

The Danger of Empty Words

By Don Green

sermonaudio.com

Bible Text: Matthew 7:21
Preached on: Sunday, March 25, 2018

Truth Community Church
4183 Mt. Carmel Tobasco Road
Cincinnati, OH 45255

Website: truthcommunitychurch.org
Online Sermons: www.sermonaudio.com/tcomm

Well, we come to a very great text in God's holy word this morning and I invite you to turn to Matthew 7. I want to read kind of an extended passage and then set the context, or in order to set the context for our remarks in our study of God's word together today. Matthew 7, beginning in verse 13. And as you are turning there, I would just say that this is a passage that turns on its head every popular conception about the nature of heaven and the afterlife and who goes to heaven and who doesn't. You know, there is the understandable at one level sense that we're all going to go to a better place when we die, someplace green, someplace with my friends or whatever, and that's not true. That's not true and we just have to come to grips with that and to let the Lord of eternity, let the Lord of the universe tell us what the truth is. We can only find the truth in God's holy word and it's not what we would like to be true that is true, it's what God says to be true that is true. We have to understand it. We have to come to grips with it. We have to search our hearts and we have to ultimately come to Christ or it won't be well for us in the end, and Jesus speaks of these things beginning in verse 13 of Matthew 7.

Matthew 7:13, he said,

13 Enter through the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is broad that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. 14 For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it. 15 Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will know them by their fruits. Grapes are not gathered from thorn bushes nor figs from thistles, are they? 17 So every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 So then, you will know them by their fruits. 21 Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'

These are arguably the most sobering words in all of the Bible, and it behooves us to take them seriously, and if you're visiting with us today, we're very glad that you're with us, and just by way of reminder of what we've looked at in the past, Jesus having taught this magnificent sermon that began back in Matthew 5:3, has given a great exposition about the nature of his kingdom and he has described the characteristics and the life and the trust that belongs to those who are true disciples of his, that are truly going to heaven, you might say, and having given this explanation and speaking to a crowd of people mixed with disciples and with others perhaps who were just curious to what he had to say, he gives them this pointed command, "Enter through the narrow gate." He starts out there in verses 13 and 14 and tells people that you need to look for a narrow gate because the gate is broad that leads to destruction and there are many who enter through it. One of the things that we said about that passage is that there is no safety in numbers when it comes to assessing your spiritual life. It will not do to say that, "I believe what a lot of other people believe. I believe that's God's mercy will save all in the end." That is simply not true. Jesus makes it as plain as he could possibly make it here that there are many who enter to destruction and there are few who find the gate that leads to eternal life.

So he invites people to come in, and as we said, this is a command of love. This is the Lord Jesus Christ commanding people how to respond to his teaching, and in love he commands them to come to him for salvation. In love he commands them to enter through him and through him alone. And why do we say it is a command of love? You know, we tend not to like having people tell us what to do, we just kind of naturally bristle at the idea of someone telling us what we must do. It's part of being a sinner, not being willing to receive instruction. But here we see that Jesus knows what the truth is and Jesus has the well-being of his audience in mind and says, "Therefore come. Enter through the narrow gate," which the narrow gate is Christ himself.

Then he goes on, having made that command, he immediately issues a caution, issues a warning about things that will make it more difficult to find that narrow gate. The problem is that the world is filled with false teachers, false prophets, and Jesus tells his audience, he tells us as we read his word today, "Don't believe everything you hear. Don't assume that everyone who claims to speak for God actually is doing that, that everyone who claims to speak for God is actually telling you the truth." Scripture says there are many false prophets that have gone out into the world. So not only is the gate narrow and many people miss it, there is other difficulty involved in the fact that there are teachers claiming to speak for God, claiming to be teachers of God's word, who actually dilute it or contradict it to a point where they are not teaching you the true way of salvation. So all of a sudden we start to realize as we come to grips with this great passage, Jesus is talking about things of great eternal significance, first of all, he's talking about matters that pertain to the eternal destiny of your own soul, and we find that Satan has planted his emissaries about confusing the issue all the more. So it is important for us to consider the gate and to consider Christ and to consider the nature of our own souls, we've seen over the past few weeks.

Now, with that little bit of background and recognizing that Jesus is warning us about the dangers that would keep us out of heaven, today we're going to see there is another

danger as well and this one is perhaps the hardest one for people to come to grips with because he's teaching us about the danger of self-deception. It's not simply, it's not merely that the gate to heaven is narrow and it is only through faith in Christ that any man can be saved, and it's not only the fact that there are false prophets that are confusing things; speaking metaphorically, turning on fog machines that hide and make things difficult for us to see what the truth is. Today, however, we see something else, we see that there is a danger inside you as well. You, despite all of your confidence in your own judgment, confidence in your self-perception, confidence in your own understanding, misplaced confidence in your own righteousness, my dear friends, my dear dear friends, you are prone to self-deception. You are prone to think that you are on good terms with God when in fact you are not, and that is the worst place of self-deception of them all is to assume that you're okay. To just say, "Well, of course, why wouldn't God want a great guy like me in heaven with him?" Well, maybe it's because you're not as great as you think you are and God is more holy than you think he is.

So there is this great danger of self-deception. Look at verse 21 with me again and you'll see that Jesus is addressing this and you can see that it's a matter of self-deception by the nature of the response that people give when the Lord turns them away at judgment. In verse 21 he says,

21 Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.

And in verse 22, look at the numbers, look at the comparative nature of things. Jesus says and it pains me to exposit this, to point this out, this is a matter of heavy weight, he says in verse 22,

22 Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?'

Enter into the spirit of what they are saying there and what they have said there in verse 22, and that there are many who are saying it. There are people that are protesting against the Lord's declaration that they must go away; that they will not enter the kingdom of heaven; that they will be sent away to experience an eternal judgment in hell for their sins. And there are many people protesting, saying, "Lord, there must be some mistake! You've got it all wrong! Remember, look who you're talking to! It's me! It was in your name that I prophesied. It was in your name that we cast out demons. It was in your name that we performed many miracles. Look at the past. Look at what we did. We did it in your name. How can you possibly be sending us away?" And Jesus says in verse 23,

23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, You who practice lawlessness.'

Somehow in the midst of this, in the midst of all of the external trappings of religion, they never really knew Christ for themselves. They never knew him personally. They had

never personally put their faith in Christ in order to be saved and they were content having an external experience of religion that had nothing to do with their inner man truly being converted to Christ. They were content to have signs and wonders and to have spiritual fireworks all around them without a deep sense that, "I am dependent on Christ alone to save me from my sin." They never knew him really. They just played games and were satisfied with the gadgets of religion, and we see according to the teaching of Christ, that many will be shocked as they are turned away on Judgment Day, shocked and most-likely cursing his name as they are led away.

Now beloved, it is essential, it is essential for you not to be numbered among them. It is essential for you to find true salvation. It is essential for you, and I say this so many times, it is essential for you not to take a false sense of comfort in the fact that you are content to just kind of gather together with the people of God without any real knowledge of Christ in your heart. It's been said that sometimes the most dangerous place to be from Sunday to Sunday is in a church if your faith in Christ is not real and it is not lively, because a place like this can lead you into a false sense of security. "Look at who I'm hanging out with. I must be okay." Well, it's that assumption, it's that false confidence that we want to address here. It's essential for you not to be in that number and how can we avoid that danger? How can it be that you could find a sense of refuge and safety, a fortress in Christ, so that you would not be numbered among those who are surprised to be sent away in the end?

You know, I can relate to this. I can relate to this in that I grew up in my younger days just calling myself a Christian, thinking, "I believe Jesus is the Son of God, therefore, I must be okay." That's what somebody had told me, "You just believe Jesus is the Son of God and you will go to heaven." Well, that's easy. That's also empty if you don't even know what that means. So for the longest time I dwelt in this self-deception of thinking I was a real Christian when I really wasn't; when I had no real love for Christ in my heart at all. I had no real love for his word at all. I had no love for the people of God at all. The Bible could have been burned and gone, it wouldn't have changed my life at all. The people of God could have been raptured and taken away, I wouldn't have even missed them because they weren't any of my friends. And yet there I was in the midst of a life like that claiming to be a Christian. The self-deception was just profound. Although, looking back on it, I do remember one thing that always kind of troubled me and kind of smote my conscience from time to time in that time prior to my real conversion. I had the curious inability to say the two words "Jesus Christ." It's funny looking back on it. You know, you're just talking two vocabulary words, Jesus Christ. Say that, Jesus Christ. But I could not name him before men, and in the rare times that I claimed before men to be a Christian, there was this resounding accusation in my conscience that said, "No, that's not true." But I would silence that and I would suppress it and I wouldn't listen to it. So, you know, I'm mindful of the fact that if I had died in that state, I would have been included in the "many" that Jesus sent away. I would have said, "Lord, how could this be? I called you the Son of God." And he would have rightly said to me at the time, "I never knew you."

So I realize that that aspect of my life is not unique. This is the experience of many. This is the spiritual reality of many where the light has never clicked on to them and they see the majesty of Christ and they see the guilt of their sin and they flee to Christ for salvation, and just content to dwell in a fog without any manner of real understanding. Oh, I don't want that for you, beloved. And you know, if there are going to be many on the final day, I would be a fool, I would be an utter fool as a pastor to stand before a group like this, such a fine group of people that I mostly know, I would be a fool to stand before a group like this and preach a text like this and give you the sense that Jesus could not possibly be talking about anybody in this room, this is a problem for people out there. Let's forget everybody outside the room and just focus on us here together and ask the question: how can I avoid that awful fate? How can I avoid this danger of empty words that Jesus speaks about?

We're just going to focus on verse 21 this morning and here's the first thing, I've only got two points for this morning, here is the first thing if you would take heed to your soul, if you would take heed to your eternal well-being, what I would have you see from the broader passage here is this, point 1: Jesus rules over eternal judgment. He rules over eternal judgment. He rules over eternal life. It belongs to him. This is his realm and his alone and so that we come to approach him as those needing a gift, rather than those making demands upon him. As Matt said earlier in his testimony, which I thought he said very well, we need to get away from this idea that we are the ones who accept Jesus and to get into the mindset that we desperately need Jesus to accept us. The whole way that this has been presented over the past decades has been a monstrosity and has made people think that they are the Sovereign in salvation, "And I will decide if Christ will save me or not." Well, the truth of the matter is that Christ is Lord. Salvation is of the Lord and he rules over eternal judgment and so we need to see that he is high and lofty and exalted in authority and respond to him from that context, rather than thinking that we ourselves are Lord.

So my friends, I ask you this question as we start this morning: would you be one of the few who actually tends to the well-being of your eternal soul? Would you take heed, would you take seriously what this text says this morning? Because you need to fear Christ and take him seriously. Those who do not view Christ as a threat, have not understood him yet. When you realize that Jesus Christ will stand at the gate of heaven, so to speak, and that the final decision about who enters belongs to him, that you're not in control of that, that starts to put you in the realm where you start to be able to receive these things and understand them. You see, the true Jesus Christ, the one who is revealed in Scripture, the one who is the second person of the Trinity, the true Son of God, coequal in deity, in essence with the Father and with the Holy Spirit, that Christ has absolute authority over heaven and hell. Absolute authority over heaven and hell. It belongs to him. Revelation 1:18, Jesus said, "I have the keys of death and of Hades." I have the keys of death and of Hades, he says. The keys belonging to him as to who enters and who does not. He is "the Alpha and the Omega," he says in verse 8, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."

So friends, because he is Lord of heaven, Jesus Christ determines who enters, and you can see this in stunning clarity as you look at verses 21 through 23 with this perspective in mind. Look at what he says there as we look at verse 21 again. He says, "Not everyone who says to Me," first person singular. Can you imagine one of us saying that? I mean, you just see it by way of contrast. For a mere man to say that, "I will determine who enters heaven and hell," for a mere man to say that, he would be a lunatic or a liar. This would be nuts and you and I would understand, if we are thinking clearly at all, that it would be insanity for us to even think about making that claim about ourselves because we know that that's not true about us. The keys of heaven and hell don't belong to us.

Christ has no such hesitation in speaking to himself, he says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord.'" Notice that Christ does not consult with anyone else, he simply says, "These people enter and these people don't." He doesn't apologize for his authority. He doesn't justify his authority. He simply asserts it. He says, "This is the way it is." He speaks from his own authority and, beloved, if you would tend well to the well-being of your eternal destiny, you would understand and embrace the fact that you are not the master of your own destiny. You are not the captain of your own soul. Christ is. The prerogative of judgment belongs to him alone. The kingdom of heaven is his alone. He is the King of heaven.

So we have to as we study these things in God's word, we have to humble ourselves and we have to come and realize who's in charge here. It's Christ. He rules over eternal judgment. And it's not simply that he determines, we see this not just in the fact of what we've already said and what we've already seen, that he speaks from his own authority, he determines who enters, notice this, beloved: Jesus Christ gives the final verdict on it all. It's not going to be some pope someplace. It's not going to be Mary. It's not going to be Joseph Smith or any of his fake writings. It's the true biblical Christ who is making this assertion and I want you to see this. He gives the final verdict. Look at verses 22 and 23 with me again. He says, "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy...cast out demons...perform many miracles?'" Then in a stunning and a graphic display of complete autonomy, Christ says in verse 23, "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" Christ is giving the final verdict.

So nothing else matters except how you are related to Christ. Your good works cannot save you. Your spiritual animations can't save you in that final day. I say good works as if we had any, but we don't. But what I want you to see here in verses 22 or 23 is this, it's kind of frightening. It is frightening. Why qualify it? There is a fearsome aspect to this passage where Jesus sweeps away many people with the condemnation, "I never knew you. Depart from Me." Six times in those three verses, you can count it, six times in those three verses, Jesus uses the singular first person pronoun: I, me. There is no one else involved. There is no other counsel. This isn't a committee decision. This is Christ saying, "Judgment belongs to me and here is how I will exercise it." This is Christ displaying that he rules over eternal judgment in this passage. So beloved, what you need to see is this: that the authority of Jesus Christ is absolute. He is sovereign. There is no higher Court of Appeal. What he says is the end of the matter.

He returns to this theme in Matthew 25, if you would turn there with me. In Matthew 25 he refers to himself in the third person as the Son of Man or as the King, but I want you to see in this later passage in the same Gospel, Christ asserting his authority and saying, "This is what it's going to be like in the final day." He says in verse 31, Matthew 25, "when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.'" You know, recognize as we're talking about this that Christ doesn't simply talk about it on a personal level, he talks about gathering nations before himself. He says, "I'll send this nation to my right. I'll send this nation to my left." The point of being for our discussion here today, the utter majesty of his sovereignty. The utter majesty of his authority. Here now you start to get a perspective of why we call him the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Kings will come and will be submitted to his authority. They will be subject to his authority. Nations will come and be subject to the authority of Jesus Christ. There will be no discussions. There will be no speculations in that day about, "Is there a God or not?" There won't be any questions like that. There won't be questions about, "Are there many ways to heaven or not?" There will simply be the display of singular majesty, singular authority, singular glory asserting what the final judgment is, and the one doing that will be Jesus Christ.

He says in verse 41 of Matthew 25, if you'll look at that with me, "He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.'" And in verse 46 he says, "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

You know, friends, the Bible says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It says that in multiple places in Proverbs. And for us to deal wisely with our souls, there needs to be this sense that these matters are of great eternal significance and that my destiny is in the hands of someone else, not my own. And on that final day, there will be many, many coming to Christ asserting that he has made a mistake, protesting his final judgment, and Christ will be undeterred. Their pleas at that time will bear no weight on his ears. So I ask you the question again: would you be one of the few who tends to the well-being of your eternal soul? Would you forget the cries of this world, would you forget the allure of this world, would you forget what others might think of you and look singularly to Christ as the one who is Lord over heaven and earth, the one who is Lord over eternal judgment? You see, those who wish to be saved must know Christ for who he really is as he is revealed in Scripture. So I ask you: do you think about Christ? Do you see Jesus Christ as the final Judge before whom all the world will stand? Is he the focal point of your destiny? Is all of your trust in him and his mercy alone? Because there is no other gate. There is no other way. Acts 4:12, "There is no other name given under heaven by which we must be saved," because eternity and heaven and hell are subject to his control.

Now, let me say something here. I realize that the tendency of the natural man, of the unsaved man, is to say something like this, "I don't like that. I don't want it to be that way. That's not what I believe." You realize, don't you, that that's utter folly? That you and I in our human flesh, in our creatureliness, in our fallenness, in our sinfulness, in this little sliver of time that the Lord gives to us, that we are in no position to say and define what reality is? Do you realize how foolish it is to say, "I see what Christ says here but I don't want it to be that way so that's not what I'm going to believe." Really? Do you mean to tell me that you would trust your own fallen judgment and just because you don't like something, you'll reject the only message that can save your soul just because you don't want it to be that way?

Friend, I say this lovingly and graciously: if that's the way that you think, you're a fool. You're a fool to think that way. Matters of final truth have not been entrusted to your private judgment. What God has done instead has given you an authoritative word that can be thoroughly trusted that you can read and you can understand and you say, "I see what God says." So the idea is not for you to sit on judgment as if you could do this, to ascend to a throne that is about God and say, "I will exercise my judgment as to whether that's acceptable or not." What you find acceptable doesn't matter. It's irrelevant. What matters is what Christ says because he is Lord of heaven and earth. He rules over eternal judgment and he says that this is the way that it is.

I've said it many times throughout the Sermon on the Mount, I'll say it again: Jesus is teaching for keeps. He's not bluffing when he says these things. He's not simply trying to frighten people. He's not playing games. He's declaring the way things really are and the way things will really be in the end and the question becomes how do you respond to that? Will you accept his authority? Will you bow before his authority? Guilty sinners face eternal punishment as the just consequences for their disobedience to a holy God. Jesus rules over eternal judgment.

Now, step back for a moment. Someone might say, "Well, Jesus is my Lord. Surely I will not be rejected. I name him as my Lord." Back in those pre-conversion days of my own that I was speaking about earlier, somebody asked me, somebody knew that something wasn't right in my soul and said, "Well, what does it mean to you to be a Christian?" And I forced out the words, "Well, I've accepted Jesus as my Lord and Savior." They said, "Oh, good, good, you are really saved then" Ah, I was not saved then.

"Jesus is my Lord. Surely I will not be rejected." That brings us to our second point here this morning: Jesus rejects empty words. He rejects empty words and may God have mercy on us as we talk about this, mercy on us that the truly saved would not be shaken from a proper sense of security, have mercy on us that those whose faith is empty and not real would find their hearts exposed before the words of Christ. God help us to that end here in this moment.

Let's take a closer look at the first verse in our passage here this morning in verse 23. Go back to Matthew 7:21, actually. In Matthew 7:21, Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My

Father who is in heaven will enter." So picture the scene here that Jesus creates. He's standing, as it were, at heaven's door and people are appealing to him for entrance, coming without a proper ticket. And the word "Lord" ascribes deity to him, ascribes highest authority to him. He's Master and Sovereign. Beloved, it's right to call him that because that is who he is and yet something is missing. Something has gone horribly wrong here. Many calling him Lord are sent away. How can this be? How can this possibly be? This is the great conundrum of eternity, in one sense. How can we understand the seeming contradiction?

What I'd like to do is approach it in this manner here, let's approach it in the most basic of terms, and at the simplest level possible, and then just kind of build from that foundation. Romans 10:9 says, "that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved." There are two kinds of people in the world in light of that verse. Let's not tie it specifically to that verse, let's just put it this way. It will be a little clearer this way. Two kinds of people in the world: there are those who confess Jesus as Lord and those who do not. He's the dividing line of eternity that way. So we know from what Scripture says that there must be a confession of Jesus as Lord if you are going to go into heaven. Anyone who is not making that confession is obviously lost. Unless God saves them before they draw their final breath, they will plunge into a Christ-less eternity of judgment. So we're not going to talk about them today because they are not in the subject of the text, so let's focus on this other group, this smaller group that at least with their mouth confesses Jesus as Lord.

Part of saving faith is a confession of the Lordship of Christ over your life, part of the reality of saving faith. You know, we've defined faith. How do you receive Christ? Going on a very important tangent here for the moment and then we'll come back to where we're at. What does it mean to have faith in Christ for salvation? To have faith in Christ means that you receive him for who he claims to be, you receive him as Lord, and also that you rest in him alone for your satisfaction before God. You realize there is nothing in your works, there is nothing in your life, there is nothing in your prayers to commend you to God and, therefore, you rest in the righteousness and the shed blood of Jesus Christ alone as your only hope for salvation; that only in Christ, only in someone outside of you can you find the righteousness that God requires to go to heaven. Nothing in myself. Preaching the Bible for 25 years has not done anything to justify me before God. Praying, none of that has made me justified before God. The only thing that justifies a man before God is the righteousness of Christ and he is received by faith, not by something that we do that obligates him in response. You receive it as a gift. So you receive Christ and you rest in him as your only hope of salvation.

Now with that in mind, come back to verse 21, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." Here's the thing, beloved, here's the pivot point for understanding what's going on in this most astonishing verse. The group of people who confess Jesus as Lord you could divide into two smaller subgroups that are mutually exclusive. What we find is that many who call him Lord will not go to heaven. You can't go to heaven without confessing Jesus as Lord, but as we see in this passage, you could confess him with your lips as Lord and still be sent away. This is where the element of

self-deception becomes so vital and so frightening. You see, just like I did prior to my conversion, as I did for many years, the statement that I made with my mouth that Jesus is Lord was empty. It was not real. There was no heart commitment to him. There was no heart submission to him. There was no love for Christ in that at all. No love. No submission. No recognition. No confession. Nothing. It was empty.

It was so empty, beloved, and I think back on that, as I've said in other places, probably said it here. Now I'm really going off track here but just follow me and we'll get back to the rabbit later. I look back on that time, I look back on that time and look at that empty shell of a confession of Christ I made, and I look back on that on the way that I lived in just the vulgarity and the anger of my entire life and recognizing that in that condition, in that inner rebellion and indifference to Christ, I was naming him as Lord. That is so repulsive to me now. That is so unthinkable now and in the pride of that, I've said and I mean this what I'm about to say, if the old Don Green walked through those doors right now and I recognized him, I would grab a ball bat and I would go and beat him to death. I hate him. I hate who that old man was. I want nothing to do with him anymore. Just the hypocrisy and the arrogance that marked who that man was. I hate him. I'm glad he's dead. I'm glad he's gone. I'm glad he's never coming back. The world is a better place, that that man no longer exists.

Now, how does all that relate to what Jesus is saying here in Matthew 7:21? You see, it's possible to make that confession of Jesus as Lord and have it be something that is totally empty, that has no inner reality to your heart. No allegiance. No love. No submission. It's just an abstract construct in the mind, "Oh yeah, he's Lord but I live my life over here and never the two shall meet." You see, beloved, true faith, true faith as Dane was saying earlier, true faith that is born from above, true faith results in a transformed life. Jesus has described it throughout the Sermon on the Mount.

What is this will of the Father? Well, go back to Matthew 5:3. Jesus starts the sermon in Matthew 5:3 saying, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted." You find embedded in true faith a declaration of spiritual bankruptcy. "I have nothing to commend myself to God. In fact, I am vile and sinful. God would rightly judge me if he would." You see, the repentant heart makes a free confession of sin side by side with its confession of the Lordship of Christ, and it is possible for a man to have in his mind two things that are utterly inconsistent: Jesus is Lord and I am good enough for heaven. Those two things don't compute biblically. You're not saved as a result of your works. Your good deeds cannot save you. Your good deeds are not good deeds because all of our righteousness, Scripture says, is like a filthy rag before a holy God.

You see, true faith is a repentant faith. That repentant faith changes your character. It's a new mind that you receive from above, that you receive as a gift, and it totally overthrows your former way of thinking. Whereas before you were impressed with your own righteousness, now you deny it. Whereas before you could play games, you could play footsie with Jesus, that's a really bad way to say it, I know, I'm sorry, but not to be serious. You see, the true repentant faith produces a sincere devotion and trust in God the

Father. It produces a sincere love and reverence for Christ that says, "I must live for him. Not to earn my salvation but because he is so worthy." A sincere love and devotion that says, "In response to what Christ has done to save me from my sin, in response to the work of Christ on the cross, all I can do is give my life to him. And if I had 10,000 lives, I give all 10,000 to him because he is so preeminently worthy." There is something of that in the essence of true faith that makes the kingdom of heaven your first life priority. A denial of self. A denial of righteousness. A love for Christ being at the preeminent heart of true saving faith. Jesus said to the ones he sent away, "I never knew you. You had no heart for me. We had no relationship. You never loved me."

Let's think about it this way, beloved: Jesus is teaching on the kingdom of heaven, Jesus is the King, how do you expect to go to heaven if you don't love the King? What place does someone have as a citizen of a kingdom for whom he doesn't care about the King? That's the distinction. That's the distinction between an empty faith and the real kind. What Jesus is saying is that it is only those who have that kind of transformed life, that kind of transformed heart, that are truly his disciples to begin with. You see, you don't have to love Christ to be fascinated with charismatic miracles and charismatic prophecies. You don't have to love Christ to have an interest in supernatural stuff. That might be nothing more than just a morbid curiosity with the supernatural, totally divorced from any real love for Christ. No one in that mindset should think that they are safe on the path to heaven if they don't love Christ for who he has revealed himself to be, Lord of heaven and the earth, Ruler over eternal judgment, the only Savior of mankind, the one who gave his life as a propitiation for sin at the cross. I'm asking you whether you believe in Christ like that, not whether you occasionally have good thoughts about him. Is he the object of your highest affections, is the question. And it's only those whose lives have been transformed like that that are truly his disciples. It is only those who have been transformed like that that will safely enter the kingdom. Everyone else is an impostor that will be exposed on the final day.

Jesus taught on this and Scripture speaks of this repeatedly. Look over at the Gospel of Luke 6. You must see these things. You must come to grips with them. There is a life affection, there is a life transformation. In Luke 6:46, a somewhat parallel passage to Matthew 7, look at this. He's teaching for keeps and he makes it so plain and obvious. You can never accuse the Lord of hiding these things. We have to vindicate his righteousness in his teaching. He has been clear. Verse 46 he says, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" Why this hypocrisy of ascribing Lordship to him when his authority as expressed in his word makes no difference in your life? Why that kind of hypocrisy? What do you expect a King to do with that kind of hypocrite in front of him? It's worse to call him Lord and refuse your obedience and affection to him than to not call him Lord at all because the hypocrite is compounding the sin. He is condemning himself with his own words saying, "I know you're Lord," when his life goes in another direction. What do you expect a holy righteous King to do with someone who pretends to be a subject like that? Whose heart and life was nothing but a testimony of superficial recognition but deep resistance to his Lordship?

Well, you can see what Jesus thinks about it in verse 47. He says, "Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built." Real genuine faith manifested by changed affections and obedience to Christ, surviving the flood of final judgment. That house stands. By contrast, verse 49, "the one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation; and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed, and the ruin of that house was great." An eternal soul multiplied by billions going to destruction, many of whom had the name of Christ on their lips but no reality in their hearts.

Scripture speaks about this in other places. You don't need to turn there but in James 2, we studied this not too long ago, in James 2:14, James says, "What use is it, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but he has no works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food, and one of you says to them, 'Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,' and yet you do not give them what is necessary for their body, what use is that? Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead, being by itself." In 1 John 2:4, the Bible says, "The one who says, 'I have come to know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him."

Scripture warns us repeatedly about the dangers of this empty faith; of a profession of lips that has no corresponding reality in your heart and life. Those are the people that Jesus is talking about being sent away. He said, "I never knew you. Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness." J. C. Ryle says in his commentary on Matthew, he says, "Do we truly repent, truly believe on Christ and live holy and humble lives? If not, in spite of all our privileges and profession, we shall miss heaven at last and be forever cast away. We shall hear those awful words, 'I never knew you. Depart from Me.' It will then be proved that to be saved means something more than making a profession. We must make a practice of our Christianity as well as a profession."

Just to be abundantly clear: the idea is not that faith plus works saves you, the idea is that true faith produces a changed life that is evidenced in the way that you live. And to claim to have faith while having a heart that does not love Christ and having a life that has no meaningful commitment to obedience to him, is to say that you don't have real faith to begin with no matter what your lips say.

Friends, let me just say this and emphasize this. As searching as this is for me to say these things and explain them to you, I'm reminded of what Scripture says someplace else. "Have I become your enemy simply by telling you the truth?" This is the truth of Scripture. It is imperative for you to take it to heart.

My friends, you dear souls, you dear souls, people call Jesus Lord without a corresponding spiritual change in their lives all the time. The broader evangelical church is filled with people like this. That's why the church has no power in our society because it's filled with people who aren't really converted. It is those people that Jesus says he will

send away in the end. Isn't it obvious why Scripture tells us in 2 Corinthians 13:5, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test?"

So beloved, we come to this in light of this magnificent statement of our Lord in Matthew 7:21, we come to this in light of what we've seen in other Scriptures and we have to ask the question: is your faith real or empty? Answer well. Ask God, ask Christ for mercy on your sin-sick soul. He says these things to be gracious to us, to stir us up to examine ourselves that if we be found lacking, we would turn to him in repentance and faith and have him finally save us in the end, to be delivered from the false sense of conversion and security that a billion people like me once knew. Is your faith real or empty? Do you love Christ or not?

Let's pray together.

Father, be merciful to us in light of these words. As we've said, Lord, it is not our desire for anyone truly saved to be shaken from the security of their soul. So we pray for the work of your Spirit to bear witness with every redeemed person and say, "I have truly been saved. I do belong to Christ. I do love him with all of my heart." Father, it's the one's dwelling in deception, it's those who have been slumbering as Judgment Day has approached, Father, it's those that we would have the word wake up there today. So Father, you know each heart, you know the need, you know what would best serve your purposes. May your Spirit move among each heart to accomplish what each one needs, Father, so that at the end everyone under the sound of my voice would truly and safely enter into your heavenly kingdom. Only you can do that, Lord. I can't make it happen. You must do the work in human hearts if any are to be saved. So with dependence, with hope, with trust, we commit all this to you in Jesus' name. Amen.

Thanks for listening to Pastor Don Green from Truth Community Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. You can find church information, Don's complete sermon library and other helpful materials at thetruthpulpit.com. This message is copyrighted by Don Green. All rights reserved.