

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”

It’s fascinating, in his ministry, how Jesus had a way of getting right to the heart of the matter. No matter what it was, almost any conversation, Jesus wasn’t much for small talk.

Now, I’m sure he was good at it. I would imagine he had many “small talk” conversations with his followers. In fact, one of my hopes for heaven (when that day comes) is to have a chance to sit with Jesus and just talk. And, full disclosure, (at least, for my sake), I hope it starts with something smaller (and easier), before going after something more direct and (maybe not quite) so easy. Time will tell.

Be that as it may, there’s no question that Jesus had a way (in his ministry) of getting past the (small things) in life that didn’t matter and going right after the larger ones that did.

We see it in how he dealt with people; his compassion, his understanding, his ability to see what was going on inside (a person), in spite of what might have been happening on the outside.

We see it in how he dealt with some of the Old Testament teachings, how he understood them and interpreted them and applied them in life. It was never enough (for Jesus) that the letter of the law was followed, if the spirit (behind the law) wasn’t there.

Countless times, Jesus went after the Pharisees who kept the letter of the law down to the last letter. He took them (head-on). He called them out. He never let them (as leaders) off the hook.

And he did it, (he did it), not so much because they were his enemies, because (in the final analysis) they were not, but he did it (for them) and he said it (to them) because they were (just like us) ones for whom he would finally (and later on) offer his life.

We need to know that about Jesus. We need to understand that about Christ. (This is basic, but it’s important.) First and foremost, Jesus came to save us. His very reason for being born (into this world) was to save us from our sin, from what separates us from God.

That’s the story of the Bible. That’s the narrative we find in this book. We call it the gospel. We talk about it as “the good news.” And it’s good news because Jesus did it for us. On the cross, he gave his life so we could have ours. In his resurrection, he was raised to life so that you and I could live.

Jesus is our Savior. He is the only reason (in this world) you and I have any hope (for living) in the next. We need to know that. (He’s our only hope.) Jesus came to save.

What he also came to do was to show us how live. Jesus came to give us an example. He came to model for us what he wants to see in us. And he did it in two ways: by the way he lived and by the things he taught. He showed us (in his life) what he wants to see in ours, and he taught us (through his life) the things we need to know.

What that means is that what Jesus teaches us (in his life) is essential for our lives. What he calls us to do (in life) is for a purpose far greater than what (might end up) doing in life. We need to trust in what he says.

In other words, there’s a direct connection between the faith we place in him (as our Savior) and our willingness to be obedient to him as our Lord. In the Christian life, you cannot have one without the other. You cannot claim to trust him as your Savior, unless you are willing to put your faith in him as your Lord. The two go hand in hand.

And so we come to the question in front of us today. And so we find ourselves challenged by one of the most powerful and (soul-searching) questions Jesus ever asked. “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?” “Why do you refer to me (in your words) as if I am, when in reality (in your actions) I am not?”

Let's talk for a few moments about the context of this question. Before trying to answer it, let's take a step back and see if we can figure out what's going on. It's a question that comes at the end of a chapter in which the teachings of Jesus are part of what we often think of as Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

Now, that "Sermon on the Mount" is actually found in two of the four gospels stories (we have) of Jesus' life, and in each of the two stories (in comparing them), we find a number of differences.

In Luke's gospel (where we read today), Jesus' sermon (his teaching) is less than one chapter in length. (It's a rather short version of a much larger teaching) Jesus offered. In Matthew's telling (of the same story), we find a more expanded version (of the same teachings) that fill three complete chapters.

The second difference (in the two versions) is that in Matthew's gospel, it says Jesus goes up on "a mountainside" to teach. Thus, we talk about his Sermon on the Mount. In Luke's gospel, (in contrast) it's says that Jesus went down and stood on "a level place." In this telling of the story, it's often referred to as Jesus "teaching on the plain."

The other thing I noticed, in my preparation, as I looked back on some of my notes from previous sermons, I found that I've never preached on this particular text before. (I never have.) In 31 years of ministry, it's never happened. The reason is (on Sunday mornings), we most often read from that larger version (in Matthew's gospel), instead of the shorter version found in Luke.

What that also means is that (in my 31 years of ministry) I've never taken on this particular question in any of my preaching. (I never have.) The reason (I never have) is that in Matthew's version of this (same story) of the two houses (which I've preached on many times), we'll get to in a moment, the question isn't asked. (It's not.) It's simply the story of the two houses. But in Luke's version, it is. As I thought about what to share (today), I had to ask myself the question "Why"?

What I realized was (as I looked more closely), was that the same question (only worded differently) actually is in Matthew's version. It's there, but it's asked in a different way, a bit earlier than the "two houses" story itself. It's also (in Matthew's version) not even asked as a question. Instead of a question (as in Luke's gospel), in Matthew's telling, it's actually a statement.

Follow this through. In Luke, Jesus asks, "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" Why do you say one thing (in your life) and the very next moment do another?

In Matthew, instead of a question, it's a statement. What Jesus says is, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (He goes on to say), "Many will say to me on that day (the Day of Judgment), 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophecy in your name and drive out demons in your name and perform many miracles?'" (In other words, wasn't it enough to make sure you were included in what we said and did?) Jesus said, "I'll tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers!'"

Now, again, let's stop for a moment and (take a step back), (this can easily become rather heavy) and try to put all of these pieces together. Because, if we don't, (I mean), how can such a challenging question and such a condemning statement be part of a story we talk about as "the good news?" It doesn't make sense. The pieces don't seem to fit; at least not until we see how they fit and they start to make sense.

If you look closely at what Jesus is saying (and what's he's doing) in his teaching, he's putting together (for us) three important pieces that are essential to the Christian life. I don't know if you noticed (or not), but there are three pieces that are part of Jesus' teaching that are each given to us as "action words" in the text. There are three actions that are essential to the Christian life: hearing, saying, and doing; hearing, saying, and doing.

Let's take them one at a time, starting with our hearing. The Bible says that the Christian life starts with our hearing. Before anything else, we hear. We hear the good news. We hear what Jesus has done. If we don't

hear, there's nothing to respond to. If we don't hear, there's no possibility for faith. "Faith comes from hearing, and hearing comes from the preaching of Christ."

And so we hear. We preach about Jesus. We teach about what Jesus has done. When we hear it, the Spirit starts to work. And when the Spirit starts to work, faith begins to grow. The message, the truth, the Word is heard. It all starts with hearing.

From there, it moves on to saying. (After we hear it, we say it.) We confess it. We proclaim it. We speak of what we have heard and have come to know. We claim the name of Jesus. We name the Name of Christ. (It's important we do that.)

(Paul says), "If you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For a man believes in his heart and so is justified, and he confesses with his lips and so is saved." In other words, if you hear it (and believe it), then you'll speak it. But if you never speak it, there's always the question of whether or not you've really heard. We hear it and we come to faith. We confess it and we know that (in Jesus) we are saved.

From there, (here's the third part), from there, we do it. We live it out. We take what we know and believe (in our heart) and what we have now confessed (with our lips) and we live it out. We apply it. We practice it. We allow it to shape and guide our life.

Now take that, those three pieces, and listen to what Jesus says in that story of the two houses. The one (he says) was built on rock and the other (he tells us) was built on sand. To build on Christ, to hear his Word (what he has said) and to trust his work (what he has done), that's our faith. That's the rock foundation that will hold up. Jesus promises that.

No matter what, against the rains, the floods, the winds of life, it doesn't matter. The foundation is solid. The Word is secure. The promise of Jesus (and his cross) will never collapse. But to hear and (even) to say, and then not to do (Jesus tells us) is a sandy foundation (at best) and you better watch out.

Now, I suppose these two homes, if you think it through, (described by Jesus) could be thought of as being identical in every way, except for the foundation. That is, they looked exactly alike. Nothing was different. You'd never know (or notice) until the storms hit and the stresses of life start pushing on the walls. It's only then that the true nature of a person is exposed. It's only then that the depth of one's faith and life are tested. Is it built on the "Rock of Ages", the foundation and the Word (and promises) of Christ? Or is it built on something else, something less, something more sandy and more crumbly that will never last? That's the question...and that's the difference.

Now, the contrast Jesus makes (in the story) is between the wise and the foolish. Those two words are used many times in the Bible. (It's an interesting word study.) Who are the wise in this life? Who are the foolish in this world. And what makes them so?

After all, there are (in this world), as we all know, those whose house looks attractive, not the building of their house (the structure), but the life which is their house. A shiny exterior coat of paint, nice furniture inside, a beautifully landscaped and decorated yard, but the foundation is not secure. There's nothing underneath to hold it up.

Even the many so-called "good people" of life, the "morally right" people of life; they might have nice families, plenty of money, successful in their work, but there's no lasting foundation, nothing solid. Even if they make it (all the way through life) and weather every kind of storm that hits, there is still the final test, death itself, facing God, standing before your Maker, the life to come.

And then, if not before, we will all be confronted with the ultimate truth, the one truth that will never change. Again, (as Paul says), "For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which has already been laid, which is Jesus Christ."

And so, there it is. Hearing and saying and doing. Listening and confessing and applying it in life. It's the difference (Jesus says) between being wise and foolish. It's the subtle (but eternally significant) difference between saying we believe (something) and actually having faith.

And we all know how that works. We can learn what we need to learn, and we can say what we need to say. But am I living it? Am I trusting it? Am I putting my faith in what (and in Whom) I have come to know and believe?

Don't miss the point. There's only one foundation that will last, and that foundation is given to us in God's Word. And there's only one foundation that will remain, and that foundation is offered to us in Christ. We hear it, we speak it, and we do it, and so we find ourselves among the wise, and so we find ourselves on solid ground.

Let me close with this, one final thought. The Sermon on the Mount and the Sermon on the Plain? Jesus as our Savior and Jesus as our Lord?

Think of this way. On the Mount, Jesus becomes our Savior. The Mount of Calvary, the Mount where he gave his life. And on the Mount, he will (one day) be our Judge, and we will be judged and we will (every one of us) come up short. We need a Savior.

But on the Plain, we all find ourselves on level ground, with Jesus as our Lord, at the foot of the cross, standing outside the empty tomb, every one of us called (and forgiven) in him.

And so (Jesus asks), "Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" Why do you say one thing (in your life) and the very next moment do another?

My friends, there's only one foundation that will last. Everything else will come crashing down. We need Jesus. Don't be a fool. Amen.