

Week 16
January 4, 2009

A Hybrid of Knowing and Doing **The Parable of the Wise and Foolish Builders**

Matthew 7:24-27

This passage is not included in every list of parables, primarily because it's told more as a metaphor and less as an *alongside-story*. But it makes some lists of the parables of Jesus, and it definitely belongs among any collection of parallel truths that illustrate definitive reality in the life-ethic of Christ.

Immediately before this passage, Jesus has been pronouncing the critical nature of *knowing* – relationship. It's not enough to merely say, "Lord, Lord," or even to do extraordinary things in the Lord's name. Jesus wants to know us – really know us.

Then, as if to balance the critical nature of knowing with the practical application of doing, Jesus goes on to say that "whoever hears his teachings and *does* them" will be the wise one. Hearing and then living out the instructions of Jesus is wise, like a wise person who builds on a solid foundation. Then, when the rains come – and they will – they won't pummel the house into ruin. And when the streams rise – and they will – they won't carry the house away. And when the winds blow – don't you know they will – the house won't be altogether battered. And when life is like a terrible storm, sending every kind of force and flying debris, the house does not fall because it has a solid foundation – the Rock.

The one who hears the teachings of Christ but is too thoughtless or stubborn to put them into practice, is foolish. That person is so foolish that he's like someone who builds a house on the sand. The rain comes and pummels the house. The streams rise and float the house until it shifts perilously off its blocks and out into a current of helplessness. The winds blow and batter the house, even toppling it. All of the force and flying debris of life's storms pound away and the house is defenseless. It falls. It *really* falls – drama and tragedy of every kind.

There's a dynamic balance. The previous passage and so much of scripture teaches the value of knowing and being and believing. "I never knew you," says Jesus, mournfully. "Whoever believes in him will have everlasting life," says John 3:16. "By believing you may have life," cries Jesus (John 20:31). "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you shall be saved" (Romans 10:9).

But our doing lends credibility to our knowing and being and doing. "Whoever loves me will obey my commandments," says Jesus (John 14:23). "This is love for God: to obey his commands", writes John (1 John 5:3). "Do not merely listen to the word ... do what it says," writes James (1:22). "Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do" (James 2:18).

So what do I do and how can I be to position myself for the best that Christ hopes for me and from me?

First, I confess and believe. I make room in my heart for faith, and I reconcile my mind for the possibility that Jesus is good and true. I believe in him and declare my faith.

Then I clothe myself with Christ. I put on Jesus and his ways and teaching as if I were putting on a whole new wardrobe that allows my personality – my whole person, really – to take on a whole new flair.

I learn to walk in the Spirit. Jesus left the Holy Spirit as a help and a guide. The one who was *with* us now is *within* us when we receive Jesus by faith. Learning to give the Spirit a voice and to empower the Spirit by relinquishing my need to be in charge will lead to every kind of growth and health.

Then we learn our spiritual gifts – those uniquely empowered realms of talent and servanthood where God wants to make our efforts supernatural.

We reorient our motivations until we are doing all the things in the name of the Lord; and even perfunctory matters take on new meaning and potential when we offer them as service to God.

We seek first God's kingdom and righteousness and find that God reorders our lives in a way that works. Things fall in place. Provisions and protections arrive on the scene as we simply apply ourselves to the matters that God prioritizes. In short, when God is our priority, life works. It's not perfect or painless. The rains still fall and the storms still come. The structure of our lives will be pounded by every kind of human challenge.

But we will not fall. We won't be moved or mangled by rising waters and grueling weather. We'll feel it all. We won't be exempt from storms. But we will not fall – like a wise man who builds his house on a rock.

The words of Jesus are intriguing at least and utterly transformative at best. When we allow them to really cut new grooves in the way we conduct our lives, we will find in the knowing and doing the abundant life that Jesus hopes for all his beloved. You are beloved of the Lord, and because he loves you, Jesus wants this for you. And because he loves those around you, he wants it from you.