

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have the opportunity to learn how to understand and teach the parables of Jesus Christ. By using *the guidelines for interpreting parables*, two teachers will study **the parable of the wise and foolish builders** in Matthew 7:24-27 and Luke 6:46-49. Remember that this parable was told in the context of parables about God's kingdom. This is a parable concerning OBEDIENCE TO GOD'S WORD IN GOD'S KINGDOM. As you listen to this programme, make notes in a notebook or record the programme.

A parable is an earthly story with a heavenly meaning. It is a true-to-life story or illustration designed to teach a spiritual truth. Jesus used the commonplace and the events of everyday to illumine the mysteries of the kingdom of God and to confront people with the reality of their situation and their need for renewal. Please read Matthew 7:24-27.

(S) Matthew 7:24-27 says, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

(T) **POINT 1. UNDERSTAND THE NATURAL STORY OF THE PARABLE.**

The parable is told in figurative language and the spiritual meaning of the parable is based on that. Therefore we will first study the words and the cultural and historical facts of the background of the story. Let us take turns to explain the true-to-life elements of the story of this parable. The story consists of three parts:

(S) First part. The manner in which the two builders build. Two people each built a house. The kind of houses to which Jesus referred was not constructed as sturdily as many present day building regulations demand. Thieves were able to dig through a wall (Mt 6:19). The roof was made of wooden poles on which earth and grass was packed, and it could easily be broken open (Mk 2:4; Ps 129:6). Everything therefore depended on the foundation! These two builders built their houses in a valley containing the bed of a water course. During the dry season this river-bed is dry or almost dry, with the result that it cannot damage these houses. The first builder is wise, sensible, and *thinks about the future*. He reckons with the fact that after the dry season, the wet season will come. So he builds his house to stand in every season of the year. He removes the sand or loose gravel and digs down to the rock bottom (Lk 6:48). Then he lays the foundation of his house on this rock bottom. The second builder is foolish, because he *does not consider what will happen in the future*. He builds his house directly on the sand or loose gravel layer, which lies in various thicknesses on the rock bottom.

(T) Second part. The test to which their houses are subjected. During the rainy season, the strong wind drives thunderstorm upon thunderstorm inland from the Mediterranean Sea in the west. Beside the strong winds, there are cloudbursts and the water-level in the river-bed in the valley rises rapidly. The strong winds batter against the walls and the water eventually rushes against the foundations of the houses.

(S) Third part. The result of the test and the reason of this result. The water cannot undermine the foundation of the first house because its foundation is built on the rock. But it quickly washes the sand or gravel under the foundation of the second house away. Although the strong winds batter the walls of the house built on the rock, it cannot topple it, because the strong foundation keeps it in place. But the walls of the second house collapse immediately into the torrent of water and the whole house is completely swept away!

(T) **POINT 2. EXAMINE THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT AND DETERMINE THE ELEMENTS OF THE PARABLE.**

The context of the parable may consist of *the setting* and *the explanation or application* of the parable. The setting of the parable may state *the occasion* for telling the parable, or describe *the circumstances* at the time of telling the parable. The setting is usually found *before* the parable and the explanation or application is usually found *after* the parable.

Let us take turns to explain the context of this parable. The setting of this parable is found in Matthew chapter 5-7, the Sermon on the Mount.

(S) First. The citizens of the kingdom of God. In Matthew 5:1-16, Jesus describes *the citizens of the kingdom of God*, when they are really blessed in God's eyes and how they should relate to the world. In Matthew 5:17 - 7:12, Jesus

describes *the righteousness in the kingdom* of God, which he, the King, grants and demands of the citizens of the kingdom of God. He grants righteousness by fulfilling God's requirements by atoning for sins and he demands righteousness by teaching how Christians should live as citizens of God's kingdom. Finally, in Matthew 7:13-27, Jesus urges all who are reached by his message, whether at the time it was delivered or later, to *enter into the kingdom* (Mt 7:13-14). He especially warns them against the teachings of the false prophets (Mt 7:15-20) and last of all contrasts the two final destinations to which the narrow and the broad way leads (Mt 7:21-27).

(T) Second. The contrast between the false prophets and the true prophets. In Matthew 7:15-20, Jesus warns the citizens of God's kingdom against the false prophets. A false prophet is a person who lacks divine authorisation and brings his own message, generally telling people what they like to hear (Isa 30:10; Jer 23:9-32; 2 Tim 4:3-4). He pretends to speak the truth, but actually speaks lies. A true prophet is commissioned by God and conveys God's message to people. People will be able to recognise the prophets by the kind of fruit they bear. Their inward character is revealed in their thinking, speech, behaviour, and in the results of their ministry. A true prophet is known by his doctrine!

(S) Third. The contrast between the talkers and the doers. In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus warns the citizens of God's kingdom against the pretenders, the hypocrites. A *talker* is a person who talks as if he is a Christian, but he does not put God's will into practice. He pretends to be a Christian, but actually is not born again. He is not a genuine Christian, but a nominal Christian. Jesus does not deny that non-Christians can perform certain miracles, through God's power and permission (Judas, Mt 10:1), or through Satan's power (2 Thes 2:9-10) or through their own trickery and illusions, which they create in order to deceive the people. The reason why these people are condemned, is not because their preaching had been wrong or their miracles had been spurious, but that they had not practised what they preached (Mt 23:3). A *doer* is a person who says and does what is pleasing to God. He preaches the truth and practises the truth he preaches. A true doer is known by his life!

(T) Fourth. The contrast between the doers and the hearers. In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus warns the citizens of God's kingdom against the foolish people. A foolish person hears what Jesus teaches, but does not put it into practice. A wise person always puts the teachings of Jesus into practice.

(S) The story of this parable is contained in Matthew 7:24-27 in the form of an exhortation. The explanation or application of this parable is actually contained in this exhortation. Jesus explains that building upon the rock has to do with "these words of mine" and "putting them into practise". The words of Jesus are first of all the words he spoke in the Sermon on the Mount (Mt 5-7), and, by extension of the figure, all the words he spoke to people, which are now recorded in the Bible.

(T) **POINT 3. IDENTIFY THE RELEVANT AND IRRELEVANT DETAILS OF THE PARABLE.**

Jesus Christ did not intend every detail in the parable to have some spiritual significance. The relevant details are those details in the story of the parable that reinforce the message of the parable. Therefore, we should not ascribe independent spiritual significance to every detail of the parable.

Which of the details in this parable are really essential or relevant?

(S) First. Jesus does not explain the rock and the sand in this parable. Therefore we should not speculate about its meaning. Nevertheless, since by what Jesus Christ says and commands, he reveals himself and his will, it is certainly correct to say that, as far as the spiritual meaning of the parable of the wise and foolish builders is concerned, *the Rock* represents Jesus Christ and his Word and *the sand* represents human insights and views.

(T) Second. Jesus explains building upon the rock and therefore it is an essential detail. Building upon rock represents *putting Christ's words into practice*" Everyone who lives in accordance with the words of Jesus Christ, builds his life on Jesus Christ! Building upon sand represents trusting in himself, not thinking about the future and especially not putting Christ's words into practice.

(S) Third. Jesus does not explain the details of the rain, the streams and the wind. However, from the context it is clear that they represent *the test*. The test may come in the form of false prophets (Mt 7:15-20), or various trials (Gen 22, Abraham; Job 1-2, Job), or temptations (Gen 39, Joseph), or bereavement (Gen 42:36; Job 1:18-22), or death (Acts 7:59-60; 9:36-37), but it will especially come in the Final Judgement (Mt 24:42-44; 25:6,31-33).

(T) Fourth. Jesus does not explain the detail that the house did not fall. In the Bible it is connected to the victory of the obedient Christian. Every wise man, who shows by his deeds that he has taken the words of Jesus into his heart and life, will never be put to shame (1 Pet 2:6). Even the Final Judgement Day will not be terrible for him, but instead, it will be a day of triumph!

(S) Fifth. Jesus also does not explain the detail that the house fell with a great crash. In the Bible it is connected to the utter defeat of the disobedient people. Every foolish man, who shows his foolishness by rejecting the words of Jesus Christ, will be rejected in the Judgement Day.

(T) **POINT 4. IDENTIFY THE MAIN MESSAGE OF THE PARABLE.**

The main message of the parable is found either in the explanation or application or from the story itself. From the way Jesus Christ himself explained or applied the parables, we know how we should interpret parables. A parable normally has only one main lesson or message, one central point to make. Therefore, we should not try to find a spiritual truth in every detail of the story, but instead look for the main message of the story.

The parable of the wise and foolish builders in Matthew 7:24-27 teaches about *obedience to God's Word in God's kingdom*.

The main message of the parable is the following. "The foundation of a person's everlasting destination must not be sought in man, but in Jesus Christ and that foundation is built by putting Christ's teachings into practice." The man who built his house upon the sand, heard Christ's word but nevertheless depended on his own insight and view of things. The man who built his house upon the rock, depended on Christ by obeying Christ's teachings. Every ambition, which a person cherishes, every plan he makes, every thought he thinks, every word he speaks and every deed he performs, are, as it were building blocks. And these building blocks must be built upon Christ by putting Christ's teachings into practice.

Obedience to God and God's word is a fundamental characteristic of God's kingdom! The people of God's kingdom do not trust in themselves or in other people, but in God, and they do not only hear God's word, but put it into practice!

(S) **POINT 5. COMPARE THE PARABLE WITH PARALLEL AND CONTRASTING PASSAGES.**

The truth in all the parables also has parallel or contrasting truth taught in other passages of the Bible. Try to find the most important cross-references that help us to interpret the parable. Always check the interpretation of a parable with the direct and clear teaching of the Bible.

(T) First. I would like to compare the parable with Hosea 4:6 that says, "Because you have rejected knowledge, I also reject you as my priests; because you have ignored the law of your God, I also will ignore your children." In Proverbs 1:24-28 the wisdom of God's word says, "Since you rejected me when I called and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand, since you ignored my advice and would not accept my rebuke, I in turn will laugh at your disaster; I will mock when calamity overtakes you. ... Then you will call to me but I will not answer." These passages warn that one cannot reject God's word without far reaching consequences.

(S) Second. I would like to compare the parable with Luke 8:15. The good soil represents Christians who retain God's word in a noble and good heart and who by perseverance produce a crop. The purpose of God's word is to bear fruit in the lives of Christians.

(T) Third. I would also like to compare the parable with 1 Peter 2:6, which says that Jesus Christ is a chosen and precious cornerstone and that the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame. And 1 Corinthians 3:11 says that Jesus Christ is the one and only foundation for Christians. Both these passages teach that Jesus Christ is the Rock on which Christians must build their lives.

(S) **POINT 6. SUMMARISE THE MAIN TEACHINGS OF THE PARABLE.**

Let us take turns to summarise the main teachings or messages of the parable.

(T) First. The main message of the parable is that the foundation of a person's everlasting destination must not be sought in man, but in Jesus Christ and that foundation is built by putting Christ's teachings into practice.

(S) Second. All people must know what the God of the Bible or Jesus Christ is like. Jesus Christ is the Rock on which people must build their lives. Whoever builds his life on Jesus Christ, will never be shaken! Jesus Christ reveals himself and his will through his teachings. And the teachings of Jesus Christ are recorded in the Bible. Whoever *puts Christ's teachings into practice*, is building his life and eternal destiny onto Jesus Christ. Whoever builds his life and eternal destiny on himself or someone else, will certainly fail, because Acts 4:12 says that salvation is in no other person than Jesus Christ.

(T) Third. Christians must know what they should be like. Christians have the responsibility to build their lives on Jesus Christ, the Rock. Christians build their lives firmly on Jesus Christ, the Rock, when they put his teachings into practice.

Why is it so attractive to put Christ's teachings into practice? In John 14:21,23 Jesus says, "Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me. He who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love him and show myself to him. ...If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him." By obeying Christ's teachings, a person will know for certain that God loves him and he will experience that God loves him! By obeying Christ's teachings, he will grow in his personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Christ will reveal himself more and more to him and make his divine presence felt. It is not so much the commandment, but these great blessings of knowing Christ personally and of experiencing his love and his presence in one's daily life that really motivates a Christian to obey Christ's teachings!

(S) **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. Preach, teach or study this parable together with another person or group of people. Next week we will study the parables of the bridegroom, the patched garment and the wineskins. As preparation, please read Mark 2:18-22.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom and www.dota.net

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".