

7:15 *Beware*- Clearly the prohibition against judging others in the sense of condemning them (7:1) doesn't mean that we can't form a valid opinion about someone's genuineness as a teacher.

*False prophets- Pseudo-prophetes* means that these people are not spiritual at all, they are faking it, pseudo- prophets. To be such a fake, a *pseudo*, is not the same as being a believer who has failed in behaviour at times or who has some Biblical interpretations which we don't personally agree with.

*Come to you*- The Greek phrase likely means 'Appear to you'.

*In sheep's clothing*- Dressed as if they are Jesus?

*But inwardly*- Given our inability to judge the inner thoughts of others, and the clear prohibition against judging to condemnation in the context (7:1), perhaps this is the Lord's comment upon them, and is not meant to be an invitation to us to claim to read the inward thoughts of others? However the next verse goes on to say that we can observe their fruits, and it is by their fruits that *we* are to discern them. But the Lord discerns them by their inward thoughts, which are visible to Him. Thereby His position on these false prophets becomes our position too- but we arrive there by different routes. We are to observe their fruits, whereas He looks upon their hearts. The Lord uses the same word several times to tell the Pharisees that *inwardly* or 'within' they are full of unspirituality (Mt. 23:25,27,28; Lk. 11:39). This suggests that His warning against "false prophets" is a warning against the Jewish leadership. But He uses the language of 'prophets' because this fits in with the Old Testament theme of false and true prophets. Just as the people had to discern between those two groups, so now, in an era when there were no more prophets in the Old Testament sense, God's people had to beware of imposters like the Pharisees. They were false prophets, false speakers of God's word, in that they had effectively elevated their interpretations of God's word [the *halakah*] to the same level as God's actual inspired word.

*Ravens*- The Greek word is always translated elsewhere as 'extortioner'. The Pharisees are clearly in view here, and yet the Pharisee of Lk. 18:11 thanked God with the same word, that he was not an 'extortioner' (Lk. 18:11). The Pharisee didn't see his own sin. The Lord saw their hearts and saw that they were extortioners, but they thanked God that they were not. This is an essay in the blindness of humans to their own sins, and in our need to see ourselves as the Lord sees us, with His eyes and from His perspective. This is the essence of self-examination. The motive of the Pharisees / false prophets was clearly financial gain. This is pinpointed by the Lord as the fundamental reason for their false prophecies, for their external appearance of spirituality- it was because they wanted cash out of people. This was and is clearly deeply upsetting to the Lord.

*Wolves*- We've seen that these false prophets were specifically the Pharisees in the Lord's immediate context. When He warns the disciples that He is sending them out as sheep amongst wolves (Mt. 10:16), He is clearly alluding to His teaching here- that the Pharisees appear as sheep, but are as wolves. The implication could be that there would be fake disciples of Jesus,

and that the real opposition to the work of the disciples would be the wolves of the Pharisees (see on 'The Jewish Satan' in my *The Real Devil*). This clearly happened after the Lord's death, where the Judaist plot to destroy Paul's preaching of Christianity involved Judaist 'false brethren in Christ' entering in to the flock as wolves (Gal. 2:4). In Jn. 10:12, the Lord speaks of how He as the good shepherd would give His life fighting the wolf so that the sheep might be saved; the implication is that the wolf killed Him. His death was at the hands of the Jewish leadership. Wolves don't usually kill men. This is an element of unreality to highlight the point- that legalism may not appear too bad nor too ultimately dangerous; but in fact it is, and was what led to the death of God's Son. Paul's warning that wolves would enter the flock (Acts 20:29) likewise came true in the Judaist false teachers who entered in to the ecclesias and destroyed so much, both spiritually and doctrinally. I have shown elsewhere that the roots of the false thinking which led to later false doctrines such as the Trinity actually began in Judaist ideas which entered Christianity. From our standpoint today, we can take the point that the major enemy of the Gospel will be legalism and posturing religious leaders.

*7:16 You shall know them-* Perhaps the emphasis was upon the "you". The Lord knows the evil hearts of these people- but we can't see their hearts, and so *we* shall know them by their external fruits.

*By their fruits-* The need for fruit as a sign of repentance had been a theme in John's teaching (Mt. 3:8,10), and the Lord in His Sermon is often building on John's words. The Lord's concern is about those who appear to have accepted His message, dressing as sheep, and yet are in fact completely false. The whole thrust of His Sermon is that acceptance of Him produces a change in human life; there must be fruit. And we take a simple lesson from that- if we are to be able to tell whether someone is a genuine Christian or not by whether their fruits are visible, we have to ask ourselves whether our lives are so markedly different from unbelievers. There is to be something about us, fruit hanging on us, which clearly differentiates us from the unbelieving world. The difference has got to be fairly obvious, because the Lord is here teaching that we can easily discern whether someone purporting to be spiritual is indeed so because the fruits of it will be evident. Therefore there will not be any debate about whether someone is in the wolf / false prophet category- because they either have the fruits of the Spirit, the signs of the transformed life, or they do not. And the difference will be obvious. And yet endless energy has been expended trying to judge false prophets according to the content of their Biblical exposition and teaching. The Lord, however, teaches that the litmus test is in their life, rather than in their intellectual position.

*Grapes of thorns-* The idea is 'Of course not'. The Lord's point is that spiritual fruit is obvious, it cannot be hidden, like a city set on a hill. If there are grapes, the blessed fruit of the new covenant, on a person- then for sure they are not a thorn bush, with all the associations between thorns and cursing. In Mt. 12:33 the Lord makes an apparently obvious point- a good tree has good fruit, a bad tree has bad fruit. But the point is that we can easily, clearly tell whether someone has the fruit of the transformed life or not. There is no argument about it, because the

fruit of the transformed life, lived according to this Sermon on the Mount, is public and visible. The seed of the Gospel which is sown by Jesus either brings forth fruit, or it doesn't (Mt. 13:8,26). So much angst about labelling individuals as false teachers is rendered unnecessary if we take this approach. And the false teachers with whom the later New Testament letters engage are teaching a false way of life, and Jude, Peter and John especially point out that their way of life indicates that they are false teachers.

*Figs of thistles-* Figs are associated with spiritual fruit (Mt. 21:19; 24:32), whereas thistles, like thorns, are associated with the curse (Gen. 3:18 "thorns and thistles"; s.w. Heb. 6:8 "that which bears thorns and thistles is rejected"). The point is, that the difference between the accepted and the condemned is apparent even in this life, because the fruit of the transformed life simply has to be seen publically on people. This is perhaps the Lord's expansion upon His command not to judge / condemn in 7:1. He's saying that we should not, however, walk around life blind and imperceptive, but rather take good notice of the presence or absence of fruit on a person.

The Lord puts it slightly another way in Lk. 6:44 when He says that men don't "gather" good fruit from a corrupt tree. The language of gathering is very much that of judgment to come; and yet the fruit is produced and gathered now, in the words / fruit that comes out of our mouth. This is why right now we can judge a false teacher, by his corrupt words [this is one of the contexts of the Lord's words about corrupt trees and fruit- we see the fruit *now*]. The corrupt man *will* speak villainy (Is. 32:6). But corrupt words don't just mean expletives- the false teacher would be too smart to use them. He comes in sheep's clothing. But Lk. 6:41-44 gives us an example of "corrupt" words; words which create a corrupting spiritual influence in a man or in a community. One may *say* to his brother that he must cast out the splinter from his eye, although he has a plank in his own. And the Lord goes on to say that a good tree doesn't bring forth corrupt fruit. The corrupt fruit, as in the above passages, means 'corrupt words'. And in Lk. 6:45 the Lord concludes by saying that "for of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh". The corrupt fruit are the corrupt words of Lk. 6:42- saying, 'My brother, I'm very sorry, but I just have to correct you, you are so obviously wrong and stupid to walk round with a splinter in your eye, I can correct your spiritual vision, because I see perfectly. At the moment your spiritual perception [eye] is just hopeless'. The Lord understood 'the eye' as ones' spiritual vision (Mt. 6:22,23). These kind of words, in essence, are the real leaven; they corrupt / pull apart over time communities as well as individual faith. These criticisms work away within a brother or sister, disaffirming them as believers, disaffirming them for who they are, raising doubt and not hope, humiliating them that they haven't made the grade... until they are corrupted. We have a specific example of a man being punished in judgment for his words, and it may well be the basis for the Lord's teaching here: "When the Lord hath performed his whole work upon mount Zion and on Jerusalem, I will punish the fruit of the stout heart of the king of Assyria, and the glory of his high looks. For he saith, By the strength of my hand I have done this..." (Is. 10:11,12). And there follows a long quotation of his words. These words were the 'fruit of his heart'- out of the abundance of his heart his mouth had spoken. And these words were almost cited back to him at

the time of his condemnation. We know, however, that it is quite possible for human actions and words to *not* reflect the heart. Consider how Sennacherib invaded Judah but in his heart "he meaneth not so, neither doth his heart think so" (Is. 10:7). This is why the Lord clearly condemns the thought as being as bad as the action, even if the action isn't actually committed. Ps. 55:21 laments how words cannot reflect the true state of a man's heart: "The words of his mouth were smoother than butter, but war was in his heart: his words were softer than oil, yet were they drawn swords". So why, then, is there so much emphasis on spoken words as the basis for judgment to come? Surely it is that although thoughts will also be judged, and the hypocrites revealed for who they are, it doesn't follow that a good man sometimes uses 'corrupt speech'. It's impossible. A good man cannot bring forth bad words. But a bad man can sometimes bring forth words which seem good on the surface, but which are in fact counterfeit. But it can't happen another way- a good man's words aren't just his surface level sin. And I for one flinch at this; because when I have to own up to having said inappropriate words, my flesh wants me to think that in my heart, I didn't mean them. And yet, ruthlessly, I must press the point: bad words reflect a bad heart. We can't justify them. We must repent of them, and by the influence of knowing God, through and in His Son and His word, we must change the state of mind that leads to them. And we should be, on one hand, simply *worried*: that bad words came out of a bad heart. And a good man cannot bring forth such corrupt fruit. There is with some especially the problem of temper, saying things well beyond what they really mean in hot blood. But here again, the words of hot blood do reflect something of the real man or woman. The tongue is a fire that can lead to condemnation, whatever and however we justify its' words as a relatively harmless outcome of our personality type. This may be true, but it isn't harmless.

7:17,18 This appears to belabour the point made in the preceding verses. But the Lord so wishes to drive the point home- that fruit on a transformed person is obvious and visible. If we are to use the presence or absence of fruit as a basis for perceiving false teachers, then we will have no problem at all discerning who is of the Lord and who isn't. And yet this very issue of deciding on others' status has been fatally divisive and destructive for the Lord's church. Statements of faith are analysed, and the teaching of others is watchfully dissected to see if it fits that given statement- in order to decide whether someone is 'in' or 'out'. The Lord foresaw that tendency, for it was the tendency of the scribes too. And instead He offers us this other way, elevating spirituality to the highest level- whoever has the fruits "cannot" be a bad tree. The issue of 'fruit' therefore becomes the key methodology through which to make the judgments which we are called to make in life. The attitude is often expressed that 'Well they may be very nice Christians and all that, but they do not understand the Truth about... [issue X]'. The Lord is tackling that mentality head on, by saying that this "cannot" be the case; if the fruit is there, then they are a good tree, whatever misunderstandings they may have (and we all have them).

7:19 *Is hewn down*- The Gehenna fire of condemnation of the wicked is "already kindled" by men's attitude now (Lk. 12:49). The tree that will not bring forth good fruit "*is hewn down, and cast into the fire*" (Mt. 7:19)- alluding to the figure of Gehenna, into which the rejected will be

'thrown'. The ungodly *are* already like the chaff that will be blown away after the Lord's return (Ps. 1:4,5; 35:5; Job 21:18-20 cp. Is. 5:24; 17:13; 29:5; Dan. 2:35; Lk. 3:17). Those who lose their first love are *now* condemned (1 Tim. 3:6; 5:12). The Lord Jesus stands with the sword of judgment *now* going out of His mouth (Rev. 1:16), as it will do at the final judgment (Is. 11:4). The Lord's description of the rejected being cut down and thrown into the fire is surely referring to the words of Dt. 12:3 (cp. 7:5); where the idols of the world were to be hewn down and thrown into the fire. The Lord understood that those who worship idols are like unto them (Ps. 115:8; 135:18). Because the idols will be destroyed in the last day, all who worship them will have to share their destruction. And yet we can be hewn down by God's word now (Hos. 6:5) rather than wait for God to do it to us by the condemnation process. We must cut off (s.w. hew down) our flesh *now* (Mt. 5:30; 18:8 cp. 7:19).

7:20 The belaboured repetition of the point (see on 7:17,18) is surely because we will have a strong temptation to undervalue spiritual fruit, and to seek to judge others in terms of their traditions, culture and specific interpretations- rather than by their fruit.

7:21 *Lord, Lord-* Mt. 7:21 = Rom. 2:13. Paul saw the "Lord, Lord" people of the parable as the Jews of the first century who initially responded enthusiastically to the Gospel. The contrast is between saying "Lord, Lord" in this life, and then in the future not entering into the Kingdom ("in that day", :22). The contrast is between merely *saying* and actually *doing*. The Lord repeats the idea in His mini parable of the two sons; the one who 'said' he would be obedient, and the other who 'did' the will of his father (Mt. 21:30,31). The acceptance of Christ as Lord means that we are as His servants and slaves; it is for us to 'do' His will and work. This fits with the context of the preceding verses- that if He is really our Lord, we will inevitably *do* His will, and that doing will be actual, practical and visible. It is the false prophets who merely say but don't *do*, just as they claim to be good trees but don't have good fruit.

*Does the will-* Allowing the Sermon to interpret itself, we see an obvious connection with our prayer asking "Your will be done" (Mt. 6:10). If that request was just asking for God to do His will, it would be easy to pray and also somewhat meaningless. But the connection with Mt. 7:21 means that we are asking that *we* do God's will. And doing His will is difficult, slow progress, building on a rock- as the rest of Matthew 7 records. The Lord's prayer in Gethsemane demonstrates the difficulty of praying for the Father's will to be done in our lives- prayed there with sweat like drops of blood (Mt. 26:42). So we are to pray for strength to do God's will, for spiritual strength to live obediently to the principles of the Sermon. 1 Jn. 5:14 encourages us that if we ask for anything "according to [*kata*] His will, He hears us". But asking *kata* His will could just as well be translated 'in order to fulfill'. If we want strength to do His will in practice, He will give it to us. And His will is expressed here in Matthew 5-7 quite clearly.

*The will of My Father in Heaven-* This is a fairly common phrase with the Lord (Mt. 12:50; 18:14; John's equivalent seems to be 'to do the will of Him that sent Me', Jn. 4:34; 5:30;

6:38,39,40). The idea seems to be that we on earth can do the will of Him who is in one sense so far away from us, "in Heaven"; and thereby collapse that distance between us.

7:22 *Many*- The Greek often means 'the majority'. Here perhaps we have the clearest implication that only a minority of those who come to Christ shall ultimately be saved. Hebrews, Romans and 1 Cor. 10 suggest that if we think that natural Israel were far worse than spiritual Israel in terms of percentage coming to salvation- then we must take heed lest we fall.

*Will say to Me*- Judgment will be a process, with the rejected initially protesting, seeking to change the Lord's mind- and then slinking away in shame. Nobody will be passive in that day. The only thing important will be acceptance at His hand and a place in the Kingdom. We will come to that position either by loving obedience to His ways in this life- or all too late, in condemnation. The logic is powerful- we must chose that desire for the Kingdom life *now* as the dominant emotion, overarching all our emotions, decision making and formation of our deepest desires.

*Lord, Lord*- Mt. 7:22 = 1 Cor. 13:2. To say "Lord, Lord" without really *knowing* Christ is living without love. Thus Paul saw an association between a lack of true love and an external show of appreciation of Christ's Lordship. Not doing what Christ says is a lack of love, in Paul's mind. If we appreciate this, we will see that those who are ignorant of Christ's words cannot show true love. Biblically ignorant Christians need to think through the implications of this. Those who insincerely say "Lord, Lord" now, will say the same then, at the judgment, with the same lack of reality (Mt. 7:21,22). The repetition of "Lord, Lord" shows that our attitude to Him in this life will be that we have when we meet in the last day. The sensation of working for the Lord can be so self-deceptive. He draws the difference between doing many wonderful works in His name, saying "Lord, Lord"; and *really* doing the will of the Father (Mt. 7:21,22). The parallel Lk. 6:46 has that men will say "Lord, Lord" but not really hear His words. To hear them is to do the will of the Father. Putting all this together, it is perfectly possible to bear His Name, call Him Lord, work hard for Him- and yet never really hear His words, and thereby never really know the will of our Father. From this parallel we can conclude that our attitude to Christ in this life (e.g. "Lord, Lord!") will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. If we think He is a hard, unreasonable Lord: that is how He will be. To the froward (in this life), He will show Himself froward. Straight away we are met head on with a major challenge: Our attitude to Christ in this life will be our attitude to Him at the judgment seat. John's letters reason down the same line: "If (in this life) our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence (now) toward God... this is the confidence that we have in him... abide in him; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence... before him (at the judgment) at His coming" (1 Jn. 3:21; 5:14; 2:28). The confidence we have towards Christ now will be the confidence we have at judgment day. This fact should pull us up out of the spiritual indifference which characterizes so much of our lives. If we see Christ as an abstract theological necessity, a black box in our brain called 'Christ'; if we don't have a dynamic, two- way relationship with Him now- then this too is how we will regard Him then.

*Prophesied...* When we consider the Lord's teaching of Mt. 7:22,23 and 25:42-44 together, He's saying that those rejected at the day of judgment will be so on account of their *omissions*- hence their surprise, and anger because they knew that they had *done* good works; they thought that what they had *committed* was morally acceptable to God, and this would usher them into the Kingdom. But their sins of *omission* cost them the Kingdom. The mention of prophesying must be seen in the context of the Lord's warning in 7:15 about *false* prophets. To claim to have spoken / prophesied in His Name (cp. 'in sheep's clothing', appearing as Jesus) implies these people had considered themselves followers of Jesus in this life.

*Cast out demons... done many wonderful works*- The possession of Holy Spirit gifts which enabled healings and miracles to be performed was no guarantee of final acceptance at the last day. Pentecostal theology needs to take note of this- for the power to do miracles is simply not any guarantee of salvation, as they wrongly suppose. And we who live in an era when the miraculous gifts have been withdrawn can still take a powerful lesson- no matter how dramatically we may be a channel for God's activity in the lives of others, this is irrelevant to our final salvation. The essence of the life in Christ, the life of the Kingdom, is internal spiritual mindedness. The contrast is between 'doing' wonderful works and 'doing' (the same Greek word is used in :21) the will of the Father. The language of 'doing the Father's will' is used about the Lord's life and final death on the cross. To be as Him, to give our deepest life as He did, is not the same as doing external works for others.

7:23 The attitude which we have to the Lord Jesus *now* will be the attitude we have to Him at the day of judgment (Mt. 7:23 cp. Lk. 6:46).

*Profess*- The Lord will "profess" to them that He doesn't know them and they must depart from Him; but Strong understands the Greek to mean 'to say the same thing as another, i.e. to agree with, assent'. The Lord will be agreeing with them, that they are worthy of condemnation. They will have condemned themselves, and the Lord will simply confirm this to them in His final verdict. If we are ashamed of Him now, we will be ashamed from before Him then (1 Jn. 2:28), and He will be ashamed of us (Lk. 9:26). Every time we are asked to stand up for Him and His words in the eyes of men, we are as it were living out our future judgment.

*Never knew*- "Many" will be rejected at the judgment seat because they don't *know* the Lord Jesus Christ; they never had a personal relationship with Jesus, even though they have experienced answered prayer, done miracles, worked for their Lord etc. (Mt. 7:22,23; 1 Cor. 13). They will have built a spiritual house, but on sand. It isn't difficult to be a good Christian outwardly. But to *know* the Lord Jesus? That's another question. The Greek for "never" means literally 'never at any time'. The course of their lives was such that there had never been a time when He 'knew' them. We rather expect Him to say '*You never knew Me*'. But He says that *He never knew them*- because the whole idea of 'knowing' Him is mutual. Insofar as we know Him (in a relational sense), He knows us- and vice versa. We really need to ask whether we are praying to Jesus, talking to Him, 'knowing' Him...

*Depart*- This is alluded to in 2 Tim. 2:19: 'Depart from sin now, or you'll depart from Christ at the judgment'. This is Paul's classic way of making plays on words; again an indication of how his writings are partly a product of his own meditation upon and familiarity with the Gospels.

*You that work iniquity-* And yet they have just protested all the good they did for others, healing, teaching etc. On one level, good can be done- but the good is a work of iniquity if it is done with an unspiritual heart, and especially in order to gain personal wealth or advantage (see on "ravening wolves", 7:15). In Old Testament times, God used the nations to do His will, but they were still condemned for their hearts being far from Him. Those who "do iniquity" [s.w.] are gathered out of the Kingdom at the last day (Mt. 13:41)- confirming that these people are within the visible Christian community. And there will be "many" of them (:22)- suggesting the Lord doesn't just have in view a handful of charlatans at the leadership level who claim to do miracles and teach in His Name just for money. This problem of thinking that we are justified before Him just because we are His channel of work is clearly foreseen by the Lord as a major and widespread problem. Mt. 24:12 could imply that this will be a specific latter day problem- for within the believing community, "because iniquity [s.w.] shall abound, the love of many [Gk. 'the majority'] shall become cold".

7:24 *Sayings- Logos* suggests more than simply words. The Lord intends us to get to the essential intention of His Spirit. God's word is often styled His 'judgments' in the OT (e.g. Ps. 119:43,160; 147:19). In His word we see His judgments- how He judges and will judge. And in the wealth of Bible history we see examples of how these judgments have been articulated with men in practice. Thus the Lord Jesus concluded the sermon on the mount with a parable of judgment, that of the two builders (Mt. 7:24-27). One heard the Lord's words of the sermon and did them, the other heard but didn't deeply apply them. The message was clear: 'Deeply meditate on what I've just been saying. For this is the basis upon which I will judge men in the last day. You can try to discern for yourselves how seriously and fundamentally you apply my words; and in this you will have a preview of how I will judge you'.

*And does them-* An echo of :21, he who *does* the will of the Father. The parallel is thus made between the will of the Father, and "these sayings of Mine" in the Sermon. Yet in the Lord's own case, the doing of the Father's will meant the death of the cross. This finally was and is the outcome of living in accordance with the Sermon. This is what it leads to. The figure of building a house on a rock conjures up the idea of sweating labour. Do we feel that we are spiritually sweating, in a sense? Is it that hard to understand and therefore do the words of Christ? A number of passages make this connection between labouring and understanding the word. Elders labour in the word (1 Tim. 5:17), as the prophets laboured in writing the word of God (Jn. 4:38); and the true Bible student is a labourer who will not be ashamed of his work at the end (2 Tim. 2:15). And the Lord Jesus spoke of us labouring for the manna of God's words, even harder than we labour for our daily bread, and more earnestly than the crowds ran around the lake of Galilee in the blazing midday sun in order to benefit from Christ's miracles (Jn. 6:27). One could be forgiven for thinking that most of us find hearing the words of Christ easy. But there is an element of difficulty, even unpleasantness for us, in truly understanding Him in practical application. How do we hear and do? We are helped to get the answer by considering how Christ elsewhere appealed to people to "Hear *and understand*" (Mt. 15:10). Truly understanding is related to action, 'doing'. In the parable, hearing and doing is like the hard work of digging the foundation on a rock. This is how hard it is to truly understand the words of Christ. Remember how the one talent man also dug into the earth (Mt. 25:18). He did some digging, he did some work. But he failed to truly understand. The very physical action of digging deceived him into thinking he had done enough, as the physical action of building deceived the man who built on

earth. Of course we are progressing somewhere spiritually, as we live day by day. But our movement can deceive us.

James clearly alludes to the appeal to not only hear but do: "But be doers of the word, and not only hearers, deluding your own selves" (James 1:22). *James spells out the problem- we hear the Lord's words and for a moment assent to them- but don't continue to do them in the long term. "The word" is paralleled by James with "the perfect law of freedom".* "But he who looks into the perfect law of freedom, and continues, not being a hearer who forgets, but a doer of the work, this man will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25). The term "perfect law of freedom" is hard to interpret, and it seems to be in contrast with how the New Testament elsewhere speaks of the Mosaic law as being a form of bondage, with Christ's teaching as the way to freedom. I would suggest that this "perfect law of freedom" refers to the Sermon on the Mount (see on 7:1), perhaps specifically to the challenge to be perfect (Mt. 5:48); the Sermon, as we showed in commenting on 5:1, was the Lord's equivalent to the Mosaic Law. The Sermon would've been memorized and recited by the vast mass of early Christians who were illiterate. And James is urging them to not merely encounter the words and nod approvingly at them, nor even merely recite them- but continuing in actually doing them. And this of course is the challenge to us too, assailed as we are in our generation by too many words, to the point that we can easily give a passing 'like' to them, and yet live on uninfluenced.

*Will liken him-* As in :27, "shall be likened unto". The future tenses imply that the truth of the parable of the builders will only be apparent at the day of judgment. The purpose of judgment day is largely for our benefit, and therefore the process will be public- we will learn from the rejection and acceptance of others. Paul alludes to the idea by saying that "the day [of judgment] shall declare" each man's building work (1 Cor. 3:13). And to whom will it be declared? The Lord already knows them that are His. It will be declared to the individual being judged, and to those who are observing. The Lord uses the same word translated 'likened' in speaking of how in this life, the state of the Kingdom in a man's life "is likened", present tense, right now, to various things (Mt. 13:24; 18:23; 22:2). But in Mt. 25:1 we find another future tense- at the Lord's return, the Kingdom *will be likened unto* the wise and foolish girls [cp. the wise and foolish builders]. We can perceive the essence of the Lord's future judgment in this life- for the Bible is full of His "judgments" ahead of time. Therefore the nature and outcome of the final judgment need not be a mystery for us, if we perceive the principles of judgment which the Lord teaches in the Sermon and elsewhere. But all the same, that day will be the final and ultimate declaration of those values.

*Built his house upon a rock-* This is exactly what the Lord Himself is doing (Mt. 16:18; 26:61). There is a mutuality between the Lord and us. We build upon a rock, and He builds us upon a rock. We ourselves build, and yet we are "built up a spiritual house" by God (1 Pet. 2:5; note how Peter goes right on to speak of the Jews as foolish builders in 1 Pet. 2:7; he surely had the Lord's parable of the two types of builder in mind). Both men *built* in that both men *heard* the Lord's sayings. We are all making progress on our spiritual journey, for good or bad. There's no way to just take a break from the journey. We are building, hearing the Lord's will- but the question is, where is our foundation. The fundamental core, the dominant desire, of the Lord's people is Him. For the rock is clearly a symbol of the Lord Jesus ("that rock was Christ", 1 Cor. 10:4; 1 Pet. 2:8 s.w.). On one hand, the Lord teaches that obedience to His sayings in practice is building upon a rock. And yet the rock is Him. He was the word made flesh, the perfect

fulfilment and example of obedience to His sayings. To follow the Sermon fully means becoming as Him. And yet the judgment of the last day will not be a simple test of legalistic obedience. It will be a revelation of where our core foundation, our dominant desire, really is. Many people living in this postmodern, passionless world will have to think long and hard before answering the question: 'What is your dominant desire?'. Short term things such as getting a qualification, a career, a particular level or form of wealth, buying a particular house, marrying a particular person, some specific success for our children... all these things fade from dominance in the course of a person's life. Many people simply don't have a dominant desire. The difference with true believers is that we do- and it is 'Christ', Him as a person, the things of His eternal Kingdom. This perhaps more than anything else is the simple difference between the true believer and all other people. This is why there is a simple test as to whether a person is a genuine Christian or not- and it's 'fruit', as the Lord has just previously explained. The difference is clear. The dominant desire of a true Christian is manifest and cannot be hid.

Comparing with the parallel Lk. 6:48 it seems that both men built on the same kind of ground- it was rock overlaid with sand. The difference was that the wise man dug through the sand to the rock, whereas the fool built only on the sand. To really get down to the rock of Christ is hard and long work. It is achieved through the process of 'doing' what He teaches. And the story is true to life- for so many of us in our spiritual biography can relate how we passed through years of being 'Christian' or religious without having any personal relationship with Jesus, not praying nor talking to Him, not sensing Him at all as a living Lord. The story suggests that there will be some, perhaps "many", who build a spiritual edifice of grand appearance which has no personal root in a relationship with Jesus- indeed, some actually preach against this because of their obsession with upholding theologies about the supremacy of God the Father. But getting through the sand, through the dirt and dust of our own humanity, to truly knowing Christ- this is what alone will come through judgment day.

*His house-* Paul uses the metaphor of building about the work of converting and building up others in Christ (Rom. 15:20; 1 Cor. 10:23; Gal. 2:18), knowing that the day of judgment shall declare the quality of our work (1 Cor. 3:13). But even if that building work does not pass through the fire of judgment, we shall personally be saved (1 Cor. 3:15). But our personal house must stand firm throughout the judgment process. Note there is a continuity between the house before and after the storm of judgment day- it "fell not". Who we essentially are in spiritual terms is who we shall eternally be; our spirit shall be saved at that day (1 Cor. 5:5), our essential spiritual person will be preserved. The experience of the day of judgment will not make us somehow flip over another side and relationship with the Lord, previously unknown to us. Those who say "Lord, Lord" in this life without meaning will use the same empty terms in that day (Mt. 7:21,22).

*A rock-* To get down to the rock, the man who truly heard Christ had to dig through the earth which the foolish man also dug into. Hearing Christ's words is likened to digging into that earth. Doing and understanding them is likened to then digging into the bed- rock. The foolish man did allow the word to go into him- skin deep. We need to ask ourselves how often these days the word really goes right through our skin, and forces us to hack into the bed- rock. Are we truly building our house on a rock? The force of Mk. 16:16, for example, went more than skin deep just before our baptism. We read it, thought about it, and did it. But now. Are we old and brave,

thick skinned, hardened by the humdrum of repetition, no longer building a house on a rock? My sense is that many of us are. Let's be aware that Heb. 6:1,2 defines "the foundation" as "repentance", and an awareness of the reality of the resurrection and coming judgment. In some ways, the longer we are in Christ, the more likely it is that we will not reach down to the bedrock of these things as we ought to. I mean, how often these days do we really repent of something? How often does the reality of the judgment seat truly come home to us? The poetry of the Bible's language, especially if we read the same version, makes God's word glide over us. Exhortations, even the recollection of Golgotha's tragic scene, the final, friendless end... can all slip so easily over our heads. We rest on the laurels of past spiritual victories. Nothing really shakes us up, reaching right down to the bedrock. Surely each of us should be sensing a surge of spiritual urgency when we look at ourselves like this. Yet God will help us; it is He Himself who will "settle" us, or 'make a foundation for' us, as the Greek can mean (1 Pet. 5:10). The rock which our response to the word must reach down to is that of the crucified Christ. That rock represents Christ and Him crucified, according to Paul (1 Cor. 10:4 and 3:11 cp. 2:2). The Lord's parable of building on the rock was surely quarried from His understanding of Is. 28:16,17: "I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone... a precious cornerstone. The hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place". Truly doing God's word will always lead us back to the spirit of the suffering Christ on Calvary. If it does not, our building, our apparent development within the much-vaunted Biblicism of our faith, is just a "refuge of lies". All our spiritual effort and suffering finds its ultimate summation in Christ's crucifixion. His suffering there is the quintessence of all spiritual struggle. It is quite possible that as we break bread weekly, we are merely digging a little deeper than usual in the earth, yet still not reaching down to the real meaning of building on the example of Christ's death. The wise man's house was "founded upon a rock". The same Greek word occurs in Col. 2:7, describing how we are "rooted and built up in him". The parallel Eph. 3:17 expands this to mean that if Christ dwells in our hearts, we are "rooted and grounded in love... able to comprehend... and to know the love of Christ", which was supremely shown in His death. Col. 1:23 associates this being "grounded and settled" with not being "moved away from the hope of the Gospel, which ye have heard". If the word really sinks down deep within us, it will reveal to us the love of Christ on the cross, it will result in true love, and all this will be the outworking of the basic doctrines of the Truth which we understood at baptism. Thus the hacking away at the rock is not only hard, grim work against human nature. It reveals the wondrous love of Christ. The implication is that we can only really understand this love, that passes human knowledge, if we are really sweating away to obey Christ's words, to build our house on a rock.

*7:25 The rain descended and the floods came-* The allusion is clearly to Noah's flood; although the Greek for 'flood' here usually refers to a river. Only those within the ark of Christ were saved. To do the will of God, to hear and do the Lord's teaching, to be in the ark of Christ, to be founded upon the rock of Christ as our dominant desire- these are all different ways of saying the same thing. Our core root, our foundation, our dominant desire, our main self-perception and self-understanding, must be of being and living in Christ. This is the fundamental divide between

persons, not their statement of faith, their spiritual culture. It comes down to whether they have a heart for the Lord Jesus and His Kingdom. And we cannot judge those "secrets of men" in this life, but we can at least be sure never to reject anyone who professes to have such a heart for the Lord. Paul uses the same word for "descended" to describe how Christ shall descend from Heaven at His return (1 Thess. 4:16); likewise the word for "came" is used about the coming of Christ (Mt. 24:30,39 parallel the coming of Noah's flood with the coming of Christ). The coming of Christ will be judgment; our meeting with Him will be the coming of the rain etc. Even the house founded upon the rock took a fair beating- the purpose of judgment day is to reveal to the builder (and other observers) how he built.

The flood which came was like the day of judgment. This fits in exactly with the way Christ used the figure of the flood to describe His second coming in Mt. 24. Peter does the same in 2 Pet. 3. The beating of the stream upon the house on a rock (v.49) is a truly apposite figure for the day of judgment. It certainly implies a process of judgment, in which the unworthy will experience a gradual collapse of their spirituality. For the man with the firm foundation, the flood of the parable would have been a worrying experience. Would the house stand up to it? In many of the parables, we can profitably speculate as to likely details of the story. The wise man would have remembered his hard work on the foundation, not with any sense of pride or self-gratitude. But he would nevertheless have been aware of it. Our real spiritual effort will be so valuable in that day. Only then will we realize the extent of the fact that there can be no short cut to true spiritual development. A man cannot be crowned, unless he strive lawfully. The Lord's parable was no doubt partly based on Is. 28:17, which speaks of the day of judgment being like hail which "shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and waters (which) shall overflow". The spiritual house of the foolish builder was a lie, effectively; an appearance of real development which deceived men. For externally, men cannot know anything about the different foundations of houses built side by side. We are left to imagine the details of the parable. The foolish man would have run outside and watched his house being beaten down and washed away. He would have thought of trying to do something to stop the destruction, but then given up, realizing it was too late. The foolish girls saw that "our oil *is* running out" (Gk.). The unworthy will have that terrible sense of their opportunity and spirituality ebbing away from them. The impression is given in the parable that the two houses were next door to each other; again confirming our feeling that this parable is about different attitudes to the word within the ecclesia.

*Came-* The same word in the model prayer- we pray for God's Kingdom to "come" (Mt. 6:10), but again we find it hard to pray that prayer if we understand it. We are praying for the storm of judgment to come and beat upon our house.

*The winds-* The disciples surely recalled the Lord's teaching when they were on the sea of Galilee with winds blowing so strongly that they were going to drown (s.w. Mt. 8:26; 14:24; Jn. 6:18 s.w. 'blow'). Those incidents they would've understood as a foretaste of judgment and condemnation- out of which they were saved only by the presence and grace of the Lord Jesus. Perhaps the winds refer here to the Angels who will play a major part in our judgment process; for God makes His Angels winds (Ps. 104:4).

*Beat upon-* The Greek for 'to beat upon' is used seven other times in the NT- and always about falling down at the feet of the Lord Jesus. We either do that in our desperation today, or His judgment shall fall upon us in the last day. There is good reason to think that our meeting of the Lord will not be just to receive a yes/no decision. The picture of the storm beating on the house to see if it collapses implies a purpose and process of the judgment (Mt. 7:27). If it were only a yes / no decision, the language of tribunal, judgment and appeal which occurs in passages concerning the judgment seat would appear to be out of place. Both sheep and goats register their surprise at their Lord's comments on various specific actions of theirs which he discusses with them- "When saw we thee...?" (Mt. 25:44).

*Fell not-* The same house stood before and after judgment. See on 7:24 "his house". The same word is used of how we desperate sinners in this life fall down before Jesus in confession that we have sinned and we dearly wish to do something about that debt (Mt. 16:26). We either do that, or we shall fall down in condemnation at the last day, with the same realization (Mt. 18:26). Every knee shall bow to Him in this manner- either in this life, or in condemnation before Him. This is what flesh must come to; and we must realize that now. We must fall down and be broken upon the rock of Christ now, or that rock will fall upon us and grind us to powder with the rest of the kingdoms of men (Mt. 21:41). Ananias and Saphira fell to the earth at their condemnation, whereas Saul fell to the earth in repentance (Acts 5:5,10; 9:4 s.w.). At the last day, we shall fall to the earth but be lifted up and made to stand (Rom. 14:4).

*Founded-* Surely alluded to by Paul when he teaches that we must be grounded / have a foundation in love (Eph. 3:17), in the Gospel of the Kingdom (Col. 1:23). And God Himself has the ability to "settle" or ground / foundation us (1 Pet. 5:10 s.w.)- if we so wish to have the things of the Lord Jesus, His love and His Kingdom, as the dominant, master passion of our lives, then God will confirm us in that.

*7:26 Built his house-* The Jews who rejected the Lord Jesus are described as builders in Mk. 12:10; Lk. 11:48- and to unwise builders in Lk. 14:28.

*7:27 The floods came...-* The Lord spoke of the rejected at the judgment as being like a house against which "the floods came, and the winds blew, and smote upon that house; and it fell". Floods (of the ungodly), winds (whirlwinds), smiting, a falling house- this is all language taken from Job's experiences. He went through all this *now*, just as each righteous man must come to condemn himself in self-examination *now* so that he won't be condemned then. Flesh must be condemned, each man must come to know his own desperation. And if he won't do this, the judgment process at the last day will teach it him.

*Great was the fall-* A common figure for condemnation (Mt. 15:14; Acts 5:5; Rom. 11:11,22; 14:4; 1 Cor. 10:8,12; Heb. 4:11; James 5:12). Condemnation will be tragic- "great". Not only for those individuals, but for the Father and Son and all of us who view it. These are the final words

of the Sermon. The Lord ends on the note of the possibility of condemnation, despite His many positive, upbeat and encouraging words about the certainty of salvation. The tragedy of the future we might miss is simply so great that the Lord felt He had to say this. It isn't mere negative psychology. The eternal reality of the issues before us are such that we can do nothing else but let the Lord's concern and earnestness ring in our ears.

The parable of the builders is fundamentally about our attitude to the Lord. There is good reason to think it mainly concerns the attitude of the responsible; in Luke, these words of Jesus (Lk. 6:47) are set against the background of Lk. 6:27: "I say unto you which hear". The rest of the chapter seems to be addressed primarily to the disciples- e.g. Lk. 6:41,42 speak of them beholding the mote in their brother's eye; warning surely more relevant to believing disciples than to the world generally. The parable of the builders likewise refers to those within the ecclesia, who know Christ as their Lord: "Lord, Lord", they say. Among this class of people there would be "many" (Mt. 7:21- 23) who would hear Christ's sayings, but not do them. I'm obviously labouring this point, that the builders in the parable are those within the ecclesia, or at best the responsible. This is because the parallel record in Mt. 7 is rather unpleasant to apply to the ecclesia; it says that "many" of us will be in the category who say "Lord, Lord", and whose house will be destroyed. The Greek for "many" can imply 'the majority'. Even the majority of those who hear Christ's words simply don't do them. Now that's an uncomfortable statistic for us who sit before the bread and wine each week, seeking to hear Christ's words and do them. This parable was spoken in the context of crowds of the ecclesia of Israel coming to Christ, hearing His words, and doing sweet nothing about it. Such an attitude is not building a house on a rock.

*7:28 The people-* Although the Lord started teaching only His disciples, leaving the multitude at the bottom of the mountain (Mt. 5:1), clearly many of them came up to hear Him over the course of His discourse- for in Mt. 8:1 we learn that the multitudes returned from up the mountain.

*Amazed-* The sense of reality commented upon in :27 left the people with utter astonishment. Never before nor since have the eternal issues of existence been stated so clearly and compellingly.

*7:29 Authority-* It was exactly because the Lord Jesus had the power to give or take eternity that He had this authority which the people sensed.