

RELIGIOUS, BUT LOST

Matthew 7:21-23

Intro: In our Lord's Sermon on the Mount, beginning with the thirteenth verse of chapter 7, on to the end of the Sermon, our Lord issued a series of warning to His disciples. He spoke, as the apostles were to write later, assuming that there were those who called themselves "disciples," and who claimed that the Lord Jesus was their "Lord," but who had never experienced true salvation in their hearts.

You will remember how in verses 13 and 14 the Lord exhorted them to enter in, or to make sure that they had entered, the narrow gate which leads to life. And He said at that time that there were "many" who were in the broad way, apparently thinking that it was the right way. And He told them that the broad way leads to destruction. If they were counting on the fact that majority was right, they would be deceived. The way to life declares that there is only one Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. A person can be very sincere, and very religious, and both are good qualities IF they are in the right way. But "many" can be sincerely wrong, and are sincerely wrong. There may be those among the "many" who know that they are not right as far as the Word of God is concerned, but they would rather reject the clear teaching of Scripture than to change. And so the Lord pointed out not only that there were just two gates, and that each person can only go through one gate, but in His own gracious way He said, "Enter ye in at the strait," or narrow, "gate."

These are two verses, 13 and 14, which ought to be told to every person on the face of the earth. As I have said, it is good to be sincere in what you believe about life after death, but sincerity alone is not enough. **We must be right!** And it is up to every one of us to make sure that we are on the way that leads to eternal life. And that way is Christ. He is the door to salvation, and He is our salvation.

When we come to verse 15, as we did last Lord's Day, we have another warning coming from the Lord Jesus Christ. And it has to do with preachers. The Lord was indicating that there are true preachers who will proclaim the truth, but that there are also false preachers who do not tell the truth. They may use Scripture, but they twist the Scriptures to make them say something besides what they obviously were intended to say.

Years ago now I was preaching in my home church in Tacoma, and at the close of the service a lady came saying that she wanted to join the church. She was an older lady and had belonged to a large church in Tacoma, but just shortly before I was talking to her, that is, a matter of several weeks,

she discovered that although the minister was using Biblical language like her former pastors had done, yet he didn't mean what they had meant. And by that she indicated that they didn't mean what the Bible meant. For example, they still talked about being born again, but they did not mean a work of salvation through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. It was more of a personal reformation, changing one's ways, but not a change of heart as a work of the Holy Spirit. Many people sit Sunday after Sunday in churches which were formerly evangelical, with pastors who loved the Lord and who taught the Word, but now there is a different breed of preachers in many of the churches in our country.

And so the Lord said, "Beware of false prophets," men who themselves are on the broad way that leads to destruction, blind leaders of the blind, so that both end up in the ditch. In the current discussion that is going on in our country about whether or not character matters, the Scriptures indicate that character is everything! It is impossible for a man to be a true preacher of the Word of God if he himself has not been transformed through the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the evidence that he has been transformed will be a godly life, a life devoted to the glory of God and to the glory of His beloved Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. A true preacher is faithful to the Bible in his teaching. The Bible doesn't teach anything that a person might want it to say. The teachings of Scripture are clearly and carefully laid out so that it gives light, true light, to those who are in darkness. "Beware of false prophets."

In our Bible reading right now we are in the book of Jeremiah. And if you want to see what the Lord thinks about "false prophets," read that book. The Lord is very jealous for His Word, and He has the harshest of words for those preach a message that is contrary to that which we find in the Word of God. "Beware of false prophets." They are with us today, and with us in great numbers. Stay as far away from them as you can get, and warn others to stay away also.

Today we come to another warning in verses 21 through 23. And this warning is to bring out:

I. THE DANGER OF AN EMPTY PROFESSION (Matt. 7:21-22).

Verse 21 is addressed to all people who claim that Jesus Christ is their Lord. Verse 22 is addressed to those who claim to be the Lord's on the basis of some service that they have performed.

Now the Lord was not saying that everyone who calls Him "Lord" will be turned away, but that "not every one that saith to Me, Lord, Lord, shall

enter into the kingdom of heaven.” In other words, some will say it when it is not true that the Lord is their Lord.

The double, “Lord, Lord,” shows insistence on the part of those who were saying this. They really think that they are the Lord’s people. The Lord seems to be anticipating the time when people will stand before Him as the Judge, and they become frantic when they learn that the door to heaven is shut to them. You can almost feel the dismay and terror in the words of the people the Lord is referring to here. I can’t think of anything worse than what people will experience when they stand before the Lord, thinking that they are saved, only to find out that they are rejected.

I call your attention to the word “saith” in verse 21, and the words, “Many will say” in verse 22. Just because people *say* that they are the Lord’s, does not make them the Lord’s.

Only Matthew and Luke, among the Gospel writers, refer to the times when people will say, “Lord, Lord.” Take for example the parable of the five wise and the five foolish virgins recorded for us in Matthew 25. Please turn to that chapter, and I will read the first eleven verses to you. **(Read Matt. 25:1-11.)** As far as their appearance was concerned, there seemed to be no way to distinguish between those who were wise and those who were foolish. But the wise were those who had oil; the foolish had no oil. And after the bridegroom came, it was too late to get it. But notice the words, “Lord, Lord.” And the Bridegroom declared that he did not know them. The oil is by some referred to the Holy Spirit, by others to the oil of salvation. But in either case the absence of oil was meant to indicate that the five foolish virgins were not saved, and so the door was closed to them.

Now let us consider what was wrong with those to whom the Lord was referring here in verse 21. The Lord Himself shows us in the last words of the verse. (Read the whole verse again.)

In Luke’s account of this part of our Lord’s message, he tells us that the Lord said,

And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? (Luke 6:46).

The Apostle John tells us of the time the Lord spent with His disciples in the Upper Room when He washed their feet. We find the account in John 13:12-15. Let me read it to you.

12 So after he had washed their feet, and had taken his garments, and was set down again, he said unto them, Know ye what I have done to you?

- 13 Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am.
14 If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye
also ought to wash one another's feet.
15 For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I
have done to you.

This was a case where the men who were present really knew the Lord, with the exception of Judas. But He was impressing upon them that since they was their “Lord and Master,” they should follow His example.

The Apostle John put it this way in his first epistle: 1 John 2:3-5.

- 3 And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his
commandments.
4 He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his command-
ments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.
5 But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of
God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him.

A little farther on when speaking of love which surely is a characteristic of a child of God, the Apostle John said this:

- 18 My little children, let us not love in word, neither in
tongue; but in deed and in truth.
19 And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall
assure our hearts before him (1 John 3:18-19).

You see, one outstanding characteristic of a true Christian, is that he lives according to the Word of God. He not only believes the Bible to be the Word of God, but he *behaves the Word*. He does what the Lord wants Him to do, and he does not do what the Lord has told him not to do. So that when you hear a person claim to be a child of God, but he lives his life the way he wants to live it with little or no regard for Scripture, you can only come to the same conclusion that the Apostle John did: that person is not telling the truth; he is a liar. *Those are strong words, but sometimes we need strong words to wake us up.*

We all need to ask ourselves, “Do those words of the Lord Jesus describe me – ‘he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven’?” And at the risk of saying something which you have heard me say repeatedly, “doeth” is one of those present tense verbs which in the Greek means *to do habitually, continuously*, not just once in a while, but as a way of life. And let me say again that doing the will of God is both positive and negative. By that I mean that you and I do what our Lord wants us to do, and we refuse to do what He doesn’t want us to do. The will of God is found in the Word of God which ought to be to us as it was to the Psalmist when he said, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path (Psa.

119:105).

Let us ask ourselves the question, “Do I really know the Lord, or is my claim to be a Christian just so much talk?” We don’t know each other’s heart, but we can examine ourselves, and ask God to search our hearts. There is no greater need that you and I have than the need to know the Lord, and to be assured that we know Him. Just look at the way you have lived this past week, and your life will tell you where you stand with the Lord. I continually pray that no one will come to Trinity Bible Church Sunday after Sunday and yet not be saved. I trust that I am among the number the writer of the book of Hebrews was speaking about when he wrote Hebrews 13:17:

Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves: for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief: for that is unprofitable for you.

I know that I speak this for all of our elders. We are not asking you to do our will; we are asking you to do God’s will. And if you are not, let us earnestly beseech you to seek the Lord because if it is not your desire to live the way the Lord wants you to live, there is a real possibility that you are not saved.

But let me go on to verse 22.

In that day when you and I stand before the Lord, what will be our claim to salvation? In my case will it be that I have been ministering the Word for over fifty years? Will it be with the apostles that they had cast out demons, and had done many other wonderful works?

When I was in Seminary many years ago one of our professors told us in our class that the wife of a prominent evangelist was asked after his death how she knew that her husband was saved. Her answer was this: “Because he was responsible for leading a million people to Christ.” Now from what I know about this evangelist, I have no doubt but that he was saved, but was he saved because he led a million souls to Christ? Are we saved by the works that we do, or do our works even contribute as a part of our salvation?

These are very important questions, and you and I had better have the right answer. If it takes winning a million souls to Christ, I will never make it, and neither will you.

Let me remind you that Judas Iscariot could have said everything that the Lord mentioned in verse 22. He had prophesied in the Lord’s Name, and

undoubtedly had seen many people saved. He had cast out demons because the Lord gave all of His disciples that power. And he had done many other wonderful works. Did that mean he was saved? No, it meant that God sometimes uses instruments, uses people that are not even saved. I heard of a Presbyterian pastor who was in the ministry for fifteen years, had preached the Gospel, and had seen people turn to Christ, but after fifteen years he realized that he was not saved, and it was then that his life was transformed.

There is a real emphasis these days on large evangelistic meetings, and megachurches, but the way God may bless a man in itself has nothing to do with proving that he is saved. There is only one way for people to be saved, and that is through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death on the Cross. And when a person is saved by the Lord, he or she becomes a new creature in Christ. So the person who is looking to his own works for his salvation, or even as the sole proof of his salvation, is in great danger of hearing the Lord say those terrible words we find in verse 23. Let us call them:

II. THE LORD'S FINAL WORDS OF JUDGMENT (Matt. 7:23).

(Read verse 23.)

Can you imagine words that could possibly be worse than these words? Notice that the Lord did not say, "I knew you, but you fell away, and so I don't know you now." He said, "I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity." You see, whatever you may be trusting in for your salvation other than Christ, is "iniquity"! One possible translation of this word iniquity, which literally means *lawlessness*, is *contempt for the Word of God*. The Bible clearly teaches that salvation is through Christ alone. If we even say that it is Christ plus anything else – our works, or baptism, or church membership, or circumcision (as with the Jews in the early days of the church) – God says it is "iniquity," a contempt for the Word of God! If God says that salvation is through Christ, and we say that there is more to it than simply trusting in Christ, we are calling God a liar and guilty of the worst kind of iniquity.

Concl: There is a verse in Paul's letter to the churches of Galatia that has made me wonder about some of the ways in which some people add to Christ when preaching about salvation. If Paul was saying that if you add circumcision to Christ for salvation, Christ shall profit you nothing, then he must have meant that if you profess to believe in Christ, but also that circumcision is partly responsible for your salvation, then you are not really saved. What would Paul say about those who claim that

salvation is by faith in Christ *and baptism*. Can a person believe that and truly be saved?

Years ago Dr. William Pettingill, who was one of the original editors of the Scofield Bible, and one of the most wonderful Bible teachers I ever heard, wrote a commentary on the book of Galatians. He gave it this interesting title: *By Grace Through Faith Plus Nothing*. That is what our Lord was teaching here. But, oh, how important it is that we understand this now, and not wait until it is forever too late. Believe me, I am not trying to disturb any of you unnecessarily, but I do not want to detract in any way from these words of our Lord Jesus Christ in verses 21 through 23 here in Matthew 7. Oh, that everyone of us could say from our hearts today, what the Apostle Paul said about his own salvation:

... for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (2 Tim. 1:12b).

Let me close with the words found in John 3:36 which gives the Gospel as clearly as it can be said:

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: and he that believeth not the Son shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him.

I trust that your faith for salvation is in Christ, and in Christ alone. There is no other Savior. If you do not know Him as your Savior, may God grant you the grace to believe on Him right now.

Closing verses: 1 Tim. 2:5-6:

5 For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus;

6 Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.