

Matt. 7:24-27

Intro:

This well-known passage is Jesus's conclusion and application of all that He had said previously. It is both an encouragement and a warning to heed and follow His teaching. It highlights two opposite possible responses to His teaching, and the inevitable conclusions that will follow on each of those reactions. He used an analogy comparing each response to a homebuilder and the different qualities and resilience of their houses, depending on how each of the houses were built.

I. Pos: The wise way to respond to Jesus' teaching (24-25)

A. Whoever hears and puts my words into practice (24a-b)

1. Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine (24a)

This passage begins with the word "therefore." Jesus clearly connected this passage with all that He had spoken before in the Sermon on the Mount. His words in this Sermon were of such an important nature that their inherent truth and power absolutely determined an inevitable consequence depending on whether someone responded well to them, or poorly. Jesus's person and teaching, because He has authority, is such that no one can remain neutral. Everyone who hears His words will experience one of two possible results. And which result they experience will be determined by how they respond to Jesus's words.

Jesus used an indefinite word "whoever" but qualified it with the word "every." This means that this category is indefinite in the sense that it only applies to those who hear His words. But at the same time, it is fixed, in that absolutely everyone who does hear His words is in the same category. This category will be further refined in the next proposition, because this proposition is only describing the necessary condition for the next proposition to be true. So, this idea is incomplete without the next. Hearing Jesus's words is the necessary prerequisite, but the response to those words will be determinant for the point which Jesus is making in this passage.

2. And he does them (24b)

The central issue in this first possible response to Jesus is that when someone hears His words, they actually "do them." Later in this passage, this will be directly contrasted with those who hear but *don't* do them. Hearing is not what makes the difference, but responding in an appropriate manner is the difference.

The word "does," which Jesus used, is a very generic word for doing or performing some action. This word could describe a huge variety of activities. Because Jesus said a variety of things in the Sermon on the Mount, a proper response will entail a variety of appropriate attitudes and actions. For example, because Jesus talked about not murdering by not hating others, a proper response would be to not hate others (and thereby to refrain from murder). And because Jesus taught about not being anxious, a proper response would be to trust God and thereby avoid sinful anxiousness. And so on for the rest of Jesus's teachings in this sermon. So, "doing" Jesus words is a multifaceted response to His multifaceted teaching. And because we all have different situations, our appropriate responses may be different from the appropriate response of others. And because Jesus concentrated on the inward attitude and motivation in the Sermon on the Mount, "doing His words" will also focus on the inward attitude and motivation, which will result in outward actions.

And Jesus said that this wise person would "do *them*." That, is, he will perform the very attitudes and actions which Jesus taught. The power for success which Jesus will promise in the next propositions does not depend on the act of doing something, but in the specifics of what is done – that they are in conformity with what Jesus actually taught. We all actively do a lot of things. But only some things – those things which are in response to what Jesus has taught will bear the good fruit which Jesus will describe. The important point is that our activities and attitudes are in direct response and conformity with Jesus teaching. Those appropriate responses will benefit from what Jesus described in the next propositions.

B. He is like a wise man succeeding because of his wisdom (24c-25)

1. He will be likened to a sensible/wise man (24c)

Jesus used a comparative analogy to describe the benefits of doing His words. He compared the person who hears and does His words to a wise man. This word “wise” has the connotation of understanding combined with the insight and wisdom to successfully put that understanding into practice, which results in a beneficial outcome. Jesus will illustrate more specifically what this looks like in the next few propositions.

2. Who succeeded because he built in a wise manner (24d-25)

Jesus’s illustration to elaborate what it meant to be a sensible, wise man has two aspects: First He described what the man did. And second, He described the ongoing result of what the man did. All this is to illustrate the actions and results of a person who puts His teaching into practice.

a Who built his house upon the rock (24d)

The activity of the wise man in Jesus’s illustration is that he built his house on the rock. Jesus did not mention anything about the construction of the house itself (its materials or workmanship). But He only mentioned the foundation upon which it was built. He will bring out the significance of this later in 25f.

b And it survived bad weather (25)

1) And bad weather struck the house (25a-d)

Jesus did not question whether bad weather would come or not. He just assumed that it would strike the house. This shows His expectance that difficult times would sooner or later be a part of his hearers’ lives. We should expect difficulties to happen. And the real issue is whether we will be prepared to survive them well when they do come.

Jesus’s illustration comes out of the regular weather pattern in that part of the world, which included occasional severe storms and flash floods. There were many river beds, which were dry for part of the year, but could, without much warning, fill up with raging torrents.

And Jesus was also directly drawing on Ezekiel chapter 13, where God warned against the false prophets. In that chapter, it is described that they built a wall, and the false prophets whitewashed it. But God sent wind and rain, and the wall fell, both destroying the people and exposing the foundation of the wall

a) And bad weather happened (25a-c)

These three propositions relate three aspects of the bad weather in Jesus’s illustration. They are obviously separate, but related parts of a bad storm. Jesus probably did not intend any significant distinction between these three events. But rather, He used all three together to colorfully describe the intensity and comprehensiveness of the storm.

(1) And the rain came down (25a)

Jesus was here picturing, not a light drizzle, but a significant downpour, as shown in the next proposition.

(2) And the rivers/torrents came (25b)

The picture that Jesus was portraying, is not a slow moving, calm river, like some may have experienced. Rather, He was describing a fast-moving torrent that would carry everything before it.

(3) And the winds blew (25c)

This is a generic phrase for the wind blowing. But in this context, we can assume He was not referring to a light breeze. Rather, this was intended to signify a strong, storm wind.

b) And it struck against this house (25d)

This is the point of the description of the storm. The storm struck against the house which the wise man had built. And the word Jesus used has the connotation of hitting it with great force, to strike against it. The result of the storm in this illustration is that it struck against the house. The force of the storm on the house would be a significant test of whether the house would be able to survive such force. And the point of this entire illustration, as seen in the next propositions, is whether or not it would survive, and the reason why or why not.

2) It survived, because it had a good foundation (25e-f)

a) And it did not fall (25e)

As expected, because the builder was wise, the house did not fall down. It survived the intense storm intact. And the reason it survived is clearly spelled out in the next proposition.

b) Reason: because it had been founded upon the rock (25f)

In this proposition, Jesus highlighted the reason why the house did not fall, which is the point of this story. The difference (as seen in the next few verses) between the house that did not fall and the one that did, is not in the quality of the workmanship or the quality of the building material. Those things may be important in a literal house, but they are not what Jesus emphasized in this illustration.

The difference that caused this house to remain standing was the quality of the foundation. The quality and success of our lives is dependent on the quality of what we build our lives upon. In other words, the difference for a blessed life is not so much in the “doing” but in the specifics of what is done and the reasons why. The power for success is not in our works, but in the truth, authority, and power of Christ’s person and teaching. Our works make a difference only when we build our works in such a way that is clear they are built on the foundation of Christ, because Christ is the One Who makes the difference.

And the illustration of “rock” is significant, because the reason Christ and His teaching are a solid foundation is because they are solid and completely dependable. Jesus is the faithful, true, unchanging, completely trustworthy creator and lawgiver over everything. His unchanging nature, as well as His sovereign control over all the universe makes Him the most solid and reliable foundation possible. He is the literal foundation of all reality, and so, there is no more fitting and reliable foundation for our lives.

On the contrary, to refuse to put His words into practice is to rely on our own righteousness, wisdom, and strength, which are completely weak and fallible by comparison. That would be a complete failure, as will be described in the next two verses. But to put His words into practice is to rely on His wisdom and righteousness. Another term for this kind of wise response (taken from Paul), is “the obedience of faith.” This kind of faith-filled response relies on the foundation of Christ and His authority. And it is shown in the faithful working out of Jesus’s instructions, knowing that they are good and true, which results in a life that is secure against the difficulties and storms which eventually come into every life. We should become prepared to successfully weather life’s storms by building deep on the dependable foundation of Christ Himself. That is the truly wise response.

II. Neg: The foolish way to respond to Jesus' teaching (26-27)

These two verses are the negative mirror image of the previous verses. In these verses, Jesus described the opposite possible response to His teaching, and the opposite result, using the exact same illustration, but with the opposite details.

A. Whoever hears but doesn't do my words (26a-b)

1. And everyone hearing these words of mine (26a)

This proposition is almost exactly the same as 24a. And the small differences in wording do not seem to change the meaning. See the comments above on 24a.

2. And not doing them (26b)

With one major exception, this proposition is almost exactly the same as 24b, with small differences in wording that do not change the meaning. See the comments on 24b.

The major difference is that in this verse, Jesus added the word "not" which makes this proposition describe the completely opposite response. To *not* do His teaching is to ignore or reject it, which is to ignore or reject Him. This response shows a lack of understanding and/or a lack of trust in Christ. And it is usually strong evidence of self-righteous rejection of Who Christ is, because He demands the rightful submission that is to be given Him as Lord and King. And because we want to be the king of our own life, we reject Him as master. We refuse to do His will, because we want to do our own instead. Of course, it could be argued that someone wanted to do Christ's words but were unable, or a variety of other excuses why they did not respond. But based on what follows, Jesus would not have believed or accepted these kinds of excuses.

B. He is like a fool who is destroyed because of his foolishness (26c-27)

1. This one will be likened to a stupid/foolish man (26c)

This proposition is very similar to 24c. See the comments there. But here, this person is likened to a "stupid/foolish" man. This word does not primarily refer to a lack of intelligence. But rather it refers to a lack of wisdom, often connected with a lack of morality, which results in a lack of success. Very intelligent people can be fools if they use their intelligence in service of bad morality.

2. Who came to destruction because he built in a foolish manner (26d-27)

a Who built his house upon the sand (26d)

This proposition is very similar to 24d. See the comments there. But here, the foolish man built his house on a foundation of sand.

This is an illustration of a foolish person who does not build their life on the foundation of Christ. Rather, they trust in their own righteousness, their own way of doing things, their own wisdom, and their own standards of judgment. There are a lot of people who act like they are smarter than God, because they reject His standards and substitute their own. But in doing so, they show that they are actually fools.

Jesus warned against this when He said that unless your righteousness surpasses the Pharisees, you will never enter the Kingdom of Heaven (see 5:20). And the rest of this passage shows the result of someone who follows this foolish way of life.

And the illustration of sand is appropriate for a foolish foundation, specifically because sand is not stable. Sand is movable, and its overall form shifts and changes. And therefore, it is not solid and stable and reliable.

In a similar fashion, many people try to build their lives on subjective whims and fashions, and claim that ethics are situational and that truth and meaning are subjective and determined only by the individual. History is full of the catastrophes and atrocities that result from this kind of mindset. Those who marry the spirit of the age are soon widowed. Those who change their position to please the mob are soon destroyed by the mob when the mob has changed its position. To build a life on anything less solid than Christ and His teaching is a very dangerous and foolish thing to do.

b And it was destroyed by bad weather (27)

1) And bad weather struck the house (27a-d)

Most of this verse (27a-d) is exactly the same wording as 25a-d. See the comments there.

Jesus is describing exactly the same kind of difficult situations that will eventually come into everyone's life. The only difference is how people will weather life's storms, depending on their foundation. But here He shows, for all intents and purposes, the storms should be considered to be the same. Of course, the details of the difficulties will be different for each person, but the significance of the difficulties will be the same, in that they will show the quality of our life's foundation (or lack thereof).

a) And bad weather happened (27a-c)

(1) And the rain came down (27a)

See the comments on 25a.

(2) And the rivers/torrents came (27b)

See the comments on 25b.

(3) And the winds blew (27c)

See the comments on 25c.

b) And it beat against this house (27d)

See the comments on 25d.

2) And it fell with complete destruction (27e-f)

a) And it fell (27e)

As would be expected in this illustration (especially if you have seen pictures or videos of the damage done by severe storms), the house collapsed. Jesus did not explicitly spell out the reason for its collapse, but the reason was clearly implied. It fell because it was built on the sand, which is not a stable enough foundation. Just as sand is easily washed away by a storm flood, anything built on that sand will just as surely be washed away and fall down. Just as our own self-righteousness or the shifting ethics and ideologies of our surrounding cultures will certainly not be able to stand when confronted with reality, any life built on these unstable and unreliable foundations will also come crashing down.

b) And its collapse was intense/thorough (27f)

In the place parallel to where Jesus gave the reason why the wise man's house did not fall (25f), here Jesus did not give the reason why the foolish man's house fell. The reason was clearly implied and did not need to be stated. Instead, Jesus emphasized how thorough and intense the fall of this house was. It did not just lose the roof or only one wall (for instance). But the entire house was completely destroyed. Its destruction was intense and terrible and comprehensive. This shows that there is no neutral response. There is no possibility that one can reject Jesus and still have a somewhat decent result. Either the house will completely stand firm, or it will completely be destroyed. Because Jesus is the true One with all authority, and every other way is inadequate.