

## The Life of Jesus

Sermon 16- Teaching on the mountain:

*Whose house will stand? Whose will fall?*

Passages: Psalm 18:1-3

Matthew 7:24-27

If you read through the Old Testament book of Psalms, you'll soon discover how often God is referred to as a **Rock**! Here are just two examples:

- Psalm 18:2 - ***The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.***
- Psalm 62:2 <sup>2</sup> ***Truly (God) is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will never be shaken.***

In 25 different places, the Psalms speak about **God as a rock**! And it's clear what is meant! Throughout the land of Israel, huge outcrops of rock are easily found. This rock is virtually immovable and unchangeable. The same can be said about God! Like a rock, His character is absolutely reliable; He is faithful, completely trustworthy, and an unfailing source of strength. He is not subject to the ravages of time. Rather, He stands like a mighty fortress, strong and dependable; a shelter from the storm; a place to hide.

And best of all, our weaknesses don't diminish His strength, reliability or consistency.

Keep all this in mind as we study today's reading from Matthew 7.

### Let's pray.

Jesus finishes His *Sermon on the Mount* by telling a parable about two builders: One built his house on rock, while the other built his house on sand. When the storms of life came, however, only the house built on the rock was able to stand. The house on the sand collapsed.

Now, tell me, who was Jesus talking about in this parable? Who did He have in mind when He spoke about the wise and foolish builders?

If you read today's parable in the wider context of Matthew's Gospel, you'll soon realise that Jesus was principally speaking about Himself! **He is the Wise**

**Builder** of the parable! Jesus' entire life was built on God. He intimately knew that His Father was His Rock and fortress; His stronghold and deliverer.

Moreover, He was inviting His disciples to build their lives in the same way. All those who went up with Him on the mountain...those who had gathered around Him for several days and listened to His teaching...were now being commissioned to go down off the mountain and get to work, following Jesus' example and living by His words, so that they might also be wise builders, building their lives on **God, the Rock**.

Who, then, are the **foolish builders**? There's no doubt that Jesus was principally referring to the religious leaders of Israel. They were the foolish builders. Why? Because they refused to listen to Him. They refused to even acknowledge the truths that were coming from His lips. They were so self-assured... so confident of their own traditions and their own interpretations of the Scriptures... that they wouldn't even give Jesus a hearing.

And here's where the irony begins! Although you would think that the wise builder would prevail and that the foolish ones would soon see the error of their ways, in the end, **it's the wise builder who gets crucified by the foolish builders!** The religious leaders were so jealous of Jesus that they plotted to have Him killed. They were jealous of His teaching and jealous of His miracles; they were jealous of how so many people were following this rabbi from Galilee. They were jealous of His free approach to life and faith. It was getting obvious that they had only two options: either they join Him or kill Him. They chose the latter.

It's somewhat of a pattern throughout the Bible! Abel was murdered by his jealous brother, Cain. Jacob was almost murdered by his jealous brother Esau. Joseph would have been murdered by his jealous brothers had it not been for the intervention of Reuben. David was almost murdered by a very jealous King Saul. And in the book of Esther, Haman was jealous of Mordecai, Esther's uncle, and tried to have him killed. All through the years, jealousy has turned to hatred; and hatred has often led to murder.

In our story, the *foolish builders* succeed in their mission! In their jealousy, they get rid of the wise builder by hanging Him on a cross! This, however, is not the full story! Take note of four things:

First, although the foolish builders may have outwardly succeeded in killing Jesus, they could never kill His determination! None of the *violent storms* that buffeted Jesus (from His betrayal, to His trial, to His flogging, to the carrying of His cross, to the nailing of His hands and feet, and to the hours He hung naked on the cross...even His death) **could ever dissuade Him from trusting in the Rock on which He had built His life!** Despite the storms, He was confident that nothing could bring His house down! This Wise Builder had nothing to fear!

Secondly, the hill on which Jesus was crucified was a rocky outcrop called Golgotha, located outside the walls of Jerusalem. *Even in His crucifixion*, Jesus was firmly planted on a rock—and no ordinary rock either! This rocky outcrop was the very same rock that Jerusalem (and its Temple) were built upon. It was all known as “Mount Zion”, the mountain of God! ***God, the Immovable Rock!***

Thirdly, at the moment Jesus died, Matthew 27:51 tells us that ***“the earth shook and the rocks split”!*** Could it be that this Wise Builder...the only One to truly build His life on solid Rock... was being farewelled by the Rock itself?

There’s one final point to the story of the crucifixion. After Jesus was crucified, we’re told that He was then buried inside a **Rock-hewn cave**, with a separate **rock** being rolled across the entrance. The wise builder (the one who built His life on the Rock) was laid to rest inside the rock! In His death, Jesus became perfectly united...perfectly hidden...perfectly sheltered...inside the rock on which He had built His life.

Psalm 18:2

***The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.***

But, of course, we also know that, three days later, *the Rock let Him go!* The stone that covered the tomb was mysteriously rolled away and Jesus was raised from the dead! **Why?** There’s only one reason—Jesus was released from His grave and raised from the dead *so that, in His resurrection, He might raise up a multitude of fellow builders...* like you and me... to continue Jesus’ building project!

**But, what are we going to build?** With the resurrected Jesus, we are going to build a new Temple!

Let's go back a bit in the story. One of the reasons why Jesus was crucified by the foolish builders is because **He dared to warn them that their house would eventually fall!** Their house, of course, was the Temple in Jerusalem, originally been built by King Solomon on the rock of Mount Zion. But the present religious leaders had so undermined the structure with the sands of false teaching, man-made rules and self-centred regulations that it needed to be torn down!

That's the reason why Jesus told them that He would destroy the Temple and, in three days, raise up a new one! Indeed, even when Jesus was hanging on the cross, onlookers reminded Him of His words; ***"You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself!"*** As we know, Jesus didn't come down from the cross and save Himself. But it didn't matter! Even though they killed Him, death could not stop this Wise Builder from completing the work He had promised! **That's what the resurrection is all about!**

And so, today, in the power of His resurrection, Jesus is at work building a new Temple—a Temple made of Living Stones! And we (His disciples) are called to join Him in His construction project. We are invited to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the resurrected Christ as *co-labourers* in building God's new House—a house of prayer for all the nations; a house from which our God rules the world; a house built on the solid Rock of God's eternal presence.

Indeed, that's what today's **baptisms** are all about!

- This morning, we have six couples who bring their children to be baptised. Why? Because they want their children to be part of God's Temple...members of God's house. Through baptism, they acknowledge that, ***"Unless the Lord builds the house, the labourers work in vain."*** Through baptism, they are asking Jesus, the Wise Builder, to touch their children and engage them in His work, even before they understand it!
- This afternoon, 12 adult believers will be doing a similar thing when they are baptised. They, however, in their personal conviction that Jesus is the Wise Builder, will be asking God to put to death their own foolish construction efforts and, instead, to help them give their lives over to Jesus, the Master Builder.

Today is Easter day. In the glory of His resurrection, Jesus is at work building a new Temple on the solid rock of His Father! The only question that remains is this: Will you join Him? Will you take your place with Jesus, the

Wise Builder, fully engaged in raising-up a house that is dedicated to the eternal worship of the One True God, our Rock?

Let's pray.