

“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 he 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 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.

Build on the Sure Foundation-Jesus Christ

1. By avoiding the pitfalls of false teachers
2. By clinging to the truth God’s Word

How important is a sure foundation? If someone was persuaded to argue that a foundation is only a minor consideration, perhaps he should speak to the residents living near Daisetta, Texas. I’m sure you’ve heard the story by now. Recently a massive sinkhole appeared near the rural town which lies northeast of Houston. To put it simply, the ground basically began to give way and created a giant hole in the earth. Oil field equipment, telephone poles, and even a tractor which sat upon that ground collapsed into the giant hole which has expanded to the width of six football fields and drops 200 feet into the ground. Although the sinkhole has caused no injuries or deaths, people in the area are very concerned about the foundations on which their own homes are built. They are coming to an important realization. They may have used the best building materials available to build their homes. But those buildings are only as strong as the foundations upon which they rest. A sure foundation is vitally important.

This morning our Savior Jesus encourages us to build upon a sure foundation. However, Jesus isn’t instructing us about how to construct our earthly homes. Jesus is instructing us about the strength and stability of our spiritual foundation. Just as with any earthly building, our spiritual lives are only as strong as the foundation upon which they are built. Therefore Jesus urges us to build our spiritual lives on him. He is the sure foundation. We build upon this foundation by avoiding the pitfalls of the false teachers. We also build upon this foundation by clinging to the truth of God’s Word.

Our lesson this morning is the concluding words of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. In this sermon Jesus spoke about all the wonderful blessings which come to us through belief in him. Jesus also spoke about the way those who believe in him as their Savior will consequently conduct their lives. In short you could say that Jesus is teaching his disciples and us what it means to be a Christian. And now, right on the heels of those teachings, Jesus offers some serious words of warning about false teachers. **“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.** Jesus is making it extremely clear that we need to avoid false teachers. And why? He says that false teachers are ravenous wolves that will

tear us apart and kill us. You see, there is only one way to eternal salvation. Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. But these false teachers lead us away from Christ, the solid foundation. Therefore we need to avoid the false teachers who lead away from Christ at all costs.

But that is easier said than done. Those who would lead us away from Jesus never openly declare that they are doing so. False teachers don't always appear so false. There are many pastors and ministers of God's Word who teach a message about Jesus. And they may have great personalities and be dynamic speakers. And they may make Christianity seem more palatable to mainstream society. They may do many wonderful things, and they may do them in the name of Jesus. They may help many people solve many of life's problems. And they may teach in the name of Jesus. Yes, they will come in the clothing of sheep. They will appear harmless, even good. But inwardly they are ferocious wolves. They will destroy our spiritual lives because they lead us away from the truth of Christ.

This picture can look pretty bleak. If their falsehood is so subtle, if their outward deeds look like good, God-pleasing works, how are we ever supposed to know what the truth is? Jesus tells us: **"By their fruit you will recognize them."** In many ways false teachers may look no different from those teachers who hold to the truth. But we are able to decipher whether they stand for the truth or not. We do so by evaluating the fruit which they produce. The fruit of a teacher is his teaching. Therefore, we will recognize whether a person is a true servant of Christ by the message he proclaims. If he proclaims something other than what the Bible teaches about Jesus and who is he and what he came to do, then we know that he is not from God. He is an evildoer who used the name of Christ as a façade to advance his own teaching. He will face God's judgment. And he will hear the words of Christ the Judge, "I never knew you."

We all too easily can ignore this warning. We may begin to think, "This really doesn't apply to me. I'm in church on most Sundays. I go to Bible class. What do I have to worry about? Besides, I'm a part of the Wisconsin Synod Lutherans. They could never go wrong. I can simply trust that they'll always tell me the right things about God's Word." When we begin to think like that, Satan has us right where he wants us. We've become indifferent about our relationship with God. It is then that Satan will send that wolf pack of false teachers after us and we will easily fall prey. The consequences of spiritual indifference are eternal.

Our Lord, however, has given us what we need to stay spiritually grounded. We keep our spiritual footings in our Savior Jesus Christ when we cling to the truth of God's Word. Jesus went on to say, **"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."** When we cling to God's Word, we are strengthened in the truths about Jesus. We see who Jesus really is and what came to do. He wasn't just another great prophet among many. He didn't come to be a great moral teacher. He came to be our Savior. He came to live in our place, to die a death that covers all of our sins. Jesus is the one who has given us salvation.

If we were left to ourselves, we would abandon the truth about Jesus. We would go the way of every other religion in the world. We would be trying to find our own way to heaven. And the rains would come and the streams would rise and the winds would blow and our spiritual house would fall with a great crash because our foundation was sand. It would be like a house built in the middle of that giant sinkhole.

But we have been built on a sure foundation. The Holy Spirit has built us on the solid bedrock of Jesus Christ. On this foundation, we know that we have nothing to offer to our God. We know that we cannot make up for the sins we have committed. On this foundation, we turn to Jesus alone for our salvation. False teachers will come, but they cannot budge us from our rock solid foundation. God's Word keeps us grounded in the truth of Jesus. The storms of life will come. The wind and rain will assault us from every side. But we will not be shaken. And when our final judgment comes, we will not be afraid. We know a place has been prepared for us in heaven. Because our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. We dare to make no other claim, but wholly rest on Jesus' name. On Christ, the solid rock, we stand. All other ground is sinking sand. Amen.