

Matthew 7:24-27

- The wise and the foolish builders, the wadi-metaphor -

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Introduction

- ❖ Matthew 7:24-27 is an urgent call of Jesus to put his words into practice and these words of Jesus are a warning for “cheap Christianity” or as Dietrich Bonhoeffer¹ wrote:
“Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves. Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, Communion without confession...Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”
John Stott said: “In applying this teaching to ourselves, we need to consider that the Bible is a dangerous book to read, and that the church is a dangerous society to join. For in reading the Bible we hear the words of Christ, and in joining the church we say we believe in Christ. As a result, we belong to the company described by Jesus as both hearing his teaching and calling him Lord. Our membership therefore lays upon us the serious responsibility of ensuring that what we know and what we say is translated into what we do.”²
- ❖ The comparison of the wise and the foolish man belongs to the wisdom tradition of the Psalms and Proverbs. The urgency becomes even more clear when the “wadi-metaphor” is taken into account. See below.

¹ The Cost of Discipleship. (2018, September 13). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Cost_of_Discipleship

² Stott, J. R. W., & Stott, J. R. W. (1992, p. 210).

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."³

- ❖ The context, form, and structure as well as the theological, technical and hermeneutical notes given in this sermon outline overlap somewhat with other sermon outlines taken from the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7). This makes it possible to use this outline as a "stand alone" or as part of a series.

Context

- ❖ To understand the teachings of Jesus, a brief summary of the historical background is necessary.
- ❖ The baptism of Jesus (Mt 3:13-17):
 - Before Jesus was baptized by John, he said: "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this **to fulfill all righteousness.**"
 - And afterwards: "As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw **the Spirit of God** descending like a dove and lighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.'"
 - The Sermon on the Mount teaches this **fulfilment of all righteousness.** <> "For I tell you that unless **your righteousness surpasses** that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law..." (Mt 5:20).
- ❖ The preaching of Jesus:
 - Jesus had already been preaching in the synagogues in Galilee for some time before he delivered his sermon on the mount. Matthew summarized these sermons as follows:
 - "From that time on Jesus began to preach, '**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**'" (Mt 4:17).
 - Jesus continued and took over the ministry of John the Baptist:
 - "In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, '**Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near**'" (Mt 3:1-2).
 - And later on, when Jesus sent out his twelve disciples:
 - "As you go, preach this message: '**The kingdom of heaven is near**'" (Mt 10:7).

³ Blomberg, C. (1992). [Matthew](#) (Vol. 22, p. 134). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

- These two themes, repentance and the kingdom, are prominent in the Sermon on the Mount.
- ❖ The life of Jesus Christ:
 - Jesus taught the Law and the Prophets, and he lived according to the Law and the Prophets. The Sermon on the Mount reflects his life. He lived according to his own teachings and by doing so set an example for his followers, the disciples. A clear example is found in Matthew 5:39: “Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” When Jesus was arrested, he didn’t strike back.
- ❖ The future of the kingdom:
 - After his resurrection, Jesus summoned his eleven disciples to go back to the mount: “**All authority in heaven and on earth** has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations (...) and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**” (Mt 28:18-20).
 - This authority is reflected in expressions like: “**But I tell you** that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment” (Mt 5:22).
 - And in: “Not everyone who says to me, ‘**Lord, Lord,**’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but...” (Mt 7:20).

Form and structure

- ❖ The Sermon on the Mount consists of five main parts:
 - 1. General calling to repentance and the promise of the kingdom: Matthew 5:3-10, characterized by: “Blessed are...”
 - 2. Then Jesus turns to his disciples and all who want to learn from him: “Blessed are you...” The main theme is “**the prophets**” (Mt 5:11-16).
 - 3. The central part is an exposition of the Law and the Prophets (Mt 5:17-7:12):
 - “Do not think that I have come to abolish **the Law or the Prophets**; I have not come to abolish them but to **fulfil** them” (Mt 5:17)...
 - The Lord’s Prayer is found at the very centre of the sermon!
 - “So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the **Law and the Prophets**” (Mt 7:12).

- 4. After his exposition of the Law and the Prophets, he returns to the theme of the Prophets and warns against “**the false prophets**” (Mt 7:13-23). This contrasts with the second part of the sermon.
- 5. He concludes his sermon with a general call to make a choice: “**Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine...**”(Mt 7:24-27).

A wise man	A foolish man
Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.	But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

Technical and hermeneutical notes

- ❖ A comparison Matthew 7:24-27 and Luke 6:47-49 reveals the following:

Matthew 7:24-27	Luke 6:47-49
Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that	I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation . The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its

house, and it fell with a great crash.”

destruction was complete.”

- The following differences can be noted:
 - Luke doesn't use the adjectives **wise** and **foolish**.
 - Luke adds **several building activities** to the story.
 - Matthew refers to **a storm**, Luke only to **a flood**.
- These differences can be explained by differences in foreknowledge and the context of the hearers:
 - Luke: the readers/hearers were not familiar with the dangers of a wadi.⁴
 - Matthew: the readers/hearers understood the “wadi-metaphor.” See for the explanation below.

Exposition

Verse 24-27

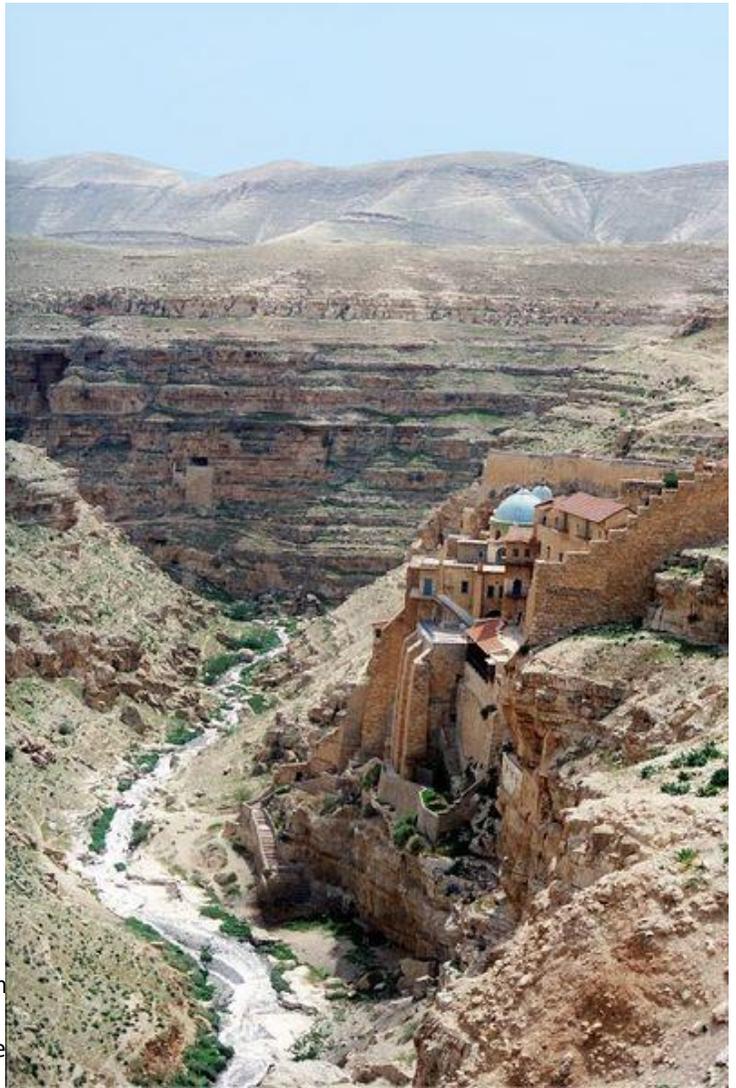
- ❖ Newman and Stine comment: “As the books of (Leviticus 26:1–46) and (Deuteronomy 28:1–68; 30:15–20) draw to an end with the pronouncement of blessings and curses, so the Sermon on the Mount concludes with a promise (7:24–25) and a warning (7:26–27).”⁵
- ❖ **“Therefore”** – connects these words with the preceding passage, and especially:
 - “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ **will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.**”
- ❖ **“Who hears these words of mine”**
 - “He who has ears, let him hear” (Mt 13:9; the parable of the sower; compare also Matthew 13:43).
 - “But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, **not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it**—he will be blessed in what he does” (Js 1:25).”
 - The voice of God said: “This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!” (Mt 17:5; see also Dt 18:15-18).

⁴ Wadi. (2018, December 20). Retrieved from <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wadi>

⁵ Newman, B. M., & Stine, P. C. (1992, p. 214).

- **“These words of mine.”** Jesus stresses the importance of his words, which are in accordance with the “Law and the Prophets” (Mt 5:17-20) and which stand in opposition to the words of other teachers “you have heard” (Mt 5:21 a.o.).
 - **“These”** refers to the contents of the Sermon on the Mount.
 - **“Mine”** is emphatic.
- **“And puts them into practice.”** This doesn’t mean that the hearer is following up a set of rules, or legislation, or traditions. Jesus used words which stress honesty, meekness, mercy, righteousness, purity of heart (Mt 5:3-10). At another instance, he used verbs like “to seek” (Mt 6:33), “to ask” and “to knock” (Mt 7:8), “to enter” and “to find” (Mt 7:13-14). These verbs belong to the realm of wisdom (“to seek”: Prov 3:13; 8:17; 15:14; 18:15; 28:15)
- ❖ Jesus refers to natural conditions in an arid area, which were well known to his listeners.

- The Judean Desert.⁶ Figure 1 is a good illustration. The Mar Saba monastery is built on the rock. Beneath there is a small valley of sand, which is most of the year dry. Only during the (heavy) rains, it is filled with water. Sometimes is called a wadi, a dry (ephemeral) riverbed **that contains water only when heavy rain occurs.**⁷ Heavy rain can cause flash floods.⁸ A flash flood is a rapid flooding of low-lying areas, such as a valley washes. It may be caused by heavy rain associated with a severe thunderstorm.
- “Each house looks secure in good weather. But Palestine is



⁶ Judean Desert. (2018, December 13). Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Judean-Desert>

⁷ Wadi. (2018, December 20). Retrieved from <https://www.britannica.com/place/Wadi>

⁸ Flash flood. (2019, January 07). Retrieved from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flash_flood

known for torrential rains that can turn dry wadis into raging torrents. **Only storms reveal the quality of the work of the two builders.**"⁹

❖ **"Wise" and "foolish."**

- Another example is found in Matthew 25:1-13 the wise and foolish virgins.

❖ **"Building his house"** is a metaphor for the personal life.

❖ **"The rock"** is a metaphor for hearing the words of Jesus and putting them in practice. The personal life is built upon the wisdom of God.

- God is often called a rock and refuge (Dt 32:4, 18, 31; Ps 18:2, 31, 46; 19:14).¹⁰

❖ **"The sand"** is a metaphor for hearing the words of Jesus and not putting them in practice. The personal life is not built upon the wisdom of God but on human wisdom. Compare 1 Corinthians 1:18-25:

- **"For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing,** but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: **"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."** Where is the wise man? Where is the scholar? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man's wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man's strength."

❖ **"It fell with a great crash."**

- Compare Matthew 7:13, 14, Matthew 7:21-23:

- **"Enter through the narrow gate.**

For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.

But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

- **"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.**

⁹ Carson, D. A. (2010, Vol. 9, p. 230). *Matthew*. In T. Longman III & D. E. Garland (Eds.).

¹⁰ Keener, C. S. (2009, p. 255).

Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

❖ Faith and Obedience required.

- This doesn't mean that man is saved by good works. Man is saved by grace. On another occasion, Jesus stresses this fact by saying:
 - "At that time Jesus said, 'I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children. Yes, Father, for this was your good pleasure. All things have been committed to me by my Father. No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal him'" (Mt 11:25-27).
 - "He replied, 'The knowledge of the secrets of the kingdom of heaven has been given to you (by God), but not to them'" (Mt 13:11).
 - "Simon Peter answered, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus replied, 'Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven'" (Mt 16:16, 17).

The secrets of the Kingdom, the knowledge of Christ and of the Father are revealed by the Father himself.

Application

General

- ❖ Praise Christ for his wisdom and authority.
- ❖ Give some examples of the wisdom of Jesus and his authority.
 - From the Sermon on the Mount.
 - Other examples are found at Matthew 19:3-12 and Matthew 22:15-22.
- ❖ Ask people urgently to accept the wisdom and authority of Jesus Christ and put his words in practice.
 - Perhaps people have their doubts.
 - Perhaps people have their anxieties.
 - Perhaps people have their own solutions to life's problems.
 - It is necessary to identify and to address them.

Verse 24-27

- ❖ You might give a short summary of the subjects Jesus was teaching the people, which are found in the Sermon on the Mount.
- ❖ **“who hears these words” = “who reads these words.”** The preacher and Christian teacher is a missionary commissioned by Christ to teach these words! Life and death, the entrance to life or destruction.
 - James 5:13-18:

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. **But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.** Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness.”
- ❖ Wisdom
 - “The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. **The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple**” (Ps 19:7).
 - **“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding.** To him belongs eternal praise” (Ps 111:10).
 - “Let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance— for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, **but fools despise wisdom and discipline**” (Prov 1:5-7).
 - **“For the LORD gives wisdom, and from his mouth come knowledge and understanding.** He holds victory in store for the upright, he is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for **he guards the course of the just and protects the way of his faithful ones**” (Prov 2:6-8).
 - **“Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil**” (Prov 3:7)
 - “Get wisdom, get understanding; do not forget my words or swerve from them. Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you; love her, and she will watch over you. Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom. Though it cost all you have, get understanding” (Prov 4:5-7).
 - “By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established” (Prov 24:3).
- ❖ **“Words of mine.”** Preachers, lay people read many books, listen to other preachers, Christian leaders and others. It is very important that all teachers and leaders in the church speak and teach in accordance with the words of Jesus. The Christian church is not called to express its own opinions.

- Jesus didn't address all aspects of the Christian faith and conduct. He set an example of his wisdom and knowledge.
"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Mt 6:33) is a call to search for wisdom like King Solomon did (Mt 6:30). This wisdom is needed to put into practice the words of Jesus in all different situations of the personal and public life, in the church and in the society.
- You will belong to the family of God: "He replied, **'My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice'**" (Lk 8:21).

❖ Judgment

- "As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the world, but to save it. **There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words**; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day" (Jn 12:47, 48).

❖ Blessing

- "But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does" (Jas 1:25)
- "He replied, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it'" (Lk 11:28).

❖ The wise and the fool compared

- "In the same way professing Christians (both the genuine and the spurious) often look alike. You cannot easily tell which is which. Both appear to be building Christian lives. For Jesus is not contrasting professing Christians with non-Christians who make no profession. On the contrary, what is common to both spiritual housebuilders is that they *hear these words of mine*. So both are members of the visible Christian community. Both read the Bible, go to church, listen to sermons and buy Christian literature. The reason you often cannot tell the difference between them is that the deep foundations of their lives are hidden from view. The real question is not whether they *hear* Christ's teaching (nor even whether they respect or believe it), but whether they *do* what they hear. Only a storm will reveal the truth. Sometimes a storm of crisis or calamity betrays what manner of person we are, for 'true piety is not fully distinguished from its counterfeit till it comes to the trial'. If not, the storm of the day of judgment will certainly do so."¹¹
- "The question is not whether we *say* nice, polite, orthodox, enthusiastic things to or about Jesus; nor whether we *hear* his words, listening, studying, pondering and memorizing until our minds are stuffed with his teaching; but whether we *do* what we

¹¹ Stott, J. R. W. (1992, p. 209).

say and *do* what we know, in other words, whether the lordship of Jesus which we profess is one of our life's major realities."¹²

❖ Compare Matthew 7:24-27 with Psalm 1:

- Blessed is the man
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of mockers.
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree planted by streams of water,
which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither.
Whatever he does prospers.

Not so the wicked!
They are like chaff
that the wind blows away.
Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous.
For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous,
but the way of the wicked will perish.

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¹² Stott, J. R. W. (1992, p. 209).

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