

Matthew 7:24-27

Hearing and Doing the Word

Context

1. With these words, Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount.
2. A context for these words might be found in Ezekiel 13 where the issue of false hope is addressed.

¹³ ‘Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: In my wrath I will unleash a violent wind, and in my anger hailstones and torrents of rain will fall with destructive fury. ¹⁴ I will tear down the wall you have covered with whitewash and will level it to the ground so that its foundation will be laid bare. When it falls, you will be destroyed in it; and you will know that I am the LORD. ¹⁵ So I will spend my wrath against the wall and against those who covered it with whitewash. I will say to you, “The wall is gone and so are those who whitewashed it, ¹⁶ those prophets of Israel who prophesied to Jerusalem and saw visions of peace for her when there was no peace, declares the Sovereign LORD.”

- a. Ancient Israel was in exile because of her spiritual rebellion.
- b. Ancient Israel had false prophets that promised false hope to the people.
- c. God indicated that the white wash of Israel’s future would one day be washed away and the false prophets would be judged.
- d. This theme provides a parallel to Jesus words in Matt.7:24-27.
- e. This parallel suggests that Jesus is warning the Jews of his day to see through their false prophets and realize the false security of the hope that they offer through their self styled religious system.

Text

Matthew 7

“²⁴ Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine, and acts upon them, may be compared to a wise man, who built his house upon the rock. ²⁵ And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and {yet} it did not fall, for it had been founded upon the rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of Mine, and does not act upon them, will be like a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand. ²⁷ And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and burst against that house; and it fell, and great was its fall.”

Two contrasting positions are presented by Jesus.

1. The wise man
 - Hears the word (Jesus’ teaching)
 - He acts on what he hears.
 - He is stable (did not fall) and withstands the pressure of the final judgment.
 - His life is built upon a rock.

2. The foolish man
 - Hears the word (Jesus' teaching)
 - He does not act on what he hears.
 - He is unstable (falls) and does not withstand the pressure of the final judgment.
 - His life is built upon sand.

Hearing the Word is not enough – it must be applied to life.

1. The Word of God is intended to bring us to faith and faithfulness.
 - Jas.1 “²² But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves. ²³ For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks at his natural face in a mirror; ²⁴ for {once} he has looked at himself and gone away, he has immediately forgotten what kind of person he was.”
 - Knowledge brings pride of special knowledge and the tools to judge others.
 - Our understanding should be a mirror (to judge ourselves) and a call to the need for holy living in the Kingdom of God.
2. Abraham provides an testimony of both faith and faithfulness (Jas.2:21-24)

This passage is no doubt the classic Biblical text cited to challenge the doctrine of imputed righteousness. The 24th verse seems devastatingly clear — “. . . a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.” There have been many attempted explanations and even expulsions of this text in an effort to harmonize it with Paul's doctrinal teaching. My explanation takes its cue from verse 14 and the phrase, “what use is it?” This passage is addressing the usefulness of faith, especially in the affairs of this life (vs. 15-16). It is entirely possible that the “justification” that James has in mind is not the Pauline concept of man's relationship before God, but rather man's relationship before God as viewed by man. Just as the justification of Abraham by faith (Genesis 15) is separated from his justification by works (Genesis 22), so Paul's use of the word and James' use of the word need to be distinguished. You and I verify our confession before one another through our conduct. Faith that does not work in action helps no one, and is unseen by man. Abraham's experience provides a good example of Paul's doctrine of justification by faith before God (Romans 4:3) and also justification by works before man (James 2:21).

How does Jesus expect us to respond to the Sermon on the Mount?

1. We must respect the fact that some of Jesus' words are not to be taken literally.
 - Matt.5 “²⁹ And if your right eye makes you stumble, tear it out, and throw it from you; for it is better for you that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. ³⁰ And if your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off, and throw it from you; for it is better for you

that one of the parts of your body perish, than for your whole body to go into hell.”

- As far as we know, the disciples did not apply this in a literal way.
 - Removing the eye of the hand would not cure lust.
 - Jesus uses hyperbolic language to emphasize the seriousness of sin.
2. We must respect the fact that Jesus is teaching in the context of the Old Covenant Law.
- Matt.5 “¹⁷ Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish, but to fulfill. ¹⁸ For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass away from the Law, until all is accomplished. ¹⁹ Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and so teaches others, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches {them,} he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. ²⁰ For I say to you, that unless your righteousness surpasses {that} of the scribes and Pharisees, you shall not enter the kingdom of heaven.”
 - Those who are under the Law must live by the Law or find their life and define their life by the Law. Gal.3 “¹⁰ For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, "*Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all things written in the book of the law, to perform them.*" ¹¹ Now that no one is justified by the Law before God is evident; for, "*The righteous man shall live by faith.*" ¹² However, the Law is not of faith; on the contrary, "*He who practices them shall live by them.*" ¹³ Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us-- for it is written, "*Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree*"-- ¹⁴ in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.”
 - Jesus presses the full demands of the Law on us so that we might see ourselves and turn to him for redemption.
 - Paul explains this in Gal.3:19-29.
3. We should respect the ethical teaching of the Sermon on the Mount as a reflection of proper kingdom living.
- Eph.2 “⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, {it is} the gift of God; ⁹ not as a result of works, that no one should boast. ¹⁰ For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”
 - While we are not justified by our moral righteousness we are called to walk in a manner worthy of our calling even if imperfectly.
 - Good works are a fruit of justifying faith, not the qualifying condition for it or the necessary counterpart to it.
4. Mistakes to avoid in responding to the Sermon on the Mount.
- a. Disrespect for Jesus’ use of hyperbole.
 - b. Distortion of Jesus’ teaching so as to “water down “ its demands.

- c. Discarding Jesus' teaching as of no value for Christians today.
- 5. What were the disciples to do?
 - a. Recognize and follow the true prophet – Jesus.
 - b. Respect the true nature of the Law, recognizing that it could not produce the righteousness that God demanded but could break us and lead us to faith in Christ.
 - 1) A spiritual OUTLAW is not broken by the Law so as to hunger for and seek Christ.
 - 2) A spiritual CONVICT is broken by the Law so as to hunger for and seek Christ.
 - c. Accept the call to kingdom living as salt and light in the world.
- 6. How have Christians understood the nature of saving faith?
 - a. **Universal reconciliation** – At the Cross the sins of the whole world were removed. As a result all will eventually be saved. The Christian's task is to make this announcement to the world.
 - b. **Confessional faith** – All those who simply call on Jesus name will be saved. There is absolutely no other requirement for saving faith.
 - c. **New Birth faith** – All who call upon the name of Jesus from a heart that is turned to him as the source of its hope will be saved. The faith must come from a heart commitment, that is sincere and life changing.
 - d. **Discipleship faith** – Only those who display a changed life that is generally obedient to the moral law of God (a sign of true faith) will be saved.
 - e. **Holiness faith** – Only those who trust and obey so as to fulfill the full demands of the Law having a pure heart and a sinless life will be saved.