

Matthew 7:24-29
Sand Castle or Rockpile Faith
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“There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine!” This quote from the great nineteenth century Dutch Journalist, Statesman, and Theologian Abraham Kuyper captures what we are celebrating today. From eternity past, to our eternal future, and even in his earthly life and ministry, Jesus is both in and among and over all creation.

Cyril of Alexandria, one of the early teachers of the Church in the early 400s said this: "Christ has dominion over all creatures, ...by essence and by nature." In an early controversy of the Christian Church Cyril debated a man named Nestorius about what exactly was the being that Mary gave birth to? He believed that within that little life born in Bethlehem was the fullness of the perfect (hypostatic) union between the Father, the Son (Logos), and the Holy Spirit. That the child born in Bethlehem was, in fact the Logos, the Word, who John 1 says was in the beginning—in whom and through whom all things were made. He is the same Word that proclaims in Revelation 1:8: “I am the alpha and the omega, the beginning and the end, the almighty.”

On this Sunday, when we’re been drawn into the heavenly courts by this transcendent music, proclaiming the words of such soaring hymns reminding us that Jesus is Lord of all, what does all this mean for me in my day to day life?

Allow me to offer this illustration: Christian, Annie, Conner, come to dinner. Or, buddy, please pick up your Legos. Or please turn off the screen and go play outside. And then...crickets. Nothing, no response. Do you hear me? Yeah dad, we hear you. But hearing and doing, that is another thing all together.

So then everyone who listens to these words of mine and does them.

We’ve come to the final section of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount where we’ve been marking our time this fall. And if you give these chapters cursory glance a very logical assessment would be that Matthew 5-7 is just Jesus ethics. It’s how we’re supposed to act. But Biblical Scholar Scot McKnight says this: The Sermon is not the Torah on Steroids. The Sermon, paradoxically, continues to point us from the demands of Jesus to the demander, from the laws to the lawgiver, from what is taught to the one who teaches.

But here in the closing verses of chapter 7 Jesus offers a warning about hearing the Word, but choosing not to do anything with it. What will you do with what you hear?

In the sections immediately preceding this one Jesus warns us about the content of what we hear. How can we be discerning and know what is wise and what is false teaching. Jesus says: Wide is the path that leads to destruction. **Be cautious who and what you listen to.** Like the old children’s song, O be careful little eyes what you see, be careful little ears what you hear... Jesus warns us to test and be cautious about making sure the messages we hear are authentic. Do they pull us to the left or to the right? Strive to be Christ-centered.

But today Jesus offers this stern warning and his gaze is pointed directly at you and me.

“So then, everyone who hears these words of *mine*, *AND does them.*” Let me preface what I’m about to say next by saying that bible study and listening to sermons and teaching is critically important, it’s something that I absolutely love doing. And I think that if you are not actively learning and growing in faith, something is wrong. But it’s possible to only hear, to just be listeners. What I mean by that is that churches can fill their calendar with opportunities for people to learn about the bible, study the bible, hear messages and devotions preached about the bible, experiences where we hear the Word of God.

But Jesus says, hear *AND* do. Later in James chapter 1 it will say “be doers of the word, and not just hearers only.” But I admit, it’s way easier to be a hearer. It’s my crutch, I love to learn stuff, I love to grow in my understanding, maybe it’s why I’m a Presbyterian because my preferred mode of worship is between my ears.

Jesus makes it very clear the way to authentic and life transforming faith is by hearing and doing what He says. Many of you worked jobs or have developed skills in very specific areas. And chances are there was a time when you were training to do that job or learning about that skill and you were learning by hearing or reading or studying. But whether its conducting a choir, replacing a knee, or sewing a quilt, you can read about them all you want, but you don’t become a conductor, a surgeon, or a quilter by just reading about it in a book—or I might add watching YouTube videos, which has give our generation a tremendously false sense of our own expertise. Now everyone’s an expert about everything because there’s a YouTube video about it. There is no substitute for getting out there and putting that learning into practice.

I heard a story once, and maybe I’ve shared this one in the past. But it was told by a preacher who was reflecting on that somewhat awkward exchange that happens after worship where the congregation greets the pastor and maybe they say something nice about the sermon that day. What do you say in response? Do you say thank you? Or do you say something spiritual, like: “to God be the glory.” Or if you’re a really confident pastor maybe you say: “of course it was.” This pastor did something I think is absolutely perfect, when someone would shake his hand say to him: “That was a good message pastor” he would lean in close and say “we’ll see.”

What will you do with what you’ve heard? How will you live the truth that you know? Jesus said when you hear my words and put them into practice you are building your life on solid rock. But if you are not putting these words into practice, it doesn’t matter if you come here 52 weeks a year and listen to every word that’s spoken here, if you’re not putting them into practice, when the tempest comes against your house, it will expose where and how you’ve built your house.

Jesus says that people who are both *hearers and doers* of these words are like the wise man who built his house upon the rock. We are all building a house of some sort. Some of you have literally built a house. But the metaphor is that of the life we are seeking to create for ourselves. We’re all building something, a life, a career, a family, the question is: upon what footing, or foundation are you building?

This is a question that goes straight to the heart because sand and rock are two *very* different surfaces. Sand is pliable, it moves easily, it’s soft and comfortable. It is awfully tempting to want to

build our lives on beachfront property, in nice cushy sand. Rocks are hard, they require more work, they are not as pliable and are often rigid and unforgiving. Building on rock can involve more struggle, you have to work at it.

I ran into someone from our church this week at the Y, and we were talking about Bonhoeffer's Cost of Discipleship—which we are reading as a church—and they said this is hard stuff. When you decide to be hearers and doers of the word, it will involve some work, some struggle.

Mauritson Wines come from the Napa Valley region of California and is made from the grapes from a number of different vineyards. Interestingly, according to Kerry Mauritson, the best grapes come from the cluster of vineyards they call Rockpile. The Rockpile vines are more stressed than the valley floor vines. They are at a higher elevation, they grow on the steeper slopes, the ground is rockier, there is very little protection from punishing coastal winds, and they dry farm these vines which means there is no irrigation. The vines in Rockpile have to work a little harder. As a result, they get a lower yield from these vines, but they get a better fruit. From stressed vine, comes better product because they're planted in a place called Rockpile.

And today you may be here and you may be living through something that makes you say: "I am a stressed vine." It's hard to live here, it's hard to grow here. I'm in a place right now where it is hard to thrive. As you are building on a rock, as you are in that rockpile environment God is wanting to cultivate in you a resiliency. It's a lot easier to building your house on sand and soft soil, but when the rains come and when the storm hits your life, and it hits us all, you will have a place to stand.

And the rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall.

What is it about this house, this life built on the rock that makes it so impressive. The most impressive thing about the house built upon the rock is not that it magically glows in the dark. Nor does it miraculously grow into a mansion. We ought to be cautious about what our expectations are when we begin to hear and do the Words of Jesus, there are lots of promises being made, lots of prominent people who hold their experience up as the model of what happens when Jesus comes into our lives. The most impressive thing about the house that is built upon the rock is that it is still standing when the storms are over.

The storms will come, the water will rise, and when they do the house built on the rock will not fall.

This is a picture of the Evangelical Presbyterian Church of Aleppo Syria. The height of the violence in Syria terrorists came and bombed this congregation's building. But listen to the testimony of Pastor Ibrahim Nseir as he tells of this community feeling the wind and the waves.

Video

You may not have had a bomb like this dropped in your life, but maybe the explosion of a relationship falling apart; maybe a hurtful word of discouragement is dropped in your lap; maybe the bomb came in the form of a unfavorable evaluation at work, or budget cuts that directly impact your team. Maybe the bomb is delivered by a doctor in the form of a diagnosis. But on this Christ the King Sunday I want to encourage you that when you place your trust and hope on the Word who was in the beginning, and the same word who in Revelation 1 is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end the wind and the waves will not destroy you. After the storms are over, after

the wind and the tempest rage, after everything is thrown at you—even the kitchen sink—you will be standing, perhaps with a limp, but standing nonetheless because you built your house upon the rock.