

Matthew 7.24-27

Building... on the Word

Amington

Sunday 6 September 2020

Build, build, build (6)

Building

We began thinking about building a few weeks ago. We read about God's promise to 'rebuild the ancient ruins'. We thought about where the gaps in our 'walls' might be, like Nehemiah riding round the walls of Jerusalem before starting to repair them. We have thought about where the centre should be, around which we build. We've seen how it's God who builds – and how he calls us to join in with him.

Today we're thinking about Jesus' parable of the wise and foolish builders. You know the one: *sing* the wise man built his house upon a rock... We all know it I'm sure, but can you remember the *point* of the parable? Jesus didn't simply tell stories – they all had a point, something to learn.

Let's see what the point of *this* parable is. *Go into the reading.*

Respond

Jesus contrasts two people: a wise builder, and a foolish builder. No-one in their right mind would try to build a house on sand – of course not! We'd build a house on solid ground, on rock – or, these days – on concrete.

That means there are two ways to respond to Jesus' teaching: one is to **hear** his words **and put them into practice**. This is like building a house on rock.

The other is, well, to *not* do that – which means either not listening at all, or listening but not putting them into practice. This is like building a house on sand.

'These words of mine'

But first – what **words** is Jesus talking about? This *particular* block of teaching – often called the Sermon on the Mount? All his teaching put together? All that plus the words others wrote about him in the New Testament?

We might hear '**these words**' and decide that the words we have Jesus recorded as saying are what is *most* important – and can effectively disregard the rest.

Fair enough – but before you decide that, perhaps you should *read* the Sermon on the Mount first. I think it's probably the most uncompromising teaching in the Bible: demanding we **be perfect** (5.48), containing difficult teaching, about people going to hell, not resisting occupying soldiers, divorce, hypocrisy – and that anger and lust are as bad as murder and adultery.

Plus, in the Sermon on the Mount alone, Jesus quotes or refers to the Old Testament Law at least seven times – either to repeat its teaching, or to make it *stricter*. He describes his teaching as summarising, not replacing the Law.

Most importantly though, Jesus is the 'Word': he inspired – by the Holy Spirit he *breathed* words *into* the authors of the books and letters that make up the Bible – they are *all* **'these words of mine'**.

'Hear'

That *inspiration*, that *breathing in*, was a miracle – but what's more amazing to me is that *exactly the reverse miracle happens today*.

When Christians read the words of the Bible – words that have been collected from various manuscripts and translated by some very gifted scholars – it's not like reading a novel or the newspaper.

When Christians read these words, God speaks. He uses these words to speak into our hearts, our minds, our deepest selves. He reminds us of the truth, about himself, about creation, about ourselves; he teaches us the way we should live; he encourages us, promises us, warns and challenges us. He gives us words to pray, words to praise, words to lament, words to thank, words to rant, words to sing, words to weep.

When we read these words, the Holy Spirit takes them and speaks to us through them in all these ways, and more.

These words are not like a novel or a newspaper – they are special. All of them. I wonder, are we listening to them?

‘Put them into practice’

When my good friends had their first child, he was one of those babies that doesn’t sleep, and screams constantly. I went round to cook a meal for them a couple of times, and once – now infamously – I took the recipe and ingredients for a parsnip cake.

Now, I love carrot cake, and I love parsnips. It was a delicious, if expensive recipe. But there was a problem. Me.

I'd never baked a cake before. But more importantly, I'd never *iced* a cake before. And this recipe had a delicious cream cheese and maple syrup frosting.

However, because I had never iced a cake before, I didn't realise how important this one instruction was in the recipe: 'allow cake to cool before icing'.

Now, I love a warm cake, just out of the oven. I wanted to make them a lovely cake, so I decided not to wait for the cake to cool, but to ice it straight away so we could have it warm and delicious.

This is the result. [*Show photo of cake.*](#)

In fairness to my baking skills, the cake was delicious, and I don't think I've ever laughed as much at something I've made.

Jesus said, 'Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock.'

Matthew 7.24 (NIV)

Reading is not enough.

Hearing is not enough.

Knowing is not enough.

Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.

James 1.22 (NIV)

Crowd, or disciple?

If Jesus worked for a modern church, his ministry would probably be hailed as a huge success. He was followed by *huge* crowds. They hung on his every word. They cried out to him for help. They brought their sick to him to be healed.

But then they screamed for him to be crucified. They jeered at him as he hung on the cross. They chased his followers out of their towns, even trying to stone some of them to death.

That's the difference between the crowd and the disciples.

'The crowd' hears Jesus' words, maybe even *likes* what they hear – 'He's a great moral teacher,' they say – while totally ignoring those so-called 'great' teachings, especially the ones about hell and sex.

You know what? I think Jesus might be the most ignored person in history.

‘The disciples’ are those who **hear** Jesus’ **words** – *really* hear them – **and put them into practice**. It’s not easy, and we’ll mess up and get things wrong every day. But what matters is what comes first.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, ‘**seek first [God’s] kingdom and his righteousness**’ (6.33). Putting Jesus words into practice means we need to stop trying to rule our life ourselves, to stop insisting we know more about life than the God who invented life, and to let *him* be King, to submit to *his* rule. And if we do that, we will find what it means to *live*.

Yes, but how?

Now, the Bible is a big book. But there are *so many* resources out there to help Christians read it, learn it, mark what it says, even ‘digest’ it (though please don’t actually eat it, that won’t help).

I have been publishing Daily Prayer since lockdown started, with a Proverb and a comment, and some simple prayers. It takes not even ten minutes to read and pray through it every day.

Scripture Union publish *Daily Bread*, which has a passage of the Bible every day, with a comment to help us understand and engage with what the Bible says, and to help us pray.

There are plans for reading the gospels, the psalms, the letters of Paul, the New Testament, the *whole Bible* – you name it, someone has written something to help you read it!

There is no excuse. If you want help, all you need to do, is ask!

My experience is that reading the Bible is best done little and often – a bit of it, every day. Take a deep breath, calm yourself, be *still* and *quiet* so you can hear what God might be saying. And like eating breakfast or having a morning coffee – let it become a habit, a *good* habit.

Friends, let's be disciples and not the crowd. Let's **hear these words** of Jesus, **and put them into practice** – and so build our life on solid rock.