

THE SIXTH SUNDAY AFTER THE EPIPHANY

Sermon Text: Matthew 7: 24-27

“Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it.”

Dear Christians, Grace and Peace to you from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Most of us have seen it. It’s the house that “looks good from the road”.

You know, the one with the beautiful new siding, the one that looks impressive on the outside, but which upon a more careful examination, reveals a structure so haphazardly built, it resembles a flimsy house of cards, more than some place you’d want to make a home, a place of safety and security for your family.

The attic rafters show evidence of a severely leaking roof. The floor joists are riddled with dry rot and reveal abundant evidence of termite infestation.

Hastily installed paneling covers crumbling plaster walls and the windows and door frames have gaps in them big enough to slip a small child’s hand into.

The basement has enough filthy water in it that you find yourself desperately trying to remember when you had your last tetanus shot and wondering whether or not the state requires the presence of a certified life guard every time you venture to what should be marked as the deep end, because the foundation is cracked and leaks like a sieve in the middle of a rushing mountain stream.

To top it off, the basement floor is so heaved up and uneven in places, you get the distinct impression the whole house must be built on a floating bed of quick sand.

Now you wouldn’t think there would be many people who would purposely live in such a house, would you?

But believe it or not, there are people who, hearing the Word of God, let it go in one ear and out the other and just leave it at that. People who like to publicly call themselves Christians and even engage in seemingly pious activities, but at the same time reject Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.

These “hearers of the Word only” and not “Doers of the Word” are doing just that with their spiritual lives---living in a spiritual house that only “looks good from the road”.

You see, they may have built for themselves what *appears* to the casual observer to be a spiritual life. They may attend church regularly. They may even have convinced themselves they are religious or “spiritually minded”, when in fact they have no spiritual discernment or understanding whatsoever.

They may believe they are Christians simply because they belong to a church (maybe even the church where their parents and grand-parents were members), and they participate in all the social activities of their church.

But, in reality their brand of “christianity” is nothing but a sham.

So many of these psuedo-christians have put their faith, *not in Christ*, not in the Forgiveness of Sins, but they have put their faith *in their faith...in their belief* ...that they are Christians simply by virtue of calling themselves Christians, when in fact, the truth is they reject the very Gospel of Christ!

Yes, they like to claim the name of “Christ”. At church, they go through the motions of listening to the Word, as it is preached (if it is preached!).

They enjoy the spectacle of what they believe is a “*symbolic*” baptism into the Holy Spirit. They do so like to be seen in attendance at The Lord’s Supper, where contrary to Scripture (First Corinthians 10:15-17), they adamantly claim it is only bread and wine and there is *no* communion of the body and blood of Christ and *no* Forgiveness of Sins.

They deny the Bible’s clear teaching that sinners receive the Forgiveness of Sins, Life and Salvation through the Gospel Word connected with the earthly elements in Holy Baptism and The Lord’s Supper. And in doing so, they deny the power of the Gospel to save in both Holy Baptism and The Lord’s Supper.

Instead, with their human logic deceptively leading them to eternal damnation, they make a mockery of the very means Scripture tells us our good and gracious God uses to grant these undeserved blessings to us. Professing themselves to be wise, they are become as fools.

Oh, to be sure they want to be known as Christians, because it is “trendy” these days. After all, look at all the publicity professional athletes get when they wear a Scripture passage reference printed on their foreheads or raise their hands to “praise God” after they score a touchdown.

But these self-proclaimed “christians” really want no part of the blessing and they certainly don’t want any part of the persecution the Bible says a life of service to God and their fellow man as a true Christian entails in this world.

Oh, yes, they’ll make sure they announce and are seen going to church on Sunday, but they rather like to keep their religious life confined to one or two hours a week, at most. You see, they work real hard to keep religion separate from the rest of the week; especially if there’s money to be made, a football game to watch, or some other leisure activity to attend.

The Apostle Paul, writing in his second letter to Timothy, describes these people as “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof...” (See Second Timothy 3:5)

And so these mock-Christians go about their lives, their spiritual understanding corrupted and clouded by the vain philosophies of men, sinful human reasoning and the lust of their own flesh.

And so their self-deceiving humanist religion is based only upon the outward trappings of Christianity and none of the inward spiritual discernment.

Yes, they may fool themselves and they may fool others, but as they are without the inward substance and vitality of true Christianity, that intimate God-given heart knowledge which is the full trust and apprehension of the Forgiveness of Sins, Life and Salvation offered in the Gospel of Jesus Christ, they are without the One Sure Foundation, Christ Jesus.

As such, they are as much the sworn enemies of Christ and His Church as Satan himself! For they work their deceit among the simple, and by despising the Word of God in their own lives, they mock the shedding of Christ’s innocent blood and so work against bringing others to a true knowledge of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

They have a religious life that “looks good from the road”, but is in reality a life of deception and filled with nothing but the continued rot of sin---unrepentant sin---begetting more and more grievous sins against God and their fellow man.

Such an outward form of religion avails them nothing. Indeed, it only works to ensure and perpetuate their lost and condemned condition as their lives are swept away chasing after the fulfillment of every perverted temptation of the devil, the cares of this world and the evil lusts of their own sinful flesh.

And so, their eternal destruction is very much assured as the Day of Judgment draws near.

On the other hand, the true Christian builds his whole life upon the sure foundation of God’s Holy Word Alone. He humbly confesses his sin before God, sincerely repents of them and receives, *by Grace Alone, through Faith Alone*, the free gift of the Forgiveness of Sins, Life and Salvation.

And the true Christian is not just a hearer of the Word, but, as our Lord says in our text, he is a “Doer of the Word”. He strives to lead a sanctified life in thought, word and deed, *because* of what God has done for him in Christ.

The true Christian is not someone who simply puts forth an effort to learn the historical facts of Christianity and the doctrines of the Scriptures without truly pondering them and committing them to heart and soul.

Nor does the true Christian thoughtlessly go through the motions of attending worship services as though it were a tedious chore to be done so that others might think highly of him, or that he might gain some favor of God or man.

No, the true Christian struggles every day to fulfill the will of God in his life *as a fruit of faith*, as an act of love towards God, flowing from a heart truly thankful for all the temporal and spiritual blessings he has been given.

The true Christian does not conform his life to the Word of God as though his obedience will make him able to withstand the assault of every enemy, able to resist the temptations of this life, or as though he might earn salvation by doing so.

Rather, in heartfelt gratitude for the forgiveness of all his sins, he conscientiously and actively attends to the building of his Christian character and life *because* his whole life is deeply rooted in his Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

So, Dear Ones, search your hearts.

Have we been complacent and for the most part, unconcerned about our spiritual welfare or the kind of life we lead six days a week, thinking we can relegate being a Child of God to just one day or even just one hour a week?

Have we allowed the devil, the world, and our own sinful flesh to cause us to be more concerned with how our spiritual house "*looks from the road*"--- (how others see us), than we are about remaining faithful to Our Sure Foundation, Jesus Christ and His Holy Word?

Let us sincerely repent of our sins!

And with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, strive to live a life of sanctification, having the example of Jesus' selfless life of service to God and man before us each and every day.

And let us with all confidence look to the Cross of Christ for sure comfort, assurance and strength whenever the storms of this world arise, threatening to shake our faith, as though they might separate us from the love of God.

Dear Ones, Our Hope, our faith, yea, *our very life* is built and stands on His unchanging Word of Grace Alone, so that:

"...in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:37-39)

Blessed are they that hear the Word of God *and keep it!*

Amen.