

'The Things That Matter'

by A.W. Tozer

The sermon emphasizes the importance of building our lives on the foundation of God's greatness and wisdom, and doing things for His glory.

Scripture: Matthew 7:21

Topics: "Foundation in God", "Sacrifice in Christian Life"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes the importance of focusing on the things that truly matter in life, rather than getting caught up in sentimentality or societal expectations. He warns against building our lives on unstable foundations, using the metaphor of houses built on sand versus rock, and stresses that only God is truly great and wise. Tozer encourages believers to ensure that their actions and pursuits are rooted in God, as only what is done for Him will endure. He highlights the necessity of sacrifice in the Christian life, asserting that true progress in God's work comes through dedication and hardship. Ultimately, Tozer calls for a reassessment of priorities, urging the congregation to align their lives with God's will.

Transcript

The Things That Matter

Pastor and author Aiden Wilson Tozer

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I hope I may be forgiven for not preaching on mother today. I have no commission from God to preach on mother. I preach on a high commission from the Most High God. And I find nowhere in the Scriptures that the Bible ever said, go into all the world and talk about Mother. I salute every good mother, and I pity every bad one. A mother is a mother by virtue of the fact that she has born offspring. She is good by the power and grace of God. And when she's a good mother, she has my respect and love and I say I salute every good mother. But there are so many of the other kind roaming the streets these days, that I find it impossible to work up a welter of sentimentality on a day like this. So, I'm going to stay by my commission, and I want to preach today about the things that matter.

Let me read in the seventh chapter of Matthew these words. Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name? And in Thy name, have cast

out devils? And in Thy name done many wonderful works? Then will I profess unto them, I never knew you. Depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore, whosoever heareth these sayings of Mine and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man which built his house upon a rock. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house, and it fell not for it was founded upon a rock. And everyone that heareth these sayings of mine and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man which built his house upon the sand. And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat upon that house. And it fell and great was the fall of it. It came to pass when Jesus had ended these sayings, the people were astonished at His doctrine, for He taught them as One having authority and not as a scribe.

Now, what seems like a generation ago, I gave a talk on the things that matter. But the turnover in this congregation has been so tremendous over the last years because of movings away into other cities and other parts of the country. And because of a new generation that has sprung up, that I want not to repeat, though there will be some repetition as there always is, what are the basic truths?

If you had to quickly tell somebody what we stand for? What's it all about? I want to talk about them. And in this chapter in which I read this story in the book of Matthew, you'll find the story of a great human tragedy. A man here puts all into a building. He puts his labor and his time and his wealth and all his hopes and dreams into that house. And then came the testing day. And the rain descended and the floods came and the winds blew. And great was the fall of that house. And we see this man, this well-intentioned man. And there's no reason to believe that he was a bad man in any criminal sense of the word. There is no reason to believe he was not a good neighbor and a good citizen and a kind hearted man who could give to the Red Cross and generally be a good decent fellow and a nice fellow to know and play golf with. But here he stands now, this man, in the cold gathering dark, homeless and poor, because he built upon the sand.

Now my friends, were religious people, but there are religious people all over the world, more so now than ever since the beginning of time. And we dare not assume anything that isn't so. Wisdom and good sense and reason dictate that we should test our foundation and know whether our assumptions are right or not; the things we're assuming, whether they're right or not. I say wisdom demands this. So I want to look over some of these basic truths this morning and show you by, as it were, reaching into the Bible and extracting the essence of truth out of it like this, taking it out and saying, now here, this is it. And everything else is simply trimmings. Everything else is simply decorations.

Now, I want to tell you what you can presuppose and assume as being absolutely true. And the rains can come and the winds and the storms, the lightning can flash and the thunder can roll, and if you have assumed this, you're right. And the world can change its mind ten times as it has at least five times in the memory of my lifetime about God and religion, four times anyway. And they can assume they can make their changes, but you because you have the Word, because you have the Book before you, you can take these things as a matter for granted. And these things must be built underneath all that you are and do. They must lie like a great foundation. And if they do lie there like a great foundation, they're going to support you in the trying day. And when the testing day comes and the rains descend and the winds blow and the floods come and that house is shaken and shivers from its foundation to its highest peak of its roof, you can still smile dry sitting inside knowing that it's all right with you.

Now, let me name them for you. And I would suggest that you young people take them down. These basic tools which we can assume. One of them is that only God is great. Now, to assume anything else is to

accept falsehood into our hearts. Only God is great. And let me explain what I mean by great. The word "great" is used in its absolute sense and in its relative or comparative sense. And in its comparative sense, anything can be said to be great.

A man may say I had a great crop last year, or he might say, I made a great profit on that deal. And he's using the word rightly because, by the word great he simply means to compare that crop or that profit with another possible crop or profit, all of them small and inconsequential when set against the great backdrop of the world. And we talk about even in the Scriptures it says God sent out a great wind and he made a great fish. But he's talking about a wind that was great because it was a little unusual compared with other winds, and a fish that was great because it was a little larger than other fish. But that's not the sense in which we use the word great here. Only God is great, and we mean by great, eminent, elevated and important.

And the mightiest thought the human mind can entertain, is God. All things began there. William Jennings Bryan used to preach a great sermon on the text, in the beginning God, in the beginning God, Now, men have sought to place greatness, that is, eminence and elevation and importance. They've sought to place greatness in three, probably three things: in things, events, and men; men, in spite of the fact they were made in the image of God, and God has given them a brilliant imagination. We still allow the dust of this world so to cover us over that we can't get off of the ground. And down here in the dust and lint and tatter of the world, we think things are great. We build tall buildings and say it was a great building. We look at the mountain and say it's a great mountain, We look at a sea and say that's a great sea. But we forget my friends, that greatness is relative, and only God is absolutely great. Only God is great.

Then there are events. We think of events. When the Queen of England was crowned, here some two or three or four years ago, the whole world saw her crowned on television. A little housewife, if you please. Not too pretty, but nice-looking and sweet, and has the wherewithal to keep looking nice; a part of a great machine the dates back hundreds of years. And we thought that was a great event. But even she knew better. And even the church people that were around her knew better.

When one of the Louises, I have forgotten which one it was, Louis the 14th or 13th, or something, was lying in state, they sent for one of the greatest preachers, probably the greatest preacher that France ever knew. And they said, we'd like to have you come and deliver an oration over the body of the king. And they were all there, the mighty and the great had sent their plenipotentiaries and their high officials from all over the world. And they sat in that great cathedral and waited for an oration which would be, a poured-out eulogy over this dead little man that lay there in his royal trappings. But the mighty French preacher rose and stepped to the front of the platform and uttered these three or four words, only God is great. And from there on, he preached not about the king, but about God. I'd like to shake his hand in that great day when the worlds have been untuned and fallen apart; and only that which is intrinsically and properly great, stands up under the fury of it. I want to shake his hand and say, you gave me courage to say, only God is great.

Then, men have said, we have said that men are great. And of course, if you want to make a distinction between, say a Churchill and the man who sweeps the street down here at 69th, perhaps Churchill is a great man. And I think he has a right to be called a great man. And we would not take away from him any greatness. But when we say he's a great man or Eisenhower's a great man, we mean they are great compared with a few million other plain men. But, when we think of eternity and the future and judgment and death and heaven and hell and the world to come, we can't think of them as being great men at all.

Only God is great. And we've got to think that only God is great. If we don't, we are far from the Truth.

I copied this morning, out of all places, the Dutch hymnal, a metrical version of the ninetieth Psalm, starting with the second verse. At Thy command man fades and dies, and newborn generations rise. A thousand years are passed away and all to Thee are but a day. Yea, like the watches of the night, with Thee, the ages wing their flight. Man soon yields up his fleeting breath before the swelling tide of death. Like transient sleep, his seasons past; his life is like the tender grass; Luxuriant 'neath the morning sun and withered ere the day is done. Man, in thine anger is consumed and unto grief and sorrow doomed. Before Thy clear and searching sight, our secret sins are brought to light. Beneath Thy wrath, we pine and die, our life expiring like a sigh. Oh, teach though us to count our days, and set our hearts on wisdom's ways. Turn Lord to us in our distress, in pity now, Thy servants bless. Let mercy's dawn dispel our night, and all our day with joy be bright. This, the Dutchman believed. And this, this I believe, that only God is great, and that man can't in any sense of the word be considered to be great.

And the second is, that only God is wise. You see, man's conception of greatness changes. If you go low enough down in the cultural scale, you come to the witch doctor. I think every witch doctor either must be devil-possessed or have a terrific sense of humor which he keeps under control because he puts horns on his head and feathers on his neck and paints himself with every kind of color, and then leaps up and down and make strange unhuman or inhuman sounds. And he's supposed to be somebody; that he's considered a very wise man. When we come up the cultural level a little way, we call philosophers wise. They are very wise indeed, because they sit around and think. And when we get a little higher up the scale, we consider the inventor and the scientist wise. So that the men who have invented our gadgets, we consider them to be very wise. And right now the physicist is perhaps the wisest of all men. We reverently take off our hat, and meekly looking down at the floor, we walk into the presence of a man who has studied physics so that he can break down the atom and send that terrible can of death and destruction down upon cities.

My brethren, only God is wise. And God waits. He waits while history writes her chronicles. And what is history after all, but tiresome records of battles fought long ago and far away. This king, led this host to battle, and he was met there by that king. And he leaped across this lake or river and he caught his enemy unprepared, and so it goes. And it all reads alike. Just exchanged names and you've got history.

Well, God's waiting, sitting quietly waiting for this little top to run down. Long, long ago, God wound it up, and God is waiting for this little top to run down. And there are wise men and thinking men and praying men today, who believe they can notice it's beginning to wobble. The top that was spinning so beautifully is beginning to wobble a bit. And only God knows when it will fall over on one side and stop running. But God is waiting for that spinning top to run down, and then we will know that righteousness and wisdom are twin brothers. That you cannot be wise and not be right. That it's impossible for a man to be a wise man if he is not a good man. That goodness and wisdom go together, that they are I say, twin brothers. Skill and shrewdness and intelligence and talent, these are all vanity without righteousness. And the most skillful man, they said of Henry Ford, that he was the most skillful man with his fingers, that any writer had ever known.

We know a man here in this city, quite an old fellow. And he's quite a widely-known surgeon. And to this day, at least the last I heard of him, he knits and tats and does these other things with his needle in order to keep his fingers skillful. He knows he has to go into a human brain or a human heart. He can't be all thumbs. He has to have skillful fingers. And we can have all the skill in the world, but if it is not allied with

righteousness, it's vanity and vexation of spirit.

And so there is shrewdness and intelligence and high IQs and fine talents. And everywhere throughout the country. We hear about talents, talents, we hear it until we're weary of hearing it. He's a talented young man. She's a talented woman, but talent without righteousness is vanity. And when the top is run down, and the great God who start it spinning looks with pity down upon it, He will reveal. and the world will know what He now knows and what believing men ought to know now, that only God is wise. And that the good man is the wise man after all, and that the highest wisdom in the world is to be childlike and to trust in God.

And then we extract this from the Scriptures and lay this deep into our foundation. And if it's not there, and if we build without it, we're going to stand in the gathering dusk, and watch our house go down. It is this, that without God, nothing merits our attention. That apart from God, nothing is worthwhile. Nothing. Nothing merits my devotion if God isn't in it. Nothing merits my support if God isn't in it. But it is sad to see men waste their lives on trifles to gain money, to gain power, to gain publicity, to gain fame, and to stand for a little while in the flickering light of publicity, and not have God in it. We're wasting our time and we're building on sand. And if what you're doing doesn't have God in it, then you're wasting your time.

But you say, Mr. Tozer, how can it be? I have a job to do, a truck to drive, an office to run. I sell in the store. I teach in a school. I'm a doctor. I am an artist. I am an advertising man. How can God be in what I'm doing? I say to you, if what you're doing is honest, you can bring God into what you're doing by bringing God into your heart and life. And the farmer can raise corn for The Devil or he can raise corn for God. And whatever we do that has not God in it, I say will go down in a roar, when the storm breaks out of the cave of God. And anything, God can be in anything that's good.

The mother who changes the baby and cooks for the family and looks after the house, God can be in that. And we'll talk for a minute about the mother, the good mother, that we read of in the Scripture. Good, God bless, and we thank God for every good mother. And she can bring God into her lowliest, simplest tasks. And I don't like to hear the word "merely" a housewife, merely a housewife. Eve was a housewife and the mother of Jesus was a housewife and Suzanne Wesley was a housewife. And who and by what authority then do we have a right to make a woman a second class citizen and say she's nothing but a housewife? A housewife who can dedicate herself to God, can have a house that's as much a part of the whole pattern and scheme of God as the church itself is, I mean, the building itself is and the fellowship.

So, if what you're doing doesn't have God in it, or if it morally can't have God in it. Or if you by selfishness exclude God from it, or you by unbelief exclude God from it, then it'll be a sandy foundation upon which you're building a lifetime of toil. And in that testing day, when the rains descend and the flood comes and the thunder roars, you will see your house go down. And what could be sadder in the gathering gloom amid the darkness to see the little man flee in terror from the house that had no foundation, and slip away into the night, to be caught at last and judged.

Well, then I give you this also, that only what we do for God will remain to us and I have practically covered that already. So I'll skip it and say again, only what we give to God is safe. Only what we give to God is safe. They say that inflation is cutting down the value of our dollars. And if a man has \$1,000 in the bank, honest money, money that he's laid up after having given not only his tithes, but more than his tithes. After having, after having given generously of his goods to help the poor and keep the work of God going along, then he lays up a little. They say that inflation is cutting the value of it down, so that month by

month and year by year, you'll have less than you had before. I don't know about all that. If you listen to one politician, you take one side and you listen to another and you take another side. But I do know this, that only what God gets from you will be safe at last, only what God gets.

Some of you are too young to remember, but I remember. We had five sons. The year 1933 The election was in '32 and the collapse in '33. No relation, however, between the election and the collapse. But we had laid up a little bank account. Oh, it didn't amount too much. Maybe the most it was about \$17 at least about \$1 and a half for the five boys. And one day wham! They closed the bank and it's never been open since. Somebody has that money. I don't know who got it, but I know it's gone. Those boys are scattered all over the country and out of the country and their money is in somebody's hands somewhere, and we lost it.

Now I don't know what that illustrates, probably nothing. But anyway, my friend, wherever, wherever you will give a thing to God, you've got that. And whatever you give to God, you've got that still. Whatever you give to God, you've got. That's yours and when you will lay it in the hand of God. But you say, I can't lay in the hand of the Lord. If Jesus were here in person, I could walk up to Him and put it in His holy hand, but he's gone. And the world has not seen him for 1900 years. Well, He's got the poor and the needy. He's got his church. He's got His foreign missionary program. He has His widows, and He has His displaced persons and He has the naked savage and he has all over the world His people. I don't say they're His in the sense that they're born into His kingdom, but He loves them and is responsible for them.

And he that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord, and He will repay him again. Does the Lord owe you anything, sir? He that giveth to the poor lendeth to the Lord. So, what you give to the poor, you lend to the Lord, and that's all you've got in that last day. There isn't anything quite so terribly, tragically, pathetic, as to see an old man lugged out and put down in a hole, who, three, four or five days before could have written checks that would have bought out all of us. Now, his one hand is folded over his other hand. And they've got all sorts of gimmicks and gadgets there to try to save the poor old derelict, poor old vagrant on the face of the earth. All he could do is write checks against huge accounts all over the world. But now his poor old white hand can't hold a pen. Nothing so pitiful, sir, I think in this world as that. And they put a cross on his chest and they put a prayer book by his head and they burn the candle over him. And they frantically cram and cram for the great examination, hoping they can help the old fellow who wasted a lifetime and got nearsighted looking at ledgers and counting up his wealth. Now he's gone. No man can bring him back and the place thereof shall know him no more.

But I have a kind of a smile in my heart when I think of what some men have done. I've heard of a few of them. They made a lot of money. They had the Midas touch, and wherever they put their fingers, it turned to money for them and they became millionaires overnight. And some of those men saw that. And toward the end, they started giving it away with a shovel. You remember, old Carnegie did that. And oh, there were several others that we read about in the newspapers. They knew the end wasn't going to be long out there, and so they started giving it away. They wanted to die poor.

I claim, what you will to God you don't give to God and at all. The Undertaker gives it to God. What a man wills to God and says I hereby bequeath that after I'm dead, that such and such a church or missionary society can have my money. Why brother, what have you got to say about it? You will be dead? You will be dead. And what we will to God, we haven't given to God at all. What we give to God when it matters means something. That's giving to God. But again, we've got to build this into our structure and lay this underneath everything we do, that God's work goes forward by sacrifice.

Now Christians have ignored this and then forgotten it. And we're the easiest, smoothest, slickest bunch of religious tabby cats a sun ever shone down on. Everybody's gotten up and most of us have too much. But ease is a deadly disease my brother. And the human spirit when it allows itself to go without discipline and hard work and sacrifice, gets fat and flabby just like a human body does, and there are so many of the Lord's children. Why are the communists so powerful? They're powerful because they're trained down and trimmed down like athletes. And they're ready to go out and die for their cause. And they believe in it so fiercely, even though it's The Devil's own doctrine. They believe in it so fiercely they're willing to die for it, and willing to suffer for it. And they go out to lose by it. Lose in order that they might communize the world.

Now, I think it is a frightful doctrine. And as I've said before, I believe it is The Devil's imitation of Christianity. Nevertheless, it's going fast throughout the world, because those who hold it believe in it. And we Christians say that we've accepted Christ, and we're just waiting for the Lord to come. And we're going to rule over five cities. Some of you can't rule your temper. How are you going to rule five cities? Some of you can't control your appetite. How is God going to give you anything to do in the millennium? Some of you have never learned to live sacrificially. You've never born a cross. You've never felt the jag of a thorn as they pushed it down on your forehead. And only the work of God goes forth only by sacrifice.

And there's a lot of religious work where nobody's sacrificing, except the poor suckers that pay the bills, the lay people that don't know any better. Poor old ladies that go down into their old-fashioned cotton sock and take out big bills that they've saved from the days of Coolidge, and tearfully give it to some scoundrel who's pleading for it over the radio so he can take a trip to Bermuda, and thus, further the cause of foreign missions.

Well, God's work goes forward by sacrifice my friends. Somebody's bleeding somewhere and wherever there is human tears and blood, there is progress. But wherever there isn't human tear or human blood, there is no progress.

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