

A WISE MAN AND A FOOLISH MAN
(The Sermon on the Mount III)

Matthew 7:1-29
Key Verse: 7:24

"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."

We have studied the Sermon on the Mount, part I, with the title, "Blessed are the poor in spirit" (5:1-48), and part II, "But seek first his kingdom" (6:1-34). Today we study the Sermon on the Mount part III, "House on the Rock" (7:1-29). As a whole, Chapter 7 teaches us mainly two things: first, ask God in prayer (1-12); second, be a wise man (13-29). The Bible teaches us that those who neither listen to the words of God nor practice them become tragic: They are like people who build their houses on sand. On the other hand, those who listen to the words of Jesus and practice them are like people who build their houses on the rock.

I. Ask God in prayer (1-12)

Verses 1-12 speak of two things: (i) do not judge others (1-6); (ii) ask God in prayer (7-12). These two narratives do not seem to correlate. But when we meditate on them, we learn that they are progressively correlated.

First, do not judge others (1-6). Look at verse 1. "Do not judge, or you too will be judged." We should not judge others. It is because we are brothers and sisters in Jesus. Furthermore, we have no authority to judge others. What then can we do for those who deserve judgment? We must pray for them so that God can help them. We must embrace with the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ those who deserve judgment. This is the mind of Jesus. This is the compassion of Jesus. This is the heart of God. Isaiah 11:3b says, "He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears..." If God judged by what he sees with his eyes, no one would be left on earth. If God judged by what he hears with his ears, all people on earth would be condemned. We remember how Jesus earnestly prayed for God's sheep instead of judging them.

A judgmental attitude is the sign of an immature Christian. One young man studied the Bible several times. Then he became very self-righteous. So he visited his family and condemned and judged his mother for her waywardness. Then he condemned and judged his father for his stinginess. And then he condemned and judged one of his friends. After condemning and judging them, the young man strangely felt he was condemned. Obviously, the devil channeled in through his self-righteousness and began to torment and condemn him. After this, he began to suffer from a habit of overeating, hysteria, and insomnia. For an immature Christian, it is easy to judge others instead of embracing the weak with God's grace. Here we learn that judging is like striking others with a baseball bat, only to be beaten with a sledgehammer in return. If we judge others we cannot please God. We only become hypocritical Pharisees.

Practically, judging means that a person sees others' weaknesses and criticizes them, not realizing that he is the same sinner. Look at verse 3. "Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?" "Speck" can be compared to moral failures or doctrinal defects. "Plank" can be compared to a man who has no God in his heart. If we harshly criticize others while condoning our own injustice, we are hypocrites and godless men.

How can we avoid this terrible sin of judging others? Look at verse 5. "You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye." We must be strict toward ourselves before God, repenting all our sins moment by moment. But we must be very prayerful about others' sins. The best way to avoid the sin of judging others is to remember what God has done for us. God, in his great mercy, did not pour out his wrath and anger on us when we sinned against him; instead, God sent his one and only Son to die for our sins. Paul, when he was Saul, condemned and judged others. But after Jesus came into his heart, he shepherded God's flock. In Acts 20:19 he says, "I served the Lord with great humility and with tears, although I was severely tested by the plots of the Jews." Paul did so because he remembered God's grace--that he was a terrible sinner and that by the grace of God he became a child of God. He wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:9,10a, "For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle...But by the grace of God I am what I am." Paul knew that he was a forgiven sinner. Paul knew he had no right to judge others. Paul knew only God is the Judge (2 Cor 5:10).

Second, ask God in prayer (7-12). Look at verse 7. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you." This verse teaches us that we must pray to God wholeheartedly while living in this real world. In prayer, earnestness is most important. If, after asking in prayer, our request is not granted, then we must not give up; we must seek God in prayer until we find him. If our request is still not granted, then we must knock until the door is opened. Those who do not pray are full of anger and crooked ideas. But for those who pray earnestly, God is their help.

What should we ask God for? When we have to live as God's people we need too many things. But one thing we have to ask God for is the power of faith. Without the power of faith, we are too weak to seek first his kingdom and righteousness. When we have no power of faith we cannot fight against the enemy of God, the devil. Without the power of faith, we cannot work hard for the glory of God. Jesus' disciples wanted to do something great. But they were powerless to do anything. Jesus said to them in Mark 11:22,23, "Have faith in God...I tell you the truth, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in his heart but believes that what he says will happen, it will be done for him."

The power of faith is not enough. We need God's wisdom to live in this world. Once James was a politically ambitious man. But after Jesus came into his heart he became a man of prayer and wisdom. So we call

the book of James "the New Testament Proverbs." James teaches us what to pray for first. He teaches us to ask God's wisdom from above. James 1:5 says, "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him." We are the children of God. We need much wisdom to live in this real world. But our wisdom is greatly limited. So we must ask God to give us wisdom from above. Those who ask God for wisdom can be truly wise men of God.

God answers all our prayers in the best way, though sometimes we feel as if our prayers have not been answered. In verse 9 Jesus says, "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone?" Jesus promises that he will give good gifts to those who ask him (10,11). Look at Luke 11:13b. "...how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" Here we learn we must ask God to give us the Holy Spirit, because the Holy Spirit is the best gift to each individual person. Without the Holy Spirit we cannot but be filled with evil spirits.

Look at verse 12. "So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets." If we love one another in Christ, we are fulfilling God's will. But if we hate one another like godless men, we are not fulfilling God's will. Once, a peculiar religious group and a professor criticized each other in a newspaper for several years. The religious group could not beat up the professor verbally. But their contention stopped when several young men from the religious group poured a drum full of urine on the professor from the ceiling, while he was criticizing their group in a meeting. Since then the professor stopped criticizing them because he did not want to invite another urine baptism. Childish people are quick to criticize but never know how to pray to build up others. Jesus' people must not criticize others, pointing the finger sharply at others' weaknesses. Instead we must pray that God may help them, because criticism breaks up, but prayer heals.

II. A truly great man (13-23)

This part teaches us three things that make us great in the sight of God.

First, the wise choose the narrow gate (13-14). Who are the wise men? Wise men are those who follow Jesus. Wise men are those who follow the way of the cross of Jesus. Wise men are those who live for the glory of God. Wise men are those who take care of God's sheep. Wise men are those who have a living hope in the kingdom of God. Wise men are those who go through the narrow gate of Jesus. Read verse 14. "But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

The narrow gate indicates Jesus himself. In John 10:9 Jesus said, "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture." Those who choose the narrow gate are those who overcome their ever-growing worldly desires and decide to follow the way of the Lord Jesus. Jesus says in John 14:6, "I am the way...." Wise men can enter the glorious kingdom of God through Jesus.

Still, there are only a few who want to follow Jesus. Here, the wide gate and broad road refer to the worldly way. There are many who seek wealth, honor, pleasures, political power and scholarly achievement in the world. But worldly achievements cannot lead man to the kingdom of God. Fallen men usually think, "I am a little better than that person," or, "I am righteous; but that other person is wretchedly unrighteous." These men think that their choice is best, and others' choices are foolish. But these fallen men do not listen to God's words, saying, "You are too naive." As a result, they choose the way to destruction. Their choices, in the long run, influence their descendants to live ungodly lives. Read verse 13. "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it."

Second, a great man has the image of Jesus (15-20). In this part, Jesus pinpoints that those who bear good fruit are truly great men. How can we bear good fruit? The best way is to imitate Jesus. Doctrinal statements or ritualistic conduct or finger motions cannot be the measure of one's greatness.

What, then, is the measure of one's greatness? Man's true greatness rests on the degree to which he can imitate Jesus. Paul is a great man because he was willing to do anything for the sake of Jesus' name. Philippians 1:21 says, "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain." Paul was a good influence to those who were wandering without a clear life direction, for he encouraged them to follow Jesus as a matter of life and death. When he did so, he bore much spiritual fruit. Paul was already a great servant of God. But he longed to imitate Jesus and to grow in his image. He said in Philippians 3:10, "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death...." Peter was a great man because he was willing to participate in the suffering of Jesus. 1 Peter 4:13,14 says, "But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you." Peter bore immeasurable spiritual fruit with his good influence. But in light of Bible teaching, true greatness does not rest even on one's merits.

Truly great men have the image of Jesus through the imitation of Jesus. Truly great men continue to make a strenuous effort to grow in the image of Jesus. One American missionary was very beautiful when she was young. But her student evangelism grew so much that she had no time to take care of herself. During the course of teaching the Bible to students she was so busy that she had to sacrifice her marriage. When she did so, she formed the image of Jesus in her heart, particularly in Jesus' selflessness. Because she did not marry, she was frequently very sorrowful and lonely. But we cannot find a hint of self-pity in her life of faith.

There is a saying, "He is like his father." Likewise, each of us can be like Jesus by having a personal relationship with Jesus. The result of being like Jesus is indeed great. If one has the image of Jesus, he can be a blessing to people around him. He can be a good influence. He can lead people to God. In short, he can bear much good

fruit. This is what God wants most.

Third, a great man bears good fruit (21-23). Jesus' people are often compared to a fruit tree. John 15:5 says, "I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." God wants us to bear good fruit. As we studied, in order to bear good fruit, we must listen to Jesus' words absolutely, as God's words, and practice them. There are many people who prophesy and drive out demons and perform many miracles. Yet, they do not listen to Jesus' words and do not put them into practice at all. Despite their acclamation, they do not belong to God's people. Read verses 22,23. "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" In conclusion, Jesus says in verse 21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." Here we learn that to do the will of God is to bear much fruit.

III. The wise men and the foolish men (24-29)

First, the wise men (24-25). This part is the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. It closes with a story about a wise and a foolish builder. It teaches us how to be a wise man. Who are the wise men? Look at verse 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." Wise men are those who "hear his words." In this verse, "hear his words" is different from our conversation through talking and listening. "Hear his words" is the same as the royal subjects who hear their king's decree with the attitude of obeying it absolutely. If we hear his words relatively we cannot be wise men. We can be like Lot and his two daughters. They heard God's words relatively. As a result, they became the most foolish people in the world (Ge 19:33). Lot's daughters' boyfriends heard God's words through the angels as if they were a joke, and they became men of jokes in history (Ge 19:15). Still, there are many who have heard God's words and built their houses on the rock. Abraham heard the words, "You will be a blessing," from his heart. He became a blessing. David heard, "I will establish the throne of your kingdom forever," from his heart. He became a man after God's own heart. Peter heard, "I will make you fishers of men" (Mk 1:17), and kept these words in his heart. He became the greatest teacher of all mankind regarding the kingdom of God. Jesus heard from above, "This is my Son, whom I love..." (Mt 3:17). We also must hear one divine word from God.

Hearing is not enough. We must put God's words into practice. Jesus demands our implicit obedience. When we obey God's words absolutely, God is pleased and we are blessed in return. When we obey God's words absolutely, we can extend the territory of the kingdom of God and we are called faithful servants. At the beginning of UBF ministry there were all kinds of persecutions. Mostly people persecuted UBF, saying, "They are presumptuous. They want to obey Jesus' world mission command when they have no money. World mission is possible only for rich Americans and Canadians." Because of persecution many students ran away. But Dr. John Jun said, "I want to obey the world mission command. Even if the top leaders of UBF run away, I will not run away. And

that's that." Those who obey God's words can lay a firm foundation for their lives. Those who listen to his words and put them into practice are stable. Read verse 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."

Second, the foolish men (26-29). Who are the foolish men? They are those who hear his words and do not put them into practice. They are like foolish builders who build their houses on sand. Basically the foolish people are lazy people. They don't want to bother to dig down to the shelf or rock below. They superficially obey God's words, mainly because of their laziness. They don't care about the fact that disaster lies ahead. Read verse 27. "The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." Wise men are men of vision and prophecy. Wise men have a sense of God's history. But foolish men are petty men with narrow vision and prejudice.

Communists promised happiness through material prosperity. But it has only made people godless. Leaders from democratic countries promised happiness through unlimited freedom. But it has only made people immoral and violent. Now it's the time we have to hear Jesus' words and put them into practice.