

"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. Usually sermons end on an inspirational note, calling believers to a hopeful future, but this time Jesus sends his listeners away with a harsh warning. Don't be like those people who deceive themselves into thinking they're being faithful to God, if only because they do great and wonderful things for God. At the same time 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 famous 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 who's poor in spirit, or in mourning and meek be the type who'd build a house on sand?"** Aren't many of us who do good works still by definition sinners, in need of God's grace and forgiveness? Why then would Jesus brush us off saying, **"I never knew you, go away from me, you evil doers."?** Very troubling.

Who's Jesus talking about? Remember, these people calling out, **"Lord, Lord"** kicked out demons and accomplished many other deeds of power in Jesus' name. These guys weren't pagans, obviously they were solid, active church members who gave time and energy to Christ and the Kingdom. If Jesus declares, **"I never knew you, go away from me, you evil doers,"** where does that leave you and me?

Most of us here this morning are solid, active church members who give time and energy to Christ and his Kingdom. Will Jesus brush us off too?

This is what biblical scholars call one of Jesus' hard sayings. Jesus gives a stern message that forces you to really test yourself. You're forced to put yourself, your motives, and your priorities under a microscope. Just like you go to your doctor for a yearly physical exam and your doctor runs rigorous tests on your body, looking for potential problems, these hard sayings urge you to go to the Good Physician, Jesus, so he can give you a thorough exam looking for the problems that cause great harm to your spiritual health.

So, the conclusion of Jesus' sermon is really a wake-up call for all of us to take a bold moral inventory of our lives. Am I on the right track, or do I need to turn around and go in another direction? Ask this question but 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, maybe 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.**"

Whenever you make this bold inventory of your life, testing your heart, priorities, and values in light of Christ's gospel, (and by the way Christ alone is the only measuring stick you should ever use to test your life against) you have to be honest with yourself and God 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. Ask yourself, "What's 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 then simply be obedient.

Remember my children's sermon? I asked them to hold their breath for as long as they could, and before they passed out I asked them to start breathing again. 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.

So breathing is a metaphor for obedience, you obey a primary need of your body, just like when you're thirsty you obey your thirst, or when you're hungry you obey your hunger and eat.

So, what's God's will for your life? 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 if you don't know God, personally and intimately, you're not really Christian. 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)

We always want to get the most and best we can at the lowest cost. By nature we're bargain hunters. 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 and won't fit right and therefore look good on you. But if you pay extra only then you'll be a satisfied customer. It may cost 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 is more expensive, carving out the basement, hauling away the stone, paying the contractor and the laborers, the cost 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 situated where God wanted you to build it, not on shifting sand, but the rock solid foundation that is Jesus Christ? Are you willing to pay the price, and not cut corners, like the little pigs who built their house of sticks and straw, 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."**

Of course, none of us could ever live up to the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount. After all we're still sinners wanting to cut corners, and throw our sticks in the air two, even three times, because we're so sure God is pointing us in the wrong direction.

Mind you, the Sermon on the Mount isn't a handbook on how to be perfect. Even so, it's still worth reading and pondering. Maybe we can't reach up to the sun high up in the sky, but we can bask in its light and warmth.

You've been given a precious gift, eternal life with God forever. God also gives you the

rock hard foundation that is Jesus Christ. 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!