

St Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI  
Pastor Mark Gartner  
Sermon for Pentecost 2 – June 23<sup>rd</sup> and 26<sup>th</sup>, 2011

### **Matthew 7:15-29**

**“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.**

**“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?’ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’**

**“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. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”**

**When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.**

Dear children of God.

Last summer about this time of the summer, we were on vacation in South Padre Island, TX. One of the things that we did was to try our hand at sand castle building. Now, this is not your “tip over a bucket of wet sand and call it a castle” type of sand castle building. No, this was to learn the real art of sand castle building. We hired the services of “The Amazin Walter” He is a professional sand builder who gives lessons right on the beach on how to build real sand castles. He has been doing this for many years. He showed up with all the right tools to accomplish our task. After a couple of hours, our group was getting better and some of the projects actually looked half way respectable. But as nice as they looked, we knew that they were only temporary, because there is this thing called the tide that rolls in every day. No matter how sturdy you built your sand castle, it would not last more than a day, because the tide would come up flatten them.

As we look at our text for today, we see this same picture. We hear Jesus say that everyone who hears his words and also puts them into practice is like a wise man who builds his house on a rock, able to withstand a storm. The one who hears his words but doesn’t put them into practice is like a fool who builds his house on the sand, only to be destroyed in a storm. Today our Savior tells us to:

### **Sermon Theme: Build On A Firm Foundation!**

- 1. Do not be deceived**
- 2. Do not deceive yourselves**

Our lesson is really the end of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. In the Sermon he has set the standard high—so high, none of us can reach it. And that’s really the point. The point he’s making is: you can’t live up to this. You can’t perform these works well enough. Even if you do some of them, they are only truly good works when they flow from faith. The book of Hebrews says, **“without faith it is impossible to please God”** (Hebrews 11:6a). But false teachers have long pointed to their good works as the proof that their message is true.

That's why Jesus calls them ferocious wolves in sheep's clothing. They may appear sanctified with their good deeds, but their false message can destroy faith. So when Jesus tells us that we will recognize them by their fruits, he's not talking about their deeds. Because they look good on the outside. To spot a false teacher we must look past the glowing outward appearances and look at what they teach. In their teaching is where we'll see the spoiled fruits from a spoiled tree. Jesus compares it to finding grapes on thornbushes or figs on a thistle bush. How do we watch out for them and recognize the bad fruit? Sometimes it's easy, such as when they make prophecies that are never fulfilled, or when they add other writings to the Bible, claiming that they are inspired by God too. But overall, the spoiled fruit we look for is any teaching which is contrary to the true teachings of the Bible.

That means we need to not only be familiar the truth of the Bible, but also be familiar with the errors they teach. False teachers have followers because their error is subtle and has hints of truth. It is believable because most often they misuse the Bible to support their errors. So, no matter how good a person's actions look and how good their words might sound, no matter how "successful" his ministry looks, if he teaches contrary to the Bible, he is a false teacher. His false teaching and false good works will bring judgment on him on the Last Day. Jesus says, he will be **"cut down and thrown into the fire"** no matter how much he pleads and puts his own deeds on display. Those good deeds will mean nothing to Christ. **"Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"** False teachers may have done a lot of works but many fail to do the will of God in simply believing in his Son. They put their faith in the false fruits of outward appearances.

The other illustration Jesus uses is of the two house-builders. One built his house on a sand foundation and the other on a foundation of bedrock. When rain and wind and floods came, the fool's house on the sand came crashing down, but the wise man's house on the rock remained. Those who believe in Jesus as their Rock and Foundation will be left standing on Judgment Day. Those who have built their faith on the sandy foundations of good works and appearances will have their rickety foundations washed out on that Day. This isn't just a warning for those outside of the church. This flood of damnation will come upon many who called Jesus "Lord"—that is many who were members of a Christian congregation. And these hypocrites may even know that Jesus has died for them, but they refuse to repent of their persistent sinful behavior. Though they superficially know what Jesus has done, they have rejected him with their impenitence. And when he comes again he will reject them and say he never knew them.

But Jesus is not just warning unbelievers and false teachers and hypocrites. He's also urging us to keep building on the right foundation—that is, on him. **"Everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock"**. We have to admit that we have also focused too much on the appearance of our faith, rather than simply exercising it. Sure, we know Jesus is the foundation of our faith. We know there's no other way to withstand the God's flood of judgment than to rest securely on him. But our everyday lives haven't always reflected it. How is our faith handling the everyday storms of life? Do you sometimes feel like even the littlest of things set you off?

Our English translation doesn't catch it, but gusts of wind that hit each house are different. The wind that hit the house on the rock was a heavy wind that literally fell down hard on it. But the wind that hit the house on the sand could be described as if it unintentionally stumbled into it—almost like it was merely a glancing blow. But it was enough to make it come down with a great crash. Sometimes, does it feel like it doesn't take much for life to shake us to the core? And you get frustrated because you think to yourself, *"I thought my faith was stronger than this! My faith should be stronger!"* Why is it that these things—little and big can shake us up so badly? Consider this.

The one who hears Jesus' words and puts them into practice is like the one who builds his house on the rock. And Jesus' entire Sermon on the Mount lays out for us what it means to put our faith into practice. Have we gotten caught up in the appearance of our faith, more than in exercising our faith? Have we convinced ourselves that our faith is strong based on the fact that we've convinced others? The Sermon on the Mount very effectively shows us how poorly we've put our faith into practice.

Allow me to summarize it briefly for you. First of all, the beatitudes teach us that the one who puts Jesus' words into practice is one who is poor in spirit, who mourns, who is meek, who hungers and thirsts for righteousness, who is pure in heart, who is a peacemaker, who is persecuted because of righteousness, who is the salt of the earth and light of the world. His righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and teachers of the law. He does not resist an evil person but turns the other cheek. He goes the extra mile. He loves his enemies. He gives to the needy without letting his left hand know what his right hand is doing. He prays humbly and sincerely. He stores up treasures in heaven and does not try to serve two masters: God and money. He trusts God to provide for all his needs. He does not judge other people's hearts, pointing out the speck in their eye through the plank in his own. And he watches out for false prophets. That is what it means to keep building your house on the Rock of Jesus. Yes, simply to have faith is to do the work God requires, but the Sermon on the Mount teaches us what it means to put your faith into practice.

- Sure, we come to church. But can you honestly say that you always hunger and thirst for righteousness?
- Can we say "blessed are we because we put ourselves in situations where we are persecuted because of righteousness"?
- Do your unchurched friends and family see the salt and light in you?
- Are we ready to love our enemies, ready to turn the other cheek?
- Are our most precious treasures stored up in heaven rather than on earth so that we generously give of our time, talents and treasures, without the need for anyone to know about it, not even our own left hand?
- Are we removing the planks from our own eyes before casting our judgmental eye at the speck in someone else's?
- Are we diligently studying the truth, so that we're not deceived by false teachers? Or have we put on the appearance of fruits of faith, rather than putting into practice our faith as Jesus encourages us here?

My brothers and sisters in Christ, this is the point of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. It is intended to send crashing down your dreams of not only becoming personally good enough for God, but also your dreams of personally handling the storms that life throws at you. Those dreams are but a sandy foundation that is easily washed away in adversity. That's why we are sometimes so shaken by the storms of life. Though we have built our faith on Christ, we have not always built our everyday lives on him.

Where would we be were it not for our Savior who was perfectly pure in heart, who perfectly hungered and thirsted for our righteousness, who did not resist evil men but loved them, who prayed perfectly and humbly, and who stored up treasures in heaven for us? Where would we be without the Rock that is Jesus, who took our sin and gave us his righteousness? The life he lived for us is a firm foundation built from scratch by the hands of God. The death he died for us washes away forever all our foolish efforts to build our own false foundations. It washes away all of our foolish efforts to find security elsewhere. His resurrection from the dead has made him a Rock which cannot be shaken or moved—the Rock on which we stand! Christ, your forgiveness, your life and salvation, is your Foundation who will not tremble, no matter how hard the waves crash and the winds howl.

With this kind of security in life and in death, you can keep building your lives on him as your firm foundation. You can trust that when you put Christ's words into practice, you will benefit greatly from it. Oh, the stress we save ourselves when we practice pursuing righteousness and being peacemakers and humble prayers and lovers of our enemies! Oh, the fruits of faith that are born without our left hands even knowing it!

My fellow wise builders, keep building on the Rock of Christ by hearing his words and putting them into practice; by not letting yourself be deceived by false teachers; and by not deceiving yourselves with the sand-foundation of life's false senses of security. Build your life on this firm foundation! Amen.