

Second Sunday after Pentecost

June 14, 2020

Christ the Rock Evangelical Lutheran Church
Farmington, New Mexico

Matthew 7:15-29 “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. **22** 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 in your name perform many miracles?’ **23** Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

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. **25** 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. **26** 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. **27** The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, **29** because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

“Take Advantage of God’s Gospel Remedy”

Brian went to the doctor complaining about pains in his chest. As these things often go, the doctor put him through an entire battery of tests. Not just taking out that thing that lets you know someone is a doctor on TV and listening to his heart. Running on a treadmill with a bunch of wires attached tests. And the thing they usually do for pregnant ladies test, but on his heart. And a bunch of others that have abbreviations Brian can’t keep track of.

And when Brian finally comes back to the doctor’s office, he sees a serious look on that medical professional’s face. We have to take action. We have to make serious changes. Brian hears the words from his doctor. But Brian has his doubts. He has heard lots of other diagnoses. He has done his own investigating on the internet and heard anecdotes from friends and former high school classmates on social media who had similar symptoms. Brian can acknowledge that he might not know everything about health and medicine and health and prescriptions.

If Brian really wants to get better, he has to listen to what his doctor has to say. Even if he doesn’t like it. Even if it makes him feel uncomfortable. He has to trust that his doctor will

provide a remedy. Then he needs to take action according to the guidance and direction of the medical professional.

Those steps are a lot like what Jesus is teaching us today in Matthew chapter seven. Identify problem and listen to the diagnosis. Take the message to heart and let it change your behavior. Then you can get better. Only, Jesus is thinking about what is best for your soul. Jesus wants you to take advantage of God's gospel remedy.

Problem #1: Confusion destroys your gospel confidence.

I'm sure I'm not the only one who has noticed this lately. At the times when we need clarity and decisive action the most, what we so often get instead is chaos and confusion. We don't even agree on what the real problem is. And before we can come to consensus about what is wrong, people start offering a variety of opinions about how to deal with it. It's a problem in general. But it's dangerous when it comes to our health. Sincere people who genuinely want to get better with lots of uncertainty and unanswered questions.

That's even more true when it comes to your spiritual health. Jesus says: **"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."** (Matthew 7:15) Beware there are different opinions out there. But when it comes to your spiritual health, we can't just agree to disagree. We need to be aware and be prepared for false and dangerous messages. Prophets sow confusion. They give you mixed messages about the real essence of Christian, the true meaning of the Bible, the actual definition of the Gospel.

Some people think Jesus was directing this message primarily at the Pharisees. Maybe he had them in his crosshairs because they were the ones so familiar with the law of God but failed to see Jesus as the Messiah. That is a possibility. But Jesus' critique is actually much broader. We can't come up with an exhaustive list of unsound or inaccurate messages. But let's at least look at a sampling of what the Gospel is not. Moralism is not the gospel. Moralism shows you how you could be doing more or doing better. Christianity as therapy is not the gospel. This brand of teaching acknowledges bad behavior and gives tools, techniques, and strategies for improving your health and performance. Using the victory of Christ to transform your life is not the gospel. This strain sees Jesus as your way to tap into your potential and power to find victory over your own problems and weaknesses.

Here's a little test I like to use. When I evaluate songs or curriculum or messages, I simply ask myself: 'Could someone use this same teaching in a mosque or synagogue or Buddhist temple?' If the answer is 'yes,' I know I haven't been as specific and as clear about the Gospel as I need to be. The Gospel focuses on Christ. What Jesus did. The gospel isn't a matter of what I should do, but what Christ did. It's not an emphasis of what I can do, but what Jesus has already accomplished perfectly.

True prophets can be sinful, flawed, weak. They can fall into a scandal or give in to immoral behavior. False prophets can lead exemplary lives. They can look like everything the Bible tells us to be and give up drinking and smoking on top of that. But they can still be false prophets. False prophets can even be very sincere. You might not catch them with a subtle,

sinister grin on their faces when the attention is off them. False prophets don't think they are false prophets. They are probably convinced their message is true.

So we need to focus on the message. Is the message Christ-centered? Is that Christ-centered message emphasizing the Gospel? Is that Gospel message focused on what Christ has done for you? That's going to give you confidence to take advantage of God's gospel remedy. That gospel remedy will change your heart and create growth.

Problem #2: Pride robs you of gospel humility

But let's be honest. Sometimes the problem isn't out there, it is in here. It's not always somebody else. Most often, the problem is me. "Ninety percent of the heart patients do not change. They remain the same, living the status quo. Study after study indicates that two years after heart surgery, the patients have not altered their behavior. Instead of making changes for life, they choose death." (Essential Church, p. 178) Why does this happen? I'm not going to give the heart doctors the cheat codes. But I do know one of the biggest obstacles in our spiritual hearts is pride. Or at least lack of humility.

Jesus points out the problem with mere familiarity, simple acquaintance with Jesus. It's not true faith. The flaw is pretty subtle. But when you are listening for it, you'll notice it. Jesus cuts to the issue: **"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 in your name perform many miracles?'"** (Matthew 7:22) Compare that with what he says in Matthew 25 about the righteous who served Jesus by providing for the hungry and thirsty, visiting those in prison and providing for the sick and the stranger. (Matthew 25:37-40)

Here's a very simple, but pretty brutal test you can use to evaluate your own heart. Does my life point to me or does it point to Jesus? Is it all about me or about my Savior? According to Jesus, it's the difference between being nothing but firewood and playing a part in a productive orchard. (Matthew 7:19) Sounds harsh. But these harsh warnings from Jesus are meant to get our attention. Warnings serve to drive us away from what seems right and feel comfortable. And in this discomfort to seek the truth. The saving truth.

Merely hearing the Word by being physically present in church. Looking at your life and comparing yourself to the people around you who are so much worse, so much more immoral. Going back to your personal history and connection to Sunday school or Christian education. All the times you have prayed. All the times you have gone through the motions of asking for forgiveness without being truly troubled by your sins. All the times you were able to rationalize that you could do better, but you're doing a lot better than most people in your life. All the Bible stories you treat as fiction. All the far-fetched things God's Word says that sound more like comic book super hero exaggerations.

One of the worst things you can say is you don't need repentance. You are telling God you don't need forgiveness. You don't think you need the primary purpose for which Jesus came to this earth. That's why it's so important to put all the emphasis of the gospel on Jesus. What he has done for you. Recognize your sinfulness. See the life of Jesus as the perfection you can never attain. Understand the sacrifice Jesus offered satisfies the demands of your

holy God in a way you never will be able to. Praise God for the victory of Jesus over the cross and grave as your only remedy.

That's why we need the gospel to focus on Christ. So Jesus can include you when he says: **"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."** (Matthew 7:21) The Father's will is your repentance. The Father's will is not that you work your way to heaven but trust in the sinless sacrifice of his Son. The Father's will is that your sorrow over your confusion and stubbornness and pride would allow you to celebrate the sacrifice of Jesus that covers every sin. The Father's will is that you trust him to change your heart. That his Word would produce real results in your life. That fruits of repentance would follow and bring him real joy.

Solution: Only the Gospel changes hearts. Only the Gospel can open you up and free you to become humble. Instead of coming up with excuses, you can marvel at the extreme generosity of your Savior. Only the Gospel can allow you to gain greater confidence. Instead of looking to yourself and what you can offer God, you can celebrate that Jesus did it all for you.

Have you noticed how so many things in life are cycles? If you need to take your medication, it gets easier the longer you do it. If you need to jump through hoops at physical therapy, you get stronger and more confident the more often you do it. The better you follow your doctor's advice, the easier it is to trust her the next time.

The Gospel is God's remedy for your life. Hearing the words of Jesus brings change to your heart. Taking that word to heart creates growth. The more you use God's Word in worship and Bible study and personal devotion, the more you can recognize falsehood. The more you put God's Word to use, the more you will see God's power producing real results in your life. The more fun it will be to keep using God's Word.

Ultimately, Brian took a careful look at his life and decided change was needed. He needed more than just to make a few adjustments. He required more help than he had the power to effect from inside himself. He went back to the doctor. He set an appointment for surgery. He stuck to his medications. He went to physical therapy appointments. He even changed his diet.

Jesus wants you to see He is the one who changes you. Jesus gives you a new heart. Your new heart allows you to humble yourself in repentance before your holy and merciful God. Your new heart gives you the confidence to trust in his power at work in your life. The more you hear God's word and respond in repentant trust, the more and greater results God brings. The more you make it a habit to sit under the teaching of your Savior, the more it will wear down your pride and stubbornness. The more you apply that forgiveness as gospel medicine for your heart, the more confident you will become in what God is doing. The more you focus on Christ by hearing and doing, the more powerful results God will bring about in your life. The gospel is your remedy. Take advantage of God's gospel remedy. Amen.