

“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. (Matthew 7:15-29 NIV2011)

Build Wisely on Christ’s Rock-Solid Word

At 186’ tall and an almost 4 degree lean is the free standing bell tower of the Pisa Cathedral. You probably know it better as the Leaning Tower of Pisa. When construction started on the second floor in the 12th century it already had started to lean. But they kept on building and the tower kept on leaning. Since its completion in the 14th century they’ve tried to remedy the situation. Many attempts failed. Others made it worse. Most recently, with the aid of modern science and engineering, they have been able to keep the tower from toppling over or further leaning for another 300 years, supposedly. The problem is quite simple: a soft, unstable foundation.

The architect for the tower of Pisa should have been paying attention to Jesus’ words. What Jesus states about building a house isn’t anything earth shattering. But Jesus isn’t giving a lesson in engineering and architecture. He’s speaking about your life and, therefore, faith life. Jesus says, **“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.” Built on the rock-solid foundation of Jesus’ words Jesus promises we will withstand the storms of life that come against us.

But here’s the kicker: it’s not just about hearing the words, do them. Put them into practice. How often when confronted with a sin do you respond, “I know should.” But instead of repenting, turning away from that sin, you hear what God’s Word says and choose to do what you want to do.

You hear the promises that God gives and think, “I know I need to trust more.” But then what you do is listen to your own reason. You trust the evidence you see and doubt God.

You hear Jesus words, “I forgive all your sins.” But you continue to torment yourself about the things you have done. You think you need to feel the guilt, be ready to forgive yourself first even though Jesus already has.

Or, maybe you are mocking his forgiveness thinking, “I know I can ask for forgiveness later. He’s always going to forgive me.”

You know what the Word says about putting God first. But your practice is devotions, time with the Lord, maybe even coming to church happens when there is enough time and you haven’t made other plans. Offering giving is whatever’s left after the rest of the bills go out and leisure is taken care of already.

If you find yourself doing these things, Jesus does not hold back, **“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.”**

Are you listening and doing Jesus words? Or have you fallen into the trap thinking you’ve already learned enough? How many believe that because they were in the Christmas programs growing up, maybe went to Lutheran elementary school, sat through catechism class and were confirmed, maybe even still have their name on the membership list, and that’s good enough? How many believe you just need to go to church, go for your hour once a week, sit in the pew a certain amount of times, and like magic everything is going to be fixed? But only hearing is not also doing.

Or are you building your foundation on something else? Some look to their families. Other’s look at their job and what they are able to do for work. Some find it in their status and having people respect and look up to them. Other’s find their foundation in being able to control the narrative by living up to other’s expectations. Some will build upon their wallets and the number that is in their bank account. Still others see their foundation as accomplishments in the past and how much they have been willing to help others. Some feel rock solid as long as life is going the way they expect and have planned. But’s it’s all

soft sand. When the rains of struggle come and the chaos of life blows, before long those houses come crashing down. It's hearing, but not putting Jesus' words into practice. For such individuals, they will answer hear something else on the Last Day when we stand in judgment before Jesus. He will say to them, "I do not know you. Get away from me." And they will be cast in the fires of hell for eternity.

Jesus doesn't want this. Jesus doesn't want the winds of this world to toss you around. He doesn't want the rising streams of troubles to sweep you away. He wants to know you. That's why he came to this earth to live and die. That's why he gives you these words to hear and do: he wants a relationship with you. As Peter wrote, these words didn't come from the writers own interpretation of things. They spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit (2 Peter 1:20). These words aren't just another humans own idea; these are God's own words that he reveals to you. From them we know we had a flesh-and-blood Savior who walks this earth and breathes our air. We know he went to a cross where he dies for the sins of the whole world including yours and mine. We know that God punishes Jesus in our place for our sins so we have peace with God. And we know all the work for saving you is done and completed: Jesus said, "It is finished." We know it because God reveals it to us in the Word.

But how can you be sure? For that we go to an empty tomb. There were 500 witnesses to the living flesh-and-blood risen Jesus. Many were killed for confessing this truth. People don't die for what they know is a lie. They were witnesses to this rock-solid truth. Your foundation is set in the rolled away stone of the empty tomb. Because Jesus is raised from the dead and lives, we know his Words are true.

And not only do you have a knowledge of this, the Holy Spirit works in your hear to believe it. In baptism he made you a new creation with Spirit-worked faith in your heart that grabs onto Jesus' forgiveness and makes it your own. And just as a fruit tree produces fruit, so faith produces. It hears Jesus' words, and does them. And the Holy Spirit works in your heart of faith sustaining and strengthening with the Lord's Supper. He continues to nurture that heart of faith as you grow in that Word where Jesus says to you, "I know you! I died for you. I live again for you. I rule over all things for your good." And the Spirit works a confident faith that knows, believes and trusts that with sins forgiven we have life and salvation. We know on the Last Day Jesus will welcome us into his kingdom.

That is what Jesus wants for you. And so he warns us to watch out for anyone who might try and threaten that foundation. Watch out because they aren't going to come out and say, "Hey, we're false prophets!" No, Jesus says, "**They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves**" (v. 15). On the surface they will seem safe. They will seem so genuine and sincere in what they do and how they care about you. They may be gifted speakers that "wow" the crowd. They may use the similar terms. They will claim

they are doing things in Jesus' name and even in defense of the Word. But just because someone comes with the name, "Pastor," or calls themselves, "Christian," does not automatically mean you should believe everything they say!

So how do we recognize them? Look at their fruit. You won't find grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles. You know what type of plant it is by their fruit. Likewise with the false prophets. But their fruit isn't in the actions they do. It's their message. We cannot look into someone's hearts and judge it. But we can examine one's message, practice, and teaching.

And so we want to build on the rock-solid foundation of Christ's words so that we can test all according to Jesus' words. This means we need to be discerning when we listen. We need to be careful about what we hear. This doesn't take a trained theologian or religious professional or only pastors. Jesus says, "**My sheep listen to my voice; I know them and they follow me**" (John 10:27).

Maybe you've felt it before coming from a different church. Something was missing. Something was added that shouldn't have been there. It's not only about where we are similar. Far more important is: where are we different. Even a little bit of false teaching is potentially fatal to faith.

"Oh, but Pastor, we all believe the same Jesus. At least they are going to church." Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, any message that takes away from who Jesus is and what he did for you, is not believing the same Jesus. Any one that brings into question Jesus' promises and robs his gifts of Baptism and Lord's Supper of their saving forgiveness, is not the same. Any message that places your confidence of being saved on your doing, feeling, is not the same Jesus. Any message that says, "Jesus did this for you, but now you need to do this to be sure of your being saved," is not the same Jesus. Any message that takes away by adding to God's Word that says we are saved by Jesus' grace alone that is yours by faith the Spirit works alone, is a ferocious wolf that is working to ravage you. They are giving you sand to build on.

And so we want to hear Jesus' words and put them into practice so that we recognize those false prophets. This is your personal responsibility. Test what I preach according to Christ's Word. We pray God protect us and our church from false teaching and keep me faithful to his Word. Build on that foundation of Christ by being here in God's house with God's people so that you may encourage one another. Build on that foundation hearing and doing what Jesus says. Repent for when you have not. And then come be fed at the Lord's Supper where Jesus works to give you strength to endure the storms of this world. Jesus gives us his Word in the Bible so that we can stand with confidence in this life and the next. Wisely build on that foundation. Amen.