

## **A People Producing Its Fruits**

Matthew 21:33-46

The Eighteenth Sunday after Pentecost, October 8, 2017

Immanuel Lutheran Church, Broadlands

Simple faith in Jesus saves.

Simple faith believes in the forgiver of sins. Jesus is the forgiver of sins. Simple faith in Jesus is simple faith in the forgiver of sins.

Simple faith then believes that Jesus has forgiven it of all of its sins. Simple faith believes that none of its sins are left over. Not only does simple faith believe that its sins are forgiven, but simple faith also believes that its original sin is forgiven that is the status of living apart from God that produced all of the other sins. Simple faith believes this because Jesus is the forgiver of all sins including and especially faithlessness.

Simple faith then confesses its sins. To believe in the forgiver of sins and to rejoice in such forgiveness is the same thing as confessing one's sins.

Let us be clear. When I say confessing one's sins, I mean acknowledging one's sins when confronted with them. When I say confessing one's sins, I mean acknowledging that in the eyes of God you are a sinner.

I am not talking about a specific confession of a specific sin, although a person who acknowledges that they are a sinner will do that if they are capable. One asks for forgiveness because one acknowledges one's sins.

When a person has simple faith in Jesus, he has simple faith in the forgiver of sins. When one has faith in the forgiver of sins, by definition one acknowledges that one is a sinner. After all if a person does not acknowledge that they are a sinner, they will not bother to believe in the forgiver of sins. The whole point of believing in the forgiver of sins is to obtain forgiveness for one's sins.

Even infants and demented people can acknowledge their sins. Faith is not primarily an intellectual exercise. While it affects the intellect and God wants you to grow in the grace and knowledge of your Lord Jesus Christ, faith is in its essence a dependence upon the one in whom it believes. Since infants can be dependent along with those suffering from dementia, they can and do have simple faith in Jesus. Thus by definition they admit that they are sinners, because simple faith in Jesus confesses its sins because to believe in Jesus is to believe in the forgiver of sins.

Simple faith in Jesus rejoices with correction.

In the book of Proverbs our Lord instructs us that foolish man hates correction, but the wise man takes advice. The wise man rejoices with corrections, but the fool is wise in his own eyes.

If simple faith in Jesus is simple faith in the forgiver of sins, then simple faith confesses its sins. If someone comes along and corrects simple faith for the sins that it is committing, simple faith will rejoice in the correction because this will enhance simple faith's confession and strengthen simple faith in Jesus, the forgiver of sins.

Thus simple faith rejoices with all of the messengers that the forgiver of sins sends to it. It does not matter if these messengers are good looking or bad. It does not matter if these messengers are interesting or boring, however, to correct someone for their sins is always an interesting endeavor. I have never known having my sins corrected to be a boring enterprise. In fact it seizes my attention more than any entertainment does.

Simple faith even rejoices paradoxically when the messenger corrects it for its lack of faith.

Thus anyone who refuses to receive a messenger from Jesus, the forgiver of sins, does not have simple faith in Jesus. They are therefore lost and damned. The stone that the builders rejected will fall on them and crush them.

Anyone who refuses to receive a messenger of the forgiver of sins is refusing to receive a messenger who is going to correct simple faith for the sins that it commits. The only reason that such a person would refuse to receive the messenger that the forgiver of sins sends to it, is if the one refusing believes that it does not need correction. But if such a person does not believe that they need correction, such a person must believe that they have a righteousness in front of God that does not need correction. Such a person does not confess their sins. Such a person does not rejoice in the forgiveness of sins. Such a person does not believe in Jesus because after all why would they? Jesus is the forgiver of sins.

Have you ever forgiven someone and they were angry with you for doing so? Ever told someone, "I forgive you," and you were met with anger and fury? The reason that you were met with anger even though you were forgiving them was because they think that they did not do anything wrong. If they think that they did not do anything wrong and you forgive them, you are telling them that they did do something wrong, but that you are not going to hold it against them. When you do this and they do not believe that they did anything wrong, they become angry, because you are implying a correction that they do not accept.

Such people are trying to justify themselves before God. They know that they need righteousness in order to justify themselves before God. In order to justify themselves before God they need to maintain that righteousness. Such people do this in a variety and combination of ways. They reduce God's requirements for righteousness to something that is more manageable for them. They compare themselves to others who are less righteous than they are. The media is really helpful in this endeavor for faithlessness. They are constantly showing us the most horrific sins of others. They also magnify the goodness of what they have done in their own minds. They do not keep track of their own sins. Ironically by not keeping track of their own sins in order to establish their own righteousness, they wind up committing more sins than they would have if they just had simple faith in Jesus. So when you forgive such a person you are telling them that what they did was wrong. You are jeopardizing their entire program of righteousness before God. Such a person will respond to you with all due hatred for not only are you taking away His standing before God, you are taking away his claim to have made his own standing before God. You are attacking his real idol which is himself.

This is what the chief priests and the Pharisees did.

They forsook the righteousness of God which is by faith and tried to establish a righteousness of their own which is by works of the Law. And then when God sent them messengers like the prophets who told them to repent of their sins, they refused to listen to them and in the worst cases they beat and killed the prophets. Many times they drove the prophets into exile and threatened them.

And now in the temple in Jerusalem God had finally sent them His Son. In the parable our Lord puts it in optimistic terms and God has to be optimistic or perhaps better He is long suffering always patiently sending one more prophet and one more wise man to correct them and then finally sending them His Son. You would think that they would respect His Son. But no, they hated Him. Here was the heir. He is the proper Lord of the vineyard of Israel. They thought that they were the proper lords and shepherds of Israel. They were not about to turn the vineyard over to this carpenter from Galilee. Like

Denethor refusing to acknowledge that Aragorn was king and refusing to bow the knee to a ranger from the north.

But the Pharisees and the chief priests took it one step further. They threw the son out of the vineyard and killed Him. They arranged for His crucifixion outside of Jerusalem.

What do you think that God should do to them? He sent them messengers. He gave them countless chances. In fact God is so patient with them that in terms of modern politics God looks ignorant. You would think that God would have learned after the first two or three prophets were rejected and killed that these people did not want to confess their sins. These people did not want to believe in the forgiver of sins. This is political stupidity. Imagine a president continuing to send ambassadors to a foreign country in spite of the fact that the first three that he sent were murdered by the government of the receiving country! But God is not operating according to human wisdom. He is operating according to His own long suffering and by the time God's judgment falls on the chief priests and the Pharisees after they had killed His Son, it is abundantly clear to anyone with an ounce of intelligence that God's ways are just.

The stone the builders rejected has become the chief corner stone. He rose from the dead. He ascended into heaven. God has done this and it is marvelous in our eyes. This stone fell on them and crushed them. The Lord predicted that this would happen prior to His crucifixion. He predicted that in Jerusalem not one stone would be left upon another. He predicted a foreign army that would come against Jerusalem, defile the temple, and destroy it. About forty years after our Lord's ascension that is exactly what happened. The Romans marched on Jerusalem. They burned the city to the ground. They defiled the temple and destroyed it. They thought they were doing it for their own political reasons, but they were in fact doing it because the Lord had directed it. They had rejected simple faith in Jesus and such rejection always brings death.

The Kingdom of God was therefore taken away from them. It is now given to you. You are the people who produce its fruits. John the Baptist when he preached told the people to bear fruit in keeping with repentance. The fruit of the Kingdom of God is repentance. Or to put it another way: anyone who has simple faith in Jesus will confess their sins and confess that they are sinners. That is the fruit of those who have simple faith in Jesus, the forgiver of sins.

In this sense He has found you to be superior to the chief priests and the Pharisees. But be warned dear Gentiles, if God did not spare them, He will not spare you either. The fact that you confess your sins is not something in which you can take pride. If you do, then you have ceased to confess your sins. To rejoice in the forgiveness of sins with simple faith in Jesus is a humble endeavor. It is a life constantly acknowledging what you have done wrong and constantly rejoicing in the Savior's mercy. If you ever take pride in it, the stone that the builders rejected will also crush you, or you will fall on it.

He will always give the Kingdom of God to the people who produce its fruits.

In the Name of Jesus. Amen.