

Matthew 7:15-29
Pentecost 2; June 14, 2020

I have only been in a courtroom a couple of times. Don't worry, I wasn't on trial for anything. I have been called for jury duty only a couple of times in my life. However, I have never yet been asked to serve on a Jury. I have been in a courtroom with a larger pool of people from whom the Jury would be chosen. But I have never been chosen. Yet, I think it would be a daunting task to sit on a Jury, no matter the seriousness of the charges. To know that you have to sit there and look at all the information that is presented and try to figure out who is telling the truth and who is not.

Yet, even though I have not had to listen to a witness myself in a courtroom, I would think that it would go something like this. A woman stands before a judge, places one hand on the Bible and the other in the air, and makes a pledge. For the next few minutes, with God as her helper, she will tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth.

She is a witness. Her job at that moment in that courtroom is not to expand or dilute the truth. Her job is to simply tell the truth. Other people in that courtroom will determine what to do with the words of that witness. But the witness? The witness speaks the truth. She is to do no more or no less than tell the truth of what she had seen and heard.

The Christian is also a witness. We make a pledge. Like that witness in court, we are called to tell the truth. It must have felt like a daunting task when Jesus would later tell his disciples that **"you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."** (Acts 1:8)

We are witnesses. Like a witness in court, we are called to testify to tell the truth. Our job is not to whitewash the truth. Our job is not to embellish the truth. It is simply to tell the truth. Perhaps, that is why Jesus gives such a powerful warning to those who change the truth. **"I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"** For God's Word is always truth. It just wasn't an option for Jesus to not tell the truth. It's not an option for us either.

Jesus is wrapping up his famous Sermon on the Mount. During that sermon, every word he spoke was honest and true. He did not shade the truth. He didn't avoid the truth. No deceit was found in his mouth. He simply told the truth. Why? Dishonesty is so completely contrary to the character of God. But the Devil is the exact opposite. Every Word he speaks is a lie. He has gotten really good at telling lies. In fact, Jesus warns his followers that is what he will do. This should be no surprise. Those who follow him are really good at making lies look like truth. Jesus says: **"Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves."** It sounds simple doesn't it? But it's not. That's why it is so important to know the Word of God.

As the teller at the bank held up a crisp \$100 bill to the light, someone asked her. *"How do you know if it's a fake? You must attend endless classes and workshops to learn what the fake bills look like."* "No," she said. *"I simply examine and study the real thing. After handling the authentic bills day after day and becoming so familiar with how the real bills look and feel, it's not hard to spot a fake."* How will you recognize the rotten fruit of a rotten prophet? By studying the real thing; by becoming so familiar with the good fruit that we can spot the rotten fruit. **"It is impossible for God to lie."** (Heb. 6:18)

What happens when we build our lives on the foundation of truth? **"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. 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."** Perhaps, this is an illustration that's a bit hard for us to fully appreciate. We wouldn't build a house without a backhoe to dig the foundation. Concrete for the foundation is delivered in a cement truck. Concrete blocks are lowered into the foundation with power equipment. Lumber and other building materials are delivered and unloaded with ease. Our walls are built with sheet rock. Shingles are lifted up on the roof by power equipment. Yet, in spite of all this equipment, building a house still takes a lot of work.

But building a house in ancient Israel was an enormous job. Homes were built in the summer. The rains come in winter. The ridge upon Jerusalem is built can even have snow. No one wants to build in the winter. Summer provides dry, warm days for building homes, but there is a down-side. The high clay content in the soil is like rock in the summer heat. That

also means that it would be hard work to dig out that rock hard soil with swinging a pick axe in the air. The idea of long back-breaking work under the hot, dry heat was not appealing. So, it would be so much easier to start building the walls on that rock-hard sand soil. In the hot summer heat, it would stand up. But then come the winter rains. The rain would turn that clay in a greasy wet mess. The walls would begin to slide. It would take long for the house to fall apart. Jesus' warning would be simple for them and us to understand. Don't stand on any other promises other than God's promises. Why would you not want to build on the rock solid foundation of God?

What is the truth of that foundation of God? We have a God who loves us. We have a God who will not abandon us. In Christ, we discover this Word to be truth that is good for all seasons and all stages of our life from the cradle to the grave. When wedding bells ring; when sorrows appear; when dreams dissolve and friends disappear; when life seems empty and void, this Word of God is still there. In the hour of guilt it judges, and then turns to grant forgiveness. In the time of storm it gives solitude; in time of grief it provides comfort. God's Word will never fail us.

Over the next several weeks, we will take a look at what it is like to be a witness for Jesus. As we witnesses of Christ, we tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. So help me God. Amen.