

Matt 7:24-29

CC 9am 3rd June 2012

So it was 60 years ago on Feb 6th that George VI died and Elizabeth became Queen and 59 years ago yesterday since she was crowned Queen in Westminster Abbey. I'm sure some of you have memories of that day, perhaps watching it on the early black and white televisions.

Sixty years of her reign is the focus of the nation's celebrations over this weekend and it would take a cleverer person than I to try and interpret the effect of her reign.

However I want to suggest, admittedly on the basis of not a lot of evidence, because naturally a lot of the thoughts and actions of our Queen are private, that it has been her Christian faith which has played a large part in guiding her through these sixty years.

However every so often we do get a glimpse of her faith and especially in the message she gives each Christmas. Perhaps this last Christmas was one of the clearest.

At the end of her message she said these words:

"Finding hope in adversity is one of the themes of Christmas. Jesus was born into a world full of fear. The angels came to frightened shepherds with hope in their voices: 'Fear not', they urged, 'we bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

'For unto you is born this day in the City of David a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.'

Although we are capable of great acts of kindness, history teaches us that we sometimes need saving from ourselves - from our recklessness or our greed.

God sent into the world a unique person - neither a philosopher nor a general, important though they are, but a Saviour, with the power to forgive.

Forgiveness lies at the heart of the Christian faith. It can heal broken families, it can restore friendships and it can reconcile divided communities. It is in forgiveness that we feel the power of God's love.

In the last verse of this beautiful carol, O Little Town of Bethlehem, there's a prayer:

O Holy Child of Bethlehem,

Descend to us we pray.

Cast out our sin

And enter in.

Be born in us today.

It is my prayer that on this Christmas day we might all find room in our lives for the message of the angels and for the love of God through Christ our Lord.

I wish you all a very happy Christmas."

I think that is a great appreciation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In that sense I have to say that I think Jesus would describe our Queen as a wise Queen and I would also say that we can gain from her example in this as in many things.

Why do I think Jesus would describe her as a wise Queen? Well on the basis of Matt 7:24, "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock." Or we could personalise it to read "Therefore every Queen who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise Queen who built her house on the rock." That I would suggest is what she has done and so I would suggest from Jesus that she is wise and sets us a good example. These words of Jesus echo to us through those who first heard them on that hill in Galilee.

Who is the wise person in Jesus view? It is the person who both hears and does what he says.

1. Wisdom in hearing

Yes the emphasis is upon doing what Jesus says but first if we would be wise and if we would build our lives on strong foundations we have to hear what Jesus says. The wise person is the one who hears the words of Jesus and recognises them for what they are. The Queen said, "To what greater inspiration and counsel can we turn than to the imperishable truth to be found in this treasure house, the Bible?"

God's word has so much to say to us in our day and it is in the word of God that we receive the wisdom of God. So we need to be listening to it as we read it for ourselves from the Bible and as it is taught us in sermons and so on. We need to listen to the word of God even when it is not comfortable to do so.

I recognise that many husbands have a problem with hearing. It is a problem of selective deafness. So for example the wife will say, "go to the shops, lay down the carpet, wash and wax the car,; get the kids from school; rent some DVD's; and do the rest of the dishes".

What the husband hears is, "**go** to the shops, **lay down** the carpet, wash **and** wax the car; **get** the kids from school; rent **some** DVD's; and do the **rest** of the dishes".

It is very possible to hear the word of Jesus and find that it is hard. It cuts across what we want to do and so we put it one side. It is possible to hear only what we want from the word of God. However when it comes to the word of God we must avoid such selectivity in our hearing and we must be open to the whole word of God. That's why here at Christ Church we have looked in recent years at Ecclesiastes, Job and Leviticus as well as Mark, Ephesians and Titus. Here is the wisdom of God, as John Stott put it, "the Bible is a handbook of faith and a handbook of conduct." That is it teaches us what to believe and then how to live in the light of that belief.

Many years ago we used to sing a chorus which said, "I am feeding on the living bread, I am drinking at the fountainhead and who so drinketh", Jesus said shall never, never thirst again."

So is that us are we taking every opportunity to read the Bible? Are we using notes to help us understand what we read? Are we reading round the Bible that is reading good Christian books which will help us understand the Bible and what we should do? Since we have his mother here this morning I just love the way when my grandson Caleb who is 2 ½ is read for bed he says “Bible time”. He loves to read the Bible though being small he uses this great book which I used on the Bible Overview course, ‘The Big Picture story Bible’. If we would be wise as God wants us to be wise we need to hear the word.

2. Wisdom in doing

But as I said earlier the point Jesus was making here, and which will be repeated next week with Dima as we look at James, is that we not only to be hearers of the word but doers of the word. The wise person is the one who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice.

In the first Christmas message of this millennium The Queen said:

“To many of us our beliefs are of fundamental importance. For me the teachings of Christ and my own personal accountability before God provide a framework in which I try to lead my life. I, like so many of you, have drawn great comfort in difficult times from Christ’s words and example.”

The point Jesus was making was that it is not a matter of whether we say good and true things about or to Jesus; nor whether we hear his words and commit them to memory until we are full of learning and truth; but whether we actually do what he says and do what we know only then are we being true to Jesus and only then are we being wise.

And in the parable he uses here Jesus seems to suggest that actually it is when we come up against times of trouble that the reality of our faith is seen. It is only in the storms and battles of life that we find out whether faith is genuine. The life of true faith will stand in the storms of life but that which is not true will crumble.

In the last couple of weeks we have seen two earthquakes in northern Italy destroying many old buildings possibly because they were built at a time when builders were not sure how to counter earthquakes.

The wise person builds on the rock of the word of God and builds a faith that will stand against the pressures and storms of life.

I remember about 10 years ago going to Universal studios in the USA and taking a bus tour which took us round some of film sets and we saw a town from about the 1930s which while it looked real was nothing but a frontage. It was all a facade and had no depth and no reality. Please don’t let that be your life and may God make sure it is not mine either.

3. Examples of action

So Jesus tells his followers that wisdom is hearing his word and doing it and thus building a strong life of faith. But what did he have in mind for his disciples to do? What words did he think they should be listening to and putting into practice.

Well I suppose overall as we have been saying we should be placing our lives under the authority of the whole of Scripture but here surely “these words of mine” must refer back to what he has just been saying and much of what he has been saying does deal with pressures the disciple will experience.

Last week in the press there was a headline which said “Revenge is tweet: scores settled on websites”.

The article went on to say, “More than half of the UK population claim to be contemplating revenge and social networks are the preferred platform for getting even.

The rise in popularity of Twitter and Facebook has made it easier and quicker to settle scores and seven in 10 (69%) people polled said online tools are responsible for people's thirst for payback.

More than half (52%) said they were currently thinking about getting their own back on someone while almost four in 10 (38%) confessed they had already sought revenge out of anger, jealousy or spite.”

Seven out of ten people looking for some kind of revenge. There is a pressure on the Christian the pressure to want to get your own back and yet Jesus said, “I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also.” (Matt 5:39) The wise person doesn't just hear and affirm such words but does them. Are you wise? Are you standing out from the crowd? Are you one of the 30% not seeking revenge?

Then we live in a world which especially for us in the west offers us many good things but of course they come with issues and problems. We get a pension but we're told our pension pot needs to be huge to maintain us in a proper way. We have houses and cars but the advertisers tell us we need or deserve bigger and better. But then you get a bigger car and can't afford the petrol or there is no petrol. The pull of the things of the world is all around us. That pull can seriously hinder our faith. In the parable of the sower the seed, which is the word of God, begins growing but the thorns, “life's worries riches and pleasures” (Luke 8:14) chokes the plant. Jesus said to his followers, “Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth... But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven” (Matt 6:19-20). Are we being wise? Are we focussing on treasure in heaven or are we consumed by the pleasures and riches of this world?

So I could go on about worry and whether we can trust God our Father for all we need as in Matt 6:25 and about not hiding our faith but rather doing what Jesus said and being salt and light in the world (Matt 5:13-14).

Why not later over the bank holiday read through the Sermon on the Mount and see how it sets out a very different lifestyle for Jesus' disciples to follow but a lifestyle which is godly, which builds a strong life of faith that will hold firm against the pressures that come on us as we live in the world and will hold up under the problems we may face.

Today we thank God for the Queen and her 60 years as monarch of the United Kingdom. But especially we thank God for her faith based on the word of God and for her witness to her faith and in that with these words of Jesus in our minds we recognise her as a wise Queen and we say thank you to God for her and long live the Queen. But then we also praise God for his word and pray that we too may be wise in hearing and doing that word.

"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock".