

# Sermon on the Mount, 13

by John Wesley

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*The sermon emphasizes the necessity of genuine faith and obedience to God's will as the true foundation for salvation.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 7:21

**Topics:** "Faith and Works", "Building on Christ"

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## Description

John Wesley emphasizes the critical distinction between mere verbal profession of faith and the genuine practice of God's will, warning that not all who call upon the Lord will enter the kingdom of heaven. He illustrates this through the parable of the wise and foolish builders, urging believers to build their lives on the solid foundation of Christ and His teachings rather than on superficial religious acts. Wesley stresses that true faith must be accompanied by works that reflect a transformed heart, as mere outward actions without inner righteousness are insufficient for salvation. He calls for self-examination to ensure one's hope is built on Christ alone, encouraging a deep, heartfelt relationship with God that manifests in love and obedience. Ultimately, Wesley reassures that those who truly follow God's will shall stand firm against life's storms and inherit eternal life.

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## Transcript

"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? And 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 every one 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." Matt. 7:21-27

1. Our Divine Teacher, having declared the whole counsel of God with regard to the way of salvation, and observed the chief hindrances of those who desire to walk therein, now closes the whole with these weighty words; thereby, as it were, setting his seal to his prophecy, and impressing his whole authority on what he had delivered, that it might stand firm to all generations.

2. For thus saith the Lord, that none may ever conceive there is any other way than this, "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? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: Depart from me, ye that work iniquity. Therefore, 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."

3. I design, in the following discourse, First, to consider the case of him who thus builds his house upon the sand: Secondly, to show the wisdom of him who builds upon a rock: And, Thirdly, to conclude with a practical application.

I. 1. And, First, I am to consider the case of him who builds his house upon the sand. It is concerning him our Lord saith, "Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." And this is a decree which cannot pass; which standeth fast for ever and ever. It therefore imports us, in the highest degree, throughly to understand the force of these words. Now what are we to understand by that expression, "That saith unto me, Lord, Lord?" It undoubtedly means, that thinks of going to heaven by any other way than that which I have now described. It therefore implies (to begin at the lowest point) all good words, all verbal religion. It includes whatever creeds we may rehearse, whatever professions of faith we make, whatever number of prayers we may repeat, whatever thanksgivings we read or say to God. We may speak good of his name, and declare his lovingkindness to the children of men. We may be talking of all his mighty acts, and telling of his salvation from day to day. By comparing spiritual things with spiritual we may show the meaning of the oracles of God. We may explain the mysteries of his kingdom, which have been hid from the beginning of the world. We may speak with the tongue of angels, rather than men, concerning the deep things of God. We may proclaim to sinners, "Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world!" Yea, we may do this with such a measure of the power of God, and such demonstration of his Spirit, as to save many souls from death, and hide a multitude of sins. And yet it is very possible, all this may be no more than saying, "Lord, Lord." After I have thus successfully preached to others, still I myself may be a castaway. I may, in the hand of God, snatch many souls from hell, and yet drop into it when I have done. I may bring many others to the kingdom of heaven, and yet myself never enter there. Reader, if God hath ever blessed my word to thy soul, pray that he may be merciful to me a sinner!

2. The saying, "Lord, Lord," may, Secondly, imply the doing no harm. We may abstain from every presumptuous sin, from every kind of outward wickedness. We may refrain from all those ways of acting or speaking which are forbidden in holy writ. We may be able to say to all those among whom we live, "Which of you convinceth me of sin?" We may have a conscience void of any external offence, towards God and towards man. We may be clear of all uncleanness, ungodliness, and unrighteousness, as to the outward act; or, (as the Apostle testifies concerning himself,) "touching the righteousness of the law," that is, outward righteousness, "blameless." But yet we are not hereby justified. Still this is no more than saying, "Lord, Lord;" and if we go no farther than this, we shall never "enter into the kingdom of heaven."

3. The saying, "Lord, Lord," may imply, Thirdly, many of what are usually styled good works. A man may attend the supper of the Lord, may hear abundance of excellent sermons, and omit no opportunity of partaking all the other ordinances of God. I may do good to my neighbour, deal my bread to the hungry, and cover the naked with a garment. I may be so zealous of good works as even to "give all my goods to

feed the poor." Yea, and I may do all this with a desire to please God, and a real belief that I do please him thereby; (which is undeniably the case of those our Lord introduces, saying unto him, "Lord, Lord;") and still I may have no part in the glory which shall be revealed.

4. If any man marvels at this, let him acknowledge he is a stranger to the whole religion of Jesus Christ; and, in particular, to that perfect portraiture thereof which he has set before us in this discourse. For how far short is all this of that righteousness and true holiness which he has described therein! How widely distant from that inward kingdom of heaven which is now opened in the believing soul, -- which is first sown in the heart as a grain of mustard-seed, but afterwards putteth forth great branches, on which grow all the fruits of righteousness, every good temper, and word, and work.

5. Yet as clearly as he had declared this, as frequently as he had repeated, that none who have not this kingdom of God within them shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; our Lord well knew that many would not receive this saying, and therefore confirms it yet again: "Many" (saith he: not one; not a few only: It is not a rare or an uncommon case) "shall say unto me in that day," not only, We have said many prayers; We have spoken thy praise; We have refrained from evil; We have exercised ourselves in doing good; -- but, what is abundantly more than this, "We have prophesied in thy name; in thy name have we cast out devils; in thy name done many wonderful works." "We have prophesied;" -- we have declared thy will to mankind; we have showed sinners the way to peace and glory. And we have done this "in thy name;" according to the truth of thy gospel; yea, and by thy authority, who didst confirm the word with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven. For in or by thy name, by the power of thy word and of thy Spirit, "have we cast out devils;" out of the souls which they had long claimed as their own, and whereof they had full and quiet possession. "And in thy name," by thy power, not our own, "have we done many wonderful works;" insomuch that "even the dead heard the voice of the Son of God" speaking by us, and lived. "And then will I profess" even "unto them, I never knew you;" no, not then, when you were "casting out devils in my name:" Even then I did not know you as my own; for your heart was not right toward God. Ye were not yourselves meek and lowly; ye were not lovers of God, and of all mankind; ye were not renewed in the image of God; ye were not holy as I am holy. "Depart from me, ye" who, notwithstanding all this, are "workers of iniquity;" -- anomia, -- Ye are transgressors of my law, my law of holy and perfect love.

6. It is to put this beyond all possibility of contradiction, that our Lord confirms it by that apposite comparison: "Every one," saith he, "who 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;" -- as they will surely do, sooner or later, upon every soul of man; even the floods of outward affliction, or inward temptation; the storms of pride, anger, fear, or desire; -- "and it fell: And great was the fall of it:" So that it perished for ever and ever. Such must be the portion of all who rest in anything short of that religion which is above described. And the greater will their fall be, because they "heard those sayings, and" yet "did them not."

II. 1. I am, Secondly, to show the wisdom of him that doeth them, that buildeth his house upon a rock. He indeed is wise, "who doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." He is truly wise, whose "righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the Scribes and Pharisees." He is poor in spirit; knowing himself even as also he is known. He sees and feels all his sin, and all his guilt, till it is washed away by the atoning blood. He is conscious of his lost estate, of the wrath of God abiding on him, and of his utter inability to help himself, till he is filled with peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. He is meek and gentle, patient toward all men, never "returning evil for evil, or railing for railing, but contrariwise blessing," till he overcomes evil with good. His soul is athirst for nothing on earth, but only for God, the living God. He has

bowels of love for all mankind, and is ready to lay down his life for his enemies. He loves the Lord his God with all his heart, and with all his mind, and soul, and strength. He alone shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, who, in this spirit, doeth good unto all men; and who, being for this cause despised and rejected of men, being hated, reproached, and persecuted, rejoices and is "exceeding glad," knowing in whom he hath believed, and being assured these light, momentary afflictions will "work out for him an eternal weight of glory."

2. How truly wise is this man! He knows himself; -- an everlasting spirit, which came forth from God, and was sent down into an house of clay, not to do his own will, but the will of Him that sent him. He knows the world; -- the place in which he is to pass a few days or years, not as an inhabitant, but as a stranger and sojourner, in his way to the everlasting habitations; and accordingly he uses the world as not abusing it, and as knowing the fashion of it passes away. He knows God; -- his Father and his Friend, the parent of all good, the centre of the spirits of all flesh, the sole happiness of all intelligent beings. He sees, clearer than the light of the noon-day sun, that this is the end of man, to glorify Him who made him for himself, and to love and enjoy him for ever. And with equal clearness he sees the means to that end, to the enjoyment of God in glory; even now to know, to love, to imitate God, and to believe in Jesus Christ whom he hath sent.

3. He is a wise man, even in God's account; for "he buildeth his house upon a rock;" upon the Rock of Ages, the everlasting Rock, the Lord Jesus Christ. Fitly is he so called; for he changeth not: He is "the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever." To him both the man of God of old, and the Apostle citing his words, bear witness: "Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: They shall perish; but thou remainest: And they all shall wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: But thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." (Heb. 1:10-12) Wise, therefore, is the man who buildeth on Him; who layeth Him for his only foundation; who builds only upon his blood and righteousness, upon what he hath done and suffered for us. On this corner-stone he fixes his faith, and rests the whole weight of his soul upon it. He is taught of God to say, "Lord, I have sinned; I deserve the nethermost hell; but I am justified freely by thy grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ; and the life I now live, I live by faith in Him, who loved me, and gave himself for me: -- The life I now live; namely, a divine, heavenly life; a life which is hid with Christ in God. I now live, even in the flesh, a life of love; of pure love both to God and man; a life of holiness and happiness; praising God, and doing all things to his glory."

4. Yet, let not such an one think that he shall not see war any more; that he is now out of the reach of temptation. It still remains for God to prove the grace he hath given: He shall be tried as gold in the fire. He shall be tempted not less than they who know not God: Perhaps abundantly more; for Satan will not fail to try to the uttermost those whom he is not able to destroy. Accordingly, "the rain" will impetuously descend; only at such times and in such a manner as seems good, not to the prince of the power of the air, but to Him "whose kingdom ruleth over all." "The floods," or torrents, will come; they will lift up their waves and rage horribly. But to them also, the Lord that sitteth above the water-floods, that remaineth a King for ever, will say, "Hitherto shall ye come, and no farther: Here shall your proud waves be stayed." "The winds will blow, and beat upon that house," as though they would tear it up from the foundation: But they cannot prevail: It falleth not; for it is founded upon a rock. He buildeth on Christ by faith and love; therefore, he shall not be cast down. He "shall not fear though the earth be moved, and though the hills be carried into the midst of the sea." "Though the waters thereof rage and swell, and the mountains shake at the tempest of the same;" still he "dwelleth under the defence of the Most High, and is safe under the shadow of the

Almighty."

III. 1. How nearly then does it concern every child of man, practically to apply these things to himself! diligently to examine on what foundation he builds, whether on a rock or on the sand! How deeply are you concerned to inquire, "What is the foundation of my hope? Whereon do I build my expectation of entering into the kingdom of heaven? Is it not built on the sand? upon my orthodoxy, or right opinions, which, by a gross abuse of words, I have called faith? upon my having a set of notions, suppose more rational or scriptural than others have?" Alas! what madness is this! Surely this is building on the sand, or, rather, on the froth of the sea! Say, "I am convinced of this: Am I not again building my hope on what is equally unable to support it? Perhaps on my belonging to 'so excellent a church; reformed after the true Scripture model; blessed with the purest doctrine, the most primitive liturgy, the most apostolical form of government!" These are, doubtless, so many reasons for praising God, as they may be so many helps to holiness; but they are not holiness itself: And if they are separate from it, they will profit me nothing; nay, they will leave me the more without excuse, and exposed to the greater damnation. Therefore, if I build my hope upon this foundation, I am still building upon the sand.

2. You cannot, you dare not, rest here. Upon what next will you build your hope of salvation? -- upon your innocence? upon your doing no harm? your not wronging or hurting anyone? Well; allow this plea to be true. You are just in all your dealings; you are a downright honest man; you pay every man his own; you neither cheat nor extort; you act fairly with all mankind; and you have a conscience towards God; you do not live in any known sin. Thus far is well: But still it is not the thing. You may go thus far, and yet never come to heaven. When all this harmlessness flows from a right principle, it is the least part of the religion of Christ. But in you it does not flow from a right principle, and therefore is no part at all of religion. So that in grounding your hope of salvation on this, you are still building upon the sand.

3. Do you go farther yet? Do you add to the doing no harm, the attending all the ordinances of God? Do you, at all opportunities, partake of the Lord's supper? use public and private prayer? fast often? hear and search the Scriptures, and meditate thereon? These things, likewise, ought you to have done, from the time you first set your face towards heaven. Yet these things also are nothing, being alone. They are nothing without "the weightier matters of the law." And those you have forgotten: At least, you experience them not: -- Faith, mercy, and love of God; holiness of heart; heaven opened in the soul. Still, therefore, you build upon the sand.

4. Over and above all this, are you zealous of good works? Do you, as you have time, do good to all men? Do you feed the hungry, and clothe the naked, and visit the fatherless and widow in their affliction? Do you visit those that are sick? relieve them that are in prison? Is any a stranger, and you take him in? Friend, come up higher! Do you "prophesy" in the "name" of Christ? Do you preach the truth as it is in Jesus? And does the influence of his Spirit attend your word, and make it the power of God unto salvation? Does he enable you to bring sinners from darkness to light, from the power of Satan unto God? Then go and learn what thou hast so often taught, "By grace ye are saved through faith:" "Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but of his own mercy he saveth us." Learn to hang naked upon the cross of Christ, counting all thou hast done but dung and dross. Apply to him just in the spirit of the dying thief, of the harlot with her seven devils! else thou art still on the sand; and, after saving others, thou wilt lose thy own soul.

5. Lord, increase my faith, if I now believe! else, give me faith, though but as a grain of mustard-seed! -- But "what doth it profit, if a man say he hath faith, and have not works? Can" that "faith save him?" O no!

That faith which hath not works, which doth not produce both inward and outward holiness, which does not stamp the whole image of God on the heart, and purify us as he is pure; that faith which does not produce the whole of the religion described in the foregoing chapters, is not the faith of the gospel, not the Christian faith, not the faith which leads to glory. O beware of this, above all other snares of the devil, -- of resting on unholy, unsaving faith! If thou layest stress on this, thou art lost for ever: Thou still buildest thy house upon the sand. When "the rain descends, and the floods come, it will surely fall, and great will be the fall of it."

6. Now, therefore, build thou upon a rock. By the grace of God, know thyself. Know and feel that thou wast shapen in wickedness, and in sin did thy mother conceive thee; and that thou thyself hast been heaping sin upon sin, ever since thou couldst discern good from evil. Own thyself guilty of eternal death; and renounce all hope of ever being able to save thyself. Be it all thy hope, to be washed in his blood, and purified by his Spirit, "who himself bore" all "thy sins in his own body upon the tree." And if thou knowest he hath taken away thy sins, so much the more abase thyself before him, in a continual sense of thy total dependence on him for every good thought, and word, and work, and of thy utter inability to all good unless he "water thee every moment."

7. Now weep for your sins, and mourn after God, till he turns your heaviness into joy. And even then weep with them that weep; and for them that weep not for themselves. Mourn for the sins and miseries of mankind; and see, but just before your eyes, the immense ocean of eternity, without a bottom or a shore, which has already swallowed up millions of millions of men, and is gaping to devour them that yet remain! See here, the house of God eternal in the heavens! there, hell and destruction without a covering! -- and thence learn the importance of every moment, which just appears, and is gone for ever!

8. Now add to your seriousness, meekness of wisdom. Hold an even scale as to all your passions, but in particular, as to anger, sorrow, and fear. Calmly acquiesce in whatsoever is the will of God. Learn in every state wherein you are, therewith to be content. Be mild to the good: Be gentle toward all men; but especially toward the evil and the unthankful. Beware, not only of outward expressions of anger, such as calling thy brother, Raca, or Thou fool; but of every inward emotion contrary to love, though it go no farther than the heart. Be angry at sin, as an affront offered to the Majesty of heaven; but love the sinner still: Like our Lord, who "looked round about upon the Pharisees with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts." He was grieved at the sinners, angry at sin. Thus be thou "angry, and sin not!"

9. Now do thou hunger and thirst, not for "the meat that perisheth, but for that which endureth unto everlasting life." Trample underfoot the world, and the things of the world; all these riches, honours, pleasures. What is the world to thee? Let the dead bury their dead; but follow thou after the image of God. And beware of quenching that blessed thirst, if it is already excited in thy soul, by what is vulgarly called religion; a poor, dull farce, a religion of form, of outside show, which leaves the heart still cleaving to the dust, as earthly and sensual as ever. Let nothing satisfy thee but the power of godliness, but a religion that is spirit and life; the dwelling in God and God in thee; the being an inhabitant of eternity; the entering in by the blood of sprinkling "within the veil," and "sitting in heavenly places with Christ Jesus!"

10. Now, seeing thou canst do all things through Christ strengthening thee, be merciful as thy Father in heaven is merciful! Love thy neighbour as thyself! Love friends and enemies as thy own soul! And let thy love be longsuffering and patient towards all men. Let it be kind, soft, benign; inspiring thee with the most amiable sweetness, and the most fervent and tender affection. Let it rejoice in the truth, wheresoever it is found; the truth that is after godliness. Enjoy whatsoever brings glory to God, and promotes peace and goodwill among men. In love, cover all things, -- of the dead and the absent speaking nothing but good;

believe all things which may any way tend to clear your neighbour's character; hope all things in his favour; and endure all things, triumphing over all opposition: For true love never faileth, in time or in eternity.

11. Now be thou pure in heart; purified through faith from every unholy affection; "cleansing thyself from all filthiness of flesh and spirit, and perfecting holiness in the fear of God." Being, through the power of his grace, purified from pride, by deep poverty of spirit; from anger, from every unkind or turbulent passion, by meekness and mercifulness; from every desire but to please and enjoy God, by hunger and thirst after righteousness; now love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy strength!"

12. In a word: Let thy religion be the religion of the heart. Let it lie deep in thy inmost soul. Be thou little, and base, and mean, and vile (beyond what words can express) in thy own eyes; amazed and humbled to the dust by the love of God which is in Christ Jesus. Be serious. Let the whole stream of thy thoughts, words, and actions flow from the deepest conviction that thou standest on the edge of the great gulf, thou and all the children of men, just ready to drop in, either into everlasting glory or everlasting burnings! Let thy soul be filled with mildness, gentleness, patience, long-suffering towards all men; -- at the same time that all which is in thee is athirst for God, the living God; longing to awake up after his likeness, and to be satisfied with it! Be thou a lover of God and of all mankind! In this spirit do and suffer all things! Thus show thy faith by thy works; thus "do the will of thy Father which is in heaven!" And, as sure as thou now walkest with God on earth, thou shalt also reign with him in glory!

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