



During this short series we'll be examining a number of passages from the gospels that expose something of the latent Pharisaism in many of our hearts, and apply the glorious gospel afresh as we're convicted of our need to trust him again. We began the series by re-thinking the Sermon on the Mount (SOM), and especially Jesus' words that conclude the sermon, encouraging to build, not upon sand, but upon rock.

But, vitally, what does it *actually* mean to build upon sand? And what does it mean to build upon rock? We noted in the sermon that a theme runs throughout the entire SOM regarding righteousness, and particularly a distinction between 'the hypocrites'¹, who are great at keeping rules (not murdering, committing adultery etc) and impressive external shows of righteousness (giving, praying, fasting etc) and the people of God, who are to be poor in Spirit, meek, mourn and ask God to forgive us our sins.

Thus to build upon sand, is to ultimately to build upon an external works righteousness, like the Pharisees, as opposed to building upon rock, that is Jesus' call to be Poor in Spirit and ultimately to have a righteousness that comes from him. This is not a parable about being 'religious' or 'irreligious' or even 'good or bad', rather where our 'righteousness' comes from – from external, impressive deeds or throwing ourselves humbly upon God.

We noted 3 things from the passage:

- 1) **both houses looked the same.** Both men wanted to build a house, both houses were built and looked identical and both underwent a barrage of storms. Frighteningly often, externally a life built on 'works-righteousness' and a life built on a righteousness can look very similar – both people might *appear* to be keen Christians who serve wholeheartedly... but finally for very different reasons.
- 2) **a life built on Jesus' words will last.** Despite the similarities, it becomes clear finally that the foundations of the houses are quite different. When the house is barraged (as houses would have been in the flash flooding common to the area), only one stands. Note that a life built on Christ and his righteousness, although having to cope with storms, will finally be firm.
- 3) **a self righteousness life will be fragile & wrecked.** One of the characteristics of a life built upon what we do, is that our current actions and indeed the action of others will have a huge influence upon 'how we're doing'. That might be assurance

or anxiety or simply our mood. Finally Jesus says this life, built upon what we do, will not stand. At final judgment we will not be rescued. The house is wrecked.

There are various questions that spring from the passage. Note that this is the first in a series of 5 so you don't need to explore everything you know about Pharisees in this first study! For info here are all the passages / topics we'll be considering...

... *We build foundations upon what we do.* (Matthew 7v24-29)

... *We compare ourselves with others.* (Luke 18v9-14).

... *We love money.* (Luke 16v13-31)

... *We do not see our own sin.* (Luke 7v36-47)

... *We feel like slaves rather than sons.* (Luke 15v1-2, 11-32)

Here are some questions that might get things going, feel free to ignore / adapt for your group:

Would you ever call yourself a 'Pharisee'? Why / why not? Do you have tendencies? What symptoms (if any) of Pharisaism do you spot in your own life? Be honest! Assuming you do, why do you think we veer into 'external righteousness'? What reasons can you come up with?

What do you think it means to be poor in Spirit (5v1)? Why is this so vital in our walk with Jesus? Why does this set the agenda for the rest of the SOM?

What 'boxes' that they were ticking does Jesus highlight in 5v21-48? How does he show they were not **really** righteous?

What external acts were they undertaking in 6v1-18? How were these more evidence that they were not **truly** righteous?

How can both of the houses that Jesus describes look the same, when the foundations were so different? Have you seen evidence of this?

Why might a 'life built on what we do (sand)', be fragile, insecure and anxious?

Why might a 'life built on rock' be different? Is it?! Why / why not?

How can we know what we're building on?

In what ways can we talk to ourselves and one another to help ourselves with this? How can we be church that is growing away from Pharisaism?

¹ See Matthew 15, 22v15-18 and 23 for their identity