TWO BUILDERS

Everyone, therefore, who hears my words and does them, I will liken him to the wise person who built his house on a foundation of the rock. When the rains fell and the rivers overflowed, and when the gales blew and these together assailed that house, it did not fall, because it was founded upon rock. And everyone who hears my words and does not do them will be like the foolish person who built his house on the sand. When the rain fell and the rivers overflowed, and when the gales blew and together assailed that house, it collapsed, and the damage was great.
Matthew 7:24-27

This parable brings Matthew's impressive teachings of Jesus to a conclusion.

Given that the Sermon on the Mount serves as a type of fulfillment for Sinai, it is not surprising that Jesus delivers this warning parable with two outcomes at the conclusion of the sermon.

Moses did the same as the people of Israel stood at the border of entering the Land.

15 "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. 16 If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in his ways, and by keeping his commandments and his statutes and his rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. 17 But if your heart turns away, and you will not hear, but are drawn away to worship other gods and serve them, 18 I declare to you today, that you shall surely perish. You shall not live long in the land that you are going over the Jordan to enter and possess. 19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, 20 loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."
Deuteronomy 30:15-20

In a sense, today's text repeats and adds strength to the preceding warning of *"I never acknowledged you"* and effectively closes out the entire Sermon on the Mount, stressing the importance of obeying the ethical teachings of Jesus.

Elisha b. Abuya said: "A man who has good deeds to his credit and has studied much Torah, to what is his life? To one who builds [a structure and lays] stones below [for the foundation] and bricks above, so that however much water may collect at the side it will not wash it away.
Avot. DeRabbi Nathan 24

As do all of Matthew's five major discourses, this one too ends with reference to eschatological reckoning.

The structure of this parable is again a parallel with two parts:

1) the wise person's house, built on rock;

2) the foolish person's house, built on sand.

We could take this a step further and recount the parallel consequences of the wise and foolish person's decision as to where they built their houses.

> *Everyone, therefore, who hears my words and does them, I will liken him to the wise person who built his house on a foundation of the rock.*
> *Matthew 7:24*

Note the intentional use of the word *"everyone."* It gives this warning parable the flavor of invitation. Those reading the words of Matthew or hearing the words of Jesus are invited to be like the wise man in the parable – *to do and not just to hear.*

One must *hear* the words of Jesus and then *do them*. This emphasis is found elsewhere.

> *But he answered them, "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and do it."*
> *Luke 8:21*

> *"For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother."*
> *Matthew 12:50*

> *But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.*
> *James 1:22-23*

The word *"wise"* is a favorite of Matthew. It appears seven times in his narrative and always in the parables or figurative passages. It refers to the one who is prudent, wise, or discerning.

The *"wise"* person not only knows the truth but acts upon it.

> *Then he will answer them, saying, "Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me."*
> *Matthew 25:45*

Contrasting the *"wise"* is the *"foolish"* person. Paul speaks to the Corinthians with the use of this language, and it sets up a great example of what Christ is speaking about.

Here Paul is contrasting the foolishness of the Apostles in their pursuit of Christ with the wisdom of the Corinthains in their pursuit of being enlightened by adding this faith to their philosophy.

We are fools for Christ's, but you wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we are dishonored.
1 Corinthians 4:10

For Paul, as well as Matthew, the wise person is the person who is obedient to Christ. Note that the emphasis of the parable is placed upon the words of Christ - *who hears my words.*

The standard of a practiced faith here, that is, the righteousness of practiced faith, are not the words gained by the study of Torah alone. The standard of practiced faith is understanding that the words of Torah are generated by, point toward, and find their fulfillment in the person of Christ. Jesus is *"the Rock"* which all the works of humanity must be grounded upon.

Having stated this as the ultimate aim of standard, *"the rock"* in our text today is metaphorical in for a firm foundation and is not specified as anything more.

When the rains fell and the rivers overflowed, and when the gales blew and these together assailed that house, it did not fall, because it was founded upon rock.
Matthew 7:25

Matthew describes the typical storm in the hot, dry climate of the Near East. Strong winds and torrential rains produce sudden rivers that had been dry wadis.

The Old Testament portrays eschatological judgment in such imagery.

Precisely because you have misled my people, saying, 'Peace,' when there is no peace, and because, when the people build a wall, these prophets smear it with whitewash, say to those who smear it with whitewash that it shall fall! There will be a deluge of rain, and you, O great hailstones, will fall, and a stormy wind will break out. And when the wall falls, will it not be said to you, "Where is the coating with which you smeared it?"
Ezekiel 13:10-12

therefore thus says the LORD God, "Behold, I am the one who has laid a foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, of a sure foundation. Whoever believes will not be in haste. And I will make justice the line, and righteousness the plumb line; and hail will sweep away the refuge of lies, and water will overwhelm the shelter.
Isaiah 28:16-17

The rain, the river and the winds are to be taken as the objects that *"beat upon"* the house. *The house* stands however, because the wise person has built his house upon the obedience to the word of Jesus and will not be brought to ruin in the eschatological judgment.

And everyone who hears my words and does not do them will be like the foolish person who built his house on the sand. When the rain fell and the rivers overflowed, and when the gales blew and together assailed that house, it collapsed, and the damage was great.
Matthew 7:26-27

The *"foolish person"* is again Matthean vocabulary (he uses this word six times where the other gospel writers do not use it at all).

Matthew links this word with the word *"blind"* which gives us an idea of how he contrasts it to the wise man who is prudent, wise, and discerning.

"You blind fools! For which is greater, the gold or the temple that has made the gold sacred?"
Matthew23:17

Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.
1 Corinthains 3:18

The foolishness of the person in this parable lies in their *hearing the words of Jesus* but *not doing the words of Jesus.*

Sand has no other significance in this parable other than that it is an unstable foundation.

"it collapsed" refers to disaster and again is used metaphorically for the full effect of eschatological judgment.

As if to stress the importance of this judgment, Matthew breaks the parallelism of the contrasting location of the houses and adds *"and the damage was great"* as the last words of this passage.

The sermon on the Mount comes to an end with exhortations in the form of warning. This teaching is to be taken with all seriousness: the words of Jesus are not only to be heard but done. Everything depends on faithfulness to what Jesus has taught. This point is made climactically in the polarities of the concluding parable: wisdom or foolishness, manifested in doing or not doing the words of Jesus, resulting in not falling or in falling in the storm of eschatological wrath. It is easy to make this discourse, with its uncompromising concluding admonitions, into a new nominism, i.e., the pursuit of righteousness through the obeying of commandments (those of Jesus replacing those of Moses). But this conclusion, as plausible as it seems at first glance, makes the mistake of ignoring the larger context, not only of the sermon itself, with the opening kerygmatic beatitudes, but also and more importantly of the whole Gospel within which this discourse takes its place. There the announcement of the good news of the dawning kingdom has priority. This means above all a new era with a new experience of the grace of

God. Any nominism, or law-centeredness, must take account of this new era. The teaching of Jesus is to be taken in all seriousness, as even Paul would have insisted. And the Sermon on the Mount, stands within the canon of the Church as a proper antidote to a Paulinism that (unlike Paul himself) champions a gospel of cheap-grace. The gospel of the New Testament has room for the stern ethic of Jesus, without ceasing to be gospel. The Sermon on the Mount represents an emphasis not simply for Jewish Christians, who may have some lingering interest in satisfying the strictures (limits and rules) of Moses, but also for Christians, who cannot claim that name without interest in the righteousness of the kingdom.
Hagner – Matthew, page 191-192