

The Reckoning
Matthew 7:21-29
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Let's go before the Lord now as we ask that He would prepare us to receive the word this morning.

Father, we thank you for your word of truth. We thank you that you invite us in to consider it and to hear it. Lord, we need your Holy Spirit to prepare our hearts and our minds to hear you speak to us. I need your Holy Spirit to speak the word which you have given and to apply it and to call your people as you call me to walk with you in humility and trust. Father, we thank you for this season which we have been looking at together, the Sermon on the Mount. Lord, we ask that even though many of these passages have been familiar to us, we pray that by your Holy Spirit they would become fresh to us again, that you would call us to deeper levels of relationship and understanding of your love and grace and mercy and what you are calling us to in discipleship with Jesus. Help us, we pray, this morning as we close this series as you equip and strengthen your people and remind them of your love. Help us, O Lord, to rejoice in Jesus Christ our Lord in whose name we pray. Amen.

As we look at this final portion of the sermon on the mount this morning, as I was preparing for it this week, I was struck as I compared it to the beginning of the sermon. The beginning of the sermon as Matthew has organized it for us is quite different than how it ends, meaning the content of what Jesus is teaching. But the way in which he wraps it up, he reminds us that there were crowds and there were the disciples. The disciples He called close to Him as Jesus taught them, but the crowds were also following and listening in. The sermon ends the same way.

But after the introduction of those who were with Jesus, Jesus launches into the series of, "Blessed are," and one would be forgiven. If you read the beginning of the sermon and you're thinking to yourself, this is doable, who could disagree with the following?

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who persecute you for righteousness sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." [ESV]

These are wonderful promises. And we receive them and we're like, now that's the Jesus I'm talking about.

But as we went through that portion of the sermon, you'll remember that in fact, this was very different to those who heard it the first time than how we hear it. It was a declaration that Jesus was teaching something to the nation of Israel who are hoping to be freed from their captivity to the Roman overlords. They were wanting one who was going to lead them in battle, lead them into triumphant freedom, but this was not what Jesus was doing.

But still, one would be forgiven if you read those. I mean, who could argue with "Blessed be," or "Happy are those"? Oh, how different that is from how the sermon ends.

As Matthew has given it to us, the sermon ends with three warnings. Now, we've split these warnings up because it would frankly be too much for one sermon. But we end with warnings that Jesus is giving to His disciples and to the crowds. And so, we would be wise to hear that this is a reckoning. Using that work specifically in its definition means it's a summary. It's a final statement. And from here, Jesus would then begin to live out his earthly ministry and His disciples would follow Him. This is a

preparation for that ministry. And it would be a preparation for the season of parables which we are going to be talking about during the advent season, the parables of the kingdom. Of what kingdom was Jesus establishing? We're beginning to hear in these final warnings.

Now, hear God's word as Jesus summarizes what He's been teaching through these warnings. Matthew 7:21-29.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes." [ESV]

This is the word of God. Thanks be to God. May the Lord bless the preaching of His word. And Lord, help the teacher.

As we look at this passage together this morning, you'll see on the outline on the screen before you we need to consider, again, the audience that Jesus is teaching. Secondly, the audacity of warning. And thirdly, authority. Audience, audacity, and authority.

Considering the audience, it is important to remember that if we miss the audience, we might misapply what Jesus is teaching here in this passage. First, we need to understand with the audience that it was twofold. It was the disciples and secondarily the crowds. And this is important because I want you to see the plurality of it. The first meaning of this passage is not for us to do naval gazing, to hear and ask the question, well, am I a part of those who Jesus will say on that day, "I never knew you"? That's not the first question because this warning is actually a promise given for the false prophets which Jesus warned about that we looked at last time together because what happens is the following. And this is to the disciples.

As they are going out, the warning makes sense because these false prophets were going out and will go out and they will teach many things. And in fact, they may even dazzle you with great performance. In fact, Jesus tells us here, they will actually perform great many things. But because they are false prophets, notice the pronoun that Jesus is using when He's warning the disciples and He says to them, verse 21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven," but then verse 22, "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name?'" Do you notice the order of the pronouns, "we?"

Jesus is saying here that the false prophets, although their bloviating may be great, they may actually exhibit great powerful works, they will meet their allotted end. And I will say to them, "I never knew you." The disciples are hearing this recognizing that the power in which they are going to be sent out is the power of Jesus and by His name, not their own power. It took the disciples a long time to get that. Jesus is reminding the disciples that they are an audience of His, that they are learning from Him.

The second is the crowds. And here only secondarily as the crowds were to hear this, they were to take the same warning. Beware of the false prophets who may say just enough truth to hook you that it is not about me, it is more about they're building and their kingdom, not mine. So, beware of them. But know that they will meet their allotted end.

What's important, thanks be to God, as we'll see in just a moment, is that this is Jesus's warning and Jesus's work. Notice who says, "I will say to them on that day." That's not my job and that's not your job. It is way above our pay grade to discern who is of the Lord and who's not. That is His. But it is a calling to ask the question, who do we follow? Who are we listening to? What teachers are we allowing to bend our ears and to capture our imagination? Here, Jesus is saying, I am the Lord. You are my audience. And I'm calling you to hear my words and to follow me.

Audacity of warning. He's warning this is what's going to happen to them. But it is important to note that what Jesus is reminding His disciples that they do not have the authority to do this. They do not have the ability to do this. It is the Lord's doing, and it is Jesus who has the audacity to warn them of these things. It might seem normal to you if you're familiar with the scriptures that this is, of course, what Jesus does. But for many, the fact that Jesus warns anybody of anything seems to be a foreign language. We cannot strip Jesus of His difficult sayings. This is one of those difficult sayings. Jesus is beginning to tell us that He is the Lord and He is the one who will discern the wheat from the weeds because He has the authority to do it.

And Jesus is giving this warning, and He is saying to them that though you may do these things, though you may even call me Lord and perform things that are great even in my name, I will say to you, "I never knew you." Why is that? It is because of what I said just a few minutes ago. Notice whose credentials they're leaning on. They're leaning on their credentials, what they're performing, what they're doing, their ability, their influence.

And I can totally resonate with that. Sometimes it's nice if you can get in on somebody else's credentials. But when it comes time, you know you want to be able to produce your own credentials. My first time I was able to visit the Naval Academy, I was with a friend of mine who was one of the superior officers at the academy. Man, I was on the bus. I was with him, right? So, I'm getting in, right? And they rolled down the window at the security gate, and I'm like, we're with the admiral. This is great. And then they look inside the vehicle and they begin asking us for our driver's license. I was like, I'll be right back. So, I got out of the car and went back to get my credentials. They had to go on and I had to produce my own because my car was parked back down the street.

Yes, I was able to produce my credentials. We like the way the world works when it asks for our credentials and we bring it. Isn't that the way we operate most of the time? And boy, don't we get mad if we have the credentials, yet we're still denied access.

Another personal story, I got that TSA pre-check. And then my second trip when I had it, it wasn't printed on my boarding pass. I waited in that line. I get up there and they said, no, I'm sorry. It doesn't say TSA. I mean, I'm right there. And I'm like, but can't you just look my name up? No, it's not TSA pre-check. It doesn't say it here. And man, I was hot because I had paid for that TSA pre-check. And now, I had to go in the regular line and wait 15 more minutes.

When we have the credentials, we want to flash it. When we have the credentials, we want to get in. And when it doesn't go our way, we get mad. And I will tell you, that is a very human reaction from the beginning of time. And this is the case here. They are supplying their own credentials. And I think it is appropriate to see that Jesus is saying, that's not enough. You cannot get in on your own credentials.

In fact, Jesus says to these false prophets not only, "I never knew you," but "depart from me, you workers of lawlessness." You've been trying to do things under your own power according to your own wisdom under your own credentials. That is not enough. It will never be enough. And we cannot take away from Jesus this hard word. Away from me.

And now what's interesting is He turns from talking about these false prophets to the disciples and to the crowds and saying, if you're building your life on anything other than my words, it is like building it on sand. What foundation are you building your life on? Is it the foundation of what Jesus is teaching, who He says He is, what He says concerning who we are and what He has come to do? Or are we seeking to build it on our own understanding, our own success, our own path, our own credentials?

Jesus says here that rain and floods and winds will come and prove the integrity of that foundation. So, it is clear to us if you are a Christian that we don't get to be Christians and just live our best life now. In fact, becoming a Christian will oftentimes invite a more difficult path. Winds and rain and floods happen to those who are God's children and those who will not and will prove the integrity of the foundation. And Jesus is saying, if you fail to build the house of your life upon the rock of my life, the rock of my personhood, the rock of my credentials, then it is as if you are building it on sand which will be quickly wiped back into the sea. This is a hard saying.

And the question becomes for us, and I think for the reasons that Matthew put the sermon together here, who do you say Jesus is? And who are you in relationship to Him? And this gets directly to the authority of Jesus.

Jesus doesn't need to say here, I am God, I am the divine Son of God because it is here implicitly and explicitly. What gives Jesus the authority to say such hard words? First, implicitly. This whole passage drips with it when He says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven," even there, Jesus is putting Himself in the path to getting into the kingdom of heaven. There will be those who will call me, "Lord, Lord." That in and of itself is not Jesus saying, I am Lord. He's saying, that is how I will be seen and recognized for I am the Lord. And when they say, did we not do great things in your name? I will say to you, "I never knew you."

This is extremely controversial because you cannot escape. We must do business with this implicit call to Jesus's authority as to being the divine Son of God and being God Himself, for only God as the Jews would have understood had the power and authority to forgive sins, have the power and authority to the keys of heaven and hell, to discern those who will be in the kingdom and those whom He will say, "I never knew you." Away from me. We have to hear Jesus on His own words. And Jesus's claim to authority of being who He is here first and foremost is implicit. It is in His actions and in the story that He is telling.

But it is not just implicit. It is also explicit when He says to them, "I then will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me.'" And then His pronouncement in verse 27, "And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great," and this emphasis that Jesus uses here in this last phrase. The English word "great" doesn't get to the greatness of the calamity of which He is showing. It is utter destruction and mighty in its fall. Jesus's authority here is explicit because He is prophesying about the lives of those whose houses and lives are built upon Him and His words which He says, if anyone fails to put these words into action, these words of mine into action, they will come to a great fall.

Jesus's authority here as Lord, as Judge, as King with the keys of heaven and hell at His disposal. This authority and declaration, for those who would hear them, is beyond their imagination. And while I cannot find the right words wherein you might enter with me as with the first audience and understand that what Jesus is declaring here is also beyond our imagination, I want to speak back to you something which we all sang here together.

And here, I want to recognize that before me every week is going to be at least three audiences. First, there is an audience here that when they hear the authority and the power of Jesus, it's like yes, Jesus. He's got the authority. He's going to show the world. He's going to do it. Go Jesus. You know who you are. There's also another subset of the audience here who hears these words and says, yes. But Lord, have mercy on me. It's not a rallying cry. They're called to humility. There's also a third audience here for whom any declaration of authority on the part of Jesus and of God is immediately met with suspicion.

And as if all of us were on the same bus, I want to speak back words that if you were singing them, I'm not sure you knew what we were singing. I was writing them down, and here's what we said. "You are my Prince of Peace, and I will live my life for you." That is easier to sing than it is to live. And each Sunday, if there is not a dissonance between what we're singing and how you're actually feeling, maybe we're not really singing because that's the dissonance in my heart. I love the sound of it. But at the street level, if I am honest, I'm not really sure I want to do it.

There's also another phrase that we sang. "Everything I am for your kingdom's cause." Man, that is a bold statement. And every Sunday, the reason why we need the gospel each Sunday is because of that very dissonance. We hear that which we want to sing, but then we look at our own hearts and our own lives and recognize there is a gap there. And often, our lives haven't caught up with our profession or our confession. That is why, Lord, have mercy upon us. Which is why any time we talk about the authority of who Jesus is and what He came to do, it must be handled delicately because we want Jesus's authority. We want Him to kick butt and take some names. We want God's will to show up and make it right. Right?

We think about how the world works. This last week, regardless of what your personal opinions are about the impeachment process, you notice the war of wills. And when one party is in authority, they exert their will. When the other party is in authority, they exert their will. And it's just a battle of wills. And when we're honest, that's how we see most authority. It's just pure will versus will. And we begin to project that onto God. We confess with our mouths that, yes, everything I have is for your cause. But we know that in the secret crevices of our hearts, no, not really. It's most of the house as long as it's not that back closet back there that I don't want to let you into.

The claim of Jesus's authority is total, and it is powerful, and it is a hard saying. But I must confess it is precisely here when I am reminded of the words of Teresa of Avila, one of the greatest spiritual writers about the path of following Jesus ever to write in any language whatsoever. She said even after many years of service and dedication to following the Lord Jesus, she wrote openly that her abiding sin that is the sin above all sins for her is the sin of self-dependence and self-will and self-direction.

And this is precisely the intersection where I did not want to bow my knees to the Lord. I was convinced that all God wanted to do was to rule in authority over me and to squash my identity, my freedom, and my personhood, and nobody was going to do that. And I wanted nothing to do with it. So, I adopted a philosophy of belief that kept God at a distance. I believed He was there, but He really didn't care about little old me living in South Carolina. I was fine with that agreement. But when it came time to seriously consider the doctrines of who Jesus is, the question came to me, who do you say Jesus is? I was afraid to answer it because I was concerned that I would no longer be who I was.

And isn't this at the base of all of our fears? Isn't this why we don't want to let God into that back-corner closet? Maybe it's a relationship. Maybe it's a process of decision-making. Maybe it's a part of who you are that frankly, you just do not trust God with it. Maybe it's that you do not want to forgive something because while you know you've been forgiven, to forgive it is to somehow give up something of yourself that you're afraid somebody's going to lord it over you. Yes, Jesus, I hear you on everything but this.

It is here we must have a reckoning and ask the question, who do we really say Jesus is? We must confess at times that we want to do our thing, and so long as our thing matches up with Jesus's thing then we are all right. But when those come into conflict with each other, who wins? And you would be right to say do not give yourself over to Jesus if all God was is pure will.

You see, the problem is God is not pure will. He is pure love. If all God was and all Jesus was is authority pointing its finger and telling people where to go and how to get there, then that would be easy to reject.

But that is not what Jesus does. Jesus in His authority and bringing them back to His words, what does it declare? It declares that first and foremost, Jesus is and God is beyond our imagination. He has

every ounce of authority that in this very moment, He could snap His finger and the world would be done, and you and I would spend eternity in one of two places, either with Him or away from Him, heaven or hell. And He has the right and the authority to do it. And yet, God in His mercy, God in His grace uses all of that authority to send Himself to us.

When we greet pure will, somebody else's agenda, somebody who's getting high on their own supply, we don't like other people lording it over us. And that's how we see authority. At least, that's what we fear about authority. Yet, God changes the whole narrative about authority. God who could do anything does this thing by sending His Son in the perfect likeness of man to live as we live, to become an offering for our sin, and not holding our sins against us but laying them on His Son, and then that Son taking all God's wrath upon Himself against all the false accusers, and Jesus without sin taking our sin dying for us, and then was raised to life on the third day announcing to us that "I am the way, the truth, and the life."

What we begin to find is this authority is calling us to Himself in love, and we begin to find that instead of squelching our fear and smashing our identity, we actually become the person we were meant to be, conditioned and founded on a love that will never let us go. It is a love that no one can take away, a love that no one else can diminish. It is understanding that I am made in the image of God and that I finally get to be in relationship with my heavenly Father, and no one can change that no matter what other people think, no matter what other people call me, no matter whether I'm a success or a disaster. In God's eyes, we are His children, holy and beloved. That's when true freedom happens. That's when learning what we were meant to be really is discovered.

And my greatest fear that God would make me something I did not want to be, I really began to see that Jesus's authority in drawing me to Himself became a reality that I finally got to be what He wanted me to be, and I found a freedom in that that enabled me to finally live life not wondering what other people thought or judged, but to find a freedom and a forgiveness that is always present. And thanks be to God, this is not dependent on my ability to obey or to get or on all my credentials.

God's authority, this reckoning, was not meant to cause fear and trembling in the sense of, oh, I can't bear you. But rather, it is inviting us in to see that this authority is to invite us into His love, to find what it really means to be a human being in the image of God when God says through His Son, I love you. "Come unto me all who are weary and heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Now, that's an authority that we can give ourselves to, not a war of wills but the beauty of love.

I don't know where you are in terms of the audiences. But if you're in that first audience, be careful. If you're in that place of, Lord, have mercy, then know that the Lord's mercy and grace is never dried up and He draws you in again this morning. If you're in the third audience and have resisted Jesus's authority because you think he wants to make you something you are afraid of becoming, know this, He is not pure will but pure love that invites you into a relationship that will change you forever, but change you to be the one He's always wanted you to be. And that is authority that will give you rest in who He is.

These are hard sayings. But these are Jesus's words of inviting us to ask the question, who is this Jesus? What is the kingdom? I want more of it. Lord, have mercy upon us for we are sinners desperately in need of grace. Help us to believe. Forgive us in our unbelief. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for your authority for you do not lord it over us. You use your authority to rescue us. You use your authority to invite us to be your children not under your thumb but in the palm of your hand from which no one can ever take us. Lord, in the quietness of these moments and in the deep crevices of our hearts, by your Holy Spirit, help us to see where we fear your authority. And help us to hear the invitation of love. We thank you for hearing us. Now, meet us. In Jesus's name. Amen.