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Beverly ECC, Chicago, IL

“BUILD ON THE ROCK”
Matthew 7:24-27

Anders, you have been my student since September 2013. Over the past two years I have imparted to you a great deal of biblical and theological information. More than that, I have shown you how to handle the Scriptures.

I am pleased with what we have accomplished together. You have asked excellent questions, made interesting observations, and grown in understanding.

❓ Now that you have finished Confirmation, what will you do with the skills and the knowledge you have gained? Will they prove to be of eternal value?

Congregation, we have been exploring the Sermon on the Mount since September 2014. Over these months we have examined Matthew chapters 5-7 in depth – and it is safe to say that these teachings have examined us!

I am pleased with what has happened in this series. We have asked good questions, we have made interesting observations, and we have grown in understanding.

❓ Now we have come to the end of the Sermon on the Mount. What will we do with the insights and convictions God has given us? Will they prove to be of eternal value?

▣ Please turn with me to Matthew 7:24-27:

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds

blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; and it fell with a great crash.”

What is the first word in verse 24?

“Therefore.” This is not a throw-away word. It is a connector that links the previous teaching with this one. It tells us that we are to interpret what follows in light of what comes before.

⌘ What comes before is a warning that God will judge humanity, and merely professing true biblical faith and doing good deeds for God is no guarantee we will pass the test. Rather, **“Only those who do the will”** of the Father and are known by the Son **“will enter the kingdom of heaven”** (Matthew 7:21-23).

📖 It follows that the devastating tempest in verses 25 and 27 is, first and foremost, a metaphor for the Last Judgment. (By that, I mean the event at history’s end when every human being will answer to Sovereign God for all they have done and left undone.)

It can also depict the storms of life. Speaking personally, the Holy Spirit has used this passage to comfort and exhort me in hardship.

⌘ Still, that is secondary; the primary focus is on the End. Messiah is echoing the prophetic imagery of Ezekiel {13:11, 13-14}: **“Rain will come in torrents, and**

I will send hail stones hurtling down, and violent winds will burst forth.... I will unleash a violent wind, and... hailstones and torrents of rain will fall with destructive fury,” and “I will tear down the wall.”

⌘ And also of Isaiah {28:15-18}:

You boast...

**“When an overwhelming scourge sweeps by,
it cannot touch us,
for we have made a lie our refuge
and falsehood our hiding place.”**

So this is what the Sovereign LORD says:

**“See, I lay a stone in Zion, a tested stone,
a precious cornerstone for a sure
foundation;**

the one who relies on it will never be stricken...

**[But] hail will sweep away your refuge, the lie,
and water will overflow your hiding
place....**

**when the overwhelming scourge sweeps by,
you will be beaten down by it.”**

The Last Judgment will test what we have done and who we are in relation to the Christ. On that basis our **“house”** (our life itself) will either stand firm in the storm or **“[[fall] with a great crash.”**

? How did we get from congratulating Anders and affirming the congregation to the deadly storm of judgment? The answer is in the text.

■ Verses 24-25: **“Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like the wise**

man who built his house on the rock.” When the storm comes, he or she will **“not fall.”**

■ In contrast, verses 26-27: **“Everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand.”** When the storm comes, he or she will fall **“with a great crash.”**

Anders: this is why I am asking, what will you do with the skills and the knowledge you have gained? Church: that is why I am asking, what will we do with the insights and convictions God has given us?

{Rev 20:13} Final judgment is coming. **“Everyone [will be] judged according to what they [have] done”** and who they are in relation to the Savior.

Hence, Matthew 7:24-27 is simultaneously a warning and an invitation: do not build your house on the sand; build it on **“the rock.”**

There is no need for guesswork regarding **“the rock.”** Jesus unambiguously identifies it as **“these words of mine.”** This includes all of his teachings; but as he is wrapping up the Sermon on the Mount, he especially has in mind the contents of Matthew chapters 5-7.

★ Back to the text: Building one’s **“house on the rock”** is an ongoing process of hearing Messiah’s words and doing what he says.

✈ This hearing is not casual or passive acoustic perception. It is intentional, active listening in which we pay attention with the goal of understanding.

Literally hearing the word read, reflected on, and explained has significant value. So does figurative hearing in the sense of silent reading, contemplation, and study.

Anders, I urge you to continue developing your skills and knowledge by hearing, alone and with your Church family. It is no accident that our Confirmation liturgy includes the call **“to keep worshipping in Christ’s church”** and **“listening to his word.”**

Congregation, I urge us to fortify our insight and conviction by striving to hear. If we believe Matthew 5-7 is part of God’s perfect rule for faith, doctrine, and conduct, then let’s not put it back on the shelf and say, ‘Been there, done that.’ Let’s keep going back to it to refresh our knowledge and get deeper understanding.

✦ Hearing Christ’s words is essential to building our **“house on the rock.”** So is doing what he says.

Acting in line with his teachings entails thinking, speaking, and behaving in conformity to the Sermon on the Mount. We give mercy to the unworthy, work for peace, strive to reconcile broken relationships, pray for our enemies, and so on.

It is also refraining from thoughts, words, and deeds that contradict the Son’s teaching. We choose not to hold a grudge, not to commit mental adultery, not to do good works for the sake of reputation, not to be controlled by materialistic anxiety.

Obedience is not gritting your teeth and joylessly keeping the rules while fearfully dodging mistakes; it is interacting rightly with God, self, and others. It is pursuing relationships of *αγαπη* [agapē] love with everyone:

relationships of honor, humility, compassion, justice, mercy, and sacrifice.

Putting Christ’s words **“into practice”** is essential to building our **“house on the rock.”**

If we stop here we will be crushed by frustration, guilt, and despair. We can by sheer effort love our enemies, turn the other cheek, and overcome lust *for a few minutes* at a time, but not much longer. This is beyond us.

So is hearing the Word. Coming to Church is not hard. Private reading and study are demanding, but doable. Always paying attention and working to understand? That is difficult. It is beyond us.

◆ But we are not stopping there! The call to hear and do Messiah’s word presupposes his presence. Discipleship is not, at its heart, a matter of following Christ’s example; it is *participating in his life*.

{Jn 15:15; 14:7} Messiah says **“I have called you friends.”** To follow the Lord Jesus is to be connected to him with bonds of affection and shared experience.

{Mt 12:47-50} Messiah says **“Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”** To follow the Lord Jesus is to be united to him as a member of his family.

{Jn 6:54-56} Messiah says **“My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.” “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.”** To follow the Lord Jesus is to partake of his essence, receiving sustenance from his being.

{Jn 15:4-5} Messiah says **“I am the vine; you are the branches.” “Remain in me, as I also remain in you.” “If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.”** To follow the Lord Jesus is to be in organic, life-giving connection with him.

{Php 4:13} Hearing and doing are beyond us. They are not beyond Christ in us! We **“can do all this through,”** *with* and *in* **“him who gives [us] strength.”**

{Eph 4:23-24} The Word made flesh is empowering us **“to be made new in the attitude of [our] minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.”**

{Mt 22:37-40} He is giving us power to love the Triune God with our entire being and to love others as ourselves, thus fulfilling the perfect Law of God.

{Gal 5:22-23} His Spirit is bearing in us the fruit of **“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.”**

? The question is: will we do our part to maintain intimate union with the true vine, thereby receiving his power to hear his words and put them into practice?

? Will we be wise and build our house on the rock? Or will we be like the fool who built his house on sand?

Matthew 7:24-27 is the Word of the Lord.