

Have faith (or What will you build your life on?)

by Rev John Castle

A sermon given on Sunday 28th September 2025

Readings: Genesis 15:1-6, **Matthew 7:15-29**

Introduction: have faith in what?

Today's sermon is the fourth in our series of "Building blocks for a happy life". We've had "Seek truth", "Know yourself", and "Value community". This week our theme is "Have faith" - but what or who should we have faith in? There are many voices seeking our allegiance, promising answers or security. What difference would it make to have faith in God?

Trends in the world

In the past three weeks there has been much in the news and on social media about the late political activist Charlie Kirk, a strong supporter of Donald Trump, who was murdered by a lone gunman while addressing students at Utah Valley University. Kirk is credited with attracting many young adults, particularly students, to the support of Trump. Christian opinion in the UK is divided between those who applaud Charlie Kirk's clear promotion of the Christian faith and those who are more concerned about some of the political and ideological ideas he advocated, including criticism of anti-racist practices, vaccine skepticism and anti-feminism.

Here in the UK, many in the church were troubled to see the Cross and Christian slogans displayed as part of anti-migrant protests. Are we experiencing the growth of a British Christian far-right movement?

On a more hopeful front, the recent survey conducted on behalf of the Bible Society claimed that more and more young people known as “Gen Z” (mainly those in their late teens or twenties) are turning to Christianity.¹ This has been labelled “The Quiet Revival”. Unfortunately for the Church of England, the growth is taking place in Roman Catholic and Pentecostal churches, rather than Anglican churches.

Taking these two trends together, it seems that in various ways, people are looking for a “big story” to guide their lives, whether it’s a political ideology or religion. Islam is also growing in the UK.

At the same time, our society continues its trend towards a greater acceptance of liberal values with regard to sexual behaviour and a more “me-focussed” attitude to life, where “finding yourself” and feeling free to express yourself are considered more important than conforming to social norms.

The challenges for Christians

I see two challenges here for Christians. The first is this: are we letting ourselves be carried along on the tide of social trends, accepting that what “everyone else” is doing or believing must be right, or are we building our beliefs, values and lifestyle on the values and teachings of the Christian faith? Do you actually know enough about what is in the Bible and Christian tradition to be able to think in a Christian way about such issues as assisted dying, abortion, poverty, migration and the Gaza war, to mention just a few current

¹ <https://www.biblesociety.org.uk/research/quiet-revival-2025>. The site also has a podcast unpacking the methodology and meaning of the YouGov survey.

topics? If not, what are you going to do to improve your biblical knowledge?

The second is to ask ourselves how we can help others find faith for themselves. So if a family member, friend or neighbour asked us a question about the Christian faith, or wanted to know how to pray, would we be able (and willing) to give them some guidance? Most of us who attend worship here at St Michael's have been going to church for many years – so we should have plenty of knowledge and plenty of personal experience to enable us to give others some guidance, even if we can't answer the tricky questions that people may have.

Authentic faith

One of the big tests in today's culture is *authenticity*. It's particularly big in the way young people think about themselves and others. On one level it's as simple as "do you practise what you preach?" For example, if you believe that God cares about the poor and the oppressed, do you express that belief in regular, generous giving to charities who help the poor and oppressed? In Luke's version of today's parable of the two housebuilders, Jesus starts by asking "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and yet don't do what I tell you?"²

In Matthew's gospel, the story comes after Jesus' warning that there will be false prophets who can lead us astray. On the outside they look as innocent as sheep, but if you choose to listen to them they will actually destroy you, like hungry wolves. Jesus is warning about false teaching. It's not just

² Luke 6:46 GNB

influencers on the internet who can make us accept false beliefs and values – even church leaders can do this. So how can we know what is true, and who are we going to follow?

Matthew's account of this parable is placed at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, as if to say, you've read three chapters of the teaching of Jesus, but you won't get into God's Kingdom just by saying "Lord, Lord". As Jesus says in chapter 7 verse 20, "you will know them by their fruits". Although that is applied as a test for false or true teachers, it can also be applied to each of us.

What will you build your life on?

In the parable of the two builders, Jesus puts before us two options for how we are going to build our lives. One is characterised by the man who built his house on sand. The sand seems to represent beliefs and values that are transient and unstable, such as the beliefs and values of the world around us, or our own self-centred interests. Clearly building on sand is a lot easier than building it on rock. Perhaps Jesus is caricaturing the person who can't be bothered with really listening to Jesus' teaching and putting it into practice in their life. It's much easier to go with the crowd, or to follow your own philosophy of life. And for a while life seems much easier that way.

But when the storms of life hit you, as they certainly will, your house will collapse. What sort of storms might we face? Serious illness of ourselves or someone we love; redundancy; identity theft; marriage breakdown; children going "off the rails", etc. It could also represent temptations to behave in a

way that is contrary to God’s commandments, which often has disastrous consequences for our lives, and for our faith.

To avoid falling apart when trouble strikes, Jesus says we need to build our lives on his teaching. This is a lot harder, just as digging foundations upon rock is harder than building on sand. If we’re serious about being Christians, that is actual followers of Jesus rather than just saying “Lord, Lord” when we come to church or say a prayer, then we need to first of all know what he teaches and then build our lifestyle, our relationships, our use of time and money on his teaching. This is what living an authentic Christian life is all about.

All of this requires faith – that is, choosing to put our trust in Jesus and his words, rather than in other views and philosophies. In the book of Genesis, Abraham was called to leave his country and go to another land, and he obeyed. Later, when he asked God about the fact that he had no son, God promised that his descendants would be as many as the stars in the sky. Would Abraham trust God to fulfil his promise? We read that Abraham “believed the LORD; and the LORD reckoned it to him as righteousness.”³ Are we willing to trust God to that extent?

Over to you

Okay, so I’ve now told you what I think Jesus is teaching in this passage from Matthew’s gospel, and related it to the world around us. You are, I hope, better informed. But that’s only the first part of the story. The second, most important part, is to put what God has been saying to you into practice.

³ Genesis 15:6 NRSV

When we finally meet Jesus in person, are we going to be in the category of people to whom he says “I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers”⁴? Or will he say, “Well done, good and faithful servant”⁵?

⁴ Matthew 7:23 NRSV

⁵ Matthew 25:21 NIV