

"GOD'S WILL FOR YOUR LIFE"

Matthew 7:21-29

Sermon preached by Dr. Cahill

Babcock Presbyterian Church

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"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of heaven..."
(Matthew 7:21)

"And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand...and great was its fall." (Matthew 7:26-27)

These two verses are found at the end of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. We like our sermons to end on an inspirational note, calling us to a hopeful future, but in this case Jesus sends us away with a harsh warning, "Don't be like those people who deceive themselves into thinking they're being faithful because they do great and wonderful things for God." And if you cut corners in building your life, don't be surprised if it falls apart when the winds and floods of this life tear you down.

That's how Jesus ended his Sermon on the Mount. Very different from how he began.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of Heaven..."

Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.

Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." (Matthew 5:3-5)

It makes me wonder. **"Wouldn't someone poor in spirit be the type who'd build a house on sand?"**

So who's Jesus talking about? Remember, these people calling out, **"Lord, Lord"** kicked out demons and accomplished many other great deeds of power in Christ's name. These guys weren't pagans, obviously they were solid, active church members who gave time and energy to the Kingdom. If Jesus tells them, **"I never knew you, go away from me, you evil doers,"** where does that leave you and me? Most of us here this morning try to be faithful and obedient by giving up our time and energy to Christ and his Kingdom. Will Jesus brush us off too?

This Scripture is what biblical scholars call one of Jesus' hard sayings, a stern message forcing you to really test yourself, by putting yourself, your motives, and priorities, under a microscope. Just like you go for a yearly physical and your doctor runs rigorous tests on your body, these hard sayings urge you and me to go to the Good Physician, Jesus, so he can give us a thorough exam and diagnose the problems that can harm your spiritual health.

So, the punch line of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount is really a wake-up call urging us to take that bold moral inventory of your life asking, "Am I on the right track, or do I need to turn around and go in another direction? Be ready to ask this question honestly but also be aware of the

potential for self-deception.

An old woman was walking the country roads. When she came to a crossroad she'd throw a stick in the air. The way it landed pointed her in the right direction. But sometimes she'd throw the stick twice, even three times in the air before moving on. **"Why?"** she was asked. **"Because,"** she replied, **"I'm letting God direct my journey by throwing this stick and the first two times he was pointing me in the wrong direction."**

And when you take this bold, moral inventory testing your heart, priorities, and values you should use Christ as the only measuring stick you should ever test your life against. Then you still have to be honest with yourself if your testing and evaluation is to have any integrity.

"Not everyone who says to me `Lord, Lord' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only the one who does the will of my father in heaven." (Matthew 7:21) That last phrase, **"but only the one who does the will of my father in heaven,"** is, I think, the key to understanding this teaching.

Here's another question. "What is God's will for my life?" Of course you can answer, **"Well, there're many things God wills for me. Every time I make a decision that effects the direction and quality of my life I need to ask God for guidance."** This is true, but unlike the old woman throwing down her stick multiple times until she got the answer she wanted, you need to trust God's will by being obedient to God's will. But doesn't that word obedient get our hackles up? Dogs and children are supposed to be obedient, but I'm an adult with free will. I can make my own choices so why oppress me with this obedient talk.

Once in a children's sermon I asked the kids to hold their breath for as long as they could. My point was God created your body to breath fresh air, and if you hold your breath long enough, sooner than later your lungs will command you to breathe and you have no choice but to obey.

Breathing is a metaphor for obedience, you obey a primary need of your body, just like you obey your thirst and drink, or when you obey your hunger and eat.

So when you get right down to it, God's will for your life is to obey your need for God. The first question of the Westminster catechism, **"What is the chief end of man? Answer: To know God and enjoy him forever."** That, in a nutshell, is God's will for your life. To know and enjoy God, now and forever.

Of course there's a big difference between knowing about God and knowing God personally. You can know all the teachings and dogmas of the Christian religion, you can even be very orthodox in your belief system. But what if you don't know God, personally and intimately? That's why Jesus said to those who cried out Lord, Lord, **"I never knew you, go away from me."** They never made that life-changing commitment to obey their need to know God and enjoy him forever.

Let's go back to the conclusion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, but this time let's focus on what it takes to obey your need for God's will for your life.

"Everyone then who hears my words and acts on them will be like the wise man who builds his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, the winds blew and beat that house, but it did not fall because it had been founded on rock." (Matthew 7:24-25)

By nature we're bargain hunters. We always want to get the most and best we can at the lowest cost. That's why discount stores do such a booming business. But the wise shopper always realizes you get what you pay for. In other words if you buy a cheap suit, chances are it's poorly made it won't fit right and look good on you. But if you pay extra you'll be a satisfied customer. It costs you more, but you'll be glad you spent the extra money.

Think of the three little pigs. The first two cut corners by building flimsy homes of straw and sticks. But the third was a wise little pig. He spent extra money and time building a house of bricks so when the big bad wolf huffed and puffed he couldn't blow his house down.

The wise man in Jesus' parable who built his house on the solid rock foundation is the patron saint of the third little pig. It would have been so much easier, so less costly to build a house on sand, because a house built on a rock means carving out the basement, hauling away the stone, paying the contractor and the laborers the costs pile up. But in the end, it's worth it, because when the floods come, and believe me the floods inevitably come, the wise man knows his house, through it all, will be left standing.

What about you? Is your house built where God wanted you to build it, on the rock solid foundation that is Jesus Christ? Are you willing to pay the price, and not cut corners, or will you be like the wise little pig and build a sturdy house that would pass inspection?

I have a homework assignment for you. This week I encourage you to read Matthew chapters five through seven, his Sermon on the Mount. I think you'll find there the blueprints for the life built on the firm foundation of Jesus Christ. You'll read verses inviting you to be both salt and light in our dark and tasteless world. You'll be warned against letting your anger kill your relationships, because in God's eyes, it equals murder. You'll also be encouraged to pray, to give generously to the poor, to love even your enemies, and not to judge your neighbor. And then, there's the golden rule, **"Do unto others as you would have them do unto you."**

Mind you, the Sermon on the Mount isn't a ten-step handbook on how to become perfect. We never will be perfect. Even so, it's still worth reading and pondering. Maybe we can't reach up to the sun high in the sky, but we can bask in its light and warmth.

You've been given a precious gift, eternal life with God forever. But you also have another gift, free will, the right to choose one way or the other.

Choose wisely. It may cost you more, in all honesty it'll cost you everything, even your life.

But in the end, it's worth it. It's really, really worth it.

Let us pray!