

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.Ivor J.W.Oakley (29-10-2000 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

Matthew 7 v 24-29

Introduction

We have now reached the end of the Sermon on the Mount. We have seen how Jesus set before his followers a new life which he wants them to enjoy through him. He explains what that new life is like, the resources for it, and how radically different it is from the way in which men and women of the world live their lives. It is a life which turns them inside out. It completely reverses their outlook. They have an entirely new centre to life.

At the same time, throughout the sermon he has been speaking of himself and saying who he is. We cannot divorce the teaching from the teacher. When we belong to the teacher, we are under his authority and we know his grace in life. We live according to his teaching.

Throughout the sermon Jesus keeps challenging his hearers. Make up your mind. There is a choice to make – one way or the other. The world's way or God's way. Eternal consequences – end in life or destruction.

Now at the end of the sermon he challenges us again. He offers two foundations for life. We can build on one, and get something which will last and can withstand all pressures of life and death. Or we can build on the other – and collapse.

As the sermon ends, the crowds are astonished at Jesus' authority. Christ and his authority over our life are to be our theme. It is a choice every one of us must make.

The authority of Jesus the teacher

This sermon is addressed to his disciples, but ends with mention of the crowds on the fringe of the circle. Every eye was on Jesus. Everyone was fixed on him, spellbound. They do not want to miss a word. He spoke of new life for those who belong to him. It was essentially a life where God was at the centre, and not self. God's character is reproduced in this new life. God is glorified. His will is done. He does not just affect the externals, but touches the heart, the inner man and the motives.

But it is totally impossible to live this new life on your own. You can struggle and strive all you like, but you are not going to get anywhere. God's resources are available, if only we humble ourselves and cast ourselves on him, and ask him for this new life. He will work a miracle. We are utterly dependent on him.

This is the only hope for the world – the people who have this new life. The world is in darkness – they are the only light. The world is corrupt – they are the salt. But it is a costly life. It leads to persecution. In this world, self is at the centre, men trust in themselves and their own power and ability. Money, fame and self-importance rule. No time for those who belong to God, who live in humble dependence on him and live for his will.

So Jesus teaches, illustrates, challenges, and warns, like any true teacher. And at the same time he is preaching about himself – He is the Son of God, he is the Judge of the world, through him God’s grace and power enter lives.

The crowds hear the sermon and weigh up the preacher. They have never heard anything like it before. Heard plenty of preachers in lifetime, the teachers of the law and the scribes, some very learned and erudite, but they lacked authority. Always quoting someone else. Afraid to speak with confidence. So dreary and monotonous and life-less and boring. In contrast, here is the young carpenter of Nazareth speaking. Speaking of life they never thought was possible. Making it plain he was much more than a carpenter. He was the Lord, the Son of God. He said “I came” from God to earth, he fulfils and reinterprets sacred books, and speaks with the authority of God: “I say to you”. He will be Judge at the end of the world. He will decide men’s fate. He explains the importance of being rightly related to him. He knows men, and invites them into a personal relationship with him. He is the Lord to be obeyed.

So like the perfect teacher, Jesus talks with knowledge about life after death. Speaks with confidence and assurance. Never hesitates or apologies, never ventures to suggest. He knows what he is talking about. Sovereign over men’s consciences and wills. They are astounded, lost for words. ἐξεπλησσαντο means dumbfounded. Who on earth is this?

The Lord Jesus Christ still confronts men. The old question comes yet again – “What do you think of Christ?” “What will you do with Christ?” If we are honest people, we must be prepared to face facts and make up mind about him. Who is this Jesus? Trilemma – we have three options. He was either completely out of his mind, a victim of extreme megalomania. Or was he the biggest deceiver and liar world has ever known. Could it be that the highest ethical teaching in the world is all from the mind of unscrupulous liar? Then option number three is that his claims are true, he is what he says he is. A lunatic, a liar, or Lord? A mad man, a bad man, or the God-man?

He presents himself to us here as the Son of God, Lord of all, Judge at the end. By his Cross he is the saving Redeemer, the Saviour of the World. Absolutely unique. We can’t classify him as good, better or best, for he is in a class all of his own. As you hear these claims, he puts you into a corner. What are you going to do about it? It will make all the difference to your life how you respond to his claims.

One thing is certain – and his enemies allow this – if he were taken seriously, this confused and chaotic world would at a stroke be totally changed for the better. Till that happens, the situation will deteriorate. Need for politicians, leaders, and for you to turn away from all else and listen and obey when he says “I say to you”.

Challenge of his authority

Jesus is clear that there are only two responses. Not a third. Two ways, two masters, two destinations, two foundations. You are offered new life. Only God can give you that life by his power, if you will give self to Christ. Hear all that Jesus says in sermon and of course throughout the New Testament. He invites you to come under his

authority, receive forgiveness of sins because of his death, and enjoy new life. It is yours if you respond by turning to him in repentance and faith and obedience.

If you do so, you are like the wise man building house on the rock. *πέτρα*, and not *πέτρος*. Not just a boulder, but massive rock formation. Something solid, immeasurable, reliable, trustworthy, permanent,

Or other option – hear, and even admire, what Jesus says, but just do nothing about it – or postpone it. The man who acts like that is a fool, because his house is built on sand.

In Palestine a builder (and Jesus as a carpenter would know all about this) had to think ahead. Many a gully in summer is a pleasant, sandy hollow. But in winter it is turned into raging torrent. To build house in a dry gully in summer is utter madness. So to refuse teaching of Jesus and his person is the work of a fool. You may be clever at school or work, an acute business man, smart politician, good friend or caring parent – but in spiritual things you are a fool if you build your house on sand, if you live life without reference to Christ and his teaching and authority. May not do anything wicked in everyday life, or evil or criminal, but simply to do nothing when confronted with Christ and his claims is the work of a fool.

Everything depends on foundation on which we build. Two houses. Very close. Outward appearances can be very alike. But in reality totally different because of the unseen factor of foundation. Consequences can be catastrophic if the house is on the wrong foundation. Likewise you can have two people from same church, family, job, or appearance – but in reality totally different because of unseen inner factor – building life on two different foundations. In spiritual and eternal terms, the difference is absolutely fundamental.

So the Lord presents us with the challenge – two choices, and two alone. Submit to me, heed my teaching, let me be in centre of life, receive my revolutionary new life. Or you do not, and just carry on in your own way. Have to do nothing to be lost. But must take vital fundamental step if to be saved. So the Lord does what ought to be done in every sermon – he preaches for a verdict.

Lord Nelson had reputation for being courteous to defeated enemies. On one occasion, a defeated captain came on to Nelson's quarterdeck as a prisoner, and knowing Nelson's reputation, held out his hand expecting to be received by Nelson. But Nelson spoke one sentence: "Your sword first, sir, and then your hand". Submit first, and then know my friendship and help and blessing. So with Christ, your sword first. Lord to be totally accepted and surrendered to. Or else, be rejected. Acceptance brings security. Rejection brings disaster.

Verification of Christ's teaching seen in the consequences

Test of security and safety of house is not revealed on a sunny pleasant summer's day. The test is in the depth of winter, when wind howls and storms rage. Test of lives and whether we are building on right foundation is not when we are young, in the best of health, prospects bright, and no cloud on the horizon. The test is when rain is on the roof, the river is flooding the foundations, and the wind is beating on the walls.

Tests and trials and strains come to all of us in life - adversities, sickness, sorrow, disappointments, bereavements, heartbreaks, betrayal, misunderstandings, doubt, and collapse of what we are depending and banking on. People can have to go through the most dark and most critical hours of life which threaten to overwhelm them. They can experience times of severe temptation, allurements of the world, and Satanic attacks. These are things which show what we are made of. These are the times when the foundation of life is revealed.

Then there is supreme test of all – hour of death, whether it is sudden or gradual. That moment will come when we will part company from familiar scenes and faces, never to return, and go to place beyond the veil with all its unknowns. What use will the worldly empty godless life be then? This is the most tremendous fact of all. We will be shaken to very core of being. This will be our greatest hour of need. Can we stand up to this? Finally seeing God face to face. Our hour of judgement. Eternal destiny is decided. Final decision, and irreversible. Will he own us as his own, saved through Christ, heart which is changed into Godward direction? **Consider the blameless, observe the upright: there is a future for the man of peace** (Psalm 37:37).

This is the ultimate test of our foundations. What have you got? What resources? What answer to fear? What confidence can you show? On whom can you rely? We shall know then whether we have been wise or foolish. Then the foundations of life will be laid bare.

Do these facts disturb you, so that you choose not to think about them? Wake up. Face reality. Build on the right foundation before it is too late. Oh the folly of the empty worldly life whose centre is self. The awfulness of being without hope and without God. How precious it is to know Christ, his salvation, submission to him, new life from the father. To be able to look at life, death and eternity without fear and with confidence. What have you got if you suddenly lost health, possessions, disfigured by disease? What would you rest on? What have you got? Are your sins forgiven? Is God at centre of life? Drop arrogance and rebellion. Call on God to move and change heart. Seek him for forgiveness. Let him take complete possession of you.

There is a living God. He has spoken in the Bible. He means all he says and will do all he has promised, both in judgement on those who reject him, and in salvation to those who accept him. **Seek the Lord while he may be found; call upon him while he is near** (Isaiah 55:6).