BUILD YOUR HOUSE ON THE ROCK

Luke 6:43–49

Key Verse: 6:47

“Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them,

I will show you what he is like…”

What usually gets you to start moving? We human beings are funny. We can know everything but be so slow to take action. Often we won’t start moving until something bad is about to happen. The warnings and notices, with big red letters, start showing up in the mail. The roof starts leaking. The car won’t start. We can’t get out of bed, the pain is so bad. We’re going to have to see certain people, and in our current state we’re going to be so ashamed. Even with all our knowledge we can be pretty stubborn, even irrational. In this Sermon Jesus has just spoken probably the most profound words ever heard. His words have the power to change us. But he knew our tendency to hear but do nothing. So he concludes with some vivid images to get us to start living based on what he said. Today’s passage gets at why we should be studying the Bible in the first place. May God open our hearts and speak to us through his words today.

Jesus has just said that if we follow him, we’re likely going to be poor, hungry, weeping and rejected, waiting for our hope in the kingdom of God (20–23). Still, we’re going to have to love our enemies, do good to those who hate us, bless those who curse us, and pray for those who abuse us (27–28). We’re going to have to overcome our habit of judging and condemning people, and instead, forgive and give to them (37–38a). His goal in teaching these things is to make us more like our Father God (35b). It’s to fully train us to be more like our Teacher, our Lord Jesus (40). But this will happen only if we start doing what he said. If we don’t take action, we’re not going to change.

To get us there, Jesus speaks first about fruit. Look at verses 43–44. In an agricultural society these words were impactful, because people were hungry. Indoor plants were not a hobby. People needed to live on what their plants produced. Any plant producing bad fruit was taking up precious time, space and resources and most likely would be replaced. People knew the frustration of looking for good figs or grapes to eat but finding only bad. Looking for good fruit on a plant that’s never going to produce it is just plain ignorant and foolish.

So what’s his point? Look at verse 45. Just as no bad plant can produce good fruit, so can no bad person produce anything good, either. In Matthew’s Gospel Jesus used this good-or-bad-fruit imagery to teach us discernment about false prophets (Mt7:15–20) and to warn Pharisees about blaspheming against the Holy Spirit (Mt12:32–37). But here in Luke he’s telling us to apply it to ourselves. He’s telling us we need to be changed if we’re ever going to produce any good fruit. As we listen to his words, we may think we should start focusing on what we’re doing or not doing. That’s just too superficial. Jesus is challenging us to first focus on who we *are*, on letting his words change us at our core.

So how does that happen? The key phrase here is “the good treasure of his heart.” What’s that? It’s his word. We need to hide his word in our heart as our treasure (Ps119:11). His word can be like a hammer that breaks open our rock-hard heart (Jer23:29; cf. Heb4:12). Later Jesus says our heart can be as hard as a path, where Satan easily plucks his word away. Or it can be emotional, like shallow soil full of rocks underneath, where his word cannot go deep. Or it can be full of the thorns of the cares and riches and pleasures of life, which choke out his word. But if we cultivate an honest and good heart that holds fast to his word, with patience, it can change our heart and produce good fruit (8:11–15). In fact, Jesus himself comes in to dwell; he becomes our treasure (2Co4:6–7). It’s so easy to let his words go in one ear and out the other. All his precious teaching can be like water on a duck’s back. For that not to happen to us, we’ve got to spend time thinking about his word deeply, making it our treasure.

Read verse 46. This is a scathing question. Jesus is being brutally honest. We can be saying all the right things, calling him “Lord, Lord,” with no intention of actually doing anything he’s said. It’s just desperate manipulation. By calling him “Lord, Lord,” we’re just trying to get out of him what we want. It can become our life habit. Jesus can see right through it. How can we have the real inner integrity and character he’s looking for?

Read verse 47. There are three powerful verbs here: “come” to him, “hear” his words, and finally, “do” them. They’re all related. Let’s think about each one. First is “Everyone who comes to me.” The religious people of Jesus’ day thought that through their diligent Scripture study they could have eternal life. They thought they’d get it through their own efforts. But they were missing the point. The whole Bible is actually pointing to Jesus. Though they were the most diligent Bible students, they were not coming to Jesus himself (Jn5:39–40). So what does it mean to come to him? It starts with showing up to church services, or to Bible studies, or just doing our own personal Bible reading. But it’s got to go deeper. To come to him means to actually open up to Jesus, get honest with him, admit what’s wrong with us, and really start asking his help. If we’re trying to do everything on our own, we won’t come to him. If we’re depending on how strong or clever or experienced we are, we won’t come to him. The good news is, we can come to Jesus, utterly helpless, totally messed up, and he’ll welcome us.

Next, we need to hear his words. If we come to him only talking and not listening, it’s actually not going to help. It’s good to express our hearts, but at some point we’ve got to quiet ourselves to listen and learn from his words. A friend of mine used to always say, “Garbage in, garbage out.” It was about data in a database. The point is, if we want good results, what we put in has to be real quality, not a bunch of garbage. The same is true in our spiritual life. If we’re always letting all the garbage of this world into our mind and heart, in the end, garbage is inevitably all that comes out of us. But if we really hear Jesus’ words and take them in, something beautiful surely will come out of us. So let’s dump out our garbage and let Jesus’ words in!

Finally, Jesus says we need to be “doing” his word. He means in our real, everyday life. “What are you *doing*?” We say this when we see a person doing something really annoying or really bad. But we should be asking this question of ourselves. James, the brother of Jesus, didn’t believe in him at first (Jn7:5). But later, he encountered Jesus after he had risen (1Co15:7) and became a leader in the early church (Ac15:13–21; Gal2:9). He wrote the book of James in the New Testament. One of the main themes of this book is to be doers of the word. If we only hear his words, we deceive ourselves into thinking we’re good. If we do that, James says we’re kind of like an idiot who looks in the mirror then immediately forgets what he looks like (Jas1:22–25). So go in the bathroom, shut the door, look in the mirror and ask yourself, “What are you *doing*?” Really think about it. In life, the biggest disconnect for most of us is what we know and what we do. It’s especially true in Christian life. We can know everything but be doing nothing! We’re pretty weird. Jesus knows this about us, but still he wants to help.

To close, he gives an unforgettable parable about two men (48–49). Both of them are in construction, building a house. But in each case, the outcome is so different. Why? It’s all about the foundation. If ever we have the chance to build our own house, we can get excited. We might like to choose a secluded location with beautiful views. We can imagine the curb appeal, the outdoor landscaping and backyard entertaining, then start planning out the interior spaces, thinking about flow and spaciousness, windows to let light in, the height of the ceilings, maybe a fireplace, beautiful flooring and moldings, a bright open kitchen to cook in, spa-like bathrooms, paint colors, a game room, home theater, maybe energy efficiency, and so on. But we’re probably not going to be thinking too much about the foundation, right? That’s just kind of boring.

But as with any construction project, everything starts with the foundation. Recently, they built the eighth largest building in Chicago. It used to be the parking lot for the famous Holy Name Cathedral. At the beginning, when they were working on the foundation for this new skyscraper, it was all about pounding into the ground until they reached bedrock. Being next to Lake Michigan, Chicago’s land is very sandy. During their digging project they discovered something unexpected. There was an old tunnel for an underground train that was never used. While digging, the place flooded. It was a big mess. It cost millions of dollars to correct. But they had to do it, otherwise the fancy new building couldn’t be built. Foundation problems often happen during construction. They’re costly but essential to fix. The same is true in life and and in ministry.

So what’s “the foundation on the rock”? It’s Jesus. Acts 4:11–12 reads, “This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.” For this reason, we need to take care to build our life and ministry on him (1Co3:10–15). If we do, we’re assured a rock solid spiritual foundation that can never be shaken (Ac2:25). If we’re deeply rooted in Jesus our Rock, we will never be put to shame (Ro9:33; 10:11; 1Pe2:6). With him as our foundation, we can survive anything. Our strength and confidence come not from ourselves but from him. Are we building our lives on wealth, security, success, comfort, or people’s recognition? Or is Jesus truly our life foundation?

But how do we do that practically? Jesus says to dig down “deep.” It involves a real struggle, and real repentance. It means coming to fully accept my own sin, and fully accept how great his grace to me is (1Ti1:13–16). It means to keep on growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus and start living for his glory (2Pe3:18). But just as it is with construction, we can’t see this spiritual foundation. Do we have one? How deep is our relationship with him?

And what’s the alternative? It’s to ignore the intense part of foundation building and only want the instant gratification of the house. We want to enjoy; we want to impress others. It may seem cheaper and smarter. But then what happens? Jesus says floods happen. We may think they won’t happen, but they always do. We can’t stop the rain. It’s a metaphor for all kinds of problems in life. Without a spiritual foundation, we’ve got no strength to handle the floods. When the streams come, we’ll just collapse. Jesus points us to the better choice, to build a rock solid foundation on him that’s ready for anything.

So how do we do it? It’s as we start *doing* his word, *obeying* it, *practicing* it. We can start with small things, specific things. It’s a slow, painstaking process. It takes time. But it’s foundation building. It’s hopeful. In light of this, Bible study isn’t a burdensome chore; it’s such a blessing. Are we busy doing many things in life? Or are we taking the time and making it a priority to come to Jesus, really start listening to his words and learning how to do them?