

Matthew 7:15-29 *“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷Likewise, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them. ²¹“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’ ²⁴“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. ²⁵The 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. ²⁶But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.” ²⁸When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, ²⁹because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.*

Dear friends in Christ our Savior,

Don’t be a moron. I know, you can’t say that in our world today. Back when I was growing up to hear a coach or adult whom you respected bark out these words was a sign of love as they were trying to keep you from going down a path or doing something that would make you look foolish. These days, this is not a politically correct thing to say. It could hurt someone’s feelings. We have very thin skin these days and don’t want to be made to think that anything we do is wrong or foolish. It certainly doesn’t come across in our day as loving or caring and it can be a little condescending.

But all this being said, this is exactly what Jesus tells us in our text for today: Don’t be a moron! You may not get that from the English translation. But the Greek word which is translated, “foolish”, is moron. It has the thought of foolish, unreflecting, foolish deeds, thoughts arising from a lack of knowledge or the inability to make correct decisions. When it comes to spiritual things, one can either be wise or foolish. While often the difference between being wise and foolish is open to speculation, when it comes to spiritual things there are some major consequences that can come from being on the foolish side of things. And when it comes to spiritual things, the difference between being wise and foolish is less open to speculation because God himself defines for us just what it means to be wise and what it means to be foolish. Let’s listen closely as God encourages us to be wise and warns us rather bluntly: **Don’t Be A Moron!**

In illustrating the difference between being wise and foolish, Jesus talks about a house being able to stand when the storm comes. The house which is built by the wise man on the rock will remain standing when the storm rages against it. The house which is built by the foolish man on the sand will come crashing down when the storm with the wind and rain rages against it. We need to understand what is the rock and what is the storm. Understanding these two things will give us a better perspective of the rest of Jesus’ encouragement.

Obviously, the house which Jesus is talking about is our spiritual house. He’s talking about what it is we base our spiritual life on and what it is on which we build our spiritual house. So the storms could be a couple of different things. Jesus could be talking about the trials and troubles of life which wreak havoc on our spiritual house and against which we need to stand strong. To be sure these are included in the storms. But I don’t think this is the full meaning of storm which Jesus is talking about. The biggest storm which we will face in which we will need our spiritual house to stand strong and built up on the firm foundation is the final and ultimate storm that comes: death. You’ve seen the pictures of houses which stand on cliffs being eroded away by the elements. Once the erosion gets up to the house and the house starts to fall, there’s no coming back from that. You can’t save the house at that point. It is as good as gone as it starts to fall into the water below. The same is true for our spiritual house when death comes. Either you were wise and built on the firm foundation and that house will stand forever as you live with Jesus in heaven or you were foolish and built on a sandy foundation that will cause that house to crash and fall in a great way as you are separated from God eternally in hell. Just prior to our text, Jesus tells us that the road to heaven is narrow and the gate into heaven is small. Therefore, it’s important to be smart and build our house on the foundation that will stand and not be morons who build their spiritual house on the shifting sand which will fall.

With that thought in mind, then, we understand the rock to be the solid truth of God’s word in all of its purity. The only spiritual house that will stand when one stands before almighty God is the one built on faith which is based on the truth of God’s Word. We could make other arguments for what the rock means if we only look at the storms as the trials and challenges of life. There are plenty of other ideas, plans, thoughts which can help people through the storms they will face in life. There are many other rocks that would serviceable to help people through tragedy, depression, breakups, losses and whatever else life can throw our way. But there is only one rock which will help us to stand firm when the final and ultimate storm of death and judgment rages against us. This is the rock of faith we have based fully on the salvation won and secured for us in Jesus our Savior.

So ultimately, we are talking about our eternity and living with God forever. This is why the warning against false prophets is such an important warning. A wise person will heed Jesus’ encouragement to be on guard against false prophets. A moron will allow himself or herself to be enticed and deceived by false prophets and find in the end that the spiritual house he/she built won’t stand. Here’s the hard part about false prophets: they don’t come to you announcing themselves as false prophets. When we hear the term false prophets, we think of those who are blatant and outright false prophets like the leaders of cults and far out religious sects. We recognize them immediately and know to stay away. But Jesus is speaking about more here than just these obvious false prophets.

In the broad sense, a prophet is anyone who claims to preach the word of God. A false prophet, then, would be anyone who claims to preach the word of God but is mistaken in what he says and misrepresents what God says in the Bible. Jesus tells us that we can identify false prophets by their fruits—in other words, what someone teaches will determine if he/she is a false

prophet or not. This is where identifying false prophets becomes difficult. Someone who teaches the fundamental doctrines about Jesus but misrepresents God's Word in teachings like Baptism or Communion, or the end times or creation would be a false prophet. Someone who teaches salvation comes through Jesus but you need to add your good works to what Jesus has already done is a false prophet. It's hard in our day to make this accusation of anyone. We don't want to tell people they are wrong. We don't want to accuse people of anything. But it's true. And we must because there are many dangers that come from any false teaching. Falsehood in some teachings may not immediately and directly affect eternal salvation. But they might eventually. False teaching erodes the authority of God's word which can lead a spiritual house to eventually fall. Whether someone is way out there in their teaching, deliberately trying to deceive people into falsehood or teaching the wrong thing about God with the best of intentions, the result will eventually be the same: the destruction of faith. False doctrine doesn't strengthen faith. It weakens faith.

So God tells us: watch out! We must always be on guard. That means just because a book is at a Christian bookstore doesn't mean it is ok. We have to read with a discerning eye to make sure we watch out for what is false. Just because a friend invites us to a Bible study at their house or with other close friends or at lunchtime at work doesn't mean we are ok. We always need to be on guard and watch out for what is false and might destroy our faith. Just because an organization calls itself Christian or even Lutheran doesn't mean we can automatically let our guard down. If we are building a house that will stand the ultimate storm of death and judgment we want to build it on what we know will stand—the truth of God's Word. A wise person will always be on alert and watch out for false prophets as he or she builds their spiritual house. When what matters most is standing before God one day, we understand better Jesus' encouragement: Don't be a moron.

The same is true when it comes to our individual lives of faith. Not only do we need to be on alert and on guard against false prophets in the world around us, we also need to be alert internally for any lusts and sinful desires that might deceive us and lead us away from God. Just as a false prophet might be someone who looks good and sounds good and even does good, we can be deceived by those who are professing Christians whose lives seem pretty good, pretty normal, but aren't really based on God's Word. Their house looks immaculate and solidly based, but the earth is fractured beneath. This is the person who says, "I don't need to follow everything God says. I can do it on my own." This is the person who looks at all the good things they have and see that as a sign that God must be pleased with how they are living so they don't need to make any changes to follow what God says. This is the person who bases their standing before God on the good things they do or the fact that there are a lot worse people than them so they won't have anything to worry about. These are the people who claim to be spiritual but not religious. They may even talk about Jesus but faith in him for salvation is far from their hearts. What a surprise it will be when Jesus comes on the last day and doesn't know them. A wise person understands that salvation comes only through faith in Jesus and his sacrifice alone. A wise person is always on guard to put down that sinful nature that wants to participate in our own salvation and take credit for our eternity. A wise person rests his confidence for salvation only on the rock of truth in God's Word. How important the advice from Jesus: Don't be a moron.

Finally, a wise person puts their faith in Jesus based on the solid rock of God's word into action. Hearing Jesus' words are not enough. Even nodding in agreement is not enough. His words need to be put into action. Just as a false prophet will be known by his fruits, so will God's people. We are saved by faith alone. But saving faith always finds ways of expressing itself in good works. The good works do not have any merit in themselves, but they do provide evidence of saving faith. A wise person whose spiritual house is built on the foundation of God's word will want to give evidence of that faith. Throughout the Sermon on the Mount in chapters 5, 6 and 7, Jesus has been pointing out what it means for a wise person to put his words into practice. A wise person is one who is poor in spirit, who mourns, who is meek, who hungers and thirsts for righteousness, who is pure in heart, who is a peacemaker, and who is persecuted because of righteousness. He is the salt of the earth and the light of the world. His righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. He does not resist an evil person but turns the other cheek. He goes the extra mile. He loves even his enemies. He gives to the needy without letting his left hand know what his right hand is doing. He prays humbly and sincerely. He stores up treasures in heaven and does not attempt to serve two masters, God and money. He trusts God to provide for all his needs. He does not judge other people's hearts. He watches out for false prophets. He enters through the narrow gate. All these God-pleasing works are included when Jesus speaks of the wise person building his house upon the rock and puts his words into practice.

We hear all of this today—especially the difference between being a wise person and being a moron or foolish person, and we can't help but admit that we haven't always been wise in what we've done or said. We don't know the truth of God's Word as well as we should and we've allowed ourselves to be deceived by prophets who sounded good and looked good but were false in their teaching. We've allowed our sinful pride to creep in and take some credit for our salvation. We've heard God's word but haven't always practiced it in our speech and lives. Try as hard as we may, there are plenty of times we have been spiritual morons and sinned against our God. How thankful we are that Jesus would come to this earth as more than an example setter, but first and foremost as our Savior, who suffered and died for our sins to grant us forgiveness and assure us of eternal life. How awesome that the Holy Spirit has opened our eyes and given us the spiritual wisdom that we need to move away from our moronic ways and build our spiritual house on the solid rock truth of God's Word.

This is the solid rock of faith on which we stand. This is the rock that will help us to endure the troubles and dangers and hardships of life. This is the house that will allow us to stand as the rain pours down and the winds beat against it and the rising streams threaten to undermine the foundation. Most importantly, this is the rock of Jesus and his word which will help us to stand when the final and ultimate storm of death rages. Then we will live with God forever! Be wise and build your house on the solid rock of faith in the truth of God's Word. Heed Jesus' warning as he encourages you: Don't be a moron. Amen.