

A Jesus person... Builds Soundly

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[0 : 00] Well, when Sarah volunteered to share her experience of the Bible Overview class, I had no idea what she was going to say. So I'm very pleased to say that she found it quite fun, actually.

And next year, there'll be an opportunity to take the Bible Overview class again. We will offer it again sometime in the first quarter, probably, or the first half of the year. So please do take up that opportunity to take that class.

Well, do make sure now that your Bible is open to Matthew 7, verses 24 to 29. And let's pray as we get ready to hear God's word. Father, will you be with us again as we explore what it means to be a wise man, a wise builder?

Will you help us indeed not just to listen to what a wise person looks like, but to actually become that wise person ourselves? So all this we pray by the power of your Holy Spirit and for the sake of your Son.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Now, as I've mentioned earlier, KVBC NextGen is a national conference that I'm involved in where we train the next generation of Christian leaders across Malaysia how to read, handle, and teach the Bible.

[1 : 15] And our official literature says that it's for 18 to 35-year-olds, although we do make some exceptions on a case-by-case basis. But this year's NextGen is a little more significant for me.

Not because it's my first year chairing it, although that is true. Not because we are holding it in very unusual circumstances, although that is also true. It's because this year is the year I'm turning 36. And so that means I'm not officially NextGen anymore. When I first got involved six years ago, the thought that one day, I myself would not fit into the NextGen age group seemed really far away. But this year I have to face up to the fact. I'm going to be double the age of the youngest delegates. A middle-aged gen is not far away. And I hate to admit it, but one day I'm going to be PreviousGen, not NextGen.

And really, this year has been the very first time where I'm beginning to feel that life is short. Not that I didn't know that already in my head, but now my heart is beginning to process it as well.

[2 : 26] I call it the first sign of an impending mid-life crisis, if you like. And it's the stage where we often begin to really take stock of our lives. We ask ourselves, what have I achieved so far?

What have I actually done? And it can be quite an uncomfortable time. Because we've lived long enough now to have some hopes disappointed, some dreams dash, some expectations dim.

And it doesn't help once you start comparing. One of my friends is now a professor of history at Oxford University, and he has already won a couple of academic prizes.

And another of my friends has worked on Hollywood films. Yet another one of my old classmates is now actively serving the community in Kuching. You see his name in the Bonio post most weeks.

And I wouldn't be surprised if he stands to be an Adun in the next election. And you can't help but look at them and wonder, well, what about me?

[3 : 28] What have I got to show? What have I built my life upon? Perhaps nothing much, especially when compared to them. Well, that's the question Jesus wants to get us reflecting on today.

What are you building your life upon? And it's a great question to ask at every stage of life, not just when we're approaching our middle years. Some of you will be graduating or have just graduated from high school and university.

Some of you are in the early years of your marriage and are in fact just about to become parents for the first time. Some of you are roughly at the same stage as I am, feeling the pressures of your 30s as your career gets into full swing, family life gets busy, and friendships get harder to maintain.

Some of you are winding down with retirement not far away and you're preparing to make adjustments again for the next stage of life. And some of you are already long retired with a set routine already established.

But whatever stage you are at, Jesus wants to ask you, what are you building your life upon? It's true that this is an especially important question when you are 23 and you still have many days in front of you, when you have more opportunity to direct the trajectory of your life.

[4 : 51] And so if that's you, don't ignore this question. Better to think about it now rather than regret it later. But even if you're past 60 already, well, as Hebrews 3 verse 7 to 8 reminds us, the Holy Spirit still says to each of us, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.

Today is still a day where you can reflect on what you have been building your life upon, and if necessary, change. Today is not yet too late.

But why is this an important question? Well, to get at this, think about what Jesus has been concerned about towards the end of the Sermon on the Mount. All throughout the sermon, he's been telling us about kingdom life.

He's been telling us about Jesus' culture. And really, what he's been doing is giving us a glimpse into the beauty of a new world of which he is king.

It's a picture of the good life, where the virtues of mercy and forgiveness and righteousness and peacemaking and purity are held high.

[6 : 05] It's a picture of a life anchored in a relationship with a generous and loving father. And in some ways, Jesus could have ended his sermon at 7 verse 14, where he's presented us with a fork in the road and invited us onto the Jesus way.

Well, that would have been a neat way to end. Except, he doesn't. Because, as we saw last week, he's concerned that we could hear all this and still deceive ourselves.

We could allow ourselves to be deceived by other prophets, yes. But perhaps even more importantly, we could allow ourselves to be self-deceived. We could delude ourselves into thinking that we're Christians when we're not.

We could delude ourselves into thinking that we're traveling on the Jesus way when we're not. We could delude ourselves into thinking that we're building on firm foundations when we're not.

And so Jesus asks, are you sure you know what you are building your life upon? Well, make sure, he says, you build wisely. You build carefully.

[7 : 14] You build rightly. You build soundly. And you do so, Jesus says, when you've got the fundamentals in place. And so let's look at verses 24 to 29 to find out what they are.

Firstly, you build wisely when you do what Jesus says. When you do what Jesus says. As he closes his sermon, Jesus once again lays before us a binary choice.

Just like there are only two gates that we can enter and only two kinds of trees that we can discern. There are only two ways to build your life. The way we build can either be wise or foolish.

There is no third alternative. And so what's the difference? Well, first of all, notice what isn't the difference. Jesus is not contrasting people who have heard and people who haven't heard.

Look at the beginning of verse 24. Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine. And then compare that to verse 26. But everyone who hears these words of mine.

[8 : 24] So both the wise and the foolish men have heard the words of Jesus. Both of them would have stood there amongst the crowds listening to Jesus teach the sermon on the mount.

Today, both a wise person and a foolish person would have been faithfully attending our online service week after week, listening to the previous 13 sermons on Matthew 5 to 7 in its entirety. Both have heard that is not the contrast. What is the contrast then? Well, let's read verses 24 and 26 again.

Verse 24. Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man. And then verse 26.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man. So did you spot the difference? It's only one word.

[9 : 26] The wise man is someone who doesn't just hear Jesus' words but puts them into practice. He does them. But the foolish man doesn't. He doesn't act on what he has heard.

That's the difference. That's the contrast. It's about whether we do or don't do what Jesus says. Now this, of course, might offend our Protestant sensibilities.

You know, what's all this emphasis on doing? After all, aren't we people who are saved, who believe in salvation by grace alone? Don't we make clear week after week that we are saved not on the basis of what we do, but on the basis of what Jesus has done?

Oh yes, absolutely. But Jesus is simply saying what James would later echo in slightly different language, that true faith is expressed in works.

Or to adapt his language from last week, a truly Jesus-believing tree will bear a Jesus-kind of fruit. In this sense, obedience is not optional, but a necessary part of the Christian life.

[10:38] It isn't the cause of salvation, but it is the path salvation puts us on. In fact, doing has been a very big part of the entire sermon.

All throughout, the doing word has popped up 22 times. It's not as obvious in our English translations, because our English versions use a variety of different words, such as practicing and obeying, but the idea is the same.

Take 5 verse 19, for instance. Therefore, anyone who sets aside one of the leads of these commands and teaches others accordingly will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices, that's the doing word, and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven.

Or take 6 verse 1, be careful not to practice, that's the doing word again, your righteousness in front of others to be seen by them. If you do, you have no reward from your Father in heaven.

And then down to verse 4, then your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. Or again, from last week, take 7 verse 21.

[11:58] 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 who is in heaven. And so Jesus is consistently saying that if you follow the man who comes from heaven, that's Jesus, you will embrace the culture he brings from heaven.

If you've been transformed into a heavenly citizen through believing in Christ, your culture, your character, your moral code will begin looking different.

It will be evident. It will be evident not because you've heard Jesus' words, or because you've quoted them, or you've taught them, or you've sung them, or you've memorized them.

It will be evident because you've done them. You've put them into practice. You've followed them.

You've not given as the hypocrites do.

You've not tried to serve both God and money. You've not been hastily judgmental. You have heard the words of Jesus and put them into practice.

[13:09] And when you do that, you are building wisely. What makes us a wise or a foolish builder is ultimately based on what we do with what we hear.

You see, don't forget, The wise and the foolish builder have much in common. And it is not immediately obvious how they build differently. For one thing, they both wish to build a proper house.

They both wish to build their lives upon something worthy. And they both believe that Jesus probably has something to offer in that department. And that's why you find both the wise and the foolish person in church, listening to the same sermons, being part of the same Bible studies, involved in the same activities.

Both of them probably have very similar goals. They are both concerned to live the good life, the ethical life. They both desire to have peace and security, especially in this turbulent world.

And I suppose in one sense, you could say that both are looking for the kingdom of heaven. But ultimately, only the wise builder is interested in obedient faith.

[14:25] Both might be interested in the blessings associated with Christ, but only one is interested in conformity to Christ. Now, the wise builder isn't one who already possesses sinless perfection, as if Jesus is a moralist who is teaching that we need to strive to earn our way into the kingdom.

I hope already that as you follow over the past few months, that is crystal clear. Otherwise, Jesus would never have taught us to pray for forgiveness or to be poor in spirit.

But rather, the wise builder is one who allows the words of Jesus to examine him, to humble him, even to expose him, and to accept that without complaint.

He accepts the words of Jesus because he trusts Jesus. So although he is sad that he often fails to live it out, he doesn't stop hammering and constructing and assembling.

He joyfully accepts that God really means what he says, when God says he is still the heavenly father who pardons and provides. And so when he stumbles, he doesn't give up.

[15:37] He keeps doing what Jesus says. He doesn't pick and choose. He keeps looking to make peace with his brother. He keeps treating his sister like his sister with absolute purity.

And so brick by brick, very quietly, he is putting together a life that pleases God. And as he does so, he is growing to truly become the temple of the Holy Spirit.

God says he already is. And so here's the big question. Is that your ambition? Are you building your life upon how big a retirement fund you eventually have?

Or how well you'll be remembered for your contributions to a particular area? If you're already retired, are you currently building the remainder of your life upon idle chit chat?

And simply planning the next holiday once the pandemic ends? Or is your ambition to continually pay deep and undivided attention to what Jesus says about everything?

[16:49] And put that into action. How are you currently building? Because I wonder if you realize what Jesus is really saying.

You know, I suspect our memories of hearing this story in Sunday school has obscured its shocking impact. Because what Jesus is really saying is this. If you are not building by doing what I say, You are a fool.

That's Jesus' words, not my words. Why such strong words? Because make no mistake, a storm's coming.

And that takes us to the second thing Jesus wants to say to us about building wisely. Secondly, you build wisely when you lay storm-proof foundations.

When you lay storm-proof foundations. A wise man is prepared for the eventual storm. That's what all those elements you see in verses 25 and 26, the rain, the rising streams, and the howling wind are all about.

[17:58] For as John Stott says, storms reveal the truth. They reveal the foundation you're building your life upon. Now, if the house represents your life, what is the storm?

It could mean the storms of life, the trials that life brings. That's how we commonly read it. And I think we could extend the application in that direction. But, it's important to say, first of all, that this is not what the storm primarily signifies.

In context, it is better to take the storm as representing God's final judgment. Let me give you three reasons why. Firstly, in the immediate context, God's final judgment has been in view for the whole of Matthew chapter 7.

At the beginning of chapter 7, we are reminded that God is the judge, who on that final day, will judge you by the same harsh standards if you persist in harsh judgmentalism of others.

In 7 verse 13 to 14, Jesus makes clear that the gate you enter and the road you choose could result ultimately in either life or destruction. Once again, final judgment is in view.

[19:18] And last week, in 7 verse 15 to 23, it was pretty clear, wasn't it, when we got that picture of people trying to get into heaven by showing their miraculous works on that final day.

And so, Matthew chapter 7 consistently has final judgment in view. Secondly, the Old Testament background also supports this. The Old Testament frequently uses the image of a storm to picture divine judgment.

There are a number of places we can see this, but perhaps Ezekiel 13 is the best. Look at verses 13 to 16 on the screen. Therefore, this is what the Sovereign Lord says.

In my wrath, I will unleash a violent wind, and in my anger, hailstones and torrents of rain will fall with destructive fury. I will tear down the wall you have covered with whitewash and will level it to the ground so that its foundation will be laid bare.

When it falls, you will be destroyed in it and you will know that I am the Lord. So I will pour out my wrath against the wall and against those who covered it with whitewash.

[20:30] I will say to you, the wall is gone and so are those who whitewashed it, those prophets of Israel who prophesied to Jerusalem and saw visions of peace for her when there was no peace, declares the Sovereign Lord.

And so here, Ezekiel warns of a storm that will bring down a whitewashed wall built upon a poor foundation as a symbol of divine judgment.

And Jesus appears to be picking up on similar imagery here. And thirdly, in Matthew's gospel itself, the next time we encounter a parable about wise and foolish people, it also comes in the context of

final judgment.

In Matthew chapter 25, Jesus talks about five wise and five foolish bridesmaids who were either ready or not ready to meet the bridegroom.

And so all this shows that we should think of the storm here primarily as final judgment. And so what is Jesus saying? He's saying that the wise person is the one who builds his life in such a way that he is ready to meet his maker.

[21 : 46] And the foolish person is one who doesn't. Again, it's not immediately obvious who is who. Both houses that are built could look attractive on the outside.

They both have a fresh coat of paint. Perhaps one is even bigger and more nicely decorated than the other. Perhaps one might have an even more sophisticated security system than the other. But the important thing in the end is what is unseen. The essential thing is what is hidden. The foundation. And when the storm comes, they bring to light what has been hidden from view.

They bring to light what kind of foundations we have been building on. They bring to light who is wise and who is foolish. And so once again, Jesus is contrasting outward appearance with inner heart righteousness.

He's contrasting the religion of the Pharisees with Jesus' culture. He's contrasting false and true faith. And he says to us, there is only one foundation that is storm-tested.

[22 : 56] And it isn't religious rituals. It isn't political power. It isn't a certain ideology. It is Jesus himself come to us in his words.

Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away, Jesus will later declare in Matthew 24, verse 35. And it may be that sometimes God allows the storms of life to test our current foundations, to show us that anything not built on Jesus and his words will fall.

And sometimes he allows trials and difficulties to come with the expressed intention of tearing down our idols and showing how they cannot save us.

And so here's a chance to make sure that we are building correctly before the final storm comes.

And it's too late. The wise builder builds his entire life on the foundation of Jesus' words and putting them into practice.

Now, of course, no one knowingly builds their house on sand. But this is where we must understand that sin acts as a master conman. He knows how to sell you a piece of dubious real estate.

[24 : 17] Now, apparently, near the sand, near the Sea of Galilee, which is near where Jesus is preaching, hardens during the hot summer months. And so it looks stable enough.

But when the winter rains come, flash floods happen and you wouldn't want a house built on that sand then. Sin, however, seeks to persuade you that that's not going to happen to your house.

Look, he says, you know, Jesus isn't bad, but he's never lived in the real world. Anyway, what does he know about foundations? He's a carpenter, not an engineer. He's not realistic.

So don't worry about looking out for yourself sometimes. Offer your heart to Jesus on the weekends, but not on the weekdays. Well, that should be good enough. After all, when you do that, you know, your life is still pretty stable, isn't it?

In fact, it probably feels even more stable. You know, you don't have to put up with all the inconveniences and struggles when you truly follow Jesus in everything that he says. Anyway, doesn't the Bible say that it was for freedom you were set free?

[25 : 27] Well, that's how sin works. He seeks to persuade you that sand is rock. Now, he won't say that the words of Jesus are necessarily bad.

He's more subtle than that. He'll just selectively choose a few and omit others. He's happy to let you remember the cross exclusively as a sign of God's love for you, while letting you forget that it is at the same time a sign of God's hatred of sin.

He's happy to let you think of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount as a legalistic document that shouldn't be taken too seriously, rather than a kingdom manifesto that gets at the heart of a true believer.

But don't listen to sin. Look at verse 27. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house that was built on the sand, and it fell with a great crash.

The wise builder will not be fooled by this particular salesman. He knows that it is Jesus' words alone that will prevent his life from tumbling down.

[26 : 46] Why is that so? Because ultimately, who is Jesus? We come now to the third thing Jesus wants to say to us this morning. Thirdly, you build wisely when you heed Jesus' authority, when you heed Jesus' authority.

Finally, after three long chapters, Jesus stops speaking. But what is the crowd's reaction? Do they applaud him? Do they shout, anchor, anchor?

Well, look at verse 28. when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching because he taught as one who had authority and not as their teachers of the law.

Now, that's not surprising once you think about it, isn't it? You see, just think carefully about what Jesus has just been saying. His look at the crowds. words. And what does he say?

He says, it's what you do with my words that is going to determine the trajectory of your life. It's what you do with my words that will determine the final evaluation of your life.

[27 : 59] My words. Not Moses' words. Not David's words. Not Confucius' words. Not the Koran's words. Not the words of the Malaysian Constitution.

And not the words of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. My words. Who speaks in such an audacious manner?

Or think back to last week in verse 23. Jesus is saying, who gets to determine entry into heaven? I do. It's about whether I truly know you or not.

And so he's saying, our eternal destiny depends on our relationship with Him. And our relationship with Him is revealed by our response to His words.

Who speaks like this? Whoever speaks like this must either be the most arrogant person in the universe or be speaking the truth.

[29 : 03] imagine if I had started my sermon this morning with these words. How you respond to my preaching this morning will determine your destiny.

I wonder how you will respond to that. But that's exactly what Jesus says. Well, no wonder the crowds are so amazed. In Jesus' day, the teachers of the law were the experts on the Old Testament.

they derived their authority from quoting scripture as well as legal tradition. And ironically, because they added so many of their own man-made, non-scriptural traditions, they ended up diluting their own authority.

But Jesus has inherent authority. He doesn't derive it from any legal tradition. Remember back in Matthew chapter 5, how he kept saying, you have heard it said, but I say to you.

But what is Jesus doing? He's claiming authority over your life. He's saying to you, I am Lord.

[30 : 16] And that's why what we do with his words is so important. We're not just dealing with the words of some prophet, or wise man, or some self-help guru.

We're dealing with the words of God himself. As Vaughn Robert says, the Sermon of the Mount doesn't just confront us with teaching, but with the teacher.

And this teacher is the very embodiment of his teaching. You see, if we are meant to be merciful, well, Jesus shows his mercy later on in Matthew chapter 9, where he heals two blind men who ask for his very mercy.

If we are to let our light shine before others so that God the Father is glorified, well, that's exactly what happened in 15 verse 31. As the people praise God for the way Jesus demonstrates the kingdom is here by his miracles, he's letting his light shine before others.

If Jesus says that we are to be prepared to be persecuted for righteousness sake, he himself suffered as he stood before Pilate who declared, what evil has he done?

[31 : 31] This is a righteous guy. If Jesus says we are to turn the other cheek when someone strikes them, he literally allows that to happen when he stands on trial.

And if Jesus says we are to love our enemies, while we were still his enemies, Jesus died on the cross for us. Jesus is no armchair teacher.

His authority is matched by his actions. And so it's decision time. The crowds are amazed, but Jesus isn't looking for amazement, he's looking for obedient faith.

He's asking you, what will you build your life upon? Well, let me speak first of all to our youth and our young adults. Now is the time to make sure that you give your life wholeheartedly to Jesus.

Some of you are currently single, but one day some of you will get married. And being single has many challenges, I don't want to minimize that for a second. But at this stage, it is true that you do have more opportunity for a more focused life compared to married people.

[32 : 48] So now is the time to make sure that you build your life wisely. Because as 1 Corinthians 7 says, when you get married, your time and your interests will get divided. And if you don't build wisely now, you will find it even harder to build wisely later.

And the same applies to those of us who are married but don't have children yet. Life will only get more complicated should they appear. And if you don't seek to follow Jesus wholeheartedly in obedient faith now, what makes you think that you will do it later when your responsibilities only multiply?

Now is the time to really get to know your Bible. Now is the time to get serious about being the kind of person Jesus talks about in Matthew 5-7.

Now is the time to commit to a fellowship of Christians. And now is the time to be prepared when suffering comes. Build wisely now. But what about those of us who are in the later stages of life?

Well, you need to keep building wisely. Now is not the time to slack off listening to Jesus' words, but to finish well.

[34 : 06] And that means being ruthlessly honest with ourselves. think about last week. Have we deceived ourselves into thinking that we just need the right doctrine or just witness the right charismatic gifts and miracles and we're okay, we're fine?

Have we become satisfied with an outward Christian appearance without letting God deal with our hearts? Well, make sure you have the right foundation.

Don't confuse maturity in age with maturity in Christ. And building wisely means pressing on and not growing wary.

There's a storm coming and Jesus doesn't want you to fall at the last hurdle. But that means no shortcuts. Again, it's easy at this stage to settle into this excuse of just saying, oh, that's just who I am and not allow God to keep working on your character and on your interpersonal relationships. It's easy at this stage to think, oh, we already know what Jesus is going to say because we've been a Christian for 30 years and not pay attention to what he is really saying, which could actually be radically different.

[35 : 29] Don't be a fool. Be wise. Well, let me conclude by telling you about my friend Farshid.

Farshid is from Iran. But as a teenager, he opened his newspaper and for some unfathomable reason, on that particular day, this Iranian newspaper had printed the sermon on the mount.

To this day, he has no idea why. And he read it. And it turned his life upside down. He was encountering the words of Jesus for the first time.

And he found it so compelling, so different from his own way and experience of life. He was amazed. And eventually that amazement turned to obedient faith.

And that has taken him on quite a journey. Today, he knows persecution. He is currently holding refugee status in Malaysia and is unable to see any of his family members.

[36 : 36] He could not even attend his own father's funeral. If he goes back home, he will most likely be killed. He was supposed to be resettled in the United States, but the election of Donald Trump meant that that can't happen for the moment.

But he has never regretted his decision. He says that his greatest joy is knowing that he has a heavenly father who has reached out to him in grace.

And his second greatest joy is knowing that he has brothers and sisters in Christ, even though he no longer has any biological family, at least not those he can meet. And while he's stuck here in Malaysia, he doesn't wallow in self-pity, for he now exercises a fruitful, apologetic ministry.

he has chosen to build his life upon the rock. My friends, what will you build your life upon?