

The Wise and Foolish Builders. Matthew 7:24 – 29

Read Matthew 7:24 – 29 and *answer the questions below (before reading the overview)*.

1. The story of the Wise and Foolish builders is one of Jesus' most well known parables. What is a parable?
2. In this parable, who is like the wise man who built his house on the rock?
3. Who is like the foolish man who built his house on the sand?
4. What does the storm in this story represent?
5. In real spiritual terms, what does it mean that one man's house fell while the other stood firm?
6. What is the point or the moral of Jesus' story and how does it apply to our lives?

The parable of the wise and foolish builders has all the elements of a classic moral fable: Two men build houses. One wisely builds on rock but the other foolishly builds on sand. When a storm comes, the house on the rock stands firm while the house on the sand is destroyed. At first glance we could assume that the moral to this story is 'wisdom triumphs over folly' or 'it's better to take care and do things right the first time'. However, coming from the mouth of God's own Son, this parable takes on a more profound eternal meaning.¹

Jesus said that the people who hear his word are like the houses built on either rock or sand. Therefore the two structures in this story represent the lives we live before God. *Proverbs 24:3 says, 'By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established.'*

In Jesus' story the first man built his life on the rock. In the Bible God is often called our Rock (e.g. Ps. 18:2) and Christ is called our cornerstone (e.g. 1 Peter 2:6). The other man built his house on the sand. When Luke records this same parable of Jesus (Luke 6:49) he declares that one house had no foundation. The Apostle Paul states, "*For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*" (1 Corinthians 3:11) Regardless of which version of Jesus parable we read, we learn that any life that is not built upon Christ and his teaching will not stand before God in the end.

We need to take note that the storm hit both houses and not just the house of the foolish man. James 1:2 reminds us that even Christians will face various trials in this life. However, the storm in this story probably represents God's final judgement more than it does our temporary trials. After all, the houses in this parable represent our whole lives and we're told that one house remained standing in the end while the other was completely destroyed.

Finally, this is not a parable about being willing listeners to Jesus but about obediently doing what he has commanded. Let's remember that this parable is the conclusion of a sermon that summarises much of Jesus' authoritative word to us (7:28 – 29). James 1:22 says, "*Don't merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*"

¹ Jesus' sermon warns us of the eternal consequences at stake (see Matthew 5:11 – 12, 19 – 22).