

## **BUILT TO LAST**

**Luke 6:46–49**

**Dr. George O. Wood**

Our Scripture today is about the rock that we build upon, the cornerstone of Christ, Luke 6:46–49.

“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? I will show you what he is like who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice. He is like a man building a house, who dug down deep and laid the foundation on rock. When a flood came, the torrent struck that house but could not shake it, because it was well built. But the one who hears my words and does not put them into practice is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. The moment the torrent struck that house, it collapsed and its destruction was complete” (Luke 6:46–49, NIV).

These words marked the close of the Sermon on the Plain, which is found in Luke 6. It is a parallel sermon of the Sermon on the Mount found in Matthew 5–7. Most likely, a different sermon preached on a different occasion. Shorter in scope, but still reflecting the fundamental teaching of the Sermon on the Mount.

Jesus, in the Sermon on the Plain, began by talking about the character, the quality of life, He wants in His disciples. People who are absolutely dependent upon God, the poor in spirit, people who hunger after righteousness, people who have an empathetic concern for others and people who are willing to endure pressure for His sake. He also talks about the importance of loving the difficult people in our life and how we ought to respond to the difficult people by blessing them and forgiving them and doing good to them and going the extra mile with them. Then, He talks

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to us about the importance of generosity or grace in our life, not setting in judgment on other people, not existing as a condemner of others but as a person who gives grace.

He brings it all to a close here. And Jesus, as He brings the sermon to a close, is showing us that He is a preacher who understands the importance of eliciting a response. He closes by asking a question which is directed to the head and giving a story which is directed to the heart.

I don't think in my early years of ministry I understood the importance of the close of the service or the close of the message. I assumed it was just sufficient that you stood up before the congregation and delivered your heart. In those days, a sermon could be expected to take forty-five minutes. I think in the first ten years of pastoring this church, I doubt I gave more than a handful of sermons on Sunday morning under forty-five minutes. Our youth director at the time accused me of studying all week to be able to get up and tell the congregation on Sunday morning all that I'd learned. Then I thought, "The people have been given the information, we have the benediction, and everybody leaves." I've discovered that that's not how the Holy Spirit operates. He wants us to take the time to respond to what has been said. That's why we have an altar time at the close of the service. This close of the Sermon on the Plain is sort of Jesus' altar time, where He asks the question that sort of sinks into the heart and elicits a response. A story that brings a response.

The question that He asked is this—and I'll confess I've read this many times and passed right over the question getting to the story that He tells—the question is a sobering question, "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say?"

It's interesting that the Lord never tries to answer that question. I looked through the Sermon on the Plain and the Sermon on the Mount and He doesn't really try to answer it. He just asks it.

"Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say?"

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As I pondered that question this week, I've come up with some answers that I see in the contemporary experience of the body of Christ today that may suggest some reasons why He is called "Lord, Lord" but people do not do what He says.

I'll suggest some reasons:

**I. One reason I think Jesus is called "Lord, Lord," and then His teaching is disobeyed is that, simply, Jesus sells. Jesus is popular.**

Jesus is now the number one FM radio station in Orange County. Isn't that great? But there is a flip side, a dangerous side to Jesus being popular. A couple of years ago, I had a luncheon with a person who is president of a major Christian publishing company. He owns it, runs it. In the course of the conversation, I said to him, "You're using some authors who have best-selling books whose lives are not right with God. You've got to know that. There is sin, real clear moral sin in their life and yet you're publishing their works. Why are you doing that?" He kind of looked down and grew a little bit sheepish. Then he said, "There's a real demand for what they're writing. And what they're writing really sells." I said, "Does that make it right?"

I've read accounts in the paper recently of a fundraising organization operating under the title of "Christian" in Southern California, which is ostensibly raising money for Ethiopian refugee relief. The charge is that they've raised millions and millions of dollars and have yet to give any to Africa, while the organization has built multi-million dollar headquarters and the executives are living on high powerful salaries. "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say?" Because the easiest way to get money out of Christians who have a loving heart is to talk about orphans or famines. If you'll talk about that and have a program to get the money, you can vacuum-clean it out of their pockets.

Jesus sells. "Why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord' and do not do what I say?"

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**II. I think another reason why people call Him “Lord, Lord” and do not do what He says is what happens to them in their life.**

The Lord says, “Why?” And they say, “Because it’s the devil that got a hold of me and made me do it.” Flip Wilson made this statement popular, I think, in the role of Geraldine. Basically, he said, “The devil made me do it.” There’s some truth in that. The devil is the enemy of our soul. The Scriptures say he goes up and down the earth seeking whom he can devour. He is our enemy, our mortal enemy. But there are times when he is blamed for areas in which we should assume the responsibility.

I was attending a pastors’ meeting this week of the Assemblies of God in Southern California, our annual church conference. I happened to be in the motel room getting ready for the meeting one morning and I don’t usually have a chance to watch the television during the daytime but I happened to have the TV on in the morning, and saw a Christian program. I recognized some friends of my wife and some people that were very well known in the Christian community. This brother had pastored one of the larger churches in the nation. Several years ago, there had been a moral failure in his life. It had necessitated his resignation of the church and undergoing a period of rehabilitation. He is now back in the ministry, and he and his wife were being interviewed about how this moral failure had occurred in their life and how God had brought deliverance to him. I cannot at all sit in judgment. I don’t even try to sit in judgment upon my brother. But I noticed that this brother giving the testimony noted that the reason he fell into moral sin was partly because there had been, in past time in his family, a curse placed on generations before him. He had also been molested as a child. Those are serious things, what happens to us in our background does very much affect our conduct. He also indicated that his real deliverance never came until someone had prayed for him and seen the demons that had been coming against him

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delivered from his life. And then finally, he knew freedom. The reason why he had fallen into sin was because of the curse, because of the demons and because of his experience as a child. All of which may well have been valid. What concerned me, however, was that never in the course of that hour-long conversation did I hear any statement that indicated he was taking responsibility. “I take responsibility for what happened in my life.”

It’s so easy when we have sinned to reach out and to blame. To blame the devil, to blame others, but to escape a sense of responsibility of our own. It happened in the first sin in Genesis 3. Adam says, “The woman that You put here with me. She gave me some fruit from the tree and I ate it. ” That’s true. She did do that. But notice He puts all the blame on her and takes no responsibility. Eve says, “The serpent deceived me and I ate it.” That’s true. The serpent did deceive her. What she does not do is take responsibility for having made the decision.

In the Old Testament, there comes that moment when Moses is up on Mount Sinai, receiving the Law, and Aaron is down below; and the people get restless and want a God they can see. So Aaron masterminds a great offering that takes in all the gold and jewelry of the people. He puts the offering in a great, big fire, heats it up and makes it molten. It’s gold. He pours it into a mold of a calf. He takes a carving tool to the calf and carves it so its fine features are delineated. Then Moses comes from the top of the mountain, sees the calf, breaks the tablets of the Law and holds Aaron accountable. And asks, “Aaron, why did you do this? Why did you make this calf?” It’s obvious by looking at the calf that the marks of the carving tool are on the calf. Aaron says to Moses in Exodus 32:24, “They gave me the gold and I threw it in the fire and out came this calf.” That’s what he said! Avoidance of responsibility.

This question is a probing question. “Why do you call Me ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I say?” There is a deep desire in me to make this question more comfortable to our spirits; a desire

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within me to remind us of all of the grace and mercy of God. If we could fully obey—on our own willpower—everything the Lord asks us to obey, we would have never needed Jesus to die for our sins. God knows we can't live the perfect life and that's why He sent Jesus to us, to give us a perfect life that's been lived for us. So in emphasizing this question –not wanting to put anybody under a restraint that says, “The Christian life means living in such a way that you never sin or never have failure”—I wanted to remind us of the grace of God, but also that the Scriptures speak strongly about responsibility in our life.

Watchman Nee tells about a new convert who came in deep distress to see him. The man said, “No matter how hard I try or how much I pray, I simply cannot be faithful to the Lord and I'm beginning to feel like I'm losing my salvation.” Watchman Nee said to him, “Do you see this dog here? He's my dog. He's house-trained. He never makes a mess. He is obedient. He's a pure delight to me. But in the kitchen I have a son, a baby son. He makes a mess. He throws his food around, he soils his clothes. But who is going to inherit my kingdom? Not my dog...well-behaved and trained; but my son, who is my heir.”

You are Christ's heir because Christ died for you. So when we face the Lord's question, “Why?” we always face it within the context of grace. But grace is never grace if it is divorced from responsibility, and responsibility in the Christian sense can never be done without grace. They always must be held together.

I think the best illustration of it is one my daughter is going to shoot me for using. We called her this week, asked her how she was doing. She took a trip the weekend before to visit her dorm-mate's home. They had borrowed a car. Evangeline was driving it. We didn't know that she was borrowing the car. That was mistake number one. Mistake number two was, I had given her permission to go and Jewel had been a little bit reluctant for her to go. Mistake number three was

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the speedometer in the car didn't work. So she didn't know how fast she was driving. Before she got out of the state of Oklahoma, a highway patrol pulled her over and wrote her a ticket for going 70 miles per hour. Evangeline by now is crying on the phone and she's telling us this. Then she says, "That's not all. I got back in the car and I was upset. The speedometer still wasn't working and an hour later, I still hadn't got out of Oklahoma and I got pulled over again and got a second ticket for going 70 miles per hour." She said, "And it cost me a hundred and fifty dollars!" I'm thinking, "It's going to cost me a fortune in insurance!" The father in me says, "Oh, Evangeline it's okay. We still love you. You'll always be our daughter. I know you need to be encouraged right now, picked up. Don't worry about it. It'll be ok. " That's my nature. That's me as a dad. Jewel's saying, "How come you didn't tell us you were borrowing a car? How come you were going 70 miles per hour? You should have known better than that! How come you got a ticket twice? Once should have been enough! Who do you think is going to pay for all this?" Evangeline needs both of us. That's why she's such a good kid. She needs grace and she needs responsibility.

If there's all responsibility and no grace, we'll never be able to amount to anything because we'll be forever insecure. We'll feel like, "Can anything I ever do please God?" But if it's all grace and no responsibility, then our life just gets to be a mess because there's no discipline or accountability in our life.

Jesus is asking us a personal question. The Scriptures do not show God as a ticked off lawgiver who, without a qualm, tosses sinners aside like a rejected piece of machinery. He is the caring husband of Hosea who is wrenched by the infidelity of his people and will go to any lengths to bring his beloved back to himself and to themselves.

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And the Lord is concerned as to how we answer that. I like the testimony Bob gave a couple of weeks ago when he said, “When I was converted, the Lord instantly gave me deliverance in my life and freed me of a lot of the hang-ups and fears and phobias I’d had before I became a Christian.” He shared some of those with us in his testimony. He said, “For a while, the cloud completely lifted. Then, sometime after my conversion, I felt that cloud move back in on me and I really got frightened because I wondered what was happening. My preconversion life seemed to be returning. So I felt God speak to me saying, ‘Bob, you learned to make the wrong choices. And now you need to learn to make the right choices.’” Accountability.

How do you answer this personal question from the risen Christ? “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I say?” It’s a searching, penetrating question for every heart.

The Lord, then, follows that with a story. It is a story that closes the sermon, much the same story that was in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus, by using concrete imagery, is going for our hearts. The story is often called “the story of the two houses.” But it’s really the story of two builders. It’s the story of one who built upon solid ground, upon a rock; and the story of the person who didn’t take time to build upon a good foundation. One of the points of the story is that the disciple of Jesus, the Christian, is going to have the same kinds of adversity as the one who is not a disciple, not a Christian. Both are going to have a storm. The storm may be an illness, the storm may be an auto accident, the storm may be the death of a loved one, the storm may be financial reverses. Both are going to have a storm. Jesus, someone has said, never promised His disciples Disneyland. He never said, “You’ll be immune” or “You’ll have an immunological shield around you.” He said, “No, both are going to have the storm, and in the storm, what you build upon and whom you build upon will be revealed.”

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The Sermon on the Plain is telling us that, when we hit the storm of life, if we've been building on the Lord's teaching about character and become a person whose life is dependent upon Him—a person who's hungry for Him, a person who cares about others, a person who's reaching out to love difficult people, a person who has a generous heart toward others, a noncritical, nonjudgmental spirit—when that sock to the stomach hits us in life, because we built upon Him and His teaching, we'll stand.

This last week, I was thinking about a person who left an indelible impact upon my life, who experienced a great storm. She was the first member of the congregation to die after I became pastor. You'd have loved to have known Diana. Diana and Ed became Christians and came into the fellowship of this church. This was the only church that they had known as Christians. In spring of 1974, I had begun preaching through the Book of Acts that particular year. At that time, Diana had received the baptism in the Holy Spirit. She'd been praying that the Lord would make her more effective in being a witness for Him, so she had sought the Lord and she had received the baptism in the Spirit. I had her, on a Sunday morning, give a testimony about how she had received the Spirit of God in her life and how she was looking forward to ways in which the Lord would use her as a greater witness.

I noticed a few weeks after that that Diana was missing. She had given a testimony and then for like three or four Sundays, she wasn't in church. Then I found out that she'd been feeling very tired and run-down and been spending a lot of time in bed and that Ed, her husband, was taking her to the doctor that week for a checkup. The checkup revealed that she had leukemia of the most viral variety. She was immediately put on chemotherapy, hospitalized. The church went to pray for her. She had two beautiful little girls. She was twenty-nine years of age, a beautiful young mother. Everything going in life for her that could be going for any person. She said on

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June 25, “In six months, I’ll be home.” She really didn’t know, when she said that, whether home would be in Newport Beach or in heaven.

Six months later—to the day—she was home, on Christmas. The leukemia went into remission in September for a while and I had Diana come back for a testimony and give us an update of where she was. The whole church had been praying for her. It’s interesting, when she first shared her testimony of being baptized in the Spirit, I was in Acts 2, when the Spirit is poured out on people. But when she shared her testimony of God with her in suffering, I was in the part of Acts which talks about Paul’s imprisonment; the fact that sometimes life is an adversary to us. She testified how God had been with her. In fact, she led every nurse that attended her to the Lord or came close to it. There must have been—in her six months of hospitalization—over two dozen people who came to know the Lord as a result of visiting Diana in the hospital. It was incredible. I’d go to minister to Diana and wouldn’t open my mouth—she’d minister to me. In fact, before the second service, one of our choir members said to me, “Remember that was when I gave my life to the Lord. I was Diana’s nurse.” I remember.

In the later stages of leukemia, in late December, it became so severe that Diana’s complete supply of blood was being replenished every day through transfusion. The doctors finally said there was nothing more they could do. So Ed and Diana, on Christmas Eve, were called to make the decision of whether or not to accept any more blood transfusions. With them, we prayed together and asked God for wisdom. Everyone felt that the time had come, if God was going to heal, this would be the time. If not, she was ready to meet the Lord. She was weak. She was in great pain. She was under sedation. She was in intensive care.

I’ll never forget the last time I prayed with her—standing by her bedside—having finished the prayer, I walked out the door, looking back to see Diana. I’m very sensitive to my shortcomings.

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I realize there are many times I've failed God. I'm sometimes like the rest of you, I wonder if God really loves me. I remember—as I stood there at the door—looking at Diana, she must have somehow sensed, in her dying moments, what my need was in life, and how she needed to minister to me. With all of her strength (and it must have taken a great deal of strength), she raised her head off that pillow, looked up at me and, with a wave of her hand, she smiled at me. It was the last time on earth I ever saw Diana, because within hours, she was with the Lord. I said to myself, “She gave me a benediction in life. She gave me the kind of smile that God has for me because she had the smile of God in her life.” If I ever have to go through anything close to what she went through, I pray that I'll have the same foundations.

Suffering and adversity reveals what had been in us all along. That's what Jesus is saying. The Lord calls upon us to take care as to what we're building in our life, because every one of us will, at one moment or another, be tested by life, will be tested by adversity. What we are in that moment, to the greatest measure, will depend on what we have been in the common ordinary moments of our life.

Maybe there are some here who feel so depressed about what's happening in your life, you're saying, “I wish that I could be like that and my solution was a medical solution. I wish I could just lie down and die, but I'm not sick.” God knows that. And for you, it's not too late for God to put a floor in your life, to put a foundation in your life. That foundation happens when we make Jesus the Rock upon which our life is built. You can last. You're built to endure if Jesus is the foundation of your life. There is no other foundation for life. And there is nothing else which will let you last other than the foundation of His presence.

### **Closing Prayer**

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Lord, we come to You in this moment. I offer a prayer on behalf of those here to whom You are saying today, “Why do You call Me ‘Lord, Lord’ and do not do what I say?” Give to that friend, Lord, a special sense of Your grace and a special aliveness to the responsibility you’ve called them to in their own life. Help each of us to understand that, no matter where we are in life, it’s never too late to build upon the Rock. That You call us to Yourself this day and call us to evaluate the thing we have held most important. If everything were taken from us, what’s left? May it be You, Lord. May it be You. Give encouragement, today, to people who are being buffeted by life’s ill winds. Give us faith, as we come to this time of prayer, to believe You for the healing of illnesses, for the curing of diseases, for the setting free from oppression of the enemy. Lord, put a Rock upon which to build in our life. In Your name we ask. Amen.