

## Week 20 – How to Live Wisely – Matthew 7:24-29

### Scripture Reading: Colossians 2:6-8

#### Introduction

This morning, we come to the last sermon in our series on the Sermon on the Mount

I've really enjoyed taking a long, holistic look at the sermon and I learned a lot by doing so and I trust you have as well

I hope that you have come to recognize that the sermon is more than a collection of sayings and that you now view it as it was delivered as one cohesive message that describes the character of the kingdom of heaven

We are looking at **Matthew 7:24-29** this morning and in verses 24-28 we see Jesus put a choice before his followers and the choice is between two different worldviews that again lead to two very different outcomes

The term, "worldview" comes from the German word "weltanschauung" (vel-ten-schwong)

And weltanschauung is how a person understands the course of events in, and of the purpose of, the world as a whole

To put it simply, our worldview determines how we view the universe and our place in it – worldview the lens through which we make sense of the world around us

When I was a kid I had a pair of secret spy decoder glasses that allowed me to see a secret message that was only visible when wearing the glasses – I thought they were about the coolest thing ever

Actually, the glasses were really nothing more than cardboard frames containing red cellophane lenses

But when looking through them at a specially printed picture they removed all the red printing allowing the "hidden" message to show through – here's an example of a Valentine's Day card with a secret message [**Valentine**] to show you what I'm talking about

I don't know how old I was when I discovered the secret but I do remember even then thinking it was cool to see what others couldn't even though it was right there the whole time

That's the way a worldview works – with the right worldview we see things as they are

But if your worldview is wrong you will think you are seeing things clearly while your vision is fundamentally distorted

So it's a good thing that having a proper worldview is within our grasp

When we consider that our worldview is determined by the authority we follow we realize that we can choose rightly or wrongly

There are several authorities that influence and establish our worldview – often without us recognizing it

Our personal experience is one authority, logic or reason is another, and tradition is a third

Those are all intrinsic, personal authorities that profoundly influence our worldview without us giving them a thought

But there is a fourth authority that we can choose and that's revelation – what God shows us in his Word

It only makes sense that we will grant ultimate authority to whichever source we believe most reliably describes the way things really are

And that is the question that Jesus turns to in this final section of his sermon using the metaphor of two builders, two houses, and one storm that reveals the wisdom of the builders

If you are taking notes, our Roman numeral one is the summation of the sermon and we will see how this final choice wraps up the entirety of the sermon

Roman numeral two is the insufficiency of religiosity where we will see how the wisdom of worldview choice will be revealed

And in Roman numeral three, we will take a look at the ultimate choice that Jesus puts before us

Follow along as I read **Matthew 7:24-27** and we'll get started –

*Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.*

## **I. The Summation of the Sermon**

Last week, we began looking at the application of the sermon as Jesus started wrapping things up and we saw how he presented a series of binary choices that face all who hear the sermon

We all must choose which gate we will pass through on our way to eternity and which path to follow through life

We all must choose who we will listen to for instruction and we must all choose how we will respond when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ

Those are sobering choices that have serious repercussions for us now and for all eternity because, as we read in **Matthew 7:13-14**, one path leads to destruction and the other to life

Now we see that verse 24 [**Matthew 7:24**] begins, “*Everyone then...*” and that little word “then” is a summary statement

In many English versions of the Bible this phrase is translated as “Therefore everyone” or “Everyone, therefore” – they all mean the same thing – and as we all know, whenever we see a “therefore” we need to ask what it’s there for

And the normal response to a “therefore” or a “then” or a “so” should be to look at what came immediately before it to understand how the statement being made relates to and applies the prior thought

As we have just reviewed, what comes immediately before this summation is Jesus’ warning of destruction for those who remain on the broad way, of fire burning unproductive trees, and of the categorical rejection of the disobedient

That’s the immediate context of our passage where Jesus now turns to the image of a man’s house being knocked down and swept away by a powerful storm

So Jesus is clearly spelling out that a frightful future awaits those who do not choose wisely

Jesus is letting his hearers know that there is a heaven to be entered and a hell to be avoided and he presents the terrifying reality that some will choose wisely and some will not

The question remains, though, as to what Jesus means by “my words” when he speaks of those who hear his words

I think it’s obvious that he is referring to his words of warning in the immediate context but I don’t believe that is all he means

I believe he means to indicate everything he has just said in the entire sermon and that’s why I say these verses contain the summation of the entire sermon

We can’t read this passage without thinking back to all the times in Matthew 5 when he said, “You have heard...but I say” as he corrected the errant teachings of the religious leaders

Jesus has revealed the character of the kingdom and a standard of righteous living starting with the Beatitudes and continuing through the Golden Rule and now he says that everyone who hears his words must make a choice

And that choice is whether or not to make his words the foundation of one’s life – of whether to obey

So let’s take a look at the two options as characterized by the two builders and their houses where we will see the insufficiency of religiosity

## II. The Insufficiency of Religiosity

So what do I mean by “religiosity”?

Religiosity is the quality of being religious; religious feeling or sentiment

And it’s typically expressed outwardly in the form of religious observance or an apparent life that is governed by religion

In Jesus’ metaphorical example we have two men who both heard Jesus’ message there is no difference in that

Then we see the two men each build a house and we understand that the houses represent the men’s spiritual lives

As we picture the two **houses** we see that they appear to be identical - they both look to be well-constructed, attractive, and well-maintained – one could easily be mistaken for the other

The difference lies well out of sight in their foundations and Jesus likens the difference between the two houses to the difference between obedience and disobedience

And Jesus says that the wise man heard his words and acted upon them – he actually did what Jesus prescribed

In so doing, he has built his house on a solid foundation – Jesus says he built his house upon the rock

Jesus is often portrayed as the Rock and the Cornerstone and even the Foundation but I don’t believe that Jesus is the foundation or the rock that’s in view in these verses

It’s the teaching, the words of Jesus that are meant by the rock metaphor – specifically the words of the sermon he has just preached but also the entire Word of God

And this first man has heard Jesus’ words and, being wise; he has made them the authority of his life and sought to obey them thereby establishing the “house” of his religious life on their solid foundation

Jesus’ words have become the lens through which the wise builder views the world around him

But while the other builder heard Jesus’ words he chose to go another way

This man is shallow in his thinking and he doesn’t make the effort to align his worldview with the standard that Jesus laid out

He doesn’t dig down to the bedrock and he’s content to have a life that merely looks good as he builds his house on the sand of some other standard

And there are all kinds of standards to choose from aren’t there?

Political affiliation, various cultural distinctions, a virtuous lifestyle, and even an inherited religious heritage

He likely sits in church each Sunday and listens to the message but he’s only a hearer of the Word and not a doer and he deceives himself believing that it’s enough to have a form of godliness

And outwardly, on the surface, his life looks like that of the wise man – it’s doubtful anyone could tell the difference

But then the storm comes and the storm reveals the truth as the house built on the foundation of the Word stands and the one built on the sand falls

We typically think of the storm here as referring to the inevitable storms of life but I don’t think that’s what Jesus means here – at least that’s not his primary meaning

Based on the context of this passage I believe he is talking about the sure and certain storm of God’s future judgment that every man and woman is going to face one day

Passages like **Ezekiel 13:10-16** and **Isaiah 28:16-22** speak of the final judgment of God as a powerful storm

Even today, a violent storm like a tornado or a hurricane evokes a profound level of fear and even more so in Jesus’ day so the symbol is appropriate

Jesus is basically telling his listeners that sitting in church each Sunday and practicing a form of superficial Christianity isn't going to be enough when facing God's judgment

God's judgment is going to come like a storm and only those houses, or lives, that have the proper foundation are going to be able to withstand it

Take a moment to think about that tragic day and how it is going to be for so many to discover too late that they chose to build on the wrong foundation as they cry out from the rubble of their life's house only to hear the Lord say, "I never knew you" ...

Looking at how Jesus closes out the Sermon on the Mount one might well say it appears Jesus is trying to scare people into the kingdom – and I think that would not be a totally unreasonable conclusion to draw

After all, he's warned about a broad way that leads to death for the majority, bad trees being thrown into the fire, many who thought their performance was sufficient being turned away, and now a revealing and destroying storm

One thing you notice when you evangelize is that people decide to accept Christ for different reasons

Some, perhaps because they feel the full weight of past sins, are drawn by the promise of forgiveness

Others look at Jesus as he is presented in the gospels and are attracted to his perfect life of moral integrity

Some see the overwhelming evidence of messianic prophecy that was fulfilled in Jesus and they recognize that the only logical conclusion they can come to is that he is indeed Messiah

Some are attracted by his winsomeness, his lovingkindness and they just sense a need to be near him

But not a few people come to Jesus because they hear the message here at the end of the Sermon on the Mount and they realize that he is talking about eternity

They recognize that the sermon is about more than a good way for people to live in the here and now and that there truly is a heaven to be gained and a hell to be avoided

We tend to fixate on heaven both in our presentations of the gospel and in our day to day so it may surprise you to know that Jesus taught about the dangers of hell much more often than he taught about heaven

Jesus wanted people to know that eternity was waiting and that there is a choice between two, and only two, very real destinations and that everyone who has ever lived will be in one place or the other when their earthly life is over

And in finishing the Sermon on the Mount as he does, Jesus presents his hearers with a choice – in fact, it's the ultimate choice that all of mankind must make

### **III. The Ultimate Choice**

During his earthly ministry Jesus compared hell to Gehenna, a valley near Jerusalem, which functioned as a huge garbage dump where all manner of trash and even dead bodies were continually burned in fires that never went out

He referred to hell as a prison and to outer place of darkness and never-ending torment where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth

Whether that weeping and gnashing is due to regret or rage is unknown but Jesus also taught that hell was a place where the worm of conscience never dies and the fire is not quenched (**Mark 9:48**)

And Jesus makes plain that there is no way out – hell lasts forever and once there, there is no opportunity to determine to humble oneself and to effectively plead for mercy

Jesus endeavored to make very clear that hell is real, it's eternal, it's terrible, and it's a place to be avoided – more than that, it's a place to flee from with haste because there are no words sufficient to truly describe its horrors

In some way, then, we can conclude that Jesus was trying to scare people away from hell and into heaven – that's not a completely unfair conclusion to draw

But it's not completely fair either to say that was Jesus' only motivation for teaching as he did

How many of you remember the name Harry R Truman – not Harry S Truman the president but Harry R Truman?

Back in 1980, Harry Truman was the 83 year old owner of a lodge on Spirit Lake near the foot of Mount St. Helens in the state of Washington

Of course we know that Mount St. Helens is an active volcano and in the spring of 1980 the mountain began to show signs that it was going to erupt

Geologists and other scientists flocked to the mountain and set up their monitoring gear and as they measured increasing geologic pressure and tremors, they instituted an evacuation order for everyone who lived in the area

But Harry Truman refused to budge in quite strong and colorful language making him something of a folk hero to many. In one interview, he told reporters that he had moved his mattress to the basement because the precursor earthquakes had shaken him out of his bed and he scoffed at the idea that people were legitimately concerned for his safety

On May 17, authorities tried one more time to convince Harry Truman to evacuate even pointing out to him the huge bulge that had formed on the side of the mountain but he refused

The mountain erupted the next day and Harry Truman, who was still at his lodge, was buried along with his 16 cats under 150 feet of volcanic debris [before and after] in the landslide that ensued

Experts say Harry Truman never knew what hit him as the heat shock would have killed him in less than a second and that he would not have had enough time to even register pain as his body was vaporized

The reason I told you this story is to show how the experts tried to frighten Harry Truman but they didn't act as they did merely to frighten him – they did so to implore him to act so as to secure his safety

And that's exactly what Jesus is doing

He reveals the reality of hell – to frighten for sure – but to frighten as a warning and an entreaty to choose differently

Here's the question that brings all of this together: Do you believe Jesus; do you accept his authority when he tells you there is a judgment coming and will you construct your life on that foundation? Or will you choose another foundation?

Verses 28-29 record the reaction of those who heard Jesus deliver his sermon on the mountainside [**Matthew 7:28-29**]

*And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.*

The religious leaders of Jesus' day taught by referring to authorities

To validate their teachings the scribes would appeal to the authority of their esteemed and respected rabbinic predecessors – so, in a very real sense any authority they had was a derived authority

But Jesus was different and the difference was obvious – he spoke on his own authority without making appeal to anyone or anything else

In **Matthew 28:18** Jesus says, *“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me”*

The authority has been given to him by God the Father and it is his – it resides in him alone

That original audience recognized his authority and they were astonished at his teaching

In the modern vernacular Jesus “blew them away” by what he said; he rocked their world

Jesus often had that effect on those who heard him as we see the temple officers who were sent to arrest Jesus returning without him saying [**John 7:46**] *“No one ever spoke like this man!”*

And in our passage, the imperfect verb tense used in the original Greek indicates those who heard the Sermon on the Mount likely went home still shaking their heads in amazement at what they had heard

But astonishment and applause aren't enough – each person must choose the authority on which to build their life

And Jesus says those who hear his words and, recognizing his authority over all things, do what he says will be shown to be wise on the Day of Judgment while those who choose otherwise will be revealed to be fools

## **Conclusion**

And so we come to the end of the Sermon on the Mount and our study of it

We have seen how Jesus put forth the character of the kingdom and how what he described is an impossible standard according to our abilities – we simply cannot achieve it on our own

While it's true that no one enters God's kingdom because of his or her obedience, it's equally true that no one enters the kingdom who is not obedient

Because, while we know all men are only saved according to God's grace through faith in Christ

And, we know that no one can truly express saving faith in Christ without recognition of their sin that leads to complete poverty of spirit and true sorrow for sin that results in repentance

We also know that God's realized grace in a person's life inevitably results in obedience

Not obedience that earns brownie points with God but obedience that bends the knee to the lordship of Jesus in everything – this type of obedience is so closely tied to true repentance that the two are quite inseparable

The abiding question then is: Do you believe what Jesus said in his sermon?

Do you believe there is a hell to avoid and a kingdom to be gained?

Christianity is not simply another moralistic religion of high standards to be struggled for

Without question the standard is high – the standard is perfection after all – but Christianity also has a crucified and risen Savior who forgives those who trust him and then desires to work through them to grow them toward the ideal

So, in the end, the Sermon on the Mount isn't meant to drive us to despair or to cause us to work harder to achieve its standard – its purpose is to cause us to turn to Jesus

So that we recognize and acknowledge his authority and commit ourselves to obedience to his Word

And what we have seen in the Sermon on the Mount should then spur us to bring as many as we possibly can into the kingdom

Every person must choose between the two destinations and to not choose is to choose by default

It should cause us no end of bother to know that many will pass through the broad gate into eternity without ever seeing there was a choice of a different gate

As I close the sermon in prayer the worship team is going to make their way to the platform to lead us in singing Hymn #562 Be Thou My Vision

As we sing, I want you to really look at and consider the words of the hymn and whether they truly reflect your attitude

Is Jesus the authority in your life and are you building your life on the foundation of his Word?

Do you truly desire to order your life and have God's Word be the lens through which you view the world?

And, if not, it would be my prayer that you would make the choice today to be wise

Let's pray