

Series: "The Way: Walking in the Footsteps of Jesus"

*Proclaiming the Kingdom*

**Matthew 5:1-2; 7:24-29**

John Breon

Dr. Bruno Strauss was a professor in an American college. But he came from Germany. He told his students about the great plans he and his brother had for their lives. The brother would be a medical doctor and Bruno would be a professor. They would each get married, raise their families, save their money, retire at age fifty and build houses on a lake where they would write their memoirs.

But World War I interrupted their plans. The pain and death of the war and the depression and inflation that followed the war wiped out all their savings.

So they started again, this time planning to reach their goals by age sixty. But in 1933 Adolph Hitler and the Nazis came into power. The Strauss brothers were Jewish. Bruno could no longer teach and his brother was constantly harassed by the Nazi officials. Fearing for their families' lives, they left all their possessions and escaped to England and freedom. They eventually made their way to the United States.

Well past the age of sixty, the brother was still trying to heal the sick. Bruno was still teaching. "But," he said, "we talk, we sing, we recite poetry, we pray, and we know that life is good." As the bell rang, he concluded, "My students, build your lives on something no one can take away" (Mouzon Biggs, *Moments to Hold Close* 85).

That's what Jesus was talking about as he concluded what we call the Sermon on the Mount. After teaching about life in God's kingdom and how to live as God's people, Jesus tells about the wise builder who built his house on a good foundation and the foolish builder who built on a weak foundation. One house stood the storms and floods while the other house collapsed.

We can see the need for a good foundation in a house. The house where I grew up, that my parents sold last fall, had done a lot of settling. When we moved there, an upstairs room had a slight slope in the floor.

Over the years that corner of the house sank more. The floor has a dramatic slope and there are cracks in various walls around the chimney. At the parsonage here, cracks were appearing in floors and walls so jacks were installed to support the house.

Comparing our lives to a house, Jesus says there is a solid rock, one permanent and dependable place, something that no one can take away, where we can build our lives. Building a life that lasts, having what we do really matter and endure means coming to Jesus, hearing his words and putting them into practice. Whoever does this “will have a life that can stand up to everything—that is, a life for eternity because it is already in the eternal” (Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy* 97).

*Come to Jesus* (see Luke 6:47). Remember Jesus’ earliest announcement and invitation: “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near” (Mt 4:17). “Come, follow me, and I will send you out to fish for people” (4:19). Later, he gives this invitation: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (11:28-30).

We sometimes hear about a “come to Jesus meeting” like it’s threat—going to put you in your place and straighten you out. But coming to Jesus is really a call, an invitation, a welcome.

A relationship with Jesus is the basis for real life that counts and lasts. Jesus is the only sure and steady one we can trust completely. We put our faith and trust in Jesus simply by telling him that’s what we want to do. We accept his invitation to come to him. We pledge our lives to him and ask him to be our foundation. In relationship with Jesus, we are related to something eternal that can deal with all the changes in this world.

A young woman walked into a church one day. She looked tired and worried. She was actually slumped over as if carrying a heavy load.

The pastor said, “What’s the matter? You look like you are carrying all the troubles of the world on your back.”

She replied sadly, “No, not *all* the troubles. The truth is I just have one problem. My problem is that I’m not really committed to anything” (Jim Moore, *Seizing the Moments* 81).

Do you want to be committed to something, something that matters, something that lasts, something that no one can take away? Come to Jesus. Hear his words. Put them into practice.

*Hear Jesus' Words.* Matthew is interested in our hearing the words of Jesus. He arranges this Gospel around five sections of Jesus' teaching. As part of our mission of making disciples, Jesus includes, "teaching them to obey all that I have commanded you" (28:20). Here, when he compares the wise builder to someone who hears his words, we can look at the section of teaching that he's just given to see an example of his words.

In this discourse that we usually call the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes life in God's kingdom. It's a concise statement of Jesus' teachings on how we actually live in the reality of God's present kingdom that's available to us (Willard 97). He's showing what life looks like after we repent and come to him. Jesus is talking to his disciples (5:1), but he wants the crowds to overhear the call to become disciples. Apparently the crowds were listening, because they were amazed at Jesus' teaching and authority (7:28-29).

Jesus summons those who would be his followers to radical devotion [to God] and radical dependence on God. His followers must be meek, must not retaliate, must go beyond the law's letter to its spirit, must do what is right when only God is looking, must depend on God for their needs and pursue interests rather than their own, and must leave spiritual measurements of others' hearts to God. In short, true people of the kingdom live for God, not for themselves. (Craig Keener, *InterVarsity Press New Testament Commentary Series: Matthew*)

We need to be careful not to hear what Jesus says here as a way to earn God's favor or as requirements for entering and receiving God's kingdom. Jesus is describing the life of people who have entered and received God's kingdom through relationship with him. The "beatitudes" (5:3-12) tell us that God's kingdom is available to everyone, including

(especially?) those who seem to have no claim to it—people on the outside, the “zeroes.”

Commitment to God’s rule in Jesus changes how we view the Old Testament Law. We seek for God to change our hearts so we fulfill the Law’s intent and not just keep the commands outwardly.

We learn how to practice spiritual disciplines not as attempts to get God’s attention or call attention to ourselves, but to get our attention on God.

In the kingdom, we rely on God and not on wealth or other material things. Instead of living with anxiety we trust God to provide.

We are willing to leave the final judgment up to God because only God knows everyone’s heart and only God can see the whole picture.

Toward the end of this section of Jesus’ teaching, he draws four contrasts “to help us not miss the path into the community of prayerful love, where what the law and the prophets really said is fulfilled because people actually treat others the way they would like to be treated” (Willard 274). Jesus shows us the narrow and wide gates (13-14), the good and bad trees (15-20), the final judgment that separates those who do the will of the Father and those who just do great deeds without a genuine relationship with God, and the wise and foolish builders—those who hear and do what Jesus says and those who don’t do what he says.

We need to listen to the teachings of Jesus, get to know what he has said and how his words speak to us now. Our lives won’t stand the storm if we aren’t grounded in God’s word. The Bible gives us guidance and a basis for making decisions. It gives us a way of looking at life that helps us live the way God created us to live.

I’ve used this Scripture several times at baccaulaureate services. I like to tell the graduates to let your relationship with Jesus, the teachings of Jesus, who is God’s Word, shape your outlook and attitude. Make him your priority and let all your other responsibilities and commitments take their place in relation to him. Don’t buy contemporary culture’s lie about what success means and what’s important.

The apostle Paul expresses these ideas this way:

With eyes wide open to the mercies of God, I beg you, my brothers and sisters, as an act of intelligent worship, to give God your selves, as a living sacrifice, consecrated to him and acceptable by him. Do not let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-make you so that your whole attitude of mind is changed. Thus you will be able to prove in practice that the will of God is good, acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:1-2 PHILLIPS).

That brings us to the third thing Jesus says about building on the rock: *Put Jesus' Words into Practice*. Hearing alone is not enough. Just knowing the right stuff is inadequate. We have to do what we know. Shape your life around who Jesus is and what he says.

Doing "the will of my Father who is in heaven" is key in the section right before the parable of the wise and foolish builders (verse 21). It's an important theme in Jesus' teaching all through the Gospels. Later in Matthew (21:28-32), Jesus tells a story about a man who had two sons. He says to one, "Son, go and work in the vineyard." The son says, "I will not." But later he changes his mind and goes. The father says to his other son, "Son, go and work in the vineyard." This son says, "I will go." But he doesn't go. Jesus then asks, "Which of the two did what his father wanted?" And the people listening reply, "The first," the one who actually did the work and didn't just talk about it.

There's a great story in the Old Testament book of 1 Samuel. The Israelites are being oppressed by the Philistines. The only people in Israel who even have swords are King Saul and his son Jonathan. Part of the Philistine army is encamped near where Saul and his men, including Jonathan, are camped. Something needs to be done, but nobody is doing it. Then one day Jonathan says to his armor-bearer, "Let's go over to the Philistine outpost." So they go. Jonathan is going to attack the Philistines. He doesn't know for sure that this is the right thing to do. He's not sure it's God's will. But it's better than sitting around doing nothing. Jonathan's armor-bearer supports him and they go up against the Philistine detachment. Jonathan says, "Let's go for it and maybe the Lord will help us. Nothing can stop the Lord from saving, whether by many or by few."

Jonathan does what he can. He tries to do what he thinks is God's will. And God does come to his aid and Israel wins a great victory over their enemies (1 Sam 13:22-14:23).

Jesus says that it's not enough to know what to do or just to say the right words. We need to take action. Jonathan shows us that even if we're not completely sure what to do, we can still take action. And if what we do is intended as obedience to God, then, succeed or fail, God can use us.

What if we really tried to live the way Jesus describes life under God's rule? What if we hear his invitation to repent, believe and follow, and we come to him? What if we listen to his words and trust that he knows what he's talking about? Jesus is brilliant and he wouldn't tell us to live this way if it wasn't good. What if we commit ourselves to him, let him transform and empower us so we can actually do what he says? We would be building on the Rock, on Jesus himself. We would have an indestructible, eternal kind of life. We would build our lives on something no one can take away.