

Being Ready for the Storm

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[0 : 00] Well, I want to start this week's sermon by asking you, what did you do with last week's sermon? What did you do with last week's sermon?

Now, I know what you're thinking, what was last week's sermon about? Don't worry, I know our memories are not the best. I sometimes forget what I preached a week later. But I'm not asking you whether you remember it. I'm asking you what you did with it when you heard it. Or if you weren't here last week's sermon, whatever sermon you heard from God's Word last, what did you do with it when you heard it?

Did you do anything with it? Did you make any changes in your life based on what you heard from God's Word? Did you maybe go home and re-read it and maybe take some notes or re-read the notes you took?

Or pray about it. Pray about what you heard. Or did you just leave it at church? Leave it where you heard it. You know, often people say, you know, I've got something to say and what I've got to say to you mustn't leave this room.

[1 : 09] You know that phrase? Well, sermons are opposite to that. When we preach, it must leave this room. But all too often it doesn't. We've got the tendency just to listen and leave it where we heard it.

Well, Jesus has just preached on a mountain in Judea. Probably the most famous sermon ever preached.

It's known throughout history and multiple cultures. Not even, even outside of Christianity. Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is well known. It's the most famous sermon ever preached.

In fact, we read at the end of it here in verse 28 when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astonished at His teaching. But even that sermon, which is far better than any sermon that I'm ever going to preach.

Even that sermon, Jesus knew that His listeners' tendency was going to be to leave it on the mountain. To leave that sermon there and go back down into their ordinary lives and eventually forget what He said.

[2 : 16] And so what He does here at the end of the Sermon on the Mount is something very interesting. To make sure that His listeners don't leave His sermon there on the mountain, He finishes with a story.

And it's a simple story. It's a story about two men building two houses, but with very different outcomes. And He wants His listener to consider something as He tells this story.

Both His listeners then and His listeners today. He wants us to consider, based on what we do with His sermon, which one of those two builders are you. And so that's what we're going to look at this morning.

Because these two men in the story, these two builders actually represent two types of listeners to the Bible. So when we come to church and we listen to the Bible, Jesus says there's two types of listeners.

So let's have a look from verse 24. He says, Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man. But verse 26, Everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn't act on them will be like a foolish man.

[3 : 26] So notice first the difference between these two builders. One is wise and one is foolish. But also notice the major similarity between them.

Did you spot it? They are both hearers of the words of Jesus. They both hear the word.

You see that? Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts versus everyone who hears these words of mine but doesn't act on them. They're both hearers of the word. They both go to church.

They both go to growth group. They both regularly hear what Jesus has to say. And yet one is wise and one is foolish. What is the difference?

What we see here, the difference between the wise hearer of Jesus' words and the foolish one is about what they do. What they do with what they hear.

[4 : 24] Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man. Everyone who hears these words of mine and doesn't act on them will be like the foolish one. The wise person acts on what they hear.

They do something about it where the fool thinks that hearing and living in a church is enough. Now we live in a world where we tend to do that with what we hear by default.

Because we hear a lot of stuff. More today than ever before in any generation we have a lot of information bombarding us from various speakers, from various YouTube videos, from various things that we see on our feeds.

And we live in a world, therefore, that we can't act on everything we hear, right? We can't do something about everything we hear. And so we become, by default, filterers.

Filterers of information. We live in a scroll generation. You know, we're scrolling, scrolling, scrolling. Next bit of information comes through.

[5 : 30] Oh, stop. This might interest me. Okay, scroll, scroll, scroll. I mean, we just have the information passing all the time. And without realizing it, we have this filtration mechanism of information.

We hear a lot, but we only let what we decide to let in and act on what we decide. But Jesus is saying you can't do that with His words.

You can't treat His words like the rest of the stuff we hear in the world. You can't just scroll past what Jesus is saying and think, well, this doesn't apply to me. You can't decide whether to act on what Jesus says or not.

Because His words come with the authority of heaven to earth. And we see that. That's how the Sermon on the Mount ends. And Matthew reflects, why were the people so astonished?

We see in verse 29, because He was teaching them like one who had authority, not like their scribes. You see, they knew that this man had authority that all the other voices that they heard did not have.

[6 : 39] Jesus' words come like nobody else's words. Because they come with the very authority of heaven, of God Himself, Jesus, the Son of God, who has come down to earth to bring about God's ancient plans for humanity, to save us from sin and death.

And so we cannot afford to ignore His words. You cannot, no matter who you are, whether you call yourself a Christian or not, you cannot afford to ignore the words of this man. They must be acted upon because of who He is.

Because He is the Son of God, the Messiah, prophesied for centuries. He is the one that God has been preparing the world in history to listen to.

And He has now come and He's said these things. We cannot afford to just scroll past them in our lives. Given who Jesus is, it's foolish not to act on His words.

We can't afford to do that. It's like if a fireman comes and knocks on your door. Maybe you've heard outside there's some kind of commotion. You don't quite know, but there's some commotion outside.

[7 : 54] You hear some noises. And then suddenly you hear a knock at the door. Okay? And then you're like, okay, it's disturbed you. You're busy watching Netflix. What's going on? And so you go to the door and there's a fireman.

And he's sweating and you can see he's been in action and he says, I need you to pack your bags and leave your house right now. Okay, what are you going to do? Are you going to go, okay, thank you, and give him a tin of beans like you give to any other person who comes and knocks on your door?

Or are you going to listen to him? Well, it's because of who he is that you're going to listen, right? Because he's a fireman. You know that listening to this man, his words are concerned for your welfare.

You know that. So you listen. Well, given who Jesus is, he's knocking, you know, and he's saying, I have something important to tell you. It is foolish not to act on his words.

It's foolish to treat them like any other person. In fact, if you never act on the words of Jesus when you hear them, it's proof that you don't really believe in who he is.

[9 : 05] You might, whatever you say, whatever you sing, whatever you come to church and say you believe, if you don't act on his words, on his every word, if you don't look at how to act on it, if you just let it scroll by, then deep down inside, you don't really believe who he is.

You don't really believe that he's heaven's authority come down to this world. Belief is seen in action. You know, if you believe that that guy standing at your door is a genuine fireman, a legitimate fireman, it will be seen in how you respond to his words.

The thing you do after you hear his words will show what you believe about that person. And it's the same with the words of Jesus. If you hear them week in and week out, but you don't do anything about them, then you don't really believe in who he is.

Or as Jesus puts it, you're building a completely different house. You're building a completely different type of Christianity. And that's the next thing we read in this story.

Two houses, two different houses. Have a look at verse 24 and compare it again to verse 26. 26. The wise man built his house on the rock.

[10 : 24] 26. The foolish man who built his house on the sand. Now, if you went to Sunday school or if you've been a Christian for any length of time, you'll know this parable.

You know, don't build your house on the sandy land. There's kids' songs about it. It's a well-known parable. But as I was reading it this week, preparing to preach in it, I asked myself, why would anybody build a house on sand?

You know, you think, that's a silly thing. Everybody knows not to do that. But actually, actually, it made sense in Jesus' context. You see, in Israel, where he was preaching, the landscape had what were called wadis, these desert valleys with flat, shaded areas of hard sand and these ragged sort of rocks above.

In fact, there's a picture of one right behind me. People still build shelters in wadis like that. You can see that. And in fact, it's quite a tourist attraction.

Now, this one is called the Desert Bird Wadi in Jordan. You can go there, pay a lot of money and you can go stay in these desert wadis.

[11 : 46] So that's the context Jesus is actually speaking this parable into. And the thing about building down in the valley in the sand is that that was actually preferable. It was much easier.

It was in the shade, in the desert. You want shade. And it was an effort to go up there and try to build up on the rock. Right? It was much more preferable to build on the sand.

Now, the problem with these desert wadis is that every so often when desert storms, sudden desert storms rolled through and there was rain when you didn't expect it, there would be these flash floods that concentrate down into these wadis and sweep away everything that's on the sand.

And what Jesus, I think, is highlighting, therefore, in this parable is that it's easy to think everything is fine if you build in the wadi on the sand.

It's easy to think, you know, it's a nice day, nothing wrong is going to happen, this is great. You might well prefer to build on the sand because it's easier, it's shadier, there's less trouble.

[12 : 55] Well, I want to tell you this morning, there is a form of Christianity that is easy, that doesn't inconvenience you, that doesn't affect your plans too much, that doesn't intrude on your life out there.

It's a form of Christianity where you can come and enjoy the church service and you really do. You enjoy the preaching, it's stimulating, you enjoy the music and the fellowship, but when you leave, you still go out and live your own way.

You leave what you hear at church. That's easy Christianity. It's Christianity on your own terms still. And the problem with that Christianity is that you really believe everything is fine.

You really believe you can get away with that because you come to church, you really believe, you know, your future is sorted, we do the communion, we do the traditions and it's easy Christianity where you know you have a hope and everything is okay.

Everything is fine in your relationship with God. Well, where Jesus actually says here that you're in a much more precarious situation than you think, but you won't know it until the storm comes.

[14 : 17] You think you're okay, you think the way you're doing Christianity now is fine, you don't see any trouble with it, it's comfortable, it works for you. You'll only know what a dangerous situation you're in when the storm hits.

And that's the next thing we see here. There may have been two different builders building two different houses, but notice there is one storm that they both have to face.

Verse 25, the rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Verse 27, the rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house.

Do you notice something? The same thing is, the exact same thing is happening to both houses.

They face the same storm. Okay, so we need to ask what is the storm?

What is the storm that Jesus says we need to get ready to face? That all His listeners are going to face?

[15:25] No matter who they are, this one storm is coming. What is the storm He's talking about? Is He talking about the trials of life, the storms of life that we will face? You know, is He saying that, well, you know, if you put His words into action, then when the storms of life come, you'll be able to get through them?

I mean, sure, there's an element of truth to that. But what I think Jesus is talking about here is the main storm that each of us is going to eventually face, which is God's judgment.

God's final judgment of our lives. Which He's been talking about this whole sermon, actually. If you look back over the Sermon on the Mount, you look at what He said last week, you see that that is in Jesus' mind.

This day that is going to come when all our lives will stand before the God who made us and we will give an account. He talks about it, but just look at the end of last week's passage, verse 21 and 22. 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 in heaven on that day. Many will say to me, blah, blah, blah.

[16:37] You know, we looked at that last week, but on that day, what day is He talking about when He says, on that day? What is in Jesus' mind when He says, on that day?

Well, it's the day when He will come back. In our future, the day Jesus returns, He knew that day is coming. The whole Bible talks about the day when He will bring God's judgment to the living and the dead.

That's what we say in the Apostles' Creed. Jesus is coming back to judge the living and the dead. And it's throughout the Bible. It's what all the apostles, what their life's mission was, was to tell people about that day.

Acts 10, verse 42, Peter is just met with the Roman centurion, Cornelius. He's preaching the gospel to him and he says to him, Jesus commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that He is the one appointed by God to be the judge of the living and the dead.

A little bit later in Acts when Paul is in Athens at the Areopagus preaching to the Greek philosophers who, you know, have never heard of Christianity or any of this and he says, God has set a day, this is at the end of his sermon, Acts 17, 31, God has set a day when He will judge the world with justice by the man He has appointed and He has given proof of this to all men by raising Him from the dead.

[18:02] This day is coming. It's all over the Bible and in the prophets, this day, God's judgment is often described as a flood, a sudden flood that many will not be ready for.

Well, this morning, Jesus is wanting you to be ready for the storm when it comes because it will come and no one is exempt from it. Not you, not me, no one.

2 Corinthians 5, verse 10, Paul says, For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ so that each may be repaid for what he has done in the body whether good or evil.

You might think everything's fine right now in your life. You're happy in the wadi, down in the valley. It's shady, it's comfortable. You're happy with your comfortable Christianity or your comfortable non-Christianity.

you're happy without needing to do everything Jesus says, without needing to really take it seriously. Well, the only reason you could live life happy without needing to do everything Jesus says is because you don't believe the storm is coming or you believe somehow you're exempt from it.

[19:28] You're immune to it, but you're not. what does Paul say? For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ. And when we do, we will finally see the difference between those who just came and heard versus those who did something about what they heard.

And that's the final thing we see in this parable, the two outcomes. look again at verse 25 and 27 and let's see what happened to these houses.

Verse 25, the rain fell, the rivers rose, and the winds blew and pounded that house. Yet it didn't collapse because its foundation was on the rock. But what about the second house?

Verse 27, the rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house and it collapsed. It collapsed with a great crash. So why didn't the first house fall in the storm?

Well, it actually had nothing to do with the house itself. You see that? It had nothing, not because of the strength of the house or how well it was built, but where it was built.

[20 : 40] That's the only thing that mattered, where this house was built. The builder didn't save that house, that first house that stood. The builder didn't save it, the rock did. The rock that it was built on.

But it was built on that rock because the builder took the storm seriously and he was humble enough to know that no matter how well he built this house, he couldn't save it from the coming storm.

Well, you know, that is a picture right there of true Christian faith. Right there, that builder. That's a picture of true Christian faith. It's the faith that Jesus describes right at the beginning of the Sermon on the Mount.

Chapter 5, blessed are the humble. This is of the Beatitudes, you'll recognize them. Blessed are the humble. Blessed are the poor in spirit.

He's talking about those people who are humble enough to admit that nothing they do is strong enough to survive God's judgment. And so they build their lives on the only thing that can.

[21 : 43] A real living relationship with Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as their only King and Savior. Not just listening to sermons about Him on Sunday, but actively following and obeying Him every day, building their life on Him.

Is that you? Because you don't want to be that second builder who thinks everything is fine as it is when it's really not.

But He only realizes that when it's too late, when the storm hits. Verse 27, look at it again. He says, the rain fell, the rivers rose, the winds blew and pounded that house and it collapsed.

It collapsed with a great crash. Literally, great was the fall of it. Why was it so great? Well, because it was so unexpected.

He thought everything was fine. And so, this morning, I, as your pastor, must plead with you to ask yourself seriously, what are you doing with these words when you hear them?

[22 : 58] Sunday in and Sunday out, what are you actually doing with these words? Not just what are you learning or what are you hearing, but what are you doing with them? As we've been going through the Sermon on the Mount for the last few weeks, what have you done with it?

What have you actually done with it? Ask yourself. Have you taken seriously these words of Jesus? He doesn't teach them just to entertain you.

These are life and death issues that He's talking about. What have you done with these vital words? Have you taken seriously His teachings about being salt and light, about hating, about lust, about materialism, about wrong priorities, about anxiety, about criticizing others?

Do you even remember what He said about those things? Or did they just scroll by? Or if you don't, then maybe it's time to read through it again.

Maybe it's time to page back in your own time, back to Matthew 5, read through, take notes, and don't just read it. But ask, God, help me to know what I must do.

[24 : 11] And Lord, help me to do it. And do that every Sunday. With everything you hear from this word, don't just leave it at church, but take it home.

And ask yourself, what am I going to do with this? You know, if you have a spouse who also came to church, sit down, and before Sunday goes and you're into your week again, talk about it over lunch and say, what struck you about the sermon today?

You know, what is God saying to you? What are you going to do about it? What should we do about it? When you're with your family, fathers, don't just let Sunday go by. God has given us this day as a break from the week that we can concentrate on Him and what He says.

And so over lunch, with your children, say, hey guys, what struck you today about the sermon or about what you heard in children's church? What are we going to do about it? Let's pray and ask God to help us to do what it says.

It's serious stuff. These words are too important to ignore. And that's what Jesus wants to warn us this morning of the coming storm and what we're going to do with His words when we hear them.

[25 : 24] I don't know if you've been following the news overseas about the United States. Well, there's lots of news overseas. But the one I'm talking about is recently in the United States, Florida, or the whole of southeastern United States was hit by a huge hurricane with massive winds, lots of destruction, many people dead.

Some say the most deadly hurricane to hit the United States coastline there in that region. Hurricane Helene, it's called.

And I was looking at the news reports and one photo, I was looking at all these photos of the destruction that this hurricane had wrought and one photo stood out for me. It was a photo of a neighborhood somewhere in Florida.

and there was one what had been a house and it was totally destroyed. It was just rubble and wood just strewn everywhere but it looked like it was a fancy house.

It was on a big property, pool and everything. But right next to it, on the other side of the fence, was a very small, nondescript, like two-bedroom house that had survived. It was still standing whereas this big fancy house had been utterly annihilated.

[26 : 44] What is the difference between those two houses? I don't know. Why did one stand and one fall? I don't know. But that is a picture of how it's going to be on Judgment Day.

Lots of people will look impressive but they won't survive. They might look really religious but they won't survive. They won't stand in the Judgment. While others who we might not expect will stand. Which will you be? Ask yourself this morning. It's the most important question you can ask in this life. Which are you going to be? The one that falls or the one that stands? Well, the difference? What's the difference? Well, it won't be based on how impressive you are, how many people liked you, how successful you were, even how religious you are. But only what you did with the words of Jesus.

Jesus. Only that will determine whether you stand or fall on that day. Let's pray that God helps us to do that. Lord, we thank you for your word that is powerful when we take time to listen to what you're saying.

[27 : 51] But we pray, help us not to just be listeners and to leave it where we hear it. Lord, from this day on, as we hear your word, as we continue through this gospel of Matthew, help us to do what we hear.

Help us to act upon what we hear. Sometimes, Lord, we admit we don't know how to do that. And so we pray that in the community of Christians that we're in, you will help us to not leave anything we hear just sitting, but to put it into practice, to remember who it is coming from, the Lord of heaven and earth, who we will stand before one day and help us, Lord, therefore, to take his words seriously, to build our lives on him and to follow him actively and to stand on that day that's coming. In Jesus' name, Amen.