grey where truth is relative where they can lie to each other and call it truth.
- And that's how most people want to live: they don't want to live with absolutes because that means they have to make some hard decisions.
- I had a lady once tell me that Jesus was not black and white.
- Jesus didn't draw lines in the sand.
- He is open and welcoming.
- And you see this even now that Jesus loves messy people - whatever that even means.
- "He meets us where we're at / he doesn't demand change / he woos us."
- And that couldn't be further from the truth.
- Jesus has just drawn half a dozen lines in the sand: and eternal destiny is on the line.
- And the gospel does come to where we are at, but the gospel never leaves us there.
- The gospel is a call to leave everything - surrender our entire lives to Jesus, forsaking our way and our sin and follow him.

- This grand finale is the conclusion to all of that.
- It's one last analogy of 2 ways: How are you going to build your proverbial house?
- Are you going to do the will of God and live or reject the will of God and be destroyed?

- Before we dive in here, I want to touch on something really quick from last week because it will spill in to what Jesus says here this week.
- Last week we were talking about people being surprised when they stand before the Lord that he says to them he never knew them.
- His point was not that no one can possibly know whether or not they are a true Christian. Following Jesus is not like following the false god Allah of Islam.
- In Islam someone can follow Allah all their life with the strictest devotion and Allah can whimsically decide to cast them into hell anyway simply because he determines it.
- There's no eternal security, like we know it in Christianity. The only eternal security is to die in jihad - which is why there are so many homicide bombers because it gives them assurance of heaven - at least that's what they think.
- Jesus is not capricious like that. The people he commands to depart are surprised, but had they simply looked at their lives they wouldn't have been surprised. They thought their salvation was based on works - casting out demons, prophesying, doing miracles - all the while living in unrepentant sin.
- They thought their good works of churchianity outweighed their works of lawlessness and rejection of doing God's will.
- So Jesus is not saying someone will be committed to him inside and out all their life only to show up at the gate of heaven to be cast into the pit of hell.
- He's saying those who are hypocrites, like he's mentioned all along, who play the game yet can expect hell.
- We saw the staggering fall of Jerry Falwell Jr. this week - I think his instability has been noted for some time.
- But he is the poster boy for exactly what Jesus is talking about. Influential Christian leader, president of the largest Christian university in the world, has political connections all the way to the White House, sought after talking head for the "evangelicals" on TV.
- Yet he, along with his wife, sexually abused the pool boy for years.
- Outwardly his resume looks amazing, inwardly he is a worker of lawlessness.
- That was what Jesus was getting at last week. Those who harbor secret sin - who work lawlessness - will be told to depart.
- Our passage here is just as stark, but a more positive spin: Do the will of God, follow Jesus on the inside and outside, and you will be saved from final destruction.
- So let's look at our passage.

1) Jesus rejects the prosperity gospel.

- The prosperity gospel basically says that if you have enough faith, then following Jesus will mean health and riches and material blessing in this life.
- The faith that saves you is the faith that will heal you and prosper you.
- The root of it is a love for money and temporal life; but notice that Jesus here doesn't promise prosperity and the good life. **Read 24-27**
- So if you hear Jesus's words and do them -
- That is, if you follow Jesus as your Lord by faith and live in the way he has been talking about all throughout the sermon - you are building your life on rock.
- But notice, building your house on the rock does not prevent the proverbial storm from coming.
- Now, we need to understand that scholars are conflicted on what the storm here represents.
- Does the storm represent trials that all people go through during life?
- Or does the storm represent final judgement? I tend to lean toward both to some extent, with a greater view to final judgment.
- I'll show you why in a few minutes.
- But I think temporary trials are also in view.
- Whether you follow Jesus or not, you're going to go through some tough things in life that will culminate in your death that probably won't be pretty.
- We live in a sinful fallen world and no one is insulated from those effects.

- Following Jesus doesn't insulate you from cancer / disease / tragedy / financial ruin.
- We're going to begin working our way through the book of Job next week - the godliest man on the planet who lost all 10 of his kids and all of his wealth in a single day and was left with nothing but rotting skin, a nagging wife, and 4 friends who blamed him nonstop for his tragedy.
- Welcome to the Kingdom.
- No one is insulated from disaster.
- Not believers, not unbelievers but the question is: Will you go through it to the glory of God or trying to bring glory to yourself?
- Sure unbelievers will make it through difficulties. Those who are foolish and sinful make it through and flourish all the time.
- Sometimes their stories are inspiring.
- I remember watching Lance Armstrong kill it on the Tour de France year after year. And part of what made his story amazing was that he had come back from cancer and dominated. Well, he cheated to dominate but that's besides the point.
- Following Jesus doesn't keep you from any of trial so if Jesus is just a lucky charm that you think will make your life go well, you're mistaken.
- Following Jesus may actually make life harder because you're hated by the world, your family.
- God may use you like he used Paul as an example of suffering to bring him glory while your unbelieving friends flourish.
- That's the whole gist of Psalm 73: we're often jealous of the wicked and arrogant because they prosper. Life for them is good.
- But just like Psalm 73, here Jesus says we need to consider the end.

- That's the second point - this storm that Jesus has in mind may deal with trials in this life, but ultimately it points to a final judgment.

2) Final Judgment is Coming:

- Jesus uses the analogy of a storm - often used in OT for God's judgment.
- **Zeph: 1:14-16:** The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the Lord is bitter; the mighty man cries aloud there. A day of wrath is that day, a day of distress and anguish, a day of ruin and devastation, a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and thick darkness, a day of trumpet blast and battle cry against the fortified cities and against the lofty battlements.
- **Jer. 30:23-24:** Behold the storm of the Lord! Wrath has gone forth, a whirling tempest; it will burst upon the head of the wicked. The fierce anger of the Lord will not turn back until he has executed and accomplished the intentions of his mind. In the latter days you will understand this.
- **Isa. 28, Ezek. 13** all talk about God's end time judgment being a massive storm.
- God often uses storm imagery when talking about his final judgment because that is the one storm we all hope to survive.
- In Israel - and many places throughout the middle east - storms are especially brutal.
- They can come with almost no warning, they are absolutely devastating.
- When I was in California there was this Catch 22 of devastation: In summer there were fires that would rage because it was so hot and dry. The fire would scorch the surface of the ground. The ground was already bad because it was riverbed and didn't absorb much water, but when the fire scorched it it would absorb even less. So the summer fires sealed up the ground, the spring rains would come and there would be flash floods because the water wouldn't absorb into the ground. Since there was no water in the ground, the fires would get worse - and around and around it went.
- That's actually the exact climate of Israel - storms and floods and fire can devastate people with almost no warning.
- That's what Jesus is picturing here.
- If you remember from the earlier sections, everything in this section is eschatological - looking forward to future judgement.
- Future judgment will be based on whether or not we've followed Jesus.
- Not whether or not we **say** we've followed Jesus, but whether or not we actually did. **Read 24, 26**

- The key difference between the wise and foolish / those who survive the judgment and those who perish is whether or not they actually lived out the words of Jesus.
- Can I just address an objection at this point that I think a lot of people give?
- “Well, who can do that? Who can follow Jesus? No one can do that.”
- And so they just throw their hands up and they use the high standard of Jesus as an excuse to sin because no one can do it.
- They will not survive the judgment.
- Jesus is not calling for theoretical righteousness that no one can obtain. He’s calling for radical obedience.
- He knows no one is perfect and we will fail. But as we saw he’s calling for a people who hunger and thirst for righteousness.
- It is their singular desire and joy to please Jesus through obedience.
- We go to the park down the street by our house about 5 times a week. And there’s all these different toys and kids climb on them, or they want to climb on them.
- I have infinite patience with kids who will give all their effort to try to climb higher or swing or jump or whatever - even if they can’t do it - as long as they are actually trying. I will help and cheer as long as they are giving effort.
- But sometimes they don’t even want to try. “I can’t climb this thing” - Dude, you climbed it 2 days ago. “I can’t.” “You’re not even trying.” “It’s hard.” “Tell me about it.”
- But Jesus promises eternal reward for those who strive and do what he commands.
- I’ve never ran a marathon and I’d probably only run one on one condition: if someone said they’d give me a million to do it.
- I could probably muster up the strength to keep stepping and keep going.
- The reward that Jesus promises for a life trusting in him, striving to do his will, is infinitely greater than the million dollars.
- Not only does it end by surviving the judgment of God we will all face, it ends with the eternal blessing of seeing God as our loving Father, fully blessed for all eternity.
- Jesus is not calling us to theoretical obedience. He’s calling us to do his will.
- **Turn to Matt 25:31-46** - Jesus on Olivet Discourse about final judgment. **Read**
- Is salvation based on feeding people or visiting people?
- Depends: If that is the basis for your salvation - “Jesus I fed people let me into heaven” - answer is no, salvation is not based on that.
- If your following Jesus never overflows into helping others, caring for others, you’re like the guy who loves to hear Jesus’ words, but never does them.
- You faith, without any works, is what? Dead.
- At the judgement Jesus will not sit there and ask us for a list of good deeds that we have done in his name to earn us access into heaven.
- At the judgment our entrance into heaven will be based upon whether or not we trusted in Christ alone to forgive our sins and impute to us his righteousness.
- But, how will we know if that really happened? How will we know if righteousness is really on our books?
- Because we will have been transformed. There will be a record of transformation that he will point to.
- Imagine you’re going to go buy a used car. Two ads both say: Toyota Camry - 100k miles - well taken care of.
- How do you know that? How do you know it was well taken care of? It could just be talk.
- You get to one guy and he talks about changing oil, rotating tires.
- And you go talk to the other guy and he pulls out a binder - and the binder is full of receipts, sales slips, warranty cards from all the service he’s had done.
- All things being equal, who are you going to believe? The guy who doesn’t just talk a good game, but shows his good game.
- This is what Jesus is talking about: Those who truly follow Jesus will have a proverbial glove box crammed full of receipts of good works and grace and mercy that they have done.
- They don’t just listen to Jesus’ words, they do Jesus’s words - and it’s obvious to all.
- And it will be obvious in the judgment.

3) Have to decide where your permanent residence will be.

- Back in Matt. 7 - why does Jesus use the imagery of a house?
- Imagery is "where will you spend your life" "Where are you parking yourself in life?"
- No mobile homes / RV trailers / tents.
- In biblical times where a person put their house was where they would dwell all their days.
- Opposite: Abraham: was a sojourner who lived in a tent his true home was always in heaven.
- Interestingly in the US as westward expansion happened, the government gave out land grants to people. Free land, with a catch. You had to live there 5 or 10 years then you could keep the property.
- Here: we are given the option of a proverbial land grant and where we decide to build is what will determine our outcome.
- Where are you going to homestead your life?
- You can homestead liking Jesus's words, or you can homestead doing Jesus's words.
- Not enough to like Jesus or his words - have to do them and do them to the end.
- "It is not enough simply to hear Jesus' call or even to respond with some temporary flurry of good deeds. Rather, we must build a solid foundation that combines authentic commitment to Christ with persevering obedience." (Blomberg, C. *Matthew*; p. 134)
- Also doesn't work half sand/half rock - it's really just one or the other.

4) Look at the response. Read 28-29

- The crowds are amazed.
- Except for John the Baptist, they've never heard anything like this.
- The Pharisees - their pastors - and the Sadducees - the guys who worked the Temple - never talked like this.
- It was all religious opinions and speculation and questioning. It was never authoritative preaching with a call to give up everything and follow the Lord with their whole heart.

- I want to leave you with 2 encouragements.
- First, make sure you've built your house on the rock of Christ Jesus. That your whole way of doing life is doing the will of God no matter what comes your way.
- You know the wedding vows? For richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health, for better or worse, forsaking all others. Til death.
- When the winds of life blow, the rain is torrential - hear the words of Jesus and do them knowing that your faith will ultimately be the means by which you endure the true storm of God's judgment on the last day.

- Here's the second thing: The thing that sets us apart from the world is that we can teach these things with the exact same authority as Jesus.
- Everything we've seen in the sermon, frankly every truth we have in the Bible, we can proclaim with the same authority as Jesus.
- People who don't know Jesus don't need another opinion. They don't need speculation or good feelings or good vibes.
- They need to be floored by the truth of God in the face of Jesus Christ.
- They need truth, they need hope and there's only one place they can have that hope and that's in Christ.
- If we want people to be astonished and amazed at Jesus and his teachings, we need to know his teachings and proclaim his teachings with the authority he had.
- And ultimately all people need to determine where they will build their house: on the sandy rock of the world
- Or on the unfailing rock of Jesus Christ.
- Come to Jesus, follow Jesus, and your house will stand in the judgment.

Pray