

Encouragement to do what you hear (Mat 7.24-28)

WestminsterReformedChurch.org

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5-15-2005

Introduction

Last week we began consideration of the closing section of the Sermon on the Mount (Mat 7.24f) by emphasizing the responsibility of “doing what you hear.” At least four things seem necessary to being doers and not hearers only of the words of Christ: commitment, pursuit, confession, and obedience. These four things give us some hooks on which to hang a mostly complete summary of the Sermon. Today I want to emphasize another dimension of the Lord’s teaching in His use of the house building metaphor, namely, I want to emphasize the encouragement that He gives to prompt and motivate us to do what we hear. The encouragement is twofold: doing what we hear leads to a) a life characterized by wisdom instead of folly, and b) a life marked by safety rather than destruction.

1A. Wisdom instead of folly

The wise man builds his house on bedrock. The foolish man builds on sand. It is wisdom to build your life by doing what you hear in the Sermon on the Mount. You are wise if from a posture of commitment to Christ, you pursue the gospel with determination in order to confess what you find on one hand and to obey it on the other hand. To hear the word, but not do it is utter folly. Let us amplify this contrast between wisdom and folly.

1B. Folly

If we meditate on folly for a while, it will help us think about the pit from which we have been dug, and this kind of thinking can be very profitable. We can do this by discussing the following four elements of folly: ungodliness, denial, distortion, and meaninglessness.

1) Ungodliness

Foolishness in Scripture is not primarily ignorance or stupidity. Rather, it is specifically a reference to ungodliness and its utter contradiction of the value, purpose, and meaning of human existence. Jesus told us this much when He spoke of the eye as the lamp of the body to picture how the bad heart leaves the whole person in profound darkness. Thus, He said, **“if your eye, [representing your heart] is healthy, your whole body will be full of light, but if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”** (Mat 6.22-23). If you firmly set your heart on earthly treasures instead of heavenly treasures, then that is where your heart is. Then your heart is unhealthy, divided, and bad. The character of your heart governs everything you think and do. The person with this kind of heart cannot see things in any other way, only bad fruit comes from a bad tree (Mat 7.18). Ungodliness is from the inside out and all encompassing.

2) Denial

The bad heart distorts all the evidence that points out its folly and sin. Every consideration takes the shape and color imposed on it by the bad heart. Each bucket that the natural man draws from the polluted well of asserted autonomy and self-sufficiency has pollutants throughout the entire bucket. Compare this toxic effect with trying to prove to someone wearing blue tinted sunglasses that a kitten is not blue but gray. You take a piece of gray paper and put it next to the kitten and say, “Look, this gray paper shows the true color of the kitten.” What response do you get? He will say, “The paper you use as evidence is blue tinted and it proves my point that the kitten is blue.” In this example, the sunglasses affect all the evidence and the person sees everything in the color of blue; it cannot be otherwise. Likewise, the natural man, the person who lives on this earth with a bad heart, looks out at the world and misreads everything in such a profound way that he is like a blind person in utter darkness (great

darkness, Mat 6.23). He cannot do otherwise (cf. he cannot submit himself to God, His authority, or His law, Rom 8.7).

3) Distortion

The bad heart is a deceitful heart. He will be either a false prophet or he will follow what is false and deceptive. As the Dutch writer, Bavinck, put it, the fool engages the psychology of deceit that involves three things. a) First, there is trauma. He reacts to the light with hatred and will not come to it because it exposes his sins, humbles his pride, and condemns his autonomy (cf. Jn 3.19). b) Second, there is repression. Per Romans 1.18, we know that the unbeliever suppresses the truth in unrighteousness. Thus, the extreme darkness includes the fact that he suppresses what he knows, along with the fact that he distorts all the facts he “knows” by processing them all through the autonomy sunglasses. c) Third, there is substitution. He exchanges the truth of God for a lie, worshiping the creature rather than the Creator (Rom 1.25).

Thus, the foolish man mythicizes. His life has no foundation or direction but He travels on asserting his autonomy and self-sufficiency. He insists on his own will. He must do things his own way. He has centuries of practicing autonomy driven myths (cf. the refinement of evolutionary theory from the Pre-Socratic Greeks to our modern day version).

4) Meaninglessness

His view of the world is such that he must either be nothing but a cog in a meaningless world machine, or a meaningless fact floating in an ocean of meaningless facts (a meaningless unity or a meaningless diversity). This tension of meaninglessness is part of the fabric of his folly. On one hand, he claims that the world is an unbreakable cause-effect chain governing the behavior of all material facts. This means that his life in total is like a gear in a series of gears: causes inflexibly push all his actions and he becomes a cause inflexibly pushing other actions. His life, his conduct, and all aspirations are nothing more than chemical reactions. He has no individualism and no humanity. He is no more than what he eats and secretes. On the other hand, he tries to find meaning, dignity, and humanity by escaping the idea of a cause-effect nexus or chain. He then tries to find meaning in a world of incoherent chance factuality where inflexible determination does not govern his entire existence. He clings here to individuality and asserts personhood. However, now his view means that there is no connection between the facts of the world. As chance facts, they are like beads that have no string running through them giving them order and meaning. Here he thinks he finds himself, he has individuality, and escapes being a cog in the world machine, but again he loses himself in meaninglessness because chance facts can have no meaning, thus, his life, accomplishments, and aspirations can have absolutely no meaning either.

The non-Christian has only these two extremes of either being a meaningless cog in the world machine or of being a meaningless fact in a world of chance factuality. Of course, neither extreme is bearable or livable (though some go as far as they can in one extreme or the other). Therefore, he dishonestly fluctuates in his thinking between these two extremes. Appealing to one extreme then the other enables him to dodge the truth by hopping and skipping between the loss of individuality and the loss of meaning. So goes the history of non-Christian thought.

Therefore, all that the person with a bad heart sees and knows amounts to nothing (cf. 1 Cor 13.1-3, **If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.**) He is in total and complete darkness. Somehow, we have to do justice to how extreme this darkness is, even with common grace and the reality of general revelation (cf. Ps 19.1-6; Rom. 1.18-20). The person who builds on sand is on the broad road that is easy to find (Mat 7.13-14). He travels life’s pathway viewing what he can see with his eyes here and now as ultimate reality. He wanders in the wilderness outside of the Garden of Eden since the fall (Gen 3.23). He has no

direction, no meaning, no standards, no truth, and no humanity. He loses himself and life itself. He is in darkness and how great is that darkness!

On a pendulum of trickery, the fool will not hear and do the words of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. This is the way of folly and the psychology of deceit. It leads along the pathway of blackness and darkness, and, profoundly, how great is that darkness.

Christian, look at the broad way and the life you could be living there in the dark. Considering the pit from which you have been dug is a great encouragement to take up the duty of doing what you hear. Just think about it for a moment: By doing what you hear from the risen Lord Jesus, you are not in the dark, but you are now living in the light of day, and, marvelously, we can proclaim it from the housetops: how great is the light!

2B. Wisdom

We can speak about two things regarding wisdom to describe it some.

1) Godliness

Therefore, a striking contrast exists between folly and wisdom. The person who does what He hears from the Sermon on the Mount is wise with the kind of wisdom that is as clear and as substantive as the wisdom of digging deep and laying the foundation of a building on solid rock. Wisdom in Scripture is predominately a reference to godliness. It means to be god-like not smart or intelligent. Intelligence is part of the picture but the accent is on being upright, godly, and righteous.

Clearly and substantively, it is encouraging to know that if I do what I hear in these words of Jesus, then I am godly. I walk the pathway of godliness and godliness saturates my life when I choose God first above all else, when I pursue the things of God in earnest, with repentance, and for practical obedience.

2) Meaning and Purpose

In ultimate terms, day-by-day, your life has direction, meaning, and purpose.

As a doer of the Sermon, you manifest good works as light shining in darkness and your good works glorify your heavenly Father. You reflect the Father's image on earth. You become more and more His restored image bearer. You fulfill the most fundamental purpose for man on the earth: to reflect the beauty and majesty of God in the world. There is no greater purpose. This is why the entire universe exists. By God's directing hand, this is the goal of every fact of human existence. Here you participate in the highest goal conceivable, to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Accordingly, the heavens declare His glory, and human beings should reflect His glory, consciously and directly. Even in judgment, the human family will manifest the glory of God's justice and power (Rom 9.23-24). By the cross and in the kingdom of God, the Christian willingly *and wisely* participates in this great purpose of reflecting the radiant beauty of God in His creation. It is impossible to aim higher; it is extremely wise to aim at this target.

Therefore, be doers of what you hear and you have this purpose to your life in all you possess, are, and do. Furthermore, in glorifying God by doing what you hear, you have dignity, value, meaning, and direction to your life. Each day passes with God as your delight, His law as light to your path, His love as comfort for your soul, and His presence as the joy of your heart.

Therefore, be a doer of the word of the risen Lord Jesus. Commit yourself to Him, pursue the things of God with resolve and determination, confess your sins, speak of what you learn, and obey His commandments, seeking their true spirit and intent.

On this pathway of the Sermon on the Mount and the Ten Commandments from the Mount (by the principles of the Law in their new wineskin forms through the death and resurrection of Christ) you have wisdom instead of folly.

2A. Safety rather than destruction

It is a great encouragement to know that doing what we hear the Lord Jesus teach us, we have a life earmarked for safety not destruction.

1B. The natural man

1) Self deception

Of course, with man's trauma and repression, he deceives and is being deceived into believing the myth that there will be no day of reckoning. Thinking there will be no final Day of Judgment, he builds his house on sand.

2) Eternal Punishment

Furthermore, hearers of the word, who have no determined resolve to serve God, who make no pursuit of the truth, who express no true confession of sin, and who have no practical obedience from the heart, build their lives on shifting sand. Fearfully, Jesus plainly states more than once that the end of this broad road is destruction. This is a sobering theme in Scripture. It is hard to contemplate beyond the metaphors and descriptions that pierce the ear, heart, and conscience. Here are some descriptions: fiery hell, cut down and thrown into the fire, weeping and gnashing of teeth, eternal punishment, destruction, no entry into the kingdom, "depart from me," no reward, great fall, great ruin, no longer good for anything, outer darkness, and great darkness (Mat 5.13, 20, 22, 29-30; 6.1; 7.13, 19, 23; 25.30, 46).

A final day of accounting is still ahead. There will be a manifestation of the burning and boiling wrath of God Almighty against ungodliness and sin. The end of the broad road of the foolish hearer is horrible, unthinkable, and unimaginable destruction. There will be a living death with deathless existence in conscious suffering without end.

2) The Christian

By contrast, what encouragement for the doer of the word: the pathway on which he walks is bound for glory. The stormy Day of Judgment will arrive, the rains will descend, floods will overflow, and winds will beat against the life of the doer of the words of the Sermon, but his life will stand safe and secure. He is safe and secure because his life rests on bedrock. Christ is the solid rock on which he stands. He fills his heart with the principles of Christ. He lives under divine authority in humble repentance trusting the forgiveness of the cross of Christ. In the last day, he shall stand as a joint heir with Christ, an heir of the new heavens and the new earth with immortality, honor, and glory (Rom. 2.1-11).

Conclusion

1) The Sermon leads to worship

When we think back over the Sermon, we have to be like those who first heard Him: **And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching,²⁹ for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.** We have to stand in amazement and astonishment. We have to worship Jesus as the king of the kingdom He proclaimed. He is the king of glory. He speaks with authority that does not rest in ancient tradition, like that of the scribes. Instead, He speaks with authority that resides in His own glorious person as Son of God and God the Son. Heaven is now His throne and the earth is now the footstool under His feet because by His death, resurrection, and ascension He is universal Lord and Sabbath king.

2) The Sermon points to doing what we hear from the Lord of glory

He summons us to commitment, wholeheartedness, study, confession, and a personal relationship with Him by means of His word. This is marvelous in our eyes and it must be the Lord's doing.

3) The Sermon encourages progress on the way

The way is hard on our self-love and asserted autonomy, but we are encouraged to press on in the joy and delight of a life flooded with fellowship with God now and filled with hope of glory yet to come.

All of the joy and hope comes from Christ as our prophet, priest, and king.

There are many trials along the way in the mystery of God's providence, but press on, O saint and doer of what you hear, because you are wise and receive mercy, purpose, value, dignity, immortality, honor, and glory on this pathway of doing. You have a great future ahead of you. You are on your way to the city that has foundations whose builder and maker is God. So fight the fight of faith, endure hardships, keep on keeping on, and strive in faith and repentance toward the crown of glory guaranteed to you by the work of Christ.