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Matthew 7:24 - 7:29



Gospel of Matthew - Steve Gregg

In this talk, Steve Gregg delves into the deeper and weighty aspects of the house-on-a-rock versus the house-on-sand dichotomy that many are familiar with from Matthew 7. He discusses the importance of laying a strong foundation in one's life by living according to the teachings of Jesus and not wasting time seeking personal pleasure and glory. Gregg emphasizes that the time to build a strong foundation is now, before the storms of life come. Ultimately, he encourages listeners to live wisely and build their metaphorical houses on a strong foundation of obedience to Jesus' teachings.

Transcript

Today we'll be looking at Matthew chapter 7, beginning at verse 24. Now, this is the closing paragraph of the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount is, of course, one of the most well-known specimens of the teaching of Jesus.

In it, in the prior sections in Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7, Jesus has laid out his program for the kingdom of God, basically. Some people have called the Sermon on the Mount the kingdom manifesto, because Jesus was calling men to a new loyalty to a new king. He, Jesus, is the king, and the men who came to him to be loyal to him must obey him implicitly, must do what he said, must be his true followers, his loyalists.

And so Jesus closes his remarks on this occasion with these words, beginning at Matthew 7, 24. Therefore, whoever hears these sayings of mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house.

And it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. Now, everyone who hears these sayings of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat on that house.

And it fell, and great was its fall. And so it was, it says, that when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at his teaching, for he had taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. Now, the story of the house on the sand and the

house on the rock is very familiar to children who have been to Sunday school, because there's a little song about the wise man built his house on the rock, and the foolish man built his house on the sand.

And it's one of those things that if a person was raised in Sunday school and knew that song, that perhaps they can hardly even hear the scripture read without that tune coming to their heads. And that, you know, there's something to be said for familiarizing children with the scriptural teaching. However, there's also a concern that because we heard it when we were young, we will relegate it to, in our thinking, to the realm of juvenile concepts, and we'll miss the depth, and the sophistication, and the magnitude and the gravity of what is being said here.

So, please, if you're familiar with this already, take seriously what Jesus is saying. You know, the Sermon on the Mount is perhaps Christ's greatest sermon, and he winds it up with this grand finale. And if you have long been familiar with the house on the sand and the house on the rock dichotomy, it may well be that there's much about it, much deeper, much more weighty than what you have considered, and I'd like to explore that with you right now.

Now, obviously, Jesus is comparing human life, human living, with the project of building a house. This is not the only place in scripture where he does so and where others do so. There is something about living that is like building a house.

For one thing, you build your house out of certain materials, and if those are good materials, and if the plan is good, if it's a structurally sound blueprint and so forth, you may have a very good house, and this could represent how that everyone lives his life according to some blueprint. And he chooses career and wife and hobbies and friends and so forth in such a way as to make his life a strong and a stable and an enduring and a worthwhile project. Now, that is the case.

Building a house has some things in common with building a life. But the one aspect of it that Jesus focuses on here is laying the foundation of the house. There may be many other ways in which life can be compared to building a house, but they are not in view in this particular passage.

One example of how this imagery could be used a different way to make a different point is when Jesus was teaching in Luke chapter 14, and he compared discipleship with building a tower. He said no man builds a tower unless he first sits down to see whether he has enough to finish it. Otherwise, after he has laid the foundation and has begun to build, if he finds that he doesn't have adequate resources to finish it, he'll have to discontinue the project and become a laughing stock to all who view it.

Now, what Jesus is saying there, of course, is that if you're going to become a follower of Jesus, you'd better count the cost first because if you start and don't finish, it will be a

reproach to both you and to his cause. But he is comparing, of course, your life with the building of a structure, in that case a tower. Now, here Jesus is making a similar comparison.

Your life is like a house that's under construction. But he wants to focus right now on what is the foundation of that house. You know, a person might use the finest materials and have a tremendously well-designed blueprint for his house.

And he might have skilled and competent laborers building that house. But if the foundation is inadequate, it will do no good. If you build that house on top of a sinkhole, the finest house and the best constructed will go down into the earth and will be worthless and will be lost.

Likewise, as Jesus points out, if you build a fine house but it has no foundation, it's just directly built on sand, there's no way that house is going to stand no matter how well you build it, no matter how much care you take in it. If your house is built on sand, that sand will simply erode away as the changes of weather cause changes in the surface of the sand. The floods and the rains and tides and floods and all that stuff, did I say floods? Those things will undermine the house and will cause the sand to be pulled away.

You might have a great house, but if its foundation is absent or inadequate, you are not going to have a fine house for very long. On the other hand, as Jesus points out, if you build a house on a rock, that rock is not going to be affected by the changes in weather and climate and year by year, and for that matter, century by century, that rock will still be there and it will remain unchanged. Therefore, your house and all the investment you put into that house, building it, will not be a wasted thing.

And that's something very important to notice here. Jesus tells the story about two men. One builds his house on sand, one builds his house on a rock.

He does not say anything else to differentiate between these two projects. For all we know, both men may have used the same blueprint, the same materials, the same construction company, and may have built identical houses from the ground up. The only difference being whether it was built on an adequate foundation or not.

And he indicates that the house that is built on the adequate foundation will survive. The one that is not built on an adequate foundation will not survive. Now, what does this house represent? It represents your life.

Is your life going to survive? And by this, of course, it is not intended to mean, are you going to live in this body forever? Obviously, nobody is going to survive, except for those maybe few Christians in history who happen to be living at the time of Jesus' second coming, in which case they will not die. They'll rise up into the air to meet him in the air without dying. But the vast majority of human beings, including the vast majority of

Christians in history, have had to die and most probably should look forward to doing so.

None of us is really going to survive forever in this body. However, Jesus' concern is that we do spiritually survive. And that we don't be lost.

And the collapse of a house that is on sand is the loss of a soul. How do I know this? Well, just because of the context immediately preceding it. Jesus is talking about those who say, Lord, Lord, but they don't do the will of the Father.

And they think they've got a house that's going to last them for eternity. But on the day of testing, on the day of judgment, their house collapses. And he says, I never knew you.

Why? Because you didn't do the things I said. Well, what is the wise man in this picture that Jesus gives us? He's the man who hears these words of Jesus' and does them. The foolish man is the one who hears these words of Jesus' and does not do them.

So here's two kinds of people. In this case, both have heard the words of Jesus. Now, there are, of course, a third class of people in the world who have never heard the words of Jesus.

They are not necessarily in view in this particular parable. Because Jesus is not addressing people who have never heard him speak. He's addressing people who are at that very moment hearing him speak.

And if you have heard the words of Jesus, if you... By the way, you've just heard some of them by listening to this program. But if you are exposed to what Jesus says, then you fall into one of these two categories. You either hear his words and obey them, or you hear his words and don't obey them.

That's really the only two possibilities. You can't kind of be obedient. You are obedient or you're disobedient.

Now, if you become aware of what Jesus said, and he was saying, of course, now that the disciples to whom he was speaking, they were now aware of what he had just finished saying, which was the Sermon on the Mount. If you hear these words of mine and you obey them, if you do them, then you'll be like the wise man who built his house on the rock. And what he's saying, of course, is that you will endure.

Your Christian life will not fall apart. You'll have eternal life. But he says, if you hear these words of mine and you don't do them, then you'll be like the foolish man who built his house on sand.

And he may have a life that is impressive to those who are looking on, but underneath it has nothing to make it permanent. And therefore, it will end. It will collapse when the final storms hit.

Now, one thing, I mean, there's many lessons we can learn just from that alone. One thing it certainly does is answers the question, are Christians expected to obey Jesus? You know, there are some people, some Christian teachers, if we could call them that, they certainly are within the Christian church, whether they're true Christians or not, only God knows, but there are some who teach that the words of Jesus are not for us today. They are for some other dispensation.

It is often taught by some seemingly respectable Christian teachers that when Jesus taught the Sermon on the Mount, he had no intention for this teaching to be directed toward what we now call the church. The church, they say, had not been established yet, and he was offering the Jews a kingdom which, had they accepted it, this would have been the law under which they would live. That is, they're saying that the Sermon on the Mount is the law of the kingdom, and that Jesus was offering to the Jews the kingdom of God.

Now, the same teachers believe that the Jews rejected this offer and that Jesus withdrew the offer for the time being, went back to heaven, and he'll establish the kingdom when he comes back in the millennial reign. And on this view, the Sermon on the Mount is the law that will prevail during the millennium. So, these teachers believe that had the Jews accepted Christ at his first coming, the kingdom would have been established, and this would have been the law under which they would live.

But they didn't, and therefore God is doing something else, and this teaching is not really the law for the Christian at all. Now, they take a great risk in saying so. For one thing, when Jesus told the disciples to go and make disciples out of others, he said, teach them, teach all nations to observe all things that I have commanded you.

That's, of course, in Matthew 28, verse 19 and 20. He said, go make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to observe what? All things that I have commanded you. Would some of those things Jesus had commanded them be found in the Sermon on the Mount? Obviously, yes.

The disciples had been commanded a number of things in the Sermon on the Mount. And Jesus told the disciples, who were Jewish, to go out to all the Gentile nations. That would be the evangelization of the Gentiles.

And he said to teach them to do what I've told you to do. In other words, the teaching that Jesus gave here is not for the Jews in some other dispensation. It is for the Gentiles who respond to the preaching of the gospel.

That's us. Therefore, doing what Jesus said is essential. Is it essential for salvation? Well, the only thing that's really essential for salvation is that we repent of our sins and believe the gospel.

But if a person has repented and really believed the gospel, then that person wants to live for God. And if we ask, how is that done? We can point them to the teachings of Jesus and say, here's where it says right here. This is what Jesus wants you to do.

In 1 Timothy 6, in verse 3, certainly Paul is not writing to some other dispensation. He's writing to Timothy about the church. And he says in 1 Timothy 6, 3, If anyone teaches otherwise and does not consent to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness, that man is proud knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words.

Now notice, Paul said, concerning the church age, the dispensation of the church, he said, If anyone does not consent to the teachings of Jesus, that man is lost. Or he's at least ignorant and foolish and so forth. Certainly, Paul is saying that the teachings of Jesus are normative for the Christian church.

Now, here at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, after Jesus is given a fairly good specimen of his teachings, he says, Any man who hears these words and does not do them is a fool, as much as if a man were to build an expensive house on an inadequate foundation of sand. The man is putting so much expense into the project, and yet he is neglecting the very thing that will, as it were, preserve his investment. If a person builds a house... Let me just go off on this a little bit, if I could.

I like to go off on things. Building your life is an expensive proposition, just like building a house is an expensive proposition. Why? Because you only get one chance to do it.

It's just like if you got an inheritance, and you only get one, because your parents, let's say, died. You only have one set of parents, and you get one inheritance in your lifetime. And now you suddenly have a lot of money, and you get to invest it somewhere.

You only get one shot at it. And if you do it foolishly, you'll be kicking yourself for a long time, because you're only going to get one shot to invest this inheritance. Okay, now switch that over.

You only get one chance to live your life here on earth. You get one lifetime. It may be short or long.

None of us yet knows how short or long ours will be, but whatever length it is, it's the only one we've got. And therefore, it's like having an inheritance that's a once-in-a-lifetime windfall, and now what am I going to do with it in order to avoid regrets and horrendous loss? Well, every moment you spend in your life is a moment you've spent, and will not be given back to you. You can't spend it again.

Every year you spend, every decade you spend, it's passing you by. You're not doing nothing. You're investing.

You're investing. You're spending it on something, and you won't get it back to spend it again. It's obvious that by the end of your life, whatever it is you have as a result of your life, was at great cost, because it cost you everything.

You've spent every last moment of your life on something. You see, when you lie in your deathbed, if you ever are so privileged as to have a deathbed, as opposed to dying suddenly and unexpectedly, but when you are at your last moment, you will have spent your last coin, and you'll then have opportunity to regret or rejoice in the way you spent it. Just like if you had an investment, and it was a good investment, you'd rejoice that you'd spent your windfall in that way, and not in some other.

But if you'd wasted it, you would certainly have much to regret, as you looked at that money disappear, and wasted and lost, and realize that you don't get another chance to do that again. Now, building a house is one such expensive way that people might use their inheritance. And thus, as you live your life, it's like you're building a house.

Every moment that passes is another coin out of your hands that you'll never get back. And Jesus is saying, you're building your house. At the end of your life, there's a storm.

There are floods. There is a time of testing. These houses that are built, they're going to have to see if they can stand the test.

The test for you is going to be the Day of Judgment. You're going to stand before God, and you will either pass through that unscathed, like a house built on rock passes through a storm unscathed, or you're going to collapse on the Day of Judgment, and you'll have lost everything, just like a house built on sand. That's what Jesus is saying.

Now, which condition would you like to be in on that time? Now, you can live your life as if there is no storm coming. You can build your house as if you're living in Arizona, and there's not going to be any storms or any rain or anything like that. But actually, you're a fool if you do that, Jesus said, because there are storms coming.

One thing that is a given in this parable is that both houses, whether good, bad, or indifferent, all houses face a storm. All persons are going to face the Day of Judgment, a day of testing. And Jesus said you can prepare or not prepare to have your investment survive that test.

That investment is your life. What do you do to prepare? Well, He says it's quite easy. Just build a house on a rock.

What would that mean? Jesus said, if you hear my words and do them, you are like a wise man who builds his house on a rock. If you hear my words and don't do them, you're like a fool who builds his house on sand. He's going to lose his investment.

Now, you only live one time. You know, there's a saying, I'm sure all Christians know, it's

not in the Bible, but it's a common one. It says, only one life will soon be passed.

Only what's done for Christ will last. And boy, is that a good illustration of what is going on here. If you live your life for God and obey Jesus Christ, that's going to cost you something.

It's expensive. You'll have to sacrifice your worldliness for that. You're going to have to sacrifice your own will for that in order to do the will of God.

However, a good house can cost something. And for you to get to the end of your life and have a house, a life that's going to go into eternity and never fall, and go right through that storm unscathed, and stand before God on the Day of Judgment unashamed, to do that, you're going to have to make a choice here. And Jesus tells you what it is.

Do what I say, He says. You're hearing my words, do them. If you don't, then you are going to put a lot of expense into your life.

Not just money. Every moment you spend is irretrievable value. And you're going to build your life, and you're going to come to the end, and you're going to face the Day of Judgment, and you're going to say, uh-oh, I spent a lot of energy, a lot of money, a lot of time, a lot of emotional energy, developing my life to the point that it finally reached, but it's gone.

It is gone. It's not eternal, because it was not built on a stable foundation. The way to have eternal life, the way to reach the end of your life with no regrets, and knowing that the things that you have done will not have been wasted, in fact, they will follow you as a reward into heaven, is to follow Jesus Christ now.

Do it now. Do not wait. You know, if you repent on your deathbed, and if your repentance is genuine, I do believe you can be saved, but you cannot count on having the ability to genuinely repent on your deathbed.

For one thing, you might not ever have a deathbed. You might die in an accident and not have any chance. Secondly, even if you do have a deathbed, you may not be able to, in your heart, sincerely repent if you've been putting God off all through the earlier part of your life.

You may just never have the softness of heart left. To really repent, you may try hard and not repent. But the point here is, even if you can repent on your deathbed and manage to do so, do you want to go into heaven regretting your entire life the only chance you had to acquire a lasting inheritance in heaven? You lost it.

You might live in heaven if you manage to repent, but you will lose all that you worked for. Your whole life will have been a waste. Why were you born, anyway? You were put

here by God for one reason, and that is to do His will, to bring pleasure and glory to Him.

And if you've been spending your time seeking your own will and bringing pleasure and glory to yourself, you've been wasting it. You've spent it the wrong way. There is still hope for you.

If you're near the end of your life, you can still turn to God. Or if you're not even near the end of your life, you can still turn to God and you can be saved. If you'll repent of your sin, put your whole trust in Jesus Christ, and make your determination that He will be your Lord, your owner, your boss, and that you will do His will through your remaining days, you will have much less to regret on the Day of Judgment, and you will enter into eternal life.

But Jesus is encouraging us to do better than that, namely, live our life in such a way that every part of our investment is secure. That is the investment of our time and decisions in life. It would be such a shame to spend so much on a life and lose it all.

Well, that's about all we have time for right now. But that is what Jesus is saying to sort of cinch His message at the end of the Sermon on the Mount. I hope you'll be able to join us for our continuing study in the Gospel of Matthew as next time we move along to chapter 8.