

Matthew 7:15-29

Dear Friends in Christ,

As Jesus finished what we call his “Sermon on the Mount” the people were amazed at something. It wasn’t that he was such an eloquent speaker. It wasn’t that he was an entertaining speaker who held their attention. What amazed them was that he spoke with authority. He wasn’t afraid to talk about touchy subjects. He wasn’t afraid to challenge conventional thinking. How often didn’t he say, “you have heard it said, but I say unto you; this is the way it is with God. It’s not just actions like murder or adultery that God judges, but thoughts like anger and hatred and lust. Just because Moses allowed a certificate of divorce doesn’t mean that it is pleasing to God.” He wasn’t wishy-washy. He didn’t quote varying opinions of the Rabbis of past generations. As God and man at the same time he simply spoke the truth. We could rightly add the phrase, “Thus says the Lord” to everything Jesus said.

Jesus spoke with authority, the authority of God himself. Because he did we are able to use his words to do what he asks us to do. We are able to use his words to discover what is good fruit and what is bad fruit.

Jesus says, **"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!'"**

Jesus makes it clear how important it is to watch out for false prophets. They are like ferocious wolves. They want to have you for lunch. If you follow them you will be among those to whom God says, “I never knew you. Away from me.” In other words, you are eternally condemned to the fires of Hell.

But, Jesus says, these dangerous false prophets come in sheep’s clothing. They say “Lord, Lord.” They claim to prophesy in God’s name and even seem to be able to perform miracles! How are we supposed to be able to watch out for and avoid these false prophets if they are so deceptive?

Jesus says, “by their fruit you will recognize them.” Now usually when we hear that statement, by their fruit you will recognize them, we think of a person’s life-style. We think if they preach Christ but then don’t live a Christian life they must be false prophets. But that’s not necessarily the case. Just because someone falls into sin doesn’t automatically mean that they were preaching false doctrine. If you follow any Christian around for a day you will find that there are times when their lives don’t match their confession. Christians, whether they are preachers or not, are to let their light shine and the fruit of good works is to be evident in their lives, but, to our eyes, even an unbeliever can do good things.

When we are talking about someone who claims to be a prophet, someone who teaches God’s word, the fruit we are mostly interested in is what they are teaching. God told the Israelites that there might be a time when he would allow a false prophet to come to them and even to

perform a miracle. Everything would seem right about them, except they say “let’s follow other gods.” God might allow what seems to be a miracle to see if his people will test the fruit that really counts, the message that prophet brings.

So, in our confused religious world today, the thing we are to focus on is the message. We are to test the fruit of the message and to test it against the authoritative teaching of God’s word. That’s where many people have trouble today because they have been misled by the false teaching that there is nothing that is authoritative. If it seems successful, if it seems right to you, if it helps you or makes you feel good, then it is right. But Jesus taught with authority. With authority he upheld the commandments. With authority he proclaimed that there will be people who are sent away from his presence forever. There is right and wrong. There is good fruit and bad fruit. There is only one way to salvation which he himself proclaimed—**he is the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the father except through him. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, whoever does not believe will be condemned.**

Because Jesus taught with authority we are able to recognize the bad fruit of false teaching. We can compare what anyone says to what Jesus has said in the Bible and if the two agree, that’s good fruit. If the two do not agree, that’s bad fruit, that’s a wolf in sheep’s clothing, someone we are to run from for our eternal lives.

Jesus closed his Sermon on the Mount with the familiar illustration of the two houses, the house of the wise man which was built on the rock, and the house of the foolish man which was built on the sand. His point is clear. He wants us to be like the wise man who built his house on the rock.

Because Jesus taught with authority we are able to do what he suggests. He says that building on the rock means two things. It means hearing his word, acknowledging that he speaks with the authority of God, accepting it as the truth. AND it means putting his words into practice.

If we hear his word every Sunday and then as soon as we leave church the tyranny of the urgent takes over and we get so involved with the things of life, our job, the kids, our recreation, that we hardly think about God and his word until the next Sunday, that’s not building on the rock. That’s building on sand. When the storms of life hit, we find that we are unprepared. Our faith is shallow. We might give in to the temptation of thinking that God doesn’t love us, or that we need to try something else because Christianity isn’t working, and our house falls with a great crash.

Building on the rock means that we hear the word regularly, not just on Sunday, but daily. It means that we take what the word says to heart. When we hear the law of God we are cut to the heart. We admit that we are sinners who deserve only God’s wrath and punishment. We confess our sins and plead for mercy, not just in the joint confession on Sunday but every day. It means that when we hear that Jesus lived and died in our place and that he rose again on the third day we say, “Thank you Lord for being my sacrifice for sin.” It means that when the storms of life hit hard, we hang on to God’s promises. We say, “Lord, whatever happens I know that you are with me, because you promised that you would be. I know that you will somehow turn this into good for me, because you promised. I know that you are the only way, truth and life, my only ticket to heaven, because that’s what you have said.”

Jesus’ authoritative teaching is the rock we can cling to in the midst of financial storms or relationship storms or physical storms and even the perfect storm, the greatest storm we will ever face, the storm of death. His authoritative teaching is truth. His teaching lights our path

through life and keeps us on the rock until he comes to take us out of the storms of this life to the perfect calm of heaven.

As you hear Jesus' teaching join the crowds who first heard him and were amazed at his authority. Accept his teaching for what it is, God's word, the truth. Use his teaching as the standard by which you test everything you see and hear so that you recognize what is good fruit and what is bad fruit. Cling to his promises through every storm of life for his promises are the rock, the only thing that will sustain you now and forever.