

The Life of Christ, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 5: The Great Teacher: Authority Like No Other

Matthew 7:24-29

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This lesson turns from the events of Jesus' early ministry to the character of His teaching, using the closing parable of the Sermon on the Mount. Two doctrinal threads run through it. The first is the unique authority of Christ as the divine Teacher. The crowds were astonished because He taught as one who had authority, not like the scribes. Where the scribes built their teaching on the authority of earlier rabbis, Jesus spoke on His own authority, saying, "But I say to you." This is not the manner of a mere teacher; it is the prerogative of God. The authority of His word is a window onto His deity. Help your class see that to submit to the words of Jesus is to bow before the Lord Himself.

The second thread is the nature of saving faith, and this is where Question 9 carries the heaviest weight. The wise builder is not merely the one who hears Christ but the one who hears and does. Jesus places the dividing line at obedience. This is a crucial guard against the notion of salvation by faith only, the idea that bare belief, with no obedient response, is enough. At the same time, take care not to swing to the opposite error of teaching that we earn God's favor by our works. The biblical picture, here and throughout, is a living, obedient faith: a faith that trusts Christ and therefore does what He says. James says it plainly: faith without works is dead (James 2:17). Obedience is not the price of salvation; it is the evidence and expression of a faith that is truly alive.

Formationally, this passage is a direct challenge to the comfortable Christianity that admires Jesus without following Him. It is entirely possible to enjoy the teachings of Jesus, to be moved by them, and to build a house that will not stand. Storms come to every life, and only the life built on obedience to Christ endures. Press your class, warmly but plainly, to move from hearing to doing, and let them feel both the kindness and the seriousness of the One whose words are the only sure foundation.

Question 1

Student Question:

In Matthew 7:24-27, Jesus contrasts two builders, and the difference between them is that one "hears these words of mine and does them" while the other hears them but does not. What is Jesus teaching about the foundation of a life that will stand, and why does He place the dividing line at obedience rather than mere hearing?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by establishing what the two houses have in common, because the parable turns on it. Both builders hear the words of Jesus. Both build houses that look the same from the outside. The difference is invisible until the storm comes: one builds on rock by doing what Jesus says, the other on sand by failing to do it. The foundation is obedience to the words of Christ.

Stress where Jesus draws the line. He does not divide the crowd into those who have heard Him and those who have not. Everyone in earshot has heard. The line falls between hearing-and-doing and hearing-only. This is sobering, because it means a person can be a regular, even enthusiastic, hearer of Jesus and still be the foolish builder. Familiarity with His teaching is not the same as obedience to it.

Explain why obedience is the foundation. Jesus is not setting obedience against faith; He is showing what real faith looks like. To build on the rock is to trust Christ enough to do what He says. The doing is not a substitute for trusting; it is trust made visible. A faith that never acts is like a foundation that was never poured.

Bring it home with the storm. Every life will face storms, and the parable promises that the obedient life will stand. This is not a guarantee of an easy life but of a secure one. The one who builds on the words of Christ has built on something that the worst weather cannot wash away.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Obedience to Christ's words as the foundation of a life that stands
- The dividing line between hearing-and-doing and hearing-only
- The danger of familiarity with Jesus' teaching that never becomes obedience
- Obedience as the visible expression of real trust in Christ
- The certainty that every life will face testing storms

Discussion Prompts

- What do the two houses have in common, and where does the difference lie?
- Why is it sobering that both builders heard the words of Jesus?
- How is doing what Jesus says an expression of trusting Him, not a substitute for it?

Question 2

Student Question:

Both builders heard the same words, but only one acted. Where in your own life are you mostly a hearer of Jesus' words rather than a doer? What teaching have you admired or agreed with, yet not actually put into practice?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question presses the parable into the student's own life. The aim is honest, specific reflection, not general guilt. Most of us have areas where we have heard and agreed with Jesus for years without ever obeying Him.

Help the class get specific. Perhaps they have admired Jesus' teaching on forgiveness while nursing a long grudge, or agreed with His words on generosity while gripping their money tightly, or affirmed His call to love enemies while quietly despising someone. The gap between admiration and obedience is where this question does its work.

Move toward a first step. The goal is not to overwhelm anyone with every area of disobedience but to identify one teaching to begin obeying. Invite each person to name one word of Jesus they have long admired but not done, and to consider what doing it would actually look like this week. The wise builder begins by laying one stone of obedience.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The gap between admiring Jesus' teaching and obeying it
- Identifying specific areas of long-tolerated disobedience
- Moving from agreement to action in concrete ways
- Taking one step of obedience rather than being overwhelmed

Discussion Prompts

- What teaching of Jesus have you admired for years but never fully obeyed?
- What has kept you in the place of a hearer rather than a doer there?
- What would obeying that teaching actually look like this week?

Question 3

Student Question:

Jesus says the storm came against both houses, the wise and the foolish alike. What does this teach us about the trials that come to every life, and why does only the house built on obedience to Christ's words remain standing?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Note carefully that the storm strikes both houses. Jesus does not promise the wise builder a life without rain, rising rivers, or beating winds. The obedient and the disobedient alike face trials. The gospel does not exempt us from storms; it secures us through them.

Explain why only one house stands. The storm does not destroy the foolish builder's house because the storm was unusually severe; it destroys it because the foundation was never sound. The same storm that topples the house on sand only proves the strength of the house on rock. Trials reveal and test the foundation we have actually built upon, whatever we may have claimed.

Apply this pastorally. Some in the class may be tempted to think that hardship is a sign of God's displeasure, or that the absence of hardship proves they are fine. The parable corrects both. Storms come to everyone; what matters is what we have built on. The obedient life will stand, not because it is spared the weather, but because it rests on the words of Christ.

Point forward to security in Christ. The promise here is deeply comforting: a life genuinely built on obedience to Jesus cannot be washed away. Whatever the storm, the foundation holds, because the foundation is the word of the One who cannot fail.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Trials and storms coming to every life, obedient or not
- Storms revealing rather than creating the true foundation
- The security of the life built on obedience to Christ's words
- Correcting the assumption that hardship signals God's displeasure

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it significant that the storm strikes both houses?
- What does it mean that the storm revealed, rather than created, the difference?
- How does this parable offer both warning and comfort?

Question 4

Student Question:

Storms have a way of revealing what we have built on. What past storm in your life exposed the true foundation you were trusting, and where do you sense the need to build deeper on Christ now, before the next storm comes?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question invites the class to reflect on their own experience. Most adults can recall a storm, a loss, a crisis, an illness, a betrayal, that tested what they were truly resting on. Such moments often reveal foundations we did not know we had, whether the rock of Christ or the sand of self, success, or the approval of others.

Handle this with pastoral gentleness, as some may be in or near a storm now. The aim is not to reopen wounds but to learn from them. Ask what past storms revealed about their real foundation. Sometimes a storm exposes a sandy foundation and becomes, by God's grace, the reason a person finally begins to build on the rock.

Turn the class toward the present. The wise time to build a foundation is before the storm, not during it. Invite each person to name one area where they sense the need to build deeper on Christ now, through obedience, prayer, and the Word, so that they will stand when the next storm comes. Foundations are laid in fair weather.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Storms revealing the true foundation of our lives
- Learning from past trials about what we have trusted
- Building deeply on Christ in advance of future storms
- Foundations laid through present obedience, prayer, and the Word

Discussion Prompts

- What past storm exposed the foundation you were really trusting?
- What did that reveal about where you need to build more deeply?
- What is one way you can build deeper on Christ now, before the next storm?

Question 5

Student Question:

Matthew tells us the crowds were astonished “for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes” (7:28–29). The scribes appealed to other teachers, but Jesus said, “But I say to you.” What does this unique authority reveal about who Jesus is?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Set the scene in its first-century context. The scribes taught by citing tradition and the rulings of earlier rabbis. Their authority was borrowed, always resting on someone else. Jesus taught in a way no one had heard. He did not appeal to other teachers; He spoke as though His own word settled the matter. Throughout the sermon He had said, “But I say to you,” placing His word alongside and above the received tradition.

Draw out what this implies about His identity. To speak this way is to claim an authority that belongs to God alone. A faithful prophet says, “Thus says the Lord.” Jesus says, “I say to you.” He does not merely deliver God’s word; He speaks as the One whose word is itself the word of God. His authority in teaching is a quiet, steady revelation of His deity.

Connect this to the parable He has just told. It is precisely because His words carry divine authority that building on them is building on rock, and ignoring them is folly. If Jesus were only one wise teacher among many, we might weigh His counsel against others. But because He speaks with the authority of God, His words are the foundation, and our only fitting response is to obey.

Lead the class to the proper response: astonishment that becomes submission. The crowd was amazed; amazement is a fine beginning, but it is not enough. The authority of Christ calls not merely for admiration but for the surrender of our lives to His word.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The unique, divine authority of Christ's teaching
- The contrast between borrowed scribal authority and Jesus' own authority
- Jesus' "but I say to you" as a claim that belongs to God alone
- The authority of His teaching as a revelation of His deity
- Amazement at Christ that must become submission to Him

Discussion Prompts

- How did Jesus' way of teaching differ from that of the scribes?
- What does His authority in teaching reveal about who He is?
- Why does His divine authority make obedience the only fitting response?

Question 6

Student Question:

Jesus' authority means His words are not suggestions to be weighed against our preferences but commands to be obeyed. Where are you tempted to treat the teachings of Jesus as optional, picking and choosing the parts that suit you while quietly setting aside the rest?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This self-examining question follows directly from the authority of Christ. If His words carry the authority of God, then selective obedience is a contradiction. Yet most of us are skilled at it. We embrace the teachings that fit our temperament or culture and quietly shelve the ones that cost us something.

Help the class see the pattern in themselves. Some find Jesus' words on grace easy and His words on holiness hard; for others it is the reverse. Some welcome His comfort but resist His commands. The tendency to pick and choose treats Jesus as an advisor whose suggestions we are free to weigh, rather than the Lord whose words we are bound to obey.

Move toward wholehearted submission. The point is not to produce despair at our inconsistency but to recover a right posture toward Christ's words: that all of them, even the costly ones, are the word of our Lord. Invite each person to name one area where they have been treating His teaching as optional, and to ask for grace to submit to Him there.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Selective obedience as a denial of Christ's authority
- Treating Jesus as an advisor rather than as Lord
- The tendency to embrace comfortable teachings and shelve costly ones
- Wholehearted submission to all of Christ's words

Discussion Prompts

- Which of Jesus' teachings do you find easiest to obey, and which hardest?
- Where are you tempted to treat His words as optional suggestions?
- What would it mean to submit to Him in the area you most resist?

Question 7

Student Question:

Jesus calls His own words the rock on which a wise person builds, and the completed New Testament is now the authority by which we know His mind (2 Timothy 3:16–17). What does this teach us about the sufficiency and finality of Christ's word for the building of our lives?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Establish the point first from the parable: Jesus calls His own words the foundation. A wise person builds on what Jesus says. His word is not one resource among many but the rock itself. To build a life that stands, we must build on His teaching.

Then connect this to how we have His word today. Christ taught with divine authority, and that authority is now preserved for us in the inspired Scriptures, especially the New Testament, which Paul says is able to make us wise for salvation and to equip us for every good work (2 Timothy 3:16–17). We are not left guessing at the mind of Christ; He has given us His word in writing, complete and sufficient.

Draw out the implication of sufficiency and finality. Because the completed Scriptures are sufficient, we do not need new revelations, fresh voices, or additional authorities to know how to build our lives. The word we have is enough. This guards against both the neglect of Scripture and the craving for some new word beyond it. The foundation has been laid; our task is to build on it.

Apply it to the life of the church and the believer. A people who treasure and obey the written word of Christ are building on rock. Encourage the class to prize the Scriptures as the very voice of their authoritative Lord, sufficient for everything He asks of them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Christ's word as the sufficient foundation for life
- The completed Scriptures as the authority by which we know Christ's mind (2 Timothy 3:16–17)
- The sufficiency and finality of the written word of Christ
- No need for new revelation beyond the completed Scriptures
- Treasuring and obeying Scripture as the voice of our Lord

Discussion Prompts

- What does it mean that Jesus calls His own words the rock?

- How do we have access to the authoritative word of Christ today?
- Why is it good news that the completed Scriptures are sufficient for building our lives?

Question 8

Student Question:

Consider how you actually take in the word of Christ, in worship, in study, in private reading. Are you listening as someone who intends to obey, or more casually, as one who merely wants to be informed or comforted? What practices would help you become a doer of the word?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This question examines the posture of our hearing. The parable warns that hearing is not enough, yet much of our hearing is shaped by wrong expectations. Some come to the word mainly to be informed, treating it as material to be learned. Others come mainly to be comforted, looking only for reassurance. Few come ready to obey.

Help the class consider the difference a posture of obedience makes. James pictures the careless hearer as someone who glances in a mirror and immediately forgets what he looks like, while the blessed person looks intently and does what the word says (James 1:22–25). To listen as one who intends to obey is to come to Scripture asking not only what it means but what it requires of me, and then to act.

Suggest concrete practices. Reading slowly and prayerfully, asking the Spirit to show one thing to obey, writing it down, and returning to it through the week. Coming to worship and study expecting to be changed, not merely informed. Discussing with another believer what they will do in response. The aim is to build habits that turn hearing into doing.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The posture of hearing: to obey, not merely to be informed or comforted
- James's contrast between the forgetful hearer and the doer (James 1:22–25)
- Coming to the word asking what it requires, then acting
- Practices that help turn hearing into obedience

Discussion Prompts

- When you hear or read the word, what do you usually come looking for?
- How would coming with the intent to obey change the way you listen?
- What one practice could help you become a doer of the word?

Question 9

Student Question:

The wise builder is defined not merely by hearing Christ but by doing what He says, which teaches us that genuine, saving faith is a living, obedient faith and not mere agreement or “faith only.” How does this passage, along with James 1:22–25 and Luke 6:46, help us understand that true faith in Christ always expresses itself in obedience, without turning that obedience into a way of earning God’s favor?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the heaviest doctrinal block of the lesson, so handle it with both clarity and balance. The parable itself makes the point: the one who hears Christ and does what He says is wise; the one who hears and does not is foolish. Saving faith is not bare hearing or bare agreement; it is a faith that obeys. This rules out the idea of salvation by faith only, the notion that one can be right with God by believing while never submitting to Christ.

Bring in the supporting Scriptures. James says that the one who hears the word but does not do it deceives himself, and elsewhere that faith without works is dead (James 1:22; 2:17). Luke records Jesus asking, “Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and not do what I tell you?” (Luke 6:46). The consistent witness is that genuine faith in Christ shows itself in obedience. A faith that never obeys is not a living faith at all.

Now guard the other side carefully, because this is where balance is needed. To say that faith obeys is not to say that we earn salvation by our works. We are saved by grace, through a faith that responds to Christ in trust, repentance, confession, and baptism, and then walks in obedience. The obedience is not a payment that puts God in our debt; it is the natural fruit and expression of a faith that has truly laid hold of Christ. Picture it this way: a healthy tree bears fruit, but the fruit does not create the tree. Obedience is the fruit of saving faith, not its purchase price.

Help the class hold both truths together, since people tend to fall off one side or the other. Against the idea that bare belief is enough, insist that real faith obeys. Against the idea that we earn God’s favor, insist that obedience flows from grace received. The wise builder trusts Christ and therefore does what He says, and in that living, obedient faith his house stands.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Saving faith as a living, obedient faith, not mere agreement or “faith only”
- The witness of James that faith without works is dead (James 1:22; 2:17)
- Jesus’ rebuke of those who call Him Lord but do not obey (Luke 6:46)
- Obedience as the fruit and expression of faith, not a way of earning salvation
- Holding together grace received and obedience offered

Discussion Prompts

- Why does this parable show that genuine faith always expresses itself in obedience?
- How would you answer someone who says that belief alone, without obedience, is enough?

- How can we insist on obedience without falling into the error of trying to earn God's favor?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back over the two builders and the authority of the Great Teacher, name one specific teaching of Jesus that you will move from hearing to doing this week, and describe the first concrete step you will take to begin building your life on that word.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This capstone gathers the lesson into a single, doable response. The whole point of the parable is to move people from hearing to doing, so resist any ending that leaves the class merely impressed. Help each person name one specific teaching to obey.

Encourage concreteness. A vague resolve to obey Jesus more will not survive the week. A specific step, such as seeking out someone to forgive, beginning a practice of generosity, speaking truthfully where one has been evasive, or setting aside unhurried time in the word, takes root and bears fruit. The first step need not be large, only real.

Close by lifting their eyes to the authority and kindness of the Teacher. The One whose words are the foundation is not a harsh taskmaster but the Lord who loves them and whose commands are for their good and their security. To build on His words is to build a life that storms cannot wash away. Encourage the class to write down their one teaching and first step, and to take it this week.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moving from hearing to doing in one specific area
- The value of a concrete first step over a vague intention
- Building on the words of Christ as the path to a life that stands
- The kindness and authority of the Teacher whose commands are for our good

Discussion Prompts

- Which specific teaching of Jesus will you move from hearing to doing this week?
- What is the first concrete step you will take?
- How does it encourage you that the Teacher whose word you obey loves you and seeks your good?