

## **A Warning to the Wise** **Matthew 7:21-29**

This week we saw the tremendous aftermath of earthquakes in Turkey and Syria; and just a few weeks ago we witnessed the destructive effects of an ‘atmospheric river’ in California. In both those events, and so many others, there were houses, apartments and buildings that were laid waste by mother nature. They were powerful, unexpected, and devastating.

So today, as we hear Jesus’ words to us we may feel very anxious. Jesus is not cutting anyone even an inch of slack. His voice is ringing out like a siren, warning of imminent danger.

Here, at the end of his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus does not want us to walk away saying ‘nice message, preacher.’ No, he wants us to do something with his preaching. In fact, it is vital that we follow through on the message. He warns us, ‘whoever hears these word of mine and does them is wise, like a man who builds his house on a rock... and whoever hears these words and does not do them is like a fool, building his house on sand.’ It does not take much imagination to know what will happen when God’s ‘catastrophic storm’ hits home – a firm foundation stands strong, a poor foundation fails, big time.

And here’s the kicker, Jesus did not say ‘your faith will save you’ (although he certainly says it elsewhere). No, here he emphasizes ‘your actions save you.’ Or does he? Just before this storm parable he tells another disturbing story of those who appear so great in their actions that they prophesy, cast out demons and perform great miracles -just like Jesus did. They even come before him, emphatically proclaiming him Lord. Yet for all their mighty works and bold words, Jesus says ‘I never knew you – go away.’ Why? Because they behave, or act, in lawlessness, without regard for God or God’s ways.

So, what gives? In the ‘storm parable’ it is your actions that seem to create security, and in the ‘coming judgement’ story, not even amazing actions is a guarantee. Perhaps the key is found not in the details, but in the larger scope of it all. Remember, the Sermon on the Mount opens with Jesus sitting down to teach his disciples, who gather around to learn. And Jesus had a whole lot to teach them. Some of his words were a comforting affirmation – ‘blessed are you...’ Some words were a challenge, ‘You have heard it said...but I say to you’ and some words were, and are, down right frightening, ‘unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.’

Now Jesus draws all his words together and says ‘the choice is yours’. You have heard, you have listened, now listen well. If you hear these words of mine, and do them, put them into practice, you are wise. And if you heard, and do not, will not act accordingly – how foolish is that!

But can anyone ever claim to have done everything Jesus said? I don’t know a soul. As Paul said, ‘all have sinned and fallen short of God’s glorious ideal.’ (Romans 3:23) That is not a one-time occurrence, now is it? So, where our hope, where is the good news here? Well, I could finish Paul’s sentence, ‘we are all made right with God by his grace. It is free gift, through Christ who redeems us.’ (Romans 3:24) Or in keeping with Jesus’ words; we have heard (and continue to hear) Christ’s words, and practice them; we lay foundation on him and his teachings, and build our lives on him and around him. It is called ‘living by faith’, or perhaps more accurately ‘a living faith’, a put-into-practice, walk the talk, follow Jesus, be my disciple- my apprentice, hearing and doing faith.

That may make this passage a bit more comfortable for us, but it is still daunting and still very, very serious. It leaves us always asking ‘am I listening to Christ?’ Not just the ‘Bible dos and don’ts’, but in the here and now ‘life-building’ - my life living – listening and learning. And if I have heard God’s word for me today, am I actually acting on it? Am I putting God’s directive into practice and practicing regularly? (Am I attending to ‘God’s will and way’ for today?)

This is the type of person Jesus assures is truly wise, building on a sure and certain foundation.

So, are you wise in Jesus’ eyes?

Amen.