

Only Two Ways to Live (Part 2)

Psalm 18:1-3; Matthew 7:21-29

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Dear Congregation of Christ: Someone once said, “I believe in both a creative and personal God, a divinely ordered universe, that man has an innate moral sense, and that Jesus was a great moral teacher, perhaps the greatest the world has witnessed... I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus.” Was this person who wrote this a true Christian? He believed in God the Creator, and in Jesus as a great moral teacher. But let me read a few more quotes from this person:

“No man ever had a distinct idea of the trinity. It is the mere Abracadabra of the mountebanks calling themselves the priests of Jesus.” “The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the Supreme Being as his father, in the womb of a virgin, will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter.” “The authors of the gospels were unlettered and ignorant men and the teachings of Jesus have come to us mutilated, misstated and unintelligible.” “Paul was the first corrupter of the doctrines of Jesus.”

This person is Thomas Jefferson, one of our Founding Fathers. He believed in God, yes, but there are fundamental doctrines of Christianity that he rejected: the Trinity; the deity of Jesus; the accounts of the Gospels; and the doctrines taught by the Apostle Paul. Because of these rejections, Jefferson published his own New Testament, *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, popularly known as the *Jefferson Bible*, in 1820. He cut and paste many sections from the New Testament, including especially the teachings of Jesus. But he excluded all miracles and all supernatural references, including the resurrection and the deity of Christ. And many of the Founding Fathers, including George Washington, John Adams, Ben Franklin, Thomas Paine, and James Madison, were deists like Jefferson.

Our text today begins with Jesus prophesying that on Judgment Day, many will come to him claiming to be true believers because they have performed many signs and wonders in his name. But Jesus rejects their false faith and confession because they were “*workers of lawlessness*.” This is the first part of our sermon today. Verses 21-23 tell us about two confessions: a true confession and a false confession. It also tells us about the two destinations of these confessors: the kingdom of heaven and the eternal fire.

The second part is in verses 24-27, where Jesus tells us about two builders and two foundations. There were the wise builder and the foolish builder. And there were the solid rock foundation and the sinking sand foundation.

Then after Jesus ends what we call the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew 5-7, Matthew comments that the crowds were astonished at his teaching. He spoke with authority that they did not find in the Pharisees and scribes.

Two Confessions, Two Destinations (verses 21-23)

Verses 21-23 is a fearful text. How can one who calls Jesus “Lord” be barred from the kingdom of heaven? They have even performed miracles and mighty works in his name, and yet, Jesus says, *“I never knew you.”* Aren’t they true Christians?

On Judgment Day, they will call Jesus, *“Lord, Lord.”* Calling a name two or three times means there’s a sense of emphasis, even urgency. In the Scriptures, the word “Lord” can refer to God, or to a master, or someone in higher position in society. But “Lord God” refers to the God of heaven and “Lord Jesus Christ” refers to Jesus the Son of God. So these people appear before Jesus and calls him “Lord,” acknowledging that he is God. But they are not true Christians.

But it is also true that Paul says, *“no one can say Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit*” (1 Cor 12:3). However, true faith is not merely an outward, spoken confession that Jesus is Lord. It is not merely knowledge about him and his teachings, as Jefferson and many others had. Rather, it is also “a wholehearted trust, which the Holy Spirit works in [a believer] by the gospel” (Heidelberg Catechism 21). So, a true confession or profession of faith in Christ must be both from the mind and heart.

What about their claim that they prophesied, cast out demons, and performed many other mighty miracles in Jesus’ name? Jesus tells them that these works alone do not qualify them for entry into the kingdom of heaven, since they can come also from unbelievers, even demons. Balaam the pagan magician and King Saul, both unbelievers, prophesied for a time. Pharisees preached and taught the Word of God, so they thought, but Jesus often condemned them. In Acts 19:13, itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to invoke the name of Jesus to cast out demons. Paul says that through the Antichrist, Satan will deceive many *“with all power and false signs and wonders”* (2 Thess 2:9–10; cf Rev 13:13-14). Judas Iscariot himself, together with the other eleven disciples, was probably sent by Jesus to preach the gospel throughout his earthly ministry. He might even have performed miracles.

Last Sunday, we learned that Jesus warned of false prophets who will come as sheep who preach in Jesus’ name. Jesus says that they will be recognized by their bad fruits. But what’s wrong with healing, prophecies and many other signs performed by televangelists? Aren’t they good fruits of faith? What’s wrong are three main things. First, they teach heresies, even denying the Trinity and the once-for-all atoning sacrifice by Christ for sin. Second, their signs and wonders are almost always staged and faked. Third, they are out for shameful gain, amassing mansions, jets, luxury cars, and millions in bank accounts. These are their works. They are workers of lawlessness or evildoers who never do the will of God.¹

We also have many people in churches today who are false confessors. They call themselves Christians, but the fruits of their lives witness that they are not. They are only hearers of the Word, and not doers, because they do not do God’s will according to his Word. They go to church on Sundays, and even go to Bible studies, but there is no visible change in their behavior. Therefore,

¹ For a detailed treatment of Word-Faith doctrines, see Robert Bowman Jr., “Word-Faith Movement,” *Watchman Fellowship Profile*, 2006. <https://www.watchman.org/profiles/pdf/wordfaithprofile.pdf>. Accessed 09-16-18.

even the Apostle Paul cannot say to them, “You once were like this, doing what the unbelieving world does, but now, you are citizens of the kingdom of God, because you do his will.” This is because they were never transformed by the Spirit, never repented, and never saved from their sin.

Therefore, let us examine ourselves that we are not like these unbelievers who confess Christ falsely. Let us be sure that we confess with our mouth and believe in our heart that Jesus Christ is our Lord and Savior. If we are to recognize false confessors by their works, let us also examine ourselves so that we will be assured that our confession is true – also by our works. Our works must not be based on the spectacular and amazing, but on our obedience to God’s law in the Scriptures. Jesus warns, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”* (John 14:15). He doesn’t require us to prophesy, cast out demons, and do other mighty works. Ordinary fruits of the Spirit, founded in faith in Christ – *“love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control”* – will open the gate of heaven for us (Gal 5:22-23).

What’s dreadful is Jesus’ response to the false confessors, *“I never knew you. Depart from me!”* Jesus never knew them in a special, saving knowledge. Of course, as the all-knowing God, he knew everyone who will ever be born in this world. But he only has an intimate, saving knowledge of all who would believe in him. This knowledge is of grace, mercy and love, a knowledge that would send him to his death on the cross for all the sins of all those whom he knew before the creation of the world. But he never knew these false confessors in this way. He knew them only as those whom he would cast out from his holy presence.

The words, *“Depart from me,”* are terrifying, because it refers to the words of Jesus to those who are condemned to eternal hell. Matthew quotes King David from Psalm 6:8, when he was persecuted by his enemies, *“Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping.”* On Judgment Day, Jesus will also condemn his enemies with the same words, *“Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels”* (Matt 25:41). Eternal fire is the destination of false teachers and false confessors.

But those who are truly saved, who repent of their sins, whose hearts have been transformed by the Spirit: they will enter the kingdom. At the beginning of his sermon, Jesus said to them, *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (Matt 5:3). Then, repeating this comforting assurance near the end of his life on earth, Jesus says that on the last day, he will say to his own sheep, *“Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world”* (Matt 25:34). Eternity in heaven is the final destination of those who have true faith and do the will of God written in Scriptures.

Two Builders, Two Foundations (verses 24-27)

Therefore, only those who hear his words and practices them are his true sheep. As James exhorts us, *“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only”* (Jas 1:22). In verses 24-27, Jesus again compares two sets of twos: a wise builder and a foolish builder; a solid foundation and a shaky foundation.

You’ve seen the news accounts of two storms: Hurricane Florence in the Carolinas and Typhoon Mangkhut in the Philippines (hurricane, typhoon and cyclone all refer to strong storms). At landfall, Florence was Category 1, while Mangkhut was Category 4. Coupled with these strong

winds were huge rainfall amounts, so there were raging floods and muddy landslides. Houses without strong foundations are destroyed. Houses built on sandy shores, even those with strong, concrete and steel piles, are also damaged or completely destroyed. Trees that have shallow or rotting roots also fall down. This is the difference between strong and shaky foundations.

But here, the foundation of a house or any structure is merely a metaphor. Jesus was pointing out a different kind of foundation: the foundation of our lives. What is our perspective of life? What is the basis for thoughts, words and deeds? How do we look at the culture around us? These are important, foundational questions that shape our lives. And Jesus contrasts us like two builders. A wise builder looks for a solid, rocky foundation before he builds his structure over it. But a foolish builder looks at the beautiful ocean or lake and doesn't care much for a solid foundation, so he builds his structure on shifting sand.

What is a true Christian's foundation of life? It is, as Jesus says, his words, his teachings and his commands. It is all the teachings in his Sermon on the Mount in Chapters 5-7. It is a life founded on the blessedness of being citizens of the kingdom of heaven. It is obeying God's Word not merely in word, but in heart and mind as well. It is praying to the Father with a humble heart. It is laying up treasures in heaven with works that are pleasing to him. It is entering the narrow gate of salvation and walking the difficult road of life full of sufferings and temptations. It is being firm in the Word to avoid being deceived by false teachers. This is the solid rock as our true foundation.

If our doctrine, worship and life are not built on the solid foundation of God's Word, then we are on shaky ground. We will be like ship being blown here and there by every wind of false teachings. Our foundation must not be the desires of life, the lust of our sinful nature, or the pride of possessions and power. We are not to make our decisions based solely on our pleasures, careers, or even families. If these are our foundation, then our fall will be, as Jesus describes, "great."

Beloved friends: Jesus points to himself as this solid foundation. He is our strong and unshakable Refuge and Fortress, our Rock of Ages, our Solid Rock. The storms of life might come upon us like a great flood, but when he is our Rock, we are not easily shaken. The Apostle Paul says that Christ was the Rock that followed the Israelites in the desert, giving them spiritual drink that kept them alive (1 Cor 10:4).

He is the chief Cornerstone of the church, his spiritual house (Matt 21:42). When Peter confessed that Jesus is "*the Christ, the Son of the living God*," Jesus said that he will build his church upon this declaration. The church is founded on the teachings of Christ, which the apostles and prophets preached to all the nations (Eph 2:20). We are then "*living stones*" that are building blocks of the worldwide spiritual house of Christ, our precious Cornerstone (1 Pet 2:5-6).

Therefore, confess with your mouth and believe in your heart that Jesus is Lord and Savior (Rom 10:9-10). For if you do, Jesus promises, "*Everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven*" (Matt 10:32-33). Believe and trust in his promise, because he is the only pure and true Confessor. He did his Father's will perfectly in true righteousness. All the miracles, signs and wonders that he did all his life on earth was founded only upon his Father's Word. Be astonished at all his teachings and works, for he taught and worked with great authority!