

The Eighth Sunday after Trinity
Matthew 7:15-23

If a Baptist clings to Jesus when he dies, he will be saved eternally.

If a Baptist clings to their decision in Christ, he will be damned eternally.

A Baptist isn't saved because he is a Baptist, but *in spite of* the fact that he is Baptist.

If a Roman Catholic clings to Jesus when he or she dies, he will be saved eternally.

If a Roman Catholic clings to the Pope when he dies, he will be damned eternally.

A Roman Catholic isn't saved because he is Roman Catholic, but *in spite of* their Roman Catholicism.

If a Lutheran clings to Jesus when he dies, he will be saved eternally.

If a Lutheran doesn't cling to Jesus, then they aren't being Lutheran. Lutheran Doctrine clings to Christ and Him alone. Lutherans care about Lutheran Doctrine. I love how Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller says it:

"Our love for theology is our love for Jesus and His words. We cling to those words because we know that our life depends on those words."¹

Jesus says, "Abide in Me, and I in you...", " and then He says "if you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you." (John 15:4a, 7)

¹ Issues, Etc. Interview: "What I Wish My Non-Lutheran Family Understood About: The Importance of Doctrine." Pastor Bryan Wolfmueller, aired July 21, 2021.

Here Jesus equates Himself abiding in you through His words abiding in you. In other words, you abide in Jesus by abiding in His words. This is why Jesus establishes the church this way in Matthew 28:

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (vv. 19-20)

First Jesus commands Holy Baptism so that we might understand His Word. Paul says, “the natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” (1 Corinthians 2:14) Without the Holy Spirit, you cannot understand the Word of God. The Holy Spirit is the promise of the Father given to you in Baptism, and He gives you understanding.

Second, Jesus commands pastors to teach the entire council of God. Not just the parts that we like. Not just the parts that aren't inconvenient. Not just the parts that seem unoffensive to a godless society. And Jesus says some very uncomfortable things. Jesus says, “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me. For whoever would save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.” (Matthew 16:24-25) He also says that “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father except through Me.” (John 14:6) Sounds like Jesus is pretty exclusive, doesn't it? You're either with Him or against Him. There is no in between.

Third, Jesus attaches a wonderful promise to Baptism and His word: “Lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” What a comforting promise. Jesus promises to be with you through thick and thin, through richer and poorer, through health and illness. Jesus keeps His vows.

Lutheran doctrine emphasizes two main things: the glory of Christ and the comfort of God's promises.

Any doctrine that takes away from that doctrine is either a false doctrine or a different doctrine and is harmful to your salvation in Christ and the comfort you have in Him.

Here's another great Pastor Wolfmueller quote:

"Everyone who comes along with a false doctrine or a different doctrine is trying to steal that joy and that peace and that comfort away from us... no, you can't have it! We simply won't let His treasure be stolen."

We have joy because we know our Father in heaven loves us apart from our worth or works. We have peace because Jesus made the way of peace. And we have comfort because we have Jesus with us through thick and thin through His word.

And Jesus warns you today that there will be false prophets who will try to steal your joy and comfort from you. He says:

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they?" (vv. 15-16)

By fruits here, Jesus primarily means teaching. It is true that false teaching will show up in someone's life as sinful behavior. But if that is the thing we look for, then there's not a Christian pastor or teacher you can trust. Pastors are beset by sin just like you are. And it's obvious if a Christian pastor or teacher is caught in some kind of gross sin, he should be removed from his office. If a pastor engages in pornography, adultery, extravagant spending, alcoholism, or any such sin, he should be removed from the office of pastor. Sadly, this week there was a report of a pastor in Rancho Cucamonga arrested for sexual abuse of a minor. I pray that he will repent and receive forgiveness, but he can no longer be a pastor. Ever.

But the primary thing we test in a pastor is his teaching. Paul commended the Bereans for testing everything he said against Scripture. (Acts 17:11)

You should do the same with me. Paul was well trained and extremely talented. If he should be tested against Scripture, how much more should I, or any pastor, be tested against Scripture? I am trained but I am still a sinner. It's possible I could get something wrong. It's important for all of us, and especially me, to be open to correction from the Word of God. We always approach God's life-saving word with humility!

Furthermore, we have to understand that there is right doctrine and wrong doctrine. Right doctrine brings life and wrong doctrine kills. And it can kill eternally. It is very much like cancer. Cancer can live inside your body and it will not kill you right away. And most likely, you don't notice it when it begins. But at some point, it will grow big enough that you have to get it treated. And the only thing you can do is cut it out with scalpels, lasers, chemo or radiation. You can't leave a single cancer cell in your body.

We must treat false doctrine the same way. And by false doctrine, I mean a little or a lot of false doctrine mixed in with true doctrine. Paul says "a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough." (Galatians 5:9) We cannot have the attitude that you can get some things wrong about the faith and you're going to be okay. Just as long as you love Jesus, that's enough for me. No! If you don't love Jesus' words, then you don't love Jesus! Jesus warns us against this in our Gospel reading:

"On that day many will say to Me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and cast out demons in Your name, and do many mighty works in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you workers of lawlessness.'" (vv. 22-23)

Notice that Jesus is casting out into the outer darkness those who think that they are Christians!

First, this serves as a warning to you. A living faith produces works. Works are necessary; just not necessary for salvation." If you look at your life and see a lack of good works, then repent! The wonderful hymn "Salvation unto Us Has Come" sums it up perfectly in the ninth stanza:

Faith clings to Jesus' cross alone
And rests in Him unceasing;
And by its fruits true faith is known,
with love and hope increasing.
For faith alone can justify;
works serve our neighbor and supply
The proof that faith is living.

Works flow out of faith. Another way to say it is that faith alone saves but faith is never alone. Faith produces works but we don't rely on them as proof that we are saved. We look to Baptism and Absolution and the Lord's Supper for proof that Jesus chose us before the foundation of the world.

Second, this warning of Jesus shows us that works cannot save. We are inundated with Christians around us who demand works be a part of justifying faith. It's faith plus your decision or faith plus your merits that save you. This false doctrine is pervasive and all around us. And it is dangerous! That's why I pick on Baptists and Roman Catholics.

Jesus warns us that wolves come dressed as sheep.

Let's look at the Baptists and, in particular, at Billy Graham. He taught decision theology; also known as altar calls. This teaching says that God does His part and you *must* do your part. In this teaching, your salvation does not depend ultimately on God, but on you. It confuses faith and works because it equates a decision, clearly a work, with faith. It ignores or completely gets wrong what God clearly says in John 1:14: Christians are "born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." The will of man is Bible talk for a decision. The Bible clearly says you cannot make a decision for your salvation. Billy Graham clearly teaches that you must make a decision for your salvation. Billy Graham is a wolf in sheep's clothing. I'm not judging Billy Graham as a person. He was an incredibly sincere and nice man. But he taught false doctrine. And if you trust in that false doctrine, you will be doomed to hell. I pray that Billy Graham clung to Jesus in spite of his false teaching.

Let's look at the Roman Catholics. The Pope and Roman Catholic Catechism say you must add works to baptism to be saved. Your sin is covered up to the point of your baptism, but then you must work satisfactions for your own sins after that. On top of that, since it's impossible for anyone to make satisfaction for their many sins, you can look forward to an indeterminate time in purgatory being purified by fire. This obviously contradicts our favorite passage:

"For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Or a similar passage in Romans:

"For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law." (Romans 3:28)

But Rome doesn't stop there. Listen to two Canons, or decrees, from the Council of Trent which is Rome's response to the Lutheran Reformation:

Canon 9 – "If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified... let him be anathema." Anathema means to be damned forever. It's what Paul pronounces on the Judaizers that were pestering the Galatian church with works righteousness.

Canon 12 – "If any one shall say that justifying faith is nothing else than confidence in the divine mercy pardoning sins for Christ's sake, or that it is that confidence alone by which we are justified... let him be accursed.

The Pope is a wolf in sheep's clothing. And like Billy Graham, he seems like a sincere and caring guy, but he is still a wolf because of his teachings! I pray that when Pope Francis dies, he clings to Jesus alone and not his work righteousness.

Baptists and Roman Catholics both contain the error semi-Pelagianism which mixes works and faith together.

We care about this because anyone who does this is seeking a way to God apart from Christ. Here's how our confessions say it:

“We obtain reconciliation only by faith when we believe that we are received into favor for Christ's sake. He alone has been set forth as the Mediator and Atoning Sacrifice (1 Timothy 2:5), in order that the Father may be reconciled through Him. Therefore, whoever believes that he merits grace by works despises the merit and grace of Christ [Galatians 5:4]. In so doing, he is seeking a way to God without Christ, by human strength, although Christ Himself said, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life’” (John 14:6). (AC XX.9-10)

Again, there are two dangers with mixing a little bad theology with good theology: you lessen the glory of Christ, and you rob yourself of comfort.

You are a beloved child of God through Baptism by faith alone through grace alone for the sake of Christ alone. You receive Christ alone by Scripture alone. And God gets all the glory. You were brought into the Faith by faith alone through grace alone for the sake of Christ alone through His word alone. You continue in the Faith in the exact same way.

This is what Lutheran doctrine teaches and it is a gift! It highlights what Jesus has done for you in Baptism and on the cross. It highlights what Jesus continues to do with His word; both His written word and the visible word of His Sacrament. These things bring you joy and peace and comfort.

Let me leave you with some of those words from the Apostle Paul:

“And I am sure of this, that He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ!” (Philippians 1:6)

Cling to Jesus through His words and He will save you!

In Jesus' name. Amen.