

Jim's Notes
December 6, 2006
The Gospel According to St. Matthew 7:24-29

Matthew 7:24

St. Augustine of Hippo (died A.D. 430)

Neither I nor any other preacher can see into your hearts . . . but God is looking, for nothing can be hidden from him. Do not deceive yourselves by coming eagerly to hear the Word and then failing to do it. If it is a good thing to hear, it is a much better thing to do. If you do not hear, you cannot do, and therefore you will build nothing. But if you hear and do not do, then what you are building will be a ruin. (Sermons 179.7-8)

St. Andreas of Crete (died A.D. 720)

If someone is a hearer of the word only and does not confirm it by his deeds, he will lose the word as well, for it will slip through his fingers and disappear. (Catena)

St. John Chrysostom (died A.D. 407)

Whereas his teaching has up to now largely focused on the future kingdom, its unspeakable rewards and its consolations, now he shifts his focus to the present life, its current fruits and how great is the strength of virtue within it. What then is its strength? It is living with security, not being easily overcome by any of life's terrors and standing above all those who treat others maliciously. What could be as good as this? For not even the one who wears the royal crown would be able to furnish this for himself. But one who pursues the way of excellence can have this stability, for that one alone is possessed of this equilibrium in full abundance. In the crashing surf of the present circumstances such a one experiences a calm sea. This is amazing. It is when the storm is violent, the upheaval great and the temptations continual that such a person is not shaken in the slightest. This is not a way of living that applies to fair weather only. For he says, "The rain came down, the floods came, the winds blew, and they beat against that house. And it did not fall because it was founded upon the rock."

In referring to rain, floods and winds Jesus is speaking about all those human circumstances and misfortunes, such as false accusations, plots, bereavements, deaths, loss of family members, insults from others, and all the horrid things in life about which one could speak. Jesus says that a soul that pursues the way of excellence does not give in to any of these potential disasters. And the cause of this is that this soul has been founded upon the rock.

Now "rock" refers to the reliability of Jesus' teaching. For his commands are stronger than any rock. They place one quite above all the human waves of life. For the one who guards these commands with care will excel not only over

human beings when treated maliciously but even over the demons themselves in their plots. (The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 24.2)

Matthew 7:25

Origen of Alexandria (died A.D. 254)

“For neither death nor life nor angels nor other things can separate us from the love of Christ” (Romans 8:38-39). Neither can the flooding of rivers, as in the land of Egypt and Assyria, do harm. Only those are harmed who build on sand, who practice the wisdom of the world. The winds that blow are like the false prophets. All these, coming together in one place, “beat upon” the house. If it is founded on rock, they do no harm. “The way of a snake upon a rock” is not to be found (Proverbs 30:19). But in the form of temptations and persecutions, which may mount into a flood, they beat upon even the one who seems to be well-founded. The house falls if it does not have Christ as its basis and foundation. But the truly wise person builds one’s house “upon a rock.” This is the way the Lord builds his church – upon the rock, with steadfastness and strength. This is why “the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matthew 16:18). All the persecutions that fall upon that house accomplish nothing. The house is founded upon the rock. (Fragment 153)

Matthew 7:26

St. John Chrysostom (died A.D. 407)

And he was right in calling this one a fool, because what could be more brainless than building a house on the sand? For such a one endures the work of building but deprives oneself of the fruit of one’s labor and relaxation, experiencing punishment instead of benefit. For it is surly clear to everyone that even those who follow a wicked path have to sweat in labor. Even the robber, the adulterer and the false accuser have to work and strain so that they can bring their evil to completion. But they not only reap no benefit at all from these labors but also experience much loss. For Paul was implying this when he said, “The one who sows to one’s flesh will reap corruption from one’s flesh” (Galatians 6:8). Who are these persons who build on the sand? Those who are given up to fornication, debauchery, drunkenness and anger – they are building on sand. (The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 24.4)

Matthew 7:27

St. Cyril of Alexandria (died A.D. 444)

Spiritually understood, the one who rightly hears the word is contrasted with the builder who builds his house on sand. In time of temptation the house falls down. The onslaught of evil wind covers it with silt, and troubled waters flood into the soul. From this turbid flood stream of iniquity the house is shaken to its foundations. This should rouse us to become aware of the danger that comes in final judgment. Those who hear the Lord’s words are like a wise man building on

a rock. Those who do not follow the Lord's words are likened to a foolish man building on sand. One who practices virtue is made thoroughly able "through Christ who strengthens him" (Philippians 4:13). We receive everything from God who puts things right. From him comes wisdom and insight and union with all that is good. The bad person cannot claim God as a cause of his own wickedness and stupidity. He makes himself like the fool when he withdraws from that which proceeds according to nature. He then turns toward what is unnatural. (Fragment 89)

Matthew 7:28-29

St. John Chrysostom (died A.D. 407)

Surly it was logical that they were in pain over the heavy weight of what he had said. They were stunned by the souring level of the requirements that he had made. But now the strength of the one teaching was so great that he seized many of them and threw them into great amazement. Because of their pleasure in what he said, Jesus finally persuaded them not to leave as he finished speaking. For not even after he went down from the mountain did the hearers leave, but even the whole audience followed him because of the great love that was shown in what he had said. But most of all they were astounded at his authority. For when he said these things, he did not refer to another, as even the prophet Moses did, but everywhere he showed that he himself was the One who had the authority to decide. For even when he was establishing laws Jesus continually added, "But I say to you" (see Matthew 5:22, 28, 32, 34, 39, 44). And when he was reminding them of the final day of judgment, he showed that he himself is the One who will bring justice, both through the punishments and through the honors. This is what made such a commotion among them. (The Gospel of Matthew, Homily 25.1)