

## **Sermon Text – Sunday, March 22, 2026 – Pastor Paula Kraus**

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading: Deuteronomy 11:18-28; 2<sup>nd</sup> Reading: Romans 8:6-11  
Scripture for Message: Matthew 7:21-29 “Solid Ground”**

The scripture we just read is the conclusion to Jesus’ “Sermon on the Mount.” What he tells his disciples and followers now closes the message from his sermon. From the beatitudes, through warnings about a righteousness greater than the Pharisees and teaching his followers to be the “salt of the earth and light of the world” in all his message Jesus teaches them to be different. These concluding words present his followers with the why – to build a strong solid foundation that will not be shaken when the storms come. Let there be no doubt the storms will surely come.

Of the things we have learned from the “Sermon on the Mount,” one theme brings everything in his sermon together – in all things we have choices to make both in attitudes and actions. Jesus tells his followers “Be different” be distinct and set apart. So, what do we do with what Jesus teaches? As he wraps up his sermon, he tells his followers that obedience is as important, if not more important, than merely hearing his word. You must put what you know, and what you hear into practice to build a solid foundation.

Face it, even if we say we believe and say we are Christian, or if we can list all the things we have done in Jesus’ name, all of it is meaningless if we do not do as Jesus does and sincerely put our beliefs into practice. Doing the will of God is different from doing what we consider religious deeds. Yes, we must confess with our lips that Jesus is Lord – and Jesus tells us that is what some did by saying Lord, Lord. Confession is the indispensable step in our salvation and saying “Lord, Lord” is using his divine title showing respect, and it is an accurate orthodox confession of Jesus as Christ. Saying Lord twice indicates a fervent and public recognition as they proclaim the things they have done in Jesus’ name. These Christians were indeed doers, so what is the problem that causes Jesus to reply, “I never knew you?”

It seems that Jesus, at the day of judgment, is not interested in how “religious” we are but with what we have done or not done in relation to God and others. The difference in this instance is “thoroughgoing obedience” – adding to what you confess with your lips is what’s in your heart and how you “confess” with your living.

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Maybe the question that should be asked at the day of judgment is why. Why did we “prophesy in Jesus’ name” or do mighty works and miracles in his name – was it for God’s glory or our own? Jesus teaches his followers to show the world what it is like to live in God’s kingdom for God’s glory and do nothing out of selfish interests. “Neither an intellectual knowledge of [Jesus] nor a verbal profession, though both are essential in themselves, can ever be a substitute for obedience.”<sup>1</sup>

Jesus gives us the why in a tale of two builders one who was wise enough to build his home on the firm foundation of the rock – the one who hears his words and puts them into practice. The other who heard his words and did not put them into practice was the foolish one building his home on the unstable foundation of sand. Even those of us who have no knowledge of building homes know what is going to happen when the storms hit. We see every year when the hurricanes hit the coastal areas of our country, those homes built on sand are going to crumble and fall unless there is a sturdy foundation. I am not saying that the builders of those homes on the beaches are foolish but like Jesus am only using that as an example. The ones who do not put into practice what they learn from Jesus will not withstand the storm of judgment.

This teaching was even more significant for his disciples, Jesus knew they would face some strong “storms” in their lifetimes. Jesus’ arrest, crucifixion, and resurrection would usher in a storm that only those with a firm and strong faith foundation could withstand. After that event and because of that event their lives would be forever changed, and persecution would follow them everywhere. For us, in our current age – maybe our trials and “storms” are not as grim, but storms come to us in our everydayness and that is why Jesus warns us.

What we read from Deuteronomy this morning is parallel to Jesus’ teaching. Moses instructs the Israelites regarding the commands God gave to them. This happens as they are about to enter the land God promised them. He tells them to not only take his words into their hearts and minds but also to “tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.” In other words, do

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<sup>1</sup> Stott, John R. W. *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount*. Intersity Press. 1978. Print. 209

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not just be hearers of the word but show your faithfulness to God's command with your lives by putting what you hear into practice. Basically, what he tells them is that faith in God requires living in righteousness – building your house on the solid rock of righteousness.

“Jesus does not set before his followers a string of easy ethical rules, so much as a set of values and ideals which is entirely distinctive from the way of the world”<sup>2</sup> He tells his followers to be different and to be preservers of the faith – salt of the earth. He tells his followers to be distinct and illuminate the kingdom – light of the world. It's not hard to do, for if we sincerely hear the Gospel and profess sincere faith, we will always obey Jesus. The indwelling of the Spirit enables this. His disciples knew that to be true – in John's first letter he writes, “Whoever says “I know him” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person” (1 John 2:4). Because if we have made that confession with our lips and placed God's word in our hearts, we cannot help but desire to do what Jesus teaches.

Paul solidifies Jesus' point of obedience as he writes to the people of Corinth, “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” (1 Cor. 13:2). Love is at the heart of the obedience Jesus mentions. We can find strength for that kind of sacrificial love through putting into practice what Jesus teaches.

“Be doers and not hearers only” is good strategy, however, our doing must be according to the will of God and not just to make ourselves look good. Doing God's will must be part of our everydayness. Being hospitable, forgiving, compassionate, just, and merciful are what pleases God.

So, how does a church build that solid foundation of faith? If prophesying, casting out demons, and performing many miracles are not enough then what exactly does Jesus want from us? A church can say it does all those things; we proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ; we help people who struggle with their demons by allowing them to use our space for their meetings. We spend time trying to make our church building comfortable, keeping it open

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<sup>2</sup> IBID 210

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and trying to fill our pews. Our meetings consider ways to keep within our operating budget and how we can spend our reserves for upkeep etc. Is that however what Jesus wants?

In some cases, maybe what is missing is hospitality, are we welcoming to those who need us, or do we put up fences to keep the “undesirable” ones out? One sin of the religious leaders of Jesus’ time was that they were so intent on protecting the purity of the temple, those needing it the most were locked out. Is that us?

What Jesus wants from us, from his church, is that we hear his words, listen, and then act on what we have heard. Jesus knows we will always be vulnerable to the call of other voices, the voices of our culture. They may change shape and form over the decades, but they will never go away. The choice we must make is to which voice we will listen. Throughout his sermon Jesus presents his followers with alternatives to what the world offers and now tells his followers to be wise.

We are given many options for the foundation on which we build our lives – we can be like the foolish builder and choose to put our security in money or earthly treasure, in vengeance, or holier-than-thou behavior but in the end none of those will withstand the storm of judgment. The only sure foundation is built on Jesus’ wise, enduring words, which point us, only and always, to the living God. To quote Moses, “See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse – the blessing if you obey the commands of the Lord your God that I am giving you today; the curse if you disobey the commands of the Lord your God and turn from the way that I command you today . . .”(Deut. 11:26-28a). Jesus wants us to be wise builders of lasting foundations – that is done through obedience to God’s will and purposes. May it be so.