

## The Key to Waiting in Sureness

Grace, mercy, and peace are yours, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

It's the season of Advent! Christmas is coming! Now that we're past Thanksgiving and into the month of December, there's a growing excitement as everyone looks ahead to this celebration. As exciting as Christmas is, for many it is a time of uncertainty as well. You'll often hear, "I can't wait to see what I'm going to get," or "I hope what I get is what I want." Can you ever be sure of what is in those gifts until you tear off the wrapping paper?

As Christians, we know that Christmas is more than just giving and receiving gifts. Our lesson for this evening shows us the rock-solid certainty of our salvation in Jesus. The key to waiting for this sureness does not come from outer cleanliness, but instead from the Key himself!

### I. DOES NOT COME FROM OUTER CLEANLINESS

The Pharisees thought that they had found the key to being sure of their salvation. They had rules and regulations they could follow to demonstrate their dedication to God's law. But Jesus warns them of this. (**read 37-40**) The Pharisees had come up with all sorts of rules to govern their lives, and on the outside, like the dishes, they seemed clean.

But Jesus' words identify the problem that these Pharisees had. They were so concerned with how they looked on the outside, that they no longer cared for what was in their hearts. On the outside, they looked like they were leading Godly lives, but their motivation, what lay in their hearts, was completely self-centered. As Jesus says, **inside you are full of greed and wickedness**. These Pharisees were hypocrites.

The Pharisees' hypocrisy had ruined their hearts. They were rotten to the core. One by one, Jesus gave examples of just how far gone they were. (**read verses 42-44, 52**) Jesus himself is that key of knowledge, and the Pharisees had thrown away the only key that could ever get them into heaven. Jesus lists of several ways that they had failed to be pure, both inside and out, and each time he does this, it's as if they have latched another lock on the "door" of salvation. They didn't care about God's law and justice, only about their own rules they had made up. Click. They were not generous with others. Click. They wanted all the praise and glory they could get. There was no room for humility and service of others in their hearts. Click. Not only had they thrown away the key to heaven, but they had also withheld that key from others, locking them out as well. Click.

Now we can sit here and scoff at the Pharisees all we want for not seeing the truth, or for being utter hypocrites, but how many times have we been too concerned with what is on the outside, that we have neglected to care for our own hearts? At times we **neglect justice and the love of God... and love the most important seats**. Jesus tells us that whenever we avoid what is right in God's eyes, and do not love others in the way that God loves us, that lock on the door to salvation clicks shut. And when we are proud and want the best seat at the table, or recognition for the things we have done, or anything else that involves our pride, another lock clicks shut. We really are no better than the Pharisees were. Our hearts are just as corrupt!

Take this season of Advent for example. Advent is about our hearts, and how we can be prepared for Jesus birth. But there is always that temptation to be swept away by all the other things that need to be done so that we're ready for Christmas. Shopping, setting up the tree and the lights and all the decorations, what gifts I should give others, and what gifts I might get back.

Just like the Pharisees, though we may seem clean on the outside, we were rotten to the core. We spend all this time getting ready for Christmas on the outside. The tree may look perfect, the Christmas card has the best picture and the most loving words, your Christmas cookies taste the best they ever have... but I've spent all that time getting ready on the outside. I was neglecting what was on the inside, and failed to address the hypocrisy within my heart.

None of this gives us any sort of SURENESS and certainty of eternal life. The only thing these hypocritical actions do is make all of us feel better about ourselves. They're a shiny little medal that we can

look at and say, "I did that." But these things have nothing to do with our salvation. In fact, Jesus shows us that this hypocrisy locks each and every one of us out of heaven.

Admittedly, this is a difficult text. Where is any of the good news? Where does it talk about love and forgiveness? It's all in that last verse. We can wait for Jesus in sureness because God has made sure that the key exists!

## II. Comes from the Key himself

Jesus is the **key of righteousness**. He has opened up each one of those locks that, through my sin, I had latched shut. He has opened heaven for you and me! There's an awe and appreciation that comes from this. Jesus gave me faith in him when he opened the door to heaven through his perfect life and innocent death. I have sureness in his sacrifice, and in the eternal life that awaits me. There is no doubt in my mind. Jesus is the only key to salvation. He even says it himself in John 14:6. **"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."**

But just the fact that a key even exists is incredible! Without Jesus, we would be lost in uncertainty and doubt. We would never know if our outer cleanliness would be enough. But more than that, we didn't even deserve a key to heaven! Because of our sins we should have been locked out forever! But Jesus is the "key" that opens heaven to us. We don't have to go about trying to search and find this key. It's already been given to us!

But this key is more than something to idly hold on to as we wait for Christ. The Key of Righteousness changes our attitude and mindset, and purifies our hearts. Even though our actions can only be clean on the outside, Jesus has made our hearts clean as well through his blood. He has given us everything, so that we can be generous to others. We already have the "best seat" in the eyes of God, and we enjoy his love and greeting each and every day! We can be completely sure that Jesus has opened every single one of those locks that we had closed. He has saved us!

This past Monday morning, before I left for church I was able to catch some of the coverage of the funeral procession of President George H. W. Bush. One of the things that really struck me as I watched the coverage was just how often the word "sure" was mentioned. "Are we sure this is the right way to honor this man's life? Are we sure that his death should be a celebration? How could he have been so calm at the end of his life?" Why is it, that when a loved one dies, we can be so sure that they are in heaven? It's because they had faith in Jesus, the Key of Righteousness. We can be absolutely sure that has opened heaven to them because they believed in his sacrifice on the cross.

Just look at the picture that Isaiah sets before us in our lesson for today. In verse 6 he says, **[The LORD] will be the sure foundation for your times, a rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge; the fear of the Lord is the key to this treasure.** Jesus is our SURE foundation. A faith that is built on him will never be shaken or moved. And this is not because of the strength of our faith, but rather the strength of what our faith is built on. The sure foundation of Christ. But more than this, he is also a **rich store of salvation and wisdom and knowledge**. Jesus will pour out his blessings on us. He is the key to this "treasure trove" of grace!

We have sureness, absolute certainty, that Jesus has saved us all now. Because of this, we also wait for Jesus, and for the eternal life that he will bring us, with 100 percent sureness. Hebrews 11:1 states this wonderfully. **Faith is being sure of what we hope for, and certain of what we do not see.**

We can be sure Jesus will return, and when he does, the door to heaven will be flung open wide. Jesus, the Key of Righteousness, gives us this sureness in him. No longer are we focused on the outside. Instead, we pray to God that he keeps our hearts pure as we do his will. He does this through Word and Sacrament, which he has promised will endure forever. For this, and for all things, we can be thankful to God, thankful that the key to heaven even exists, and we can be sure that he has given us the key. Now we can share the "key of knowledge" with others, so that they may have this same sureness in Christ. May God always keep us sure and confident in his salvation.