

A FIRM FOUNDATION

Matthew 7:21-29

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IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER AND OF THE SON AND OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. AMEN.

you're all familiar with Ten Commandment controversy. For years the Ten Commandments have been displayed on a plaque on the Chester County courthouse. A judge ruled that the Commandments must not be displayed on a public building and maintained at tax payers expense. The Ten Commandments aren't generic -- they're specifically Judeo-Christian. They require us to worship only the God who brought Israel out of Egypt. Lot's of tax paers don't worship that God. The state shouldn't support a particular religion. So the judge, "Cover those commandments until the appeal process has been completed." So the Ten Commandments were covered. One night hooligans removed the cover. I thought of that piece of current events when I was working on my sermon.

Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven." Whether or not they're displayed, God wants us to obey his commands. The best display of the Ten Commandments is our lives, by our obedience to them. Unfortunately, few Americans know the Ten Commandments. A lot of us say, "Lord, Lord! We want those commandments displayed." But we don't obey.

Jesus went on to say, "On that day (judgment day) many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name? Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.'" Wow! Can this really be "gentle Jesus meek and mild?" Let's think about what Jesus said. God calls very few of us to prophesy in his name, to cast out demons or to work

miracles. Those are all good things to do. But it's not God's will for most of us. Most of us are called by God to obey his will in little, everyday things.

Listen to a parable I made up. A father left home and told his son, "I don't have work for you to. Just relax. Read. Watch the TV. Invite some friends over and enjoy. Do whatever you want but it's really, really important to answer the phone if it rings. I'm expecting an important phone call that will have the most wonderful news for you." After the father left the son said to himself, "I've never cut the grass, trimmed, or worked in the garden unless dad told me to." So he went out and worked in the yard all day. When his father came home the son said, "Dad, Dad! Did you see the lawn and the garden and all the other wonderful things I did while you were gone?" But the dad said, "What about the phone call? It had the most wonderful news for you. I hope you didn't miss it." "Dad, Dad, I didn't listen for the call. I must have missed it. But I did all these other wonderful things." "Why do you call me Dad, Dad, but don't do what I tell you. Now you'll never know what wonderful news that telephone call had for you."

God doesn't command most of us to do anything spectacular. He just wants us to live a life to his glory as a witness to his grace, love and mercy that comes to us in Jesus Christ. ^{Call a lovely person} The words of Jesus come at the end of his Sermon on the Mount where Jesus commanded his disciples to show mercy rather than vengeance; to be peacemakers rather than saber rattlers; to treat our enemy with love; to go the extra mile when someone compels us to go one. He told us not to judge others and to live faithfully in all our relationships. He didn't tell most of us to cast out demons, work miracles or prophesy.

This week we'll be confronted with many choices. Will we show mercy? Will we be peacemakers? How will we express our anger or react when our enemy tries to get our goat?

Reread the Sermon on the Mount and decide how you'll respond to what Jesus said. Listen to his words and obey.

Jesus said the choices we make carry consequences for good or ill. What we do repeatedly becomes a habit either good or bad. Habits developed over the years build character whether either good or bad. And our character determines how our lives end up. Jesus wasn't teaching salvation by works. God unequivocally loves, forgives, accepts and forgives us by grace alone received through God's gift of faith. But the faith God gives produces actions. Disciples of Jesus who live by his grace and walk in the Spirit are expected to do what Jesus says if they call Jesus Lord. And if we were to obey what he says we'd enter the kingdom of heaven -- even right here on earth - the kingdom of peace and justice and righteousness. All of us are building our lives. Every day we make decisions that effect our relationship with friends, fellow workers, spouses and lovers. We're building our lives one act at a time.

There's a story of a rich man who contracted a builder to build "the finest house you have ever dreamed of building." No expense was spared, and the builder went to work. When the house had been built the rich man said to the builder, "The house is yours, but you've got to live in it." Then some of the builder's shoddy workmanship only he could notice stared at him. He regretted that he hadn't built better. We're building a house. God has provided us with all the material we need. He's paid for it through the death of Christ. Let's build houses that will protect us from the rain and wind and storms of life. Whatever kind of house we build will be the house we live in for a long time.

Children build sand castles on the sea sand below high-tide mark, not thinking of the tide which will in a few hours roll in and sweep away their castle. There are people who, day by day, by word and deed, are building their lives on sand, making impulsive choices that bring

disastrous consequences. One cruel, hateful word thrown at someone who loves us creates a crack in a poor foundation which eventually makes the house fall apart. Sometimes we don't know how dumb our decisions are until years later.

I sometimes have a nightmare that I'm standing at the Pearly Gates and Saint Peter greets me with a friendly hello. "Your name?" "Ted... Ted Atkinson." He looks over a long list of names. "How do you spell that? What's your birth date? Who were your parents?" He searches and finally looks at me and says, "I don't see your name here. Let me get the boss." Out comes Jesus. He's very friendly but he says, "I don't think I know you." "What do you mean, you don't know me. I was a Presbyterian Minister. I served on the Overtures, Amendments and Review committee." And Jesus says, "Boy, your name doesn't ring a bell. I'm sorry."

That nightmare is not meant to frighten me into obedience but to take a sober review of my life and think about the consequences of the direction I'm going. We all sin. None of us reaches Christian perfection in this life but what road are we traveling. What kind of house are we building? Built on the foundation of the prophets and apostles with Jesus Christ being the chief cornerstone our house will stand whatever comes.

God of grace,
no one is beyond the reach of your love,
or outside your limitless mercy.
Move us toward those the world despises and people reject,
so we may venture to follow Christ,
and risk showing his love.
Stand with those who are outcast;
strengthen them in peace;
encourage them by your presence;
and use them to build on the cornerstone of Christ,
until differences are honored and respected,
and all people together give you glory. Amen.