

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Eighth Sunday After Trinity, July 21, 2024

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 16 (250:4) 295, 291, 48

Lessons: Isaiah 6:1-13; 1 Peter 5:1-5; Luke 10:1-15

Text: Matthew 7:24-27 (NIV)

Sermon by Pastor M. H. Eibs

Dear friends in Christ Jesus,

The words of our text are the conclusion of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. In these words Jesus emphasizes that a believer in Christ should not only hear what Jesus teaches but also put into practice what he hears. It is taught in Scripture that we should listen to Jesus' words. Moses in the Old Testament times foretold the coming of the great Prophet Jesus, God's own Son. He told the people of Israel, "*The LORD your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own brothers. You must listen to him,*" *Deuteronomy 18:15*. When Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James and John, a voice from heaven said, "*This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased. Listen to him!*" *Matthew 17:5*. Jesus told the Jews who were determined to kill Jesus, "*He who belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God,*" *John 8:47*.

Now in our text Jesus emphasizes more than merely hearing his Word. We should also put into practice what we hear. Jesus teaches this in a parable of

THE WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS.

- 1. The wise builder hears the Word of God and puts it into practice;**
- 2. The foolish builder also hears the Word of God but fails to put it into practice.**

Jesus spoke this parable at the conclusion of what has come to be known as the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus preached this Sermon to his disciples after he had appointed the twelve Apostles. There were also other people present to hear Jesus' teachings, but he addressed his words primarily to the disciples. At the beginning of the Sermon Jesus spoke what we call the Beatitudes, sentences that begin with the word "*Blessed*".

It is also in this sermon that Jesus teaches us the words we should pray in what we call the Lord's Prayer, and many other truths about his kingdom. In general the Sermon on the Mount teaches us how we ought to live according to Jesus' Word and in this way show that we are true followers of Christ. In our Catechism we learn about this as the third use of the Law, as a rule to live by. In his epistle, James writes, "*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like,*" *James 1:22-24*. Luther wrote, "*The doctrine is a good and precious thing, but it is not being preached for the sake of being heard, but for the sake of action and its application to life,*" Luther's Works, Vol.21, p.281.

In the words of our text Jesus does not say that it is actually possible for a Christian to perfectly do all that his Word commands. He is simply teaching that we should not only hear what God says but also put it into practice. We as Christians do not reach perfection in this life. We have to confess with the Apostle Paul, "*I know*

that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do, no, the evil I do not want to do - this I keep on doing," Romans 7:18-19. A true Christian wants to do what God commands in his Word, but there is much imperfection to mar his sincerest efforts to please God.

In praising the hearer who is also a doer of the Word, Jesus puts him into the class of a man who is wise, understanding and sensible. Jesus says in our text, ***"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."*** We are to picture in our minds a wise man who had an estate of land on which he wanted to build his house. His first consideration was not the outward beauty of the house and property, but the foundation on which he would build. It had to be founded on rock. That proved to be a wise decision, for Jesus continues, ***"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."*** All the heavy rainfall that resulted in flooding and the terrific pounding of the winds against his house did not prove to be a disaster because of the rock-solid foundation. So that house builder was a wise man.

In applying this parable to our own lives, the emphasis must be on having Jesus Christ as our only sure Foundation. The Apostle Paul speaks of his ministry of the Word and says, ***"By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder..."*** Then he emphasizes, ***"No one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ," 1 Corinthians 3:10-11.*** Paul also spoke about his ministry of the Word as preaching about Jesus as the one firm foundation when he said, ***"I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified," 1 Corinthians 2:2.*** Paul was concerned about the salvation of those to whom he preached. He wanted them to know Jesus Christ as their Savior, to trust in him, and not in their own miserable attempts to do good. In so many churches what we call the Social Gospel is being preached. Social, economic and political problems are addressed. What we find lacking is the preaching of the Law to show people their sins and the preaching of the true Gospel to show them their Savior. If Jesus Christ and him crucified is not the foundation for all church work, souls will not be saved. The Apostle Peter also emphasizes Jesus Christ as the one foundation. He quotes from the prophecies of Isaiah, ***"See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame," 1 Peter 2:6.*** Luther wrote, ***"If we stand grounded and built on that, we shall remain impregnable. We can let the world and the devil and all the false teachers and schismatic spirits send rain and hail and slush on us and storm and rage around us with every kind of danger and trouble,"*** Luther's Works, Vol. 21, p. 282.

Likewise, the man who hears the Word of God and then puts it into practice, has chosen the right means of reaching the goal of eternal life in heaven. Jesus says, ***"Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it," Luke 11:28.*** That means to believe the Word of God and to do according to it. A true believer should not be satisfied merely to hear what the Word of God says about leading a Christian life, but he will sincerely want to put the commands of God into practice. Again, it is well for us to be reminded that Jesus does not in the words of our text teach righteousness by works. Jesus does not say that by doing according to his sayings, you can earn forgiveness of sins, life and salvation. These are gifts of God's undeserved love and mercy and we accept them only by faith. But when we have been brought to faith by the Holy Spirit's work through the powerful Gospel Word, we should want to lead a Christian life. Paul says ***"The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control," Galatians 5:22.*** That should be the manner of life of a Christian as he travels toward heaven, and such a person is a wise man, Jesus says.

Then when the storms of life descend upon such a man in the form of tribulations, sorrows and troubles, it will soon become evident that he not only hears the Word, but puts it into practice. Trials and troubles, whatever they may be, sickness, suffering, persecution, will not cause his faith in Christ to waver. It will soon become evident that he has built his life on Christ as his firm foundation. The psalmist David says, ***"Cast your cares on the LORD and he will sustain you; he will never let the righteous fall," Psalm 55:22.***

But if a person's Christianity is a sham, mere hypocrisy, when the storms of life arise, he will quickly give up his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Such a person is described in the parable in our text as **a foolish builder who hears the Word but fails to put it into practice.**

2.

Jesus says in our text, ***“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.”*** Jesus is describing a man who builds his house on a nice, level stretch of sand. It looks like an ideal place to build, but it does not have the proper foundation. Soon his folly becomes evident. ***“The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”*** The house looked good, but it did not stand the test of storms of rain and wind. The sand foundation quickly washed away and the house fell with a great crash. He was recognized as a foolish builder.

Spiritually speaking, such a man may be a follower of Christ, but only outwardly. He may even occupy a seat in church and appear to be very devout and pious. But his faith is not firmly grounded on Christ the one sure foundation. He listens to the Word preached, but does not accept it by faith. So he also cannot order his life according to God's will and command. That is foolishness. We can compare him with a sick person who fails to heed the advice of his physician. He feels it is not necessary to carefully pay attention to what the doctor has said. He may think that he has a better idea of how to get well.

If we would not do something so foolish in earthly matters, think of how much more important it is not to ignore God's Word in spiritual matters. It is not only more important, but it is a matter of life or death, either eternal life in heaven or everlasting damnation in hell. It is a matter of having Christ as our sure foundation and believing what Jesus did for us to save us from our sins. If we have Christ as our sure foundation, we will remember what the Gospel says about him. ***“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace that he lavished on us with all wisdom and understanding,”*** **Ephesians 1:7-8.** The writer to the Hebrews said, ***“we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone,”*** **Hebrews 2:9.**

If we believe that this Jesus is the only sure foundation for us and, that we should trust in him for salvation, then we will also want to put into practice what God's Word tells us to do. The psalmist prays, ***“Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name,”*** **Psalm 86:11.** God grant that we all may be sincere doers of the Word, put into practice what God has commanded and so live to please him who died for us. Then finally by his grace we will serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness in heaven. Amen.

(Reprinted from a Ministry By Mail sermon for June 22, 2008)