

**SERMON TITLE:** "The Last Word—Do It"

**TEXT:** Matthew 7:24-28

**PREACHED AT:** Neighbourhood Church

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In February we began a journey through the Sermon on the Mount. It is just 3 chapters and is probably less than a 20 min sermon—but it is filled with almost infinite content- but we took on the journey nonetheless.

That journey took us through Easter and Easter marks off a conclusion to Jesus' Good News just as in many ways the SOTM marks off its introduction.

Now we are one week after Easter and asking the next question. In some way all of life's questions are variations of "So what does it mean now?" That is a constantly shifting question because whatever situation we find ourselves in colours what we see and hear and pay attention to.

At the beginning of Jesus' ministry things are new and exciting—in the middle things shake out—at the end, especially with an event as dramatic as the Easter story there is another the overwhelming drama of it all.

And then when it is all over- people have to again step back and ask—"So what does it all mean—now?"

For the city of Vancouver the 2010 Olympics are the huge event that everything has been building towards. One year from now everyone will be putting stuff away and wondering if it really was all worth it. Maybe—maybe not. But the question "What does it mean now?" will be the question that will need asking.

It is the same kind of question that all dramatic events lead to. It certainly takes place with weddings. I remember all the drama that went into our wedding—and I also remember a week into our honeymoon Janet asking herself—"What have I done?" And that was still the honeymoon.

Exactly those questions filled the minds of the disciples in the weeks after Easter. They knew something huge had taken place—something that would forever change their lives. But they didn't actually know what it meant. In fact they like you and me, would spend the rest of their lives trying to figure out what it mean [in a good way].

I want us to think about that question today one week after Easter.

But because I had one sermon left to complete the SOTM I want to tie that together—and in fact it ties together very nicely.

When Jesus had finished the SOTM He ended with this short story:

"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."

When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law. Matthew 7:24-28

This is the story that inspired a song that all those who grew up in “Old School” Sunday School knows from the inside of their bones. Most of us even remember the actions that go along with it.

As with many of these timeless truths however, they can just become just good words and the import can be lost.

Today, however we are going to look back at that parable as part of the “Now what does it mean?” question.  
“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. Matthew 7:24

It is a story that has several parts:

### #1. People Have To Hear The Words

Jesus is concluding His sermon so this is a self-evident statement in many ways—but in fact it is not self-evident in another context. Those who have heard His words have an obligation to share them with others-

This goes along side of the great preacher’s verse:

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!" Romans 10:14-16

The Good News has to be heard!

At staff meeting this week the question of bringing our Bibles to church was raised. There was a time when part of the routine of going to church was bringing our Bible along. You wouldn’t think of going without it.

And the preacher would tell you “Turn to Matthew chapter 7 and we will read from verse 24.”

And then the preacher would direct you of the words he wanted to focus on.

That still is a way of preaching that is very effective but today we have technology that wasn’t available. Now when I read a Scripture I put it up behind me on the screen and you read while looking up. In my opinion that is a better way of listening.

But not everyone finds it so. Some people find it easier to follow when they are looking down on a page.

But what is the bottom line? The bottom line is not whether or not you carry a Bible to church- the bottom line is whether or not the words of the Scripture are getting off of the page into your heart.

To get that job done we need to try all kinds of means. We read them, we recite them, we sing them, we have them read to us. All for the purpose of getting the Scriptures into ourselves.

But just getting them in is NOT the end of the story

### #2. We Need To Do What Those Words Instruct Us

Again it would appear that there is hardly anything more self-evident than this. What is the use of going to the doctor, hearing a diagnosis of your complaint, taking the prescription with you—and then not taking the pills.

No matter how accurately your doctor's assessment—no matter how much you agreed with it—if you don't do actually take the pills and follow the directions—it won't do any good.

As obvious as this is Jesus makes the point because we humans are very prone to thinking that just agreeing to something achieves an end. Agreeing is good—but without action that reflects that agreement—it means nothing.

It is a blunt but simple reality. Jesus, I am quite certain, was the most captivating speaker of all time. The crowds followed Him everywhere and hung on every word- but if that is where the story ends—it accomplishes nothing. Even the words of Jesus accomplish nothing on their own.

So one of the very last things Jesus says is-  
Therefore go and make disciples of all nations . . . teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. Matthew 28:19-20

It is not enough to have the words of Jesus heard—teaching obedience to those words it the bottom line.

It is not hard to understand that actually doing Jesus' word is important. But how important is it?

With that as the bottom line—Jesus explains why it is important and He does it with a metaphor.

### #3. Everyone Is Building A "House"

Each of us is creating a project. Many people don't think of their lives in this way- and frankly, for most of our lives we tend not to go there. But there are times . . .

Many men go through the infamous "mid life crisis." Typically somewhere in the 40s or 50s a man will start to do an assessment of where he stands in life's totem pole and how much time there is left to get to the position he imagined himself deserving. More times than not such a thought process leads to despair. The question that haunts men in this despair is "What have I accomplished and what chance to I have of accomplishing my former dreams?"

That's the "house" problem and in this parable—everyone is building whether they are conscious of it or not.

This is a picture that the Bible uses on several occasions.

In this particular parable Jesus does not address the question of the type of house that is being built- whether it is a mansion or a castle, or a family home- doesn't matter at this point. A house is a house and this house is a life long building assignment.

The parable assumption, however is that this is an important building project. This project represents everything important about life on earth. The stakes are high just as the stakes are high when we move our family into a home. It needs to protect us from the weather. If it doesn't do so- it is a failure.

The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house . . .  
Matthew 7:25

The next parable assumption is:

### #4. Storms Hit Every House—Guaranteed!

There is not difference, on this point, between the wise man and the foolish man. The wise man is not able by his wisdom to built in a less stormy area. The question is not

if, or even how often the storms will come—the question is strictly limited to what happens when the storm comes.

On a couple of occasions we have watched “Mike Holms Goes To New Orleans.” In this special Mike’s crew goes to rebuild a home in a storm devastated region of New Orleans. This is a region where big hurricanes hit every 50 odd years. That’s just how it is. There is nothing to be done about it. The only question will be—if the Big One hits—what will happen you my house?

The parable assumption is that we are living in a “flood plan.” As we speak the Red River is wreaking havoc in Manitoba and south from them. Is this a peculiar event? No, it is an event that takes place to greater and lesser degrees every year. Some years are of course worse.

This is an important life principle to remember. There are things we can do to minimize the risks we take—and we should do that—however there are circumstances in life that allow for no avoidance of risk.

If you live in a hurricane climate—you will periodically be hit by hurricanes.

We don’t like to think about this part of life. In some ways it seems a whole lot more pleasant to enjoy the sun while it’s shining and leave it at that. But, the storms of life are not like the 500-year earthquake event that hangs over our heads here on the West Coast. There is a very good chance that we will not experience the Big Earthquake in our life times.

But according to this parable—we will absolutely face storms in our life times. House destroying storms will hit us.

If this is the case then the obvious thing we must do is prepare.

Knowing that a home destroying storm will hit us sooner or later can be a depressing thought if it were not for this absolute assurance-

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. Matthew 7:25

#### #5. We Can Beat The Storm

Mike Holms’ project in New Orleans is to build a storm proof house for a family. It must be kind of fun for his team to work on this house. They have the best equipment and a team of engineers working to design this house. No expense is being spared to make the house hurricane proof.

The contrast between this and the ruined shacks in the neighbourhood is stark. This house is mounted on engineered concrete pillars. It is built out of engineered wood products treated to resist insects and rot. The roof and its beams are anchored to the foundation with powerful steel rods that run from the top of the rafters down into the concrete foundation pillars.

This is an impressive house and even as they are building it I wish I could see how it stands up during a Katrina type storm. I am quite certain that if another Katrina were to blow through after this house were built it would stand proud and strong against the worst that the storm could deliver and in fact be the refuge in the neighborhood that everyone would be able to enter and be safe.

And what is Jesus telling His listeners?

Yes storms will come.

Yes they will be home destroying storms.

BUT your house can, not only survive—but actually go through the storm unscathed. This is an incredible promise. It is so incredible that you might be tempted to put it into the category of over the top promises that keep going out.

But read it carefully. There are identical 2 houses described in this parable. There is no middle ground here. One house survives unscathed—the other is destroyed.

Which house do you want to have? Silly question.

The question is- what does it take to have the surviving house? The answer is—“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. Matthew 7:24-25

#### #5. Build It On The Rock—The Rock Is Obedience

Jesus cuts to the chase like no one else. Once we hear the Word of God and allow it to enter our hearts it “divides our every essence”.

For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Hebrew 4:12

Those who encounter Jesus, those who allow His words to enter their hearts will hear instructions given to them. As we have taken our journey through the SOTM we have encountered them. Among them are:

-“Don’t worry”

-“Don’t store up treasures on earth”

-“Forgive your brothers and sisters”

-“Love your enemies”

The earliest Mennonites like the earliest Christians heard these words of Jesus and knew the conclusion of this parable very well and so they took the words of Jesus very literally. If Jesus commands us to forgive—then we forgive.

If Jesus commands us not to strike another person- then we don’t strike.

If Jesus commands us to sell everything we own and give it to the poor—then that is exactly what we do.

It looks extreme at times—and at times it came out of confusion about the context and meaning of the Scriptures- and sometimes in the process they actually missed the point rather dramatically.

In fact at times this desire to follow Jesus’ teaching resulted in a whole new set of commandments and missed the heart.

The problem was that for each of us, at each stage of life the challenge is different. I am not always struggling to forgive, or with worry, or with accumulating treasures.

The challenges faced by the disciples when Jesus first called them were radically different from the challenges they faced a week after Easter.

But what they found was the heart of Jesus challenge remained the same.

What is at the heart of the SOTM? It is an instruction that Jesus repeated over and over again—“Follow Me.” What is to be the mark of a follower of Jesus is a commitment to listen and to follow Him, on the road He lays before us.

Before He began the SOTM Jesus had encountered several sets of men and He issued a challenge that sounded like the one He gave to James and John- "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." Matthew 4:19 The essence of the command was "Follow." He repeated it over and over again and that is why Christians are called "Followers." Whoever serves me must follow me; and where I am, my servant also will be. John 12:26

Wherever we are in life—this call goes out. It went out at the beginning, in the middle and at the end of Jesus' time in earth.

It also went out again after the resurrection—after Easter. In each stage of life the challenge of that call is different and at every stage we again need to ask, "What does it mean, now?"

One thing that it means is—following is an active response to Jesus' words.

And the promise of this parable is—if we keep that as our prize—we will survive the storms.