Introduction

The sun was hot; without much shade it was difficult to get comfortable. But we had been there for over an hour listening as best we could. The press of people around us made it hard to hear and occasionally we heard someone ask “What did He said?” while someone else would try to quiet everyone by saying “Shhhhh”. I really couldn’t see Him because He was against a rock that hid Him from my view but I could see the faces of those around me. There was the man who looked to be the oldest one there. A small tear rolled down his face when the Teacher had said “Blessed are the poor in spirit” but now a comfortable smile was etched on his craggy face. The two fishermen at first seemed to be hardened and untouched by His words but now their faces showed something different. Confusion? Concern? Surprise? Awe? A woman sat by herself and tears flowed as though a great river had been released. Every face seemed to be saying something different but all were speaking volumes.

I could hear the sound of rustling but really couldn’t see what was going on until I realized the Teacher was standing up. A few tried to stand with Him but they quickly sat back down as I could see Him motioning everyone to stay where they were. He started turning and looking around at those who were listening to Him. A knowing smile was on His face as though He could read each face and understand every story. As He finished His examination, He came to an abrupt stop and said

Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man...

He was looking directly into my eyes.

Study

Companion text: L. Todd Collier, Walk this Way: Chapter 42: The Solid Rock

In the final moments of His teaching Jesus turned the discussion to force a decision from His listeners. As was to become His custom, He would often challenge His listeners to make a life-impacting decision by telling a
simple story. In the few short verses from Matthew 7: 13-24, He does this three (3) times. We call them parables today (little stories with big meanings), but to His listeners they provided a clear way to understand and remember His lessons and He was using them to force a choice from His listeners. Each of the stories He tells during the sermon focused on the hearer’s relationship with God. The first two tells the story of a wide road and a wide gate through which most of the world chooses to travel and a narrow road with a gate through which on the traveler could pass, unencumbered with his load. The second story is of two trees each with a different quality of fruit representing the results of a life devoted to self and the world versus the one devoted to God. This third parable was easily understood by desert dwellers who knew the problem with shifting sands.

Everyone who hears my words and puts them into practice...

He begins the story by saying “everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice”. But what were the “words” to which He is referring? They were the collected thoughts He had spent more than an hour discussing. In simple but not exhaustive terms, He said:

1. We need to change our understanding of what it means to be “joyous” or blessed (Matthew 5: 3-11) so that we can look at life from God’s perspective;

2. Merely because society or the religious leaders have told us what to believe or what to do, there is a different, new understanding of the ancient teachings, based on love of others;

3. We must develop a relationship with God that is based on our love for and trust in Him; not because we want people to see “how holy we are”;

4. Our focus should be God, not the things we want or think we need; and

5. Many will pretend to want to serve God but they are no different than those who would outwardly deny God.

...is like a man who built his house on a rock

The story of the two men who build their houses on the rock and the sands would be a situation with which these Jews are extremely familiar.

Palestine was, to a considerable extent, a land of hills and mountains. Like other countries of that description, it was subject to sudden and violent rains. The Jordan, the principal stream, was annually swollen to a great extent, and became rapid and furious in its course. The streams which ran among the hills, whose channels might have been dry during some months of the year, became suddenly swollen with the rain, and would pour down impetuously into the plains below. Everything in the way of these torrents would be swept off. Even a house erected within the reach of these sudden inundations, and especially if founded on sand, or any unsolid basis, would not stand before them. The rising, bursting stream would shake it to its foundation; the rapid torrent would gradually wash away its base; it would totter and fall, and be swept away. Rocks in that country were common, and it was easy to secure for their houses a solid foundation.

No comparison could, to a Jew, have been more striking. So tempests, and storms of affliction and persecution, beat around the soul. Suddenly, when we think we are in safety, the heavens may be overcast; the storm may lower; and calamity beat upon us. In a moment, health, friends, comforts, may be gone. How desirable then to be possessed of something that the tempest cannot reach! Such is an
interest in Christ; attention to his words; reliance on his promises; confidence in his protection; and a hope of heaven through his blood. Earthly calamities do not reach these; and, possessed of religion, all the storms and tempests of life may beat harmlessly around us. (Barnes Notes on the New Testament)

The life of devotion to God that Jesus had described requires dedication, discernment, and a desire to see God in all we do. When such a life is built on the rocks of truth, its strong foundation will protect it from the storms that life hurls against it. It is important that we remember that Jesus says that the life built on the sands of the world will have no foundation to help that life survive the storms of life. If not built on a relationship with God to have a deep storm-proof foundation, we are doomed to live collapsed lives in the world. It was as clear a way to close His sermon to make certain that His listeners would get the message. It demanded that each listener make a choice to follow Him or forget Him.

The foundation in this parable is obedience to God’s Word—obedience that is an evidence of true faith (James 2:14ff). The two men in this story had much in common. Both had desires to build a house. Both built houses that looked good and sturdy. But when the judgment came (the storm), one of the houses collapsed. What was the difference? Not the mere external looks, to be sure. The difference was in the foundation: The successful builder "dug deep" (Luke 6:48) and set his house on a solid foundation. (Warren Wiersbe, Be Loyal, 1989)

The message was on that day and still is today that merely hearing what He said is not enough. We must do what He teaches. It would be like being given the winning lottery ticket and never cashing it in; or having an opportunity to speak to the President about something which you are passionate and with the knowledge he would do what you tell him, but not doing it. The response to Jesus required action but the benefits are great.

A weak foundation can exist for anyone who has not taken the teaching of Jesus to heart. Regardless of how frequent we do “Christian things”, our foundation must be built on a relationship with Jesus in our service to God so that we can do what He taught us to do. It is our willingness to follow Jesus that defines our foundation regardless of our backgrounds:

Words are not a substitute for obedience, and neither are religious works. Preaching, casting out demons, and performing miracles can be divinely inspired, but they give no assurance of salvation. It is likely that even Judas participated in some or all of these activities, and yet he was not a true believer. In the last days, Satan will use "lying wonders" to deceive people (2 Thes. 2:7-12). We are to hear God’s words and do them (see James 1:22-25). We must not stop with only hearing (or studying) His words. Our hearing must result in doing. This is what it means to build on the rock foundation. (Warren Wiersbe, Be Loyal, 1989)

We are called to a life of action, not to a life of hearing. Only when we take the time and make the effort to become the people of Jesus will we become the Disciples He calls us to be. We must begin now to see other people as God's priority. He has told us not to worry, not to seek praise, not to be wrapped up in the religious debates of the day, not to seek after our personal desires. We are called to be a people of action who hear and immediately ask “what can I do to be like Jesus?” James addresses this very thought when he says:

14What good is it, my brothers, if a man claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save him? 15Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. 16If one of you says to him, "Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it? 17In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead. 18But someone will say, “You have faith; I have deeds.” Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do. 19You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder. James 2:14-19 (NIV)
Summary

The foundation of life that Jesus calls us to build is the rock of faith in God. Our own efforts to build a foundation on the things of life such as success, wealth, hobbies, personal interests, family and even “church”, often lead to personal disaster when the rough times hit and we have nothing to which we can cling. Jesus calls us to replace the things of the world with a life in God. With a deep strong foundation, we can weather the storms when they come…and they will come.

Discussion

1. Give example of some of the sandy foundations Christians confuse for the rock of Jesus.
2. Jesus has called His Disciples to true service and relationship. What does He mean when He says you must “put them into practice”?
3. Is our service about the members of the church or the members of society who are not Christians?

References

2. Clarke, Adam. Bible Exposition Commentary,
4. (Douglas, J.D. (General Editor) New Testament: Based on the Classic Commentary of Jamieson,

My Time: (make a list of the important concepts you discussed today that you want to pray about and turn over to God this week)