

Prayer

Holy Spirit, listen to our hearts, we pray. Listen to those things which are so deep we cannot put them into words; see those things to which we have become blind; and feel those experiences we endure which we cannot understand. Make sense of all these things for us, Holy Spirit, and guide us into a deeper understanding of our lives and everything You would like to do through us. AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Thanks for Life

Give thanks to God for the gifts of sensory perception; sight, sound, touch, smell and taste. All of these give meaning to life. Pray for those who are not able to access all five senses

On-going prayers

- *Pray for those who have been caught up in the use of drugs*
- *Pray for those who influence the price of oil, especially governments*
- *Give thanks for close friends*

Meditation

How far are you prepared to go for your brother or sister?

As far as will suffice to keep the family peace?

How far are you prepared to go for your neighbour in the street?

As far as ensuring your privacy is not breached?

How far are you prepared to go for your own country?

As far as voting, paying tax, and keeping the peace?

How far are you prepared to go for the church you attend?

As far as turning up and giving a small gift?

How far are you prepared to go for the people you work with?

As far as doing what's asked of you, within reason?

Just remember, my brother, sister, and friend;

Whatever was asked of Jesus our Lord,

He went as far as giving the whole of His life.

Now consider your calling, which is no less!

Bible Study - Matthew 7:24-29

²⁴ 'All those who listen to these words of mine, and act on them, will be like a wise man who built his house on a rock. ²⁵ The rain fell, the rivers flooded, and the winds blew and pounded on that house, but it did not collapse, because it's foundation was on rock. ²⁶ Also, all those who listen to these words of mine, and do not act on them, will be like an idiot who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, the rivers flooded, and the winds blew and pounded on that house, and it fell with a spectacular crash!'

²⁸ When Jesus had finished all these words, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹ for he taught them as one with authority, not like their scribes.

Review

The Sermon on the Mount comes to its conclusion with a warning about listening and doing the words of Jesus (7:24-27), followed by a description of the amazement that greeted His teaching (7:28,29). At the end of the Sermon, we are in a very different place from where we were at the beginning. Throughout the sermon, Jesus has answered questions arising from his preaching of the Kingdom, but He adds some surprises at the end of each item of teaching which points Jesus Himself as the fulfilment of the 'Law and the Prophets'. Indeed, He is the very expression of the Kingdom here on earth. By the end of the Sermon, He presents Himself as the only one through whom we can enter the Kingdom, and the only Judge of entry (see yesterday's study; 7:21-23); thereby presenting Himself as God's own Son, the Messiah.

Two things arise from the Sermon. Firstly, the moral teaching itself, which to this day has a reputation of being of the highest order. Secondly, and inseparable from the teaching itself, is our increasing understanding of Jesus as the Messiah and the 'king' of the Kingdom. It is in response to both these that the crowds were amazed; at His teaching (7:28) and at Jesus Himself and His authority (7:29).

The very last illustration of Jesus in His Sermon is that of a house-builder. How appropriate! As a carpenter, Jesus would have known all about building houses! If we are to understand what Jesus meant by building on a rock or on sand, then we should consider the landscape of Israel. In parts of the country, the hillsides were sheer rock on which it was almost impossible to build. Archaeological evidence shows that most houses and towns were built on the foundations of older ones, using the rock and rubble already compacted into the soil. It was not wise to build on the flood plains of rivers, because in a dry country such as Israel, many river beds and their surrounds were dry through most of the year, but flooded in the rainy season, creating impossibly boggy ground. But what do these two signify in Jesus' story?

The parable of the wise and the foolish man emphasises the foundations upon which they built, and people would have quickly realised that 'building upon rock' did not mean virgin' rock, but rather rocky soil which had already been built upon. Jesus said that building upon such rock was like acting on His words, making the parable like a simple way of stressing Jesus' own teaching. However, the word 'rock' is also a scriptural word which is used to describe God Himself (Deut. 32; Psalms 27:5, 28:1, 31:2,3, 40:2 etc). This analogy of God is also used by Isaiah; 'Trust in the Lord ... you have an everlasting rock' (Is. 26:4). Now although we may be used to thinking about Jesus and God 'in the same breath', those who first heard Jesus were not! What they heard was that Jesus said His words were the solid ground and the equivalent to the words of God Himself!

The last point that we should take from this parable agrees with what Jesus said at the beginning of His Sermon (5:11,12) about persecution. In this parable, everyone is subject to a rising flood and the ferocity of the wind, and both of these are Biblical images of persecution. Only the house built on the rock of Jesus and His Father, survives, and the house built on the inappropriate sandy ground without rocky foundations, is swept away. The message is simple. Everyone will face storms of persecution, but those who are founded upon Jesus' word will stand. Here, no-one is singled out for trouble, but Jesus warns us of it and if we take His advice, we will withstand it!

Finally, the authority with which Jesus taught was a combination of three things. Firstly, the enigmatic way in which He made it clear that His words were God's words. Secondly, the charisma of a man who could command respect for teaching old and yet new truths in a profoundly revealing fashion. Thirdly, the fact that Jesus lived the same quality of life that He taught. If one person present at the Sermon had been able to stand up and say; 'Jesus, I have watched you, and what You do does not fit with what you preach,' then the crowd would have melted away. But they did not.

It would be wrong to place too much emphasis on any one of these three features of Jesus as a man and as a teacher. Each will be significant in the story of the rest of Matthew's Gospel. Jesus began His ministry with powerful, original and deeply spiritual teaching which explains the Kingdom of Heaven and His role as Messiah. Now He will begin His journey of faith, walking around the countryside with the disciples, putting into practice the things He has taught.

Questions *(for use in groups)*

1. Make a list of things that you think of as central to your faith. How many of them are reflected in Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount?
2. How does this passage help us understand the 'building' of the church today? What else is required for the building?
3. How does Jesus' authority make you change your life? Have you ever changed anything as a result of His word to you?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

I find the authority and the power of Jesus' teaching to be the most important factor in this part of the Sermon. We all know this story so well, yet when we read it in its context, we realise that Jesus was saying quite amazing things and in an astonishingly powerful way. This is no moral tale, it is a challenge to accept Jesus as the Christ!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Do you believe that your local church is effective in teaching the values of the Kingdom of God? Is Jesus the centre of all that is done and the focus of all its activities? How can you enable any perceived deficiencies to be made up?*
- *Pray for all the children who are taught this parable about the Kingdom of God. Pray that their teachers are themselves able to understand the power and authority with which this story is told.*

Final Prayer

When You say a word, may we hear You, Lord. When You touch our hearts, may we feel You, Lord. When You lead the way, may we follow You, Lord. When You inspire us, may we respond to You, Lord. May all our lives be lived in response to Your calling, Lord Jesus. AMEN