

ChristReformationChurch

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The Gospel According to Matthew

The Starting Point is Faith

January 13, 2019

Sermon Text: Matthew 12:

Scripture Reading: Hebrews 11

Mat 12:33-42 "Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. (34) You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. (35) The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.

(36) I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, (37) for by your words you will be justified, and

by your words you will be condemned."

(38) Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you." (39) But he answered them, "An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. (40) For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. (41) The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. (42) The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

Which comes first? Faith, or the evidence for faith? This is one of the

subjects we are going to hear Jesus address this morning. Most people will say, "I will believe in Christ but first you must prove to me that the Bible is true and really is God's Word. I need evidence." Is that correct? Is that how the Lord deals with us? Let's find out.

Make up Your Mind

"Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. (34) You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. (35) The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil.

Jesus is building here upon His earlier statement:

Mat 12:30 Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

People are given to the middle road. It is a fantasy when it comes to our relationship to Christ. Jesus' call to us to follow Him is black and white, narrow road or wide road, sheep or goat, righteous or unrighteous. Give it all up and follow Him, try to keep some of the world and He won't have us.

This is what He is confronting these enemies with in this passage. If a tree produces good fruit, then it is a good tree. You cannot insist that a tree is a bad tree when you are holding its good fruit in your hand. Nor the other way around. You cannot make a bad tree into a good tree when its fruit is rotten.

But that is exactly what these Pharisees were doing. Jesus showed them the best fruit they had ever seen. Right in front of their eyes He did powerful works by God's Spirit, and those works were very good. Casting out demons. Healing people. Raising the dead. Who could argue that an evil person (or Satan himself) could do such things? And yet they did say Jesus was of the devil. Why?

Because they were children of the devil themselves. They wanted to be God. They wanted power and control and worship. So they hated Jesus.

So it simply will not do for a person to say "Jesus was a very good man, a very good teacher, but I reject the notion that He was God. I reject that He is the Creator of the universe. I reject that His death on the cross is the only way for us to be put right with God." No. Jesus will not allow this middle of the road business. Make the tree good or make it evil. One or the other.

And notice very carefully this powerful statement again:

Mat 12:30 Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.

Many people say “I believe in God, or I love God.” But they refuse to believe or even hear what Christ says. They are in fact then *enemies* of God. And in fact they *actively* oppose Him. They protest loudly if told this. But Jesus says this is in fact the truth.

Jos 24:15 And if it is evil in your eyes to serve the LORD, choose this day whom you will serve, whether the gods your fathers served in the region beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD."

Make no mistake. Many, many people who sit in churches each Sunday are in fact Christ's enemies. They are working against His kingdom and causing people to stumble, hindering them from coming to faith.

What Does This Mean?

(36) I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, (37) for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be

condemned."

In the context here, it certainly means this:

What we say about Jesus will be the basis for what Jesus will say about us on the Day of Judgment.

People speak all kinds of “careless” words about Christ. “care” + “less.” Words that show they don’t care. Jesus does not have in mind here primarily some bad swear word we say (though we shouldn’t speak in the language of the flesh, which is what swearing is). No, the careless words for which men will give account are the words those men said *about Him*. And many such people are *religious* people just like these Pharisees.

Therefore this brings each one of us to an obvious question, does it not? *Am I for Jesus, or against Him?* Am I helping Him gather people into His kingdom or am I hindering them and scattering?

Mat 10:37-39 Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. (38) And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. (39) Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

How Much Evidence do we Need?

Now, listen once again to Jesus' words to the Pharisees when they insisted that they didn't have enough evidence in order to believe in Him:

(38) Then some of the scribes and Pharisees answered him, saying, "Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you."

(39) But he answered them, "**An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah.**

(40) For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

(41) The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

(42) The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign. Listen to Hebrews on

this and then let's think it through carefully:

Heb 11:1-6 **Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.** (2) For by it the people of old received their commendation.

(3) By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

(4) By faith Abel offered to God a more acceptable sacrifice than Cain, through which he was commended as righteous, God commending him by accepting his gifts. And through his faith, though he died, he still speaks.

(5) By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.

(6) And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

Faith is God's requirement. Not some "faith" that we define ourselves, but the genuine faith that God defines. You have that definition in verse one:

Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

In addition, it is only by this faith that we truly believe God and which He rewards.

That is to say, “faith” that demands a sign, that insists on more evidence, is not faith. God does not reward it. In fact, He calls such false faith, “evil.” It is characteristic of an adulterous people who crave a false god. Which comes first? Faith or Evidence for faith? The answer is plain, though it is not the answer fallen man gives – *faith*. If we are to approach God, if we are to be heard by Him, then we must come to Him, *believing* certain basics about Him:

1. Believe that He exists, and
2. That He is a rewarder of those who seek Him

To ask for “signs” then is to fail the test. It is to reveal an evil, unbelieving heart.

Remember now that every human being who ever existed on this planet *has already been given all kinds of evidence for faith in God:*

Rom 1:18-23 For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of

men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. (19) For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. (20) For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. (21) For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. (22) Claiming to be wise, they became fools, (23) and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.

How can we know God? How can we be put right with Him? Well, simply this:

Believe that He exists, believe that He is the Creator of all things, believe that He will hear and answer your prayer.

And just what is that prayer? That is also quite simple:

Mar 9:20-24 And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. (21) And Jesus asked his father, "How long has this

been happening to him?" And he said, "From childhood. (22) And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." (23) And Jesus said to him, "If you can! All things are possible for one who believes." (24) Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, "**I believe; help my unbelief!**"

There it is. "I believe; help my unbelief."

But ask Him for a sign? Demand more evidence so that you can "believe"?...you aren't going to get it.

An Example for the Evil Unbelieving Heart

Listen to these words once again:

(40) For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

(41) The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here.

(42) The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation

and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

In addition to God's revelation of Himself to us through the created world and universe, we now have something even more powerful – *the resurrection of Christ, the sign of Jonah*. Even that would not be enough for the wicked:

Luk 16:27-31 And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house-- (28) for I have five brothers-- so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' (29) But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' (30) And he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.' (31) He said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, **neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.**'"

Just think how much evidence God in His mercy has given us for faith. The creation. His Spirit working. Christ coming into the world. His miracles and His resurrection and ascension. All of it right here in His Word that we hold in our hands. What will it be like in the judgment for people today who are rejecting all this?

Well, Jesus gave the answer. He said that the wicked people of Nineveh and the pagan Queen of Sheba will stand justified on that Day because they believed. What did they believe? Nineveh believed God's Word preached through Jonah. And the Queen believed God's Word through Solomon. Yet we have a huge, huge amount more than they did.

Therefore, it is vital that we all recognize this:

When any person says "I cannot believe in Christ until I have more evidence," they are adding to their condemnation. Such a demand is evil, a product of their evil, unbelieving heart.

Rather, we must approach God *in faith* and ask Him honestly and genuinely to increase our faith and dispel any trace of unbelief. Such a person will never be rejected by Him. He rewards those who seek Him.