

Sunday – September 4, 2011  
Pastor – Rev. Walter W. Westbrook  
Sermon – **Sermon on the Mount VII**  
**Rock and Sand**

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### **Matthew 7:21-23**

We're back to the idea that Talk Is Cheap. We can say the right things, and even *do* the right things (miracles), but why are we saying and doing the right things? Is it because we want to do God's will? Or is it because we want to impress somebody? Being a Christian means serving God because we love God and we know that God loves us; not doing what we know God wants because that will benefit us by impressing the right people.

This also leads us back to the idea that God Is Not Stupid. God knows if we are doing things out of love for God OR out of self-interest. There will be more on this in a moment.

### **Matthew 7:24-27**

The houses both builders build appear to be fine. I don't think we'd be out of line to say that they were identical, essentially the same house. They both look the way you would want a house to look.

But, one is built with storms in mind. The other is built with no concern for storms. And storms come, and the difference becomes obvious.

John Wesley interpreted the storms as temptations. I think we can think of this also as the disasters and suffering and pain that we find in life, and the temptation we find in those circumstances to give up on God and seek some other source of strength and solace.

So, building on rock is basing our lives on The Sermon on the Mount. I don't think the parable of the two houses is arbitrarily stuck at the end of The Sermon on the Mount. Jesus concludes his Sermon with this parable because he is illustrating the difference between a life built on this rock and a life built on the need to *look* like a follower of Christ. The two lives will look the same, until the life built on sand, built on the idea that the only important thing is *looking* Christian and not *being* Christian, is completely destroyed by stress and calamity, and the temptations that come in their wake.

Storms come. Bad things happen. Temptations rear their ugly heads, no matter what you build your house on. But, a house built on the desire to serve God above all else, is built on rock. The life built on the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, which are most clearly and succinctly stated in The Sermon on the Mount, will weather the storms. It will still be standing when the storms have passed.

### **Matthew 7:28-29**

The crowds were astounded, they were amazed, they were in shock. Not because of what Jesus taught, at least not entirely. They were in shock because, while he places himself in the tradition of Hebrew Scripture (“You have heard that it was said...”), he teaches according to his own authority (“But, I say to you...”).

Up to that time, and ever since, teachers and preachers in the Judeo-Christian tradition never claim to be teaching or preaching based on our own authority. Our authority is based on doing God’s will by explaining God’s will as we have understood it from scripture, tradition, experience and reason.

If we come up with anything new, it’s a new understanding of what God is saying. And this changes as time goes by. A long time ago, we would have defended the idea that the earth is flat and that the sun orbits around it. Not so long ago, we might have argued that God wanted white people to own black people, or, later, we might have argued for segregation because of the inherent superiority of the white race over the black race, not to mention all the other races.

Those positions were taught and preached by people who were using the Bible and church tradition and their own experience and reason. But, those ideas changed, and they changed without having to abandon the Bible.

The point I’m trying to make is that we try to base what we’re saying on that long history of ideas we find in the Bible. In fact, we’d better base our ideas on the teachings of Jesus, in particular. Otherwise, we will be able to find support for hatred, when Jesus would deny that hatred is ever right or good.

And, this need of preachers and teachers to be in that long line of witnesses is what shocked Jesus’ listeners. He didn’t feel obligated to fall into that line.

He was having original thoughts and expressing completely alien ideas, such as loving your enemy, blessing the meek and the grieving, treating others they way you'd like to be treated, refusing to judge, and you can't serve God and wealth.

And he taught as someone who is a direct spokesman for God. We don't think this is shocking because we know the story. But, his first listeners didn't know the story. So, their minds were blown, to say the least.

So, as we come to the end of this sermon series on The Sermon on the Mount, we might be asking ourselves, Can anybody live this way? And, why would they want to? It's easy to think of reasons not to love our enemy, reasons to judge, reasons to try to serve God *and* wealth.

It becomes clear that we shall never be able to live The Sermon on the Mount without Christ. We shall never even *want* to live The Sermon on the Mount without Christ. Its demands are incomprehensible unless we have Christ deep in our hearts. Oh, we can understand what the words, "Love your enemy" mean, but without Christ, we'll never understand why in the world we'd want to do that.

So, as I've mentioned a couple of times over the last few weeks, The Sermon on the Mount is not about Jesus. It's about *you*. It is about how you and I should live, how we can carry Christ's message into the world with our lives, not just our words. *Showing* people what it means to be a Christian is always much more effective than *telling* people what it means. Remember, Talk Is Cheap. And everybody knows it.