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St. Paul's Lutheran Church  
2100 16<sup>th</sup> Street SW  
Austin, MN 55912-1749  
Pastor Ted Barthels  
Sermon preached on  
June 18, 2017  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Scripture Lessons: Deuteronomy 11:18-21, 26-28, Romans 3:21-28  
Hymns: 21; 353:1-4; 307; 309

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord  
and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Matthew 7:15-29

“Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup>You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup>Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup>A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup>Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup>Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

<sup>21</sup>“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. <sup>22</sup>Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ <sup>23</sup>And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

<sup>24</sup>“Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: <sup>25</sup>and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

<sup>26</sup>“But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: <sup>27</sup>and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

<sup>28</sup> And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, <sup>29</sup> for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.  
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, dear fellow Redeemed:

**INTRO:** Certainty of salvation

It is a common pursuit for people. They want to find that certainty of eternal salvation. This is a very important matter. Each and every one of us desires to possess such certainty of eternal life. It is something we need to have and hold in our hearts. It is something we need for ourselves, and it is something we need to possess in our hearts regarding our loved ones. This may be a pursuit that is filled with pitfalls and false hopes. You need to know how one may go about --

**THEME: Securing Your Salvation.**

Since this is an area that is common among men, including many Christians, we need to pay close attention to the counsel of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Our text is taken from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. These verses comprise the conclusion of this important sermon. Jesus sets forth a serious warning:

### **I. Beware of False Prophets and their Schemes.**

**Matthew 7:15-19** "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. <sup>16</sup> You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor *can* a bad tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Therefore by their fruits you will know them.

Jesus warns us to beware because false prophets don't seem dangerous. They seem like other sheep of the flock. Yes, false prophets often profess to be Christian. They impress others with how much they care for other Christians. They will talk about how they want the best for other people, for their fellow Christians. They will talk about meeting your needs that are not being met in other churches. Religion in America today is very much about felt needs, and often these needs have little or nothing to do with the forgiveness of sins. It may be that people feel the need to be entertained in their worship, or excited about their faith. Or people have a special cause they want to advance, a social evil they feel the need to fight against. They feel the need to be accomplishing something tangible with their church attendance. So it is that false prophets not only appear friendly, their teachings are also appealing to the flesh, but in fact they are spiritual thorns and thistles.

False prophets come in sheep's clothing. Outwardly they appear to be topnotch Christians, but they are ravenous wolves. Instead of showing you the certainty of salvation that is found alone in Christ, they direct people to emotions, experiences, and social programs and social accomplishments, all things that will fall away.

Take Jesus' words of warning to heart. He knows that false prophets are not harmless, in spite of how nice they appear to be, or how accomplished they are as public speakers. They do not make your salvation secure.

Jesus moves on to an even more pernicious error that appears all too attractive to the child of God.

## **II. Don't Put Your Trust in Your Good Christian Life.**

**Matthew 7:21-23** "Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. <sup>22</sup> Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' <sup>23</sup> And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

This passage is enough to send shivers down almost any Christian's spine. Aren't we encouraged by the Apostles in many places to live godly lives? Doesn't even Jesus exhort, "Go and sin no more?" (John 8:11) Aren't these words of encouragement that we should take to heart as we endeavor to live godly lives? The answer to all of these questions is, "Yes, yes of course!" Then why does Jesus talk this way about people who profess the Christian faith, and praise Jesus with their lips?

Jesus said, "**Not everyone** who says, 'Lord, Lord!' shall enter into heaven." One immediately thinks of hypocrites, people who are only professing to be Christians but don't really believe. We would think that such people would know that they are not Christians, wouldn't we? We would not expect them to be surprised when Jesus says "*I don't know you.*" Look at the protest they raise. They are looking to the wonderful life they lived as they professed Jesus to be Lord. They may even have been preachers. They may have performed miracles. . And there is their problem. In spite of apparent sincerity in what they teach and believe, the certainty of their salvation was not found in Christ but in themselves. They trusted in the good lives they lived, and in the deeds they performed. Jesus declares that in all these things they were not doing the will of the Father. And one must do the will of the Father to enter into heaven.

That begs the question; "What is the will of the Father?" We read Jesus' response to this question in the sixth chapter of John's gospel:

**John 6:28-29, 40** "Then they said to Him, 'What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?' 29 Jesus answered and said to them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.' ... "And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Jesus directs us to faith, not works. The work of God, the will of God is our salvation through **faith** in Christ Jesus. Certainty of salvation is not found in our own works, not even in our best works, though they may glorify Jesus before the world. The certainty of our salvation is found in Jesus Himself, in His works,

in His righteousness, in His sufferings and death, in His resurrection. It is as we read in our epistle lesson this morning, God is “**the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. ...**

**<sup>28</sup> Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith apart from the deeds of the law.”** (Romans 3:26,28)

In the final verses of our text Jesus directs us to the one place where we may find confirmation of our salvation. He directs us to His Word.

### **III. Secure Your Hope of Life in Jesus’ Word.**

As Jesus finishes the Sermon on the Mount He concludes with a parable encouraging His disciples to whom this sermon was addressed, to take the words of our Lord to heart, to know that what Jesus says is true and dependable.

**Matthew 7:24-27** “Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: <sup>25</sup> and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

<sup>26</sup> “But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: <sup>27</sup> and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.”

The storms of life will come. More than that, the storms of life bring with them assaults upon the Christian’s faith. That is when we need to know with absolute certainty that all that Jesus has declared is true. When we build our lives on the certainty of Jesus’ words, on the reliability of all that He has promised coming to pass, we are not being superstitious or foolish. We are building upon the rock solid foundation of the Word which shall never fail, which shall never pass away.

On the other hand, those who take a more casual view of the Word, and think of Jesus as being a wise teacher but not infallible, these build upon the shifting sands of human opinion. When the storms come they find the foundation of their hope for life is easily undermined, and the house of their faith will fall. When our Lord

adds “*And great was its fall,*”(v.27) Jesus is making it clear that this is a spiritual disaster that leads to loss of life, not merely temporal life, but spiritual and eternal life.

If we are to take hold of eternal life we need to take hold of the Word. Jesus’ Word and the Word of God are one and the same. Jesus’ Word will not fail. The gates of hades shall not prevail against it. We can rely upon the power and certain truth of Jesus’ Word in any and all crises of life. Yes, even the gates of death cannot stand against the Jesus’ Word. He raised Lazarus by the power of His Word (John 11:43-44). He raised Jairus’ daughter by the power of His Word (Luke 8:54-55). He raised the young man of Nain by the authority of His Word (Luke 7:14-15). We too shall rise to everlasting life by the power of Jesus Word (John 5:28-29). The Spirit works in our hearts through the Word! The Spirit assures us of forgiveness of sins through the Word. The Spirit fortifies our faith with the gospel in Word and sacrament. Jesus said of the sacrament of the altar, “*This is My body which is given for you.*”(Luke 22:19) ... *This is My blood of the new covenant which is shed for many for the remission of sins.*” (Matthew 26:27-28). We know and believe that we have forgiveness of sins, life, and eternal salvation because our certainty is not found in our experience, or our feelings of being saved, or our works claiming that we have attained some higher level of righteousness. Our certainty of salvation is found in Jesus.

“Christ Jesus is the Ground of faith,  
Who was made flesh and suffered death.  
All that confide in Him alone  
Are built upon this chief Cornerstone.” (The Lutheran Hymnal 245:2)

The Spirit leads us to the same conclusion that many observed that day regarding Jesus’ teaching.

**Matthew 7:28-29** And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching,<sup>29</sup> for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes.

Jesus’ has the authority. His Word possesses the authority of God. He guarantees us everlasting life. That makes our salvation sure both now and forever!

**AMEN.**

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)