

## Week of February 21, 2021

### Matthew 7:13-29

<sup>13</sup> “Go in through the narrow gate. The gate that leads to destruction is broad and the road wide, so many people enter through it. <sup>14</sup> But the gate that leads to life is narrow and the road difficult, so few people find it.

<sup>15</sup> “Watch out for false prophets. They come to you dressed like sheep, but inside they are vicious wolves. <sup>16</sup> You will know them by their fruit. Do people get bunches of grapes from thorny weeds, or do they get figs from thistles? <sup>17</sup> In the same way, every good tree produces good fruit, and every rotten tree produces bad fruit. <sup>18</sup> A good tree can't produce bad fruit. And a rotten tree can't produce good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that doesn't produce good fruit is chopped down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> Therefore, you will know them by their fruit.

<sup>21</sup> “Not everybody who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will get into the kingdom of heaven. Only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven will enter. <sup>22</sup> On the Judgment Day, many people will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name and expel demons in your name and do lots of miracles in your name?’ <sup>23</sup> Then I'll tell them, ‘I've never known you. Get away from me, you people who do wrong.’

<sup>24</sup> “Everybody who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise builder who built a house on bedrock. <sup>25</sup> The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It didn't fall because it was firmly set on bedrock. <sup>26</sup> But everybody who hears these words of mine and doesn't put them into practice will be like a fool who built a house on sand. <sup>27</sup> The rain fell, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat against that house. It fell and was completely destroyed.”

<sup>28</sup> When Jesus finished these words, the crowds were amazed at his teaching <sup>29</sup> because he was teaching them like someone with authority and not like their legal experts.

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### “On Christ The Solid Rock I Stand...”

...all other ground is sinking sand; all other ground is sinking sand.” So says the refrain of the popular hymn, “My Hope is Built on Nothing Less.” It is a wonderful, uplifting hymn with a great tune, and it's found in nearly every denomination's hymnal - Baptist, AME, Lutheran, Presbyterian, United Methodist, etc - 80 modern hymnals in all. But, while the majority of the verses and the refrain are uplifting, the final verse comes with a hope that's a little less certain: “When he shall come with trumpet sound, O may I then in him be found, dressed in his righteousness alone, faultless to stand before the throne.” It's a hope that we might be found righteous in Jesus' second coming, and the way it's framed makes it seem like it's not a certain outcome. Reading verses 21-23 show why there's that kind of uncertainty. It's a little off putting to hear Jesus say to those who feel as though they've done everything right, “Get away from me.”

Jesus' ending to the Sermon on the Mount comes with a big, scary caveat. If I preached what Jesus did, I don't think many people would be particularly excited about my ministry here. But the difference is, I'm no Jesus. Jesus has an authority I simply do not have, nor will I ever have. So often the Sermon on the Mount is taken in small chunks, which makes us lose sight of the big picture. When Jesus talked about the narrow path, he's specifically talking about all he'd just laid out in the Sermon, especially in how Jesus reinterpreted the people's understanding of the Old Testament Law. He wasn't saying that there are unknown qualities that ensure our salvation, but laying out a very straightforward fact - to be his follower means very specific things, anything less is unacceptable. To be a follower of Jesus is to be radically kind in all that you say and do, to be humble and private about your faith, and to trust fully in God. It's an orientation for living that isn't simple and is so diametrically different than what is the norm that it is actively uncomfortable, but Jesus said it was the requirement.

Living in the way Jesus has commanded will be evident by the fruit our life produces, hence Jesus' tree metaphor. Being a follower of Christ shows, not because we put vinyl decals everywhere announcing how much we love Jesus, but because peace and love emanate from all that we do. Jesus' other metaphor, upon which the refrain from the hymn was based, is that to be his follower is like a builder building on a solid foundation rather than in the sand. Christ is the solid foundation for our life, but it's a foundation that will only remain solid so far as it's whole - we can't parcel off Jesus' teachings to what suits our preferred lifestyle or else we'll find our metaphorical house sagging and unstable, because it was built partly in sand.

It's a hard lesson to hear, but it's deadly serious and absolutely imperative for us to understand. But the good news for us, who truly want to build our lives on the solid rock of Christ, is that the gospel continues from this place. It continued all the way to his death and resurrection, giving us the assurance of Christ's love and salvation and freeing us to worry only about doing our best to put into practice what Jesus taught us.

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*Loving God - you gave your Son to us so that we might have a solid foundation upon which to build our lives. May we trust in his strength as we begin to construct our lives for your will instead of our world. Help us to know of your forgiveness and grace as we try and fail, and try again, assured by the truth that, ultimately, we'll rest on solid ground because of Christ. Amen.*