

# *What Do You Mean When You Say Jesus is Lord?*

Luke 6:46-49

Rev. Jeff Chapman ~ April 15, 2018 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

<sup>46</sup>“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say? <sup>47</sup>As for everyone who comes to me and hears my words and puts them into practice, I will show you what they are like. <sup>48</sup>They are 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. <sup>49</sup>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, NRSV)

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Imagine with me. You’re a twelve-year-old boy. Your mother is going to be out for the afternoon and you’ll be home alone with your little brother. She knows the both of you well and so before she leaves she reiterates a rule you know well. No playing ball inside the house. If you want to throw the football around, or kick the soccer ball, go to the park. “Yes, mom”, you tell her as she leaves. “We understand.”

As soon as she’s gone you grab your football and yell at your brother to join you outside. On the way out of the house, however, you just can’t help yourself and you toss the ball to him as he comes towards you through the family room. It’s just so hard to hold a ball still in your hands when you’re a twelve-year-old future NFL quarterback. The problem is, you’re not yet an NFL quarterback and your throw is a bit off target, and your not-yet-an-NFL-receiver brother can’t handle the off-target pass and the ball crashes into a table lamp and leaves it in pieces on the carpet.

Still imagining with me, picture the scene two hours later when mom comes home and discovers the broken lamp. “Was I unclear?” she asks. “Was there anything about my instructions which you did not understand? Did you not promise me that you would not play ball in the house? Why did you do this? Why?” There is no good answer to that question, right? At least no good honest answer that you are going to give. Because the truth is you thought you knew better than your mom knew when it came to playing ball in the house. Clearly, you thought, she is underestimating our ability to throw and catch a football. Clearly, she doesn’t have any idea how much fun it is to throw a ball in the house

or she’d understand why we can’t resist doing so. Do you follow me? When a child refuses to obey a parent that disobedience is often rooted in mistrust. Kids think they know better. They don’t trust the values, the judgment, the experience of their parents. So they do things their way even though they may have given previous lip service to obedience.

Think about the parallels in Jesus’ challenge to those of his followers who fail to obey his teaching, “**Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I tell you?**” The double invocation of the title “Lord” makes clear that Jesus has in mind the person who shows up in worship on Sunday morning and offers passionate praise to God but then turns around Monday morning and pays little to no attention to the things God has told him or her to do. And again, the reason for their lack of obedience is simply a lack of trust.

For example, Christ tells us that his daily bread for us is sufficient and that we must not worry about material things in this life. If we then spend our time always worrying about whether or not we will have enough to get by tomorrow, or worse years from now, it simply means that we don’t trust Christ. We at least suspect we might know better when it comes to these matters. Christ tells us that because it is through hardship that he will grow our faith, we must therefore receive hardship with joy. If then when hardship comes it makes us bitter instead of joyful we demonstrate our lack of faith. Christ promises that we are forgiven completely, we and everybody we know. So when we refuse to accept God’s forgiveness, and then in turn refuse to extend it on to others, we make clear that we don’t believe God’s Word when it declares that Christ did not come to condemn but to save. We say Jesus is our Lord. So why don’t we do what he tells us to do? The answer is always the same. Disobedience is always rooted in distrust. If we trusted Christ, truly believed he was Lord over all creation, we would always take him at his word.

This is a truth emphasized over and over in scripture: *true faith leads to true obedience*. In addition to this reference in Luke 6, listen to how many times Jesus makes this point in Luke’s Gospel alone. Luke 8:21: “**My [family includes] those who hear the word of God and do it.**” After teaching his disciples about being a good neighbor through the parable of the Good

Samaritan, Jesus tells them, **“Go and do likewise.”**<sup>1</sup> Luke 11:28: **“Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it!”** And of course, these famous words later in the letter of James: **“Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.”**<sup>2</sup> And later, **“Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.”**<sup>3</sup> I could go on, but I think that makes the point.

Just in case we still don't get it, however, Jesus uses a very concrete illustration here to drive his point home. Two men set out to each build a house for themselves. The first man digs and digs until he finds bedrock which he then uses as the foundation for his house. The second man, however, simply finds a nice plot of ground with a view and builds his house on the ground without knowing what sort of foundation lies beneath. Then when the river rises in flood season, the first house withstands the torrent while the second one is washed away.

Jesus' contemporaries had no trouble understanding his illustration. In Palestine in those days many of the rivers dried up in the summer heat and left sandy river beds in their place, with perhaps only a gentle creek running through. The temptation for the fool was to find an inviting stretch of sand – river front property! – and build his house there. After all, it was much harder labor to search for and then build on a foundation of rock where the footings must be cut into the stone. But then in autumn, after the September rains had come, those gentle creeks became raging torrents which swept the fool's house away. It was then that the wise man's toil was amply repaid. His house stood strong and firm and secure.<sup>4</sup>

Now, we need to understand that Jesus is not making a distinction here between Christians and non-Christians. Rather, he's speaking to his followers, to all those who say to him “Lord, Lord!”. That means that his words here are both an encouragement and a warning to us, the church. Apparently there are some of us here, just as there were among those associated with Jesus back then, who are in danger of practicing a Christian devotion that is in word only and to do so is to root your life on a foundation that will not endure. The question, of course, is which one are you? Which one am I? Apparently there is a difference between Sunday morning listeners and lifelong obedient disciples, a difference that carries with it enormous implications.

As we seek to find out which one we are, let's closely examine each one in Jesus' parable.

First, Jesus says the man who builds his house on the foundation of bedrock is the man or woman who, **“comes to me, hears my words, and acts on them.”** Is that you? Is that me? Remembering what I said before, this is the person who doesn't just understand Jesus' teaching but trusts Jesus' teaching because he or she trusts Jesus. He or she has a heart that is in a humble position in relationship to Christ, teachable and open.

If you a golfer trying to improve your game you might hire a golf coach to help you. If she is a good coach she is not going to be afraid to tell you exactly what is wrong with your swing and show you what you need to do differently. You are pulling your head. Your stance is all wrong. Your grip is a mess. Once she gives her assessment, however, now it's up to you. Do you believe she knows better than you know when it comes to your golf swing? If you do, you will listen to her and try to do what she tells you to do. Will you be able to do everything she tells you to do? Probably not. You're still a student. Even the best coach with the most teachable student can't fix everything overnight. But if your mindset is in a position of humble submission, you will set yourself on a pathway to becoming a better golfer.

Listen carefully to me. When it comes to the Christian life, *obedience is not the bedrock foundation*. Our lives do not stand or fall on our ability to obey, and that's a very good thing because all of us will often fail to obey. Notice that the first builder does not create the foundation himself but *discovers the foundation after he searches for it*. The foundation already exists. Our obedience does not already exist. Christ's obedience, however, does exist. And because he obeyed his Father all the way to the cross, there now exists a bedrock of sufficient grace available to us all not only to be forgiven for our disobedience but to then empower us to learn to obey. Now it's a matter of faith, of trust. Do we really trust that Christ is Lord, that he not only has forgiven us for how we have lived in the past, but now is ready to help us live differently in the present? If Christ truly is the eternal Son of God, the very creator of all that exists, and truly has given everything for our sakes because he loves us so much there is nothing he would not do to draw us to himself and share his life with us, how can we not then take him at his word no matter what that word happens to be. That is the foundation – Christ, and the grace he offers us all!

This is where the rubber meets the road. Most everybody alive today takes Jesus at his word some of

<sup>1</sup> Luke 10:37

<sup>2</sup> James 1:22

<sup>3</sup> James 2:17

<sup>4</sup> William Barclay, *The Daily Bible Study Series: The Gospel of Luke* (Westminster Press, 1953), 81.

the time. Even non-believers like some of what Jesus taught. But big deal. If you only like some of what Jesus taught, are only willing to obey some of what he commanded, Jesus is not your Lord.

Imagine a person who decided he was only going to obey certain traffic laws, only the ones he agrees make sense. He likes the stop light laws. Those make sense. We can't have people racing through intersections from all directions willy-nilly. But the speed limit laws are stupid, or at best only meant for those unlike him who can't handle their vehicles at high speeds. Now, is this a person who respects the authority of the law? No, not at all! The traffic laws actually have no authority in his view. *He* is the authority, the final word on things, and so he will only agree with the traffic laws that are in line with his assessment.

There are so many people today who treat the Bible the same way. Some say, "I really like what the Bible says about justice, about taking care of the poor, but I think the Bible is way out of date in what it says about sexual purity." Or, "The Bible is absolutely right when it comes to sexual purity, but I'm not as interested in what it says about the dangers of accumulating material wealth while others in the world go without." Do you understand that there is nothing to commend in the person who follows God's law only in the places they agree with God's law. For them, Christ's teachings are not the authority. They don't trust Christ. They trust themselves. They are the authority.

You see, you can't trust Jesus as Lord without believing that he was right about everything, that he has the key to every aspect of our lives on this earth and beyond. That's what it means to call him 'Lord.' You may struggle to follow his teachings. Sure, we all do! We are, after all, still apprentices. But if you call Christ Lord that means that at your core there is a deep trust that he is Lord. He is the bedrock upon which you, with his help, are going to construct your entire life in the ways he tells you and empowers you to construct your life.

But not everybody wants that and so there's an alternative. Jesus says the man on the other hand who builds his house on something other than the foundation of bedrock is the man or woman who, "**hears and does not act.**" Is that you? Is that me? Because Jesus ends the parable with this example, rather than the positive example, it's clear that his teaching here is meant to be a warning to his audience. I would suggest it's a warning to all of us. He certainly wouldn't warn his followers against empty devotion if he didn't feel that there existed a real danger that we might practice empty devotion.

Notice here that both houses, from the outside at least, look the same. Who knows, maybe the second house actually has more curb appeal. It's got that beautiful little creek running through the front yard, after all. But the external similarities fail to tell the whole story.

Do you understand what Jesus is saying? When you look around the church it's not always so easy to distinguish the first sort of person from the second. We all call Jesus "Lord" on Sunday mornings. We all sing the same songs and pray the same prayers and recite the same creeds. We all sit and listen to the same scriptures and same sermons. We could get up and walk out, but we don't. We all put offering in the plate. We all serve in some capacity in the work of the church. On the outside it's really hard to tell the difference.

Apparently, then, the only way to tell the difference is when the rains come and the creek rises. When hardship visits a life, as it eventually visits every life, that's when it becomes apparent which houses are truly built on the bedrock, which lives truly do honor Jesus as Lord. As one writer puts it, "Our confession of faith, no matter how exuberant, when unaccompanied by obedience will not hold one's life when the storms hit."<sup>5</sup> Again, there is a great difference between Sunday morning listeners and lifelong obedient disciples, and that difference will always become apparent in the hardships of life. That's when faith is truly tested.

But if not ultimate faith in Christ in all things, what other foundation might somebody in the church choose instead? Everybody chooses a foundation in life. That's part of the story. Both builders choose a foundation, that thing on which they build their life because they believe it will sustain their life. The foundation of your life is the thing that gives you ultimate purpose, security and identity. And if it's not Christ for you, it's usually still a good thing. Remember, idols are often good things which we make into ultimate things.

Chris Evert was one of the world's best tennis players in the 1970s and 1980s. Her career win-loss record was the best of any singles player in history. But as she got older and was forced to contemplate retirement, she became afraid. In October of 1990 she said this in an interview with *Good Housekeeping* magazine,

I had no idea who I was, or what I would be away from tennis. I was depressed and afraid because so much of my life had been defined by my being a tennis champion. I was completely lost. Winning made me feel like I was somebody. It made me feel

<sup>5</sup> Fred Craddock, *Interpretation Series: Luke* (John Knox Press, 1990), 93.

pretty. It was like being hooked on a drug. I needed the wins, the applause, in order to have an identity.<sup>6</sup>

Career, success, beauty and applause – those are all good things. But retirement, age, the loss of popularity, these are all floods that come to test the foundation of our lives. A story like Chris Evert’s story ought to prompt us to carefully consider what unworthy foundations we may be building our lives on. What thing in life – and it’s probably a good thing – are you tempted to look to for ultimate meaning, identity and security? Material wealth or comfort? Career? Pleasure? The opinions of others? Some good cause you are fighting for? Your age or health? Even your marriage or family? Coming back to where we started, these are the things that many people trust, the things in which many of us, even in the church, place our ultimate faith. But none of these things are assured for tomorrow. The right storm in life will eventually come through and wash every one of them away. Then what? Jesus tells us what: **“When the river burst against it, immediately it fell, and great was the ruin of that house.”**

Again, Jesus’ illustration here is a warning, a warning given to those he deeply loves, to us. It’s a call to self-examination, of course. Don’t try to assess the foundations of other people’s lives. For one, you don’t have enough information at your disposal to make a proper assessment. On top of that, it’s not helpful because it distracts you from the issue at hand, which is examining your own foundation. And again, the question really is a matter of trust. We call Jesus “Lord”, but do we mean it? If we do, we trust Jesus was right about everything and continues to be right about everything, that he has the key to every aspect of our lives on this earth. Therefore, his teaching doesn’t just go into our ears and settle in our minds but penetrates our lives in such a way that it works itself out, by his grace, in our hearts, our hands, our lips, our feet. Jesus never teaches us simply to inform us but ultimately to transform us! Faith without the fruit of works is a dead faith. It’s not even faith at all.

Jesus made this abundantly clear. And there is absolutely nothing in what he said or did that should lead us to believe that we can just receive the grace of God in Christ and then turn around and live our lives in disregard of his teaching. He can’t just be Savior without also being Lord. A theologian named A.W. Tozer once put it this way. “I feel that a notable heresy has come into being throughout Christian circles – the

widely accepted concept that we humans can choose to accept Christ only because we need him as Savior and that we have the right to postpone our obedience to him as Lord as long as we want to... That salvation apart from obedience is unknown in the sacred scriptures.”<sup>7</sup> How can we trust Jesus for forgiveness and salvation without then trusting him in everything else? That’s Jesus’ point. You can’t.

We all began worship today by declaring that Christ is risen and that he has risen indeed! We say we believe it, which means we believe he is Lord, a *living* Lord, placed in authority over everything there is, even death! That means this is Christ’s world and we have no choice but to honor him as Lord. What good news it is, therefore, that Christ has already demonstrated that he is a Lord who loves us no matter what and that he would be willing to give his life in utter shame so that we could live forever without shame! What good news it is that Christ was sent by our Father in Heaven who is a good, good Father who knows all and can be trusted in all. It would be one thing if we were called to bow down to a tyrant. We are not. We are invited into a relationship with a Father who is God but who also has come to be among us to give us every good thing he has to give, if we would only trust him enough to receive it all. And he does not expect perfection in our obedience, but only our willingness to place ourselves in his hands that we might grow, by grace and over time, in obedience.

In the end, of course, there still might be the person among us who wants to hedge their bets. Can I be saved if I don’t do what Jesus tells me to do? Can I get into heaven someday when I die if I acknowledge Jesus as Lord but I’m still not quite ready to let him teach me to obey everything he commanded us to do? I don’t know. Maybe you can. God’s grace and love are wider and deeper than I think any of us can imagine.

But if that’s the question you’re asking, maybe you’re asking the wrong question. If you don’t really trust Jesus now, and don’t really want to find a way to walk with him through this life and know him as well as you can, what makes you think that after you die you will suddenly want to enter into a reality where it cannot be denied that he is absolutely the center of everything and everywhere you look everybody is living in every way according to his will. I love how writer and theologian Dallas Willard puts it,

You might wish to think about what your life amounts to *before* you die, about what kind of

<sup>6</sup> Cited by Timothy Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* (Riverhead Books, 2009), 76-77.

<sup>7</sup> Cited by Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission* (Harper, 2006), 13-14.

person you are becoming, and about whether you really would be comfortable for eternity in the presence of One whose company you have not found especially desirable for the few hours and days of your earthy existence.<sup>8</sup>

If you don't trust Christ now, what makes you think that you will suddenly want to trust him then? He didn't save us to go to heaven, you know. He saved us to be with him, and heaven is just the reality in which he exists. If we trust him now, not just in our words but with our lives, we will find our lives rooted on a foundation of bedrock which will never be shaken, not even in death. So may God give us the grace to trust him in all things, the gift of faith which changes everything.

Amen.

*Almighty God, give us grace to be not only hearers, but doers of your Holy Word, not only to admire, but to obey your message, not only to profess, but to practice your ways, not only to love, but to live your gospel. So grant that what we learn of your glory we may receive into our hearts, and show forth in our lives: through Jesus Christ our Lord. All these things we pray in His name – all glory, all power, for all time, forever and ever. Amen.*

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## The Next Step

*A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application*

1. Read Jesus' words in Luke 6:46-49. What is the first thing which stands out to you here?
2. Why would somebody call Jesus "Lord, Lord!" but then refuse to do what he tells them to do?
3. What is the "foundation of rock" in the parable meant to symbolize? Why does one have to dig down to get to it?
4. In James 1:22 we read, "**Be doers of the word, and not merely hearers who deceive themselves.**" In James 2:17 we read, "**Faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.**" What relationship does the willingness of our obedience have with the authenticity of our faith?

5. What is it about hardships (i.e. the rising river in Jesus' parable) that tends to expose the true foundation upon which we have built our lives?
6. A.W. Tozer suggests that we can't accept Jesus as Savior but then postpone our obedience to him as Lord, that if we trust Jesus for forgiveness we must trust him in all things. What do you think?
7. What good thing in this life (other than Christ) are you tempted to make the foundation upon which you build your life?
8. As Jesus' teaching here calls you to self-examination in your life, what do you discover? What do you feel Christ is teaching you through this scripture and message?

### Table to Table Question

*A question for kids and adults to answer together*

What are you building your life on?

Is that a good foundation that will last?

<sup>8</sup> Dallas Willard, *The Great Omission*, 17.