

# COMMENTARY ON THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT

## Matthew 7:24-29

We're in the world. And we're for it. But we're not *of* it. We don't march to it's beat. We march to a beat that transcends this city and its culture, this world and its ways. It's a beat from above. It's the beat of Christ's heart. Its rhythm is his timeless wisdom. Its tempo is his time-tested love. And the Sermon on the Mt is the song. In this Sermon, Christ teaches us to live the right way up, in an upside down world. This commentary, written by Terran Williams, draws from some of the best available sources. It will aid in individuals and groups in their study of Christ's teaching in his Manifesto of Life in the Kingdom, Matthew 5-7.

### Outline of the Sermon on the Mount

- the life God blesses (5:1-12)
- the call to influence (5:13-16)
- love for the scriptures (5:17-20)
- radical love (5:21-48)
- spirituality before the audience of One (6:1-18)
- pursuing that which is worthy of our lives (6:19-24)
- overcoming anxiety about the future and preoccupation with not-so-important things (6:25-34)
- how *not* to help each other change (7:1-6)
- strong encouragements to pray and love (7:7-12)
- responding to the Sermon's call to radical living (7:13-29)

## Matthew 7:24-29 -

### RESPONDING TO THE SERMON'S CALL TO RADICAL LIVING, PT 2

#### The Wise and Foolish Builders

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."

#### Build your life upon eternal values not temporal ones.

- We're building something with our lives. Each of us spends our time, our money, our energy and our thoughts building for ourselves a life. We hope to achieve something with our lives. We hope that as our lives progress we become increasingly secure and stable.
- The question is, "What foundation are we building upon"? In Jesus' parable one man builds upon the foundation of sand. The other builds upon the foundation of rock. Everyone consciously or unconsciously builds their lives upon some convictions about the world we live in. Our ideas about reality impact the way we live and the way we build our lives. Some people build upon the sand of temporary values. They build their lives upon a central conviction such as: "What matters most is money, or happiness, or my reputation, or success in my career, or my children, or my family, or my education, or my attractiveness, or my adventures, or the experience of pleasure." To build our lives primarily upon temporal values is to build our lives upon sand. But Jesus calls us to build our lives upon the rock of eternal values. Our central conviction

should be: “What matters most is my love for and my faith in Christ, and my whole-hearted, joyful obedience to him and his teachings.” We should stop and evaluate our foundations. What is our conviction about what is of most importance? Is it temporal values? Or is it eternal values?

- Interestingly, when things are going well, the difference between a person building their lives on temporal values (sand) and eternal values (rock) is not immediately obvious. In fact the person building their life on the sand has an easier job. The person building on the rock of eternal values needs to give much thought to their ways. It requires extra energy and focus. The person building on the sand of temporal values probably builds a more impressive house, outwardly at least, simply because they worry so little about what’s below the surface, while the person building on the rock of eternal values does.
- But, eventually all is revealed. Storms come. The rains of adversity hit the roof. The winds of calamity blast against the walls. The floods of difficulties eat at the foundations. Not only the storms of life, but also the storms of God’s judgment come. The biggest storm to ever hit our lives is the storm of Judgment Day when we will stand before God. Our whole lives, how we lived, and what we built our lives upon will be evaluated by God himself. Jesus tells us that the life built upon sand will come crashing down when the storms of adversity and Judgment Day come. Whereas the life built upon rock will remain standing!
- Is Christ speaking to Christians or non-Christians here? The answer is probably both. Although this sermon has been directed at disciples / Christians, there is reason to believe it’s also for those who have yet to put their faith in Jesus. Throughout the sermon Jesus addressed “you” (i.e. disciples 5:1). Then in 7:15-23 he spoke of “them” (i.e. false prophets). Now he speaks to “everyone” (v24). It seems that, although the message was primarily for his disciples, some crowds started to gather around the edges (see verse 28). Therefore, Jesus is probably addressing the disciples plus curious onlookers.

### **Christ wants you to be transformed not just informed by his words.**

- Interestingly both the man building his house on sand, and the one building his house on the rock have had exposure to Jesus’ teaching. Jesus says of both that they have heard these words of his (v24,26). If they both have heard Jesus’ words, then what is the difference? The main difference is that the one man’s life has been transformed by the words of Jesus, while the other man’s life hasn’t been transformed. One man has “put into practice” the words of Christ. The other hasn’t.
- As important as hearing and even studying the words of Jesus is, it’s not enough. First of all, we need to actually retain Jesus’ words. If we hear and then simply forget his words, they will have no effect on us. For example, it’s no good reading our Bible in the morning – hearing Jesus speak to us about our day – and then giving no thought to his words throughout the day. Second of all, we need to actually put into practise his words. They need to result in some kind of life change, even if it’s a very small degree of change. It’s one thing being informed by Jesus. It’s another thing completely being transformed by Jesus. Scarily, we sometimes feel moved by sermons or times of Bible reading – and think

that, that's all that matters, that we feel moved. Feeling moved is not what matters. Actually moving is what matters. Feeling stirred is not enough. The stirring must translate into some kind of life change. Our thought patterns need to change. Our beliefs need to change. Our lifestyles need to change. It's not enough to hear Christ's words. We need to do them.

- This applies to believers and non-believers. I have already given examples of how it applies to believers. Let me show how it applies to a non-believer: a non-Christian who hears about Jesus – perhaps even affirming mentally what they hear – but then doesn't place their trust in Jesus, and open their lives to his leadership is like someone who builds their life on the sand. Even the devil gives mental assent to reality of Jesus. But the devil doesn't trust in Jesus, and yield his life to Jesus.

28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. 8:1 And when he came down from the mountain great crowds followed him.

**Jesus and his teaching are nothing short of amazing.**

- The “crowds were amazed at his teaching” and “followed him” “down from the mountain”. Why were the people amazed by Jesus’ teaching? What drew people to him?
- *The contents of his teaching is amazing.* It's a call to radical living. He taught on qualities to be congratulated (5:1-12), the call to courageous influence (5:13-16), love for the Scriptures (5:17-20), radical love (5:21-48), devotion before the audience of One (6:1-18), pursuing that which is worthy of our lives (6:19-24), overcoming anxiety about the future and the preoccupation with not-so-important things (6:25-35), how *not* to try help each other change (7:1-6), encouragements to pray and love (7:7-12), and then he brought his sermon to a close by urging us to respond to his call to radical living with warnings included if we fail to respond appropriately (7:13-29). What a powerful message! What a thorough life-changing message!
- *The way the pictures and themes of his teaching connect with our everyday life is amazing.* He speaks of salt, light, pens, brothers, pennies, courts, prisons, fire, eyes, hands, knives, legal documents, thrones, footstools, hair, teeth, tunics, sun, rain, trumpets, religious buildings, doors, rooms, perfume, faces, moth, rust, thieves, treasure, masters, money, food, drink, clothing, birds, flowers, fields, specks, planks, dogs, pigs, fathers, gifts, bread, stones, fish, snakes, gates, roads, sheep, wolves, grapes, figs, trees, houses, sand, rock, storms, rains, winds, floods and more! And he speaks of such relevant life themes: blessing, persecution, hunger for what's right, significance, courage, obedience, the Scriptures, teaching others, conflict resolution, reconciliation, adultery, sexual purity, lust, divorce, remarriage, marital faithfulness, the use of speech, the tendencies to exaggerate and manipulate with words, integrity, revenge, responding to attack,

forgiveness, motives for doing good deeds, the danger of pursuing a “respectable reputation”, prayer, alternate spiritualities, submission, temptation, the devil, reward, fasting and appetite-denying disciplines, goals, priorities, money, materialism, anxiety about the future, satisfaction and pleasure, future security, fashion and image, passions of the heart, condemnation, self-amendment, hypocrisy, tact, faith, the golden rule, decision-making, false prophets, whole-life orientation and so much more!

- *The sheer authority and boldness with which he teaches is amazing.* Unlike the rabbis of Jesus’ day, Jesus didn’t quote other rabbis. They would tend to say ‘Rabbi So-and-so said this’. But Jesus keeps on using the refrain, “But I tell you.” He was so direct, so sure. His authority did not come from great learning (although we have no reason to think Jesus did not develop his mind as much as he could). His authority came from God. He did not just share information gleaned from study, but revelation received from heaven. The Holy Spirit supernaturally empowered his preaching, giving boldness and wisdom to him as he spoke, as well as cutting listeners to the heart. People could feel this message was from heaven.
- *The way Jesus seemed to embody the very teachings he brought is amazing.* Jesus literally practiced what he preached. In all the records we have of Jesus, not once do we see his lifestyle in anyway contradicting the radical living he speaks of in the Sermon on the Mount. He lived what he taught, and taught what he lived.
- *Most importantly, the way the sermon is actually about Jesus is amazing.* Although many people think that the Sermon on the Mount shows that Jesus was merely a moral teacher, and not the unique Son of God, a closer look reveals that this is entirely incorrect. The Sermon on the Mount calls us first and foremost to trust in Jesus himself, before it calls us to trust and follow his teachings. It is not just a call to radical living. It’s a call to faith in a radical Saviour. Just think about it: He speaks confidently about what people need to see God (5:8). There is no doubt in him at all. He says there is blessing for those who are persecuted “on account of” him (5:11). He says “I have come to fulfil the Scriptures” (5:17). “Come” from where? It means “come into this world on a mission from heaven”. And he claims to be the fulfilment of the entire Old Testament. Without brushing the inspiration or authority of the Old Testament, he transcends it. He teaches in a way that outstrips and outclasses its laws. He calls people to a higher righteousness than the one available in the Old Testament. He tells people to live their lives by his commands. He claims to be the final judge of false prophets, deciding the eternal destiny of people. He tells us that the only way to live an indestructible life, and the only way to withstand life’s storms, and to remain standing at the great judgment is to base our lives on his teaching. A person who is first exposed to this teaching should ask, “Who does Jesus think he is?” C.S. Lewis comments well on this question in his book, *Mere Christianity*: “I am trying to prevent anyone from saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: ‘I’m ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not

say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things that Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic or else He would be the devil. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to do so.”

*Reference is made to the following sources throughout this commentary. Each time the author and the page number is mentioned, but not the book title.*

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