

What are you building on?

There's a famous bell tower I saw in Italy a few years back. It stands next to a great cathedral in a wide grassy space called the Field of Miracles. Which is ironic, because it's practically a miracle that the 186 foot tower is still standing 700 years after it was completed. You might know this tower, because it's famous: The Leaning Tower of Pisa.

And do you know why it leans? There's nothing wrong with the tower itself. The problem was where they built it. The Field of Miracles is an unstable mixture of clay and sand. And instead of digging deep to rest the tower on bedrock, they laid a shallow foundation right on top of the soil – and, well, here in Houston we know all too well what happens next. The ground shifted under the tower's weight, and the tower started leaning already as they were still building it. And if it weren't for hundreds of years of work and millions of dollars of repairs and man's best engineering know-how, it would have fallen long ago. One day, it certainly will.

Seems silly, right? All that trouble all because no one stopped to ask, “Hey, what are we building this on?”

Of course, that's a question that maybe we don't stop and ask ourselves often enough, either. Not as we build towers – as we build our lives. Jesus, at the end of his sermon on the Mount, describes two men – a wise one who built his house on rock, and a fool who built his house on sand. And he's talking about how we're all building our lives now and for eternity on something. But on what? It's an important question to ask, because so many are building on sand without even realizing it. It's eternally important, because there is only one rock that's strong enough to withstand every storm and keep us standing forever: Jesus and his Word.

So, listen as Jesus leads you to ask yourself: “What am I building on?”

Matthew 7:15-27: ¹⁵ “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

²¹ “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. ²² 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 in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

²⁴ “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. ²⁵ 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. ²⁶ 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. ²⁷ The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

II. Check your foundation

So...what are you building on? The question is important Jesus says, because – well – a storm is coming. There are really only two types of builders: The wise one who builds his life on Jesus and his word, and the foolish one builds on something – anything – else. But the one thing they have in common is that the storm hits both of their houses.

What is this storm? It wouldn't be wrong to think of the troubles in life – both believers and unbelievers experience them. Jesus and his word are the foundation that strengthen you to withstand them. But it really seems like Jesus' focus in this section is more on that *final* storm we'll face – death, and the judgment that follows. What are you building on – resting your confidence in - to weather *that* storm?

We might blow off the question as a no-brainer. But Jesus wants us to take a closer look. Because there a whole lot of people who look like Christians and think they're Christians who are in for a horrible surprise on Judgment Day. **Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven... 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 in your name perform many miracles?' ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'**

It's a pretty strong warning, isn't it? Here are people who call Jesus, "Lord..." like we do. Obviously, they've spent quite a bit of time in church...like we do. In fact, they've even preached and done miracles and driven out demons...all in Jesus' name. They thought they were on a solid foundation...only to find out they weren't, when they fall with a crash on the last day.

No, Jesus didn't say this to scare us. But he does want us to take a close look at what we're building on. Because even people who know about Jesus and hear about Jesus can be building on sand. Maybe it's the sand of thinking that calling yourself a Christian makes you one; or thinking that a head knowledge of what Jesus did is the same as trusting in what Jesus did to save us. Maybe the sand is thinking that Jesus' forgiveness means you can go on living however you want...and living in sin as a result. Maybe like the people Jesus mentions here it's the sand of thinking that the great things we've done for Jesus...or at least the fact we go to church and try hard to be decent people...is the reason we're going to heaven.

So...what are you building on? Jesus reminds you this morning that God has given you a much better foundation. The only one that is strong enough to keep you standing now and forever. It's the truth of his Word, with Jesus and his work as it's heart and core.

His word that shows you the truth about your sin and leads you to repentance. His word that shows you the truth that there is nothing you can do for God to save yourself...but that

Jesus loved you and did everything that was needed to save you. His word that shows you how Jesus kept God's commands flawlessly for you and died the death you deserved to pay for all of your sins. His word that shows you how Jesus rose as proof your sins are forgiven and heaven is yours. His word that doesn't just give you a head knowledge of that...but gives you living trust that it's true for you.

This is the only rock there is. And it will never shift, because nothing can change what Jesus has done for you. The promises Jesus gives you on the pages of scripture will never change or fail. So when you build on Christ – when you trust in him – you will never be disappointed. Not now, because in storm and sunshine, you're always God's forgiven and dearly loved child. Not in that final storm of death and judgment, because Jesus beat death for you and will raise you to life. And clothed in his righteousness, you can stand before God without fear.

What are you building on? By grace, we can answer: The unchanging word of God and the unchangeable work of Christ. God built you on that firm foundation when he brought you to faith. Jesus wants to keep you on it forever. That's why he wants us to check our foundation.

II. Beware of false foundations

But it's also why he warns us about other people who try to get us to build somewhere else. **Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves.** When you hear false prophets, maybe right away your mind goes to pastors and teachers who peddle their own ideas and pawn it off as God's truth, when it's not. They're included here. But really, a false teacher is anyone who gives you spiritual advice or guidance for your life that isn't God's truth – friends, family, TV personalities, books. Some of these false teachers know they're deceiving you. Others don't – they're deceived themselves. Either way, Jesus says they're dangerous – he calls them wolves.

The tricky part? They don't *look* the part. They're dressed like sheep, Jesus says. They seem harmless and helpful. They might look like a Christian should – kind and loving. They might use bible words like faith and Jesus and salvation, just like we do. They might be so sincere that they talk to you with tears in their eyes. And that just makes them all the more dangerous.

I don't have to tell you that Jesus' words here are pretty much ignored in today's religious landscape. You know there are fewer and fewer churches that would say there is anything such as a false prophet or false teaching. Most downplay differences in doctrine as not a big deal. Most people think it doesn't really matter what church you go to – it's all basically the same. After all, there are so many ways to interpret the bible, who's to say who's right and wrong? Find what fits you. If none do, no matter - come up with your own ideas about God. Why bother worry about what you're building on? It's all good.

But it's not. And according to Jesus, it does matter. It matters a whole lot, because the last thing he wants is to see us build our lives on sand and fall with a great crash.

So, Jesus says, watch out. When you visit another church with a friend, watch out, because you might be spending time with a wolf. When you read religious books or look for spiritual advice on the internet, you might be looking for figs where you'll only find thorns. When a well-meaning friend gives you spiritual advice, watch out, because it might harm you and not help you. When teachers talk religion and morals to your kids at school, they might be telling them to build on sand.

So, how do you tell the difference – recognize who's a wolf and who's not? Jesus says don't look at their sincerity or their kindness or the number of their followers. Look at their fruit. Trees produce fruit, and teachers produce teachings. Before you swallow what they say, check their teachings. Compare them to what God actually says. And if it doesn't line up with what God says in his word, it's rotten fruit and a false foundation.

Of course, to do that, you need to know what the truth is. And that's why staying on the rock means staying in the Word. **Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock...** It's through your learning of God's Word that God gives you Jesus. It's through your learning of God's Word that God gives you a sure defense against anything that would lead you away from Jesus. It's through God's Word that God keeps you built strong and standing firm on the solid Rock, your Savior, that nothing has or ever will overcome. Amen.