

# The Danger of Empty Works

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The text for our message this morning comes from Matthew 7. This is our next-to-last message out of the Sermon on the Mount after 60-some messages. We've come to the conclusion that Jesus wants to press upon us, the reality of judgment, the reality of the essential nature of responding to what he has said from a sincere and obedient heart and not by paying him lipservice.

Matthew 7:21, if you'd look there with me. Jesus 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. 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.'"

Two weeks ago with Resurrection Day sandwiched in between, we opened this passage with a message titled "The Danger of Empty Words" and we looked at Matthew 7:21. We saw that Scripture describes a faith that is empty, a faith that does not save, a faith that has no power to change, it's simply a verbal affirmation, a verbal assent that does not actually change a life, and therefore Scripture says, faith without works is dead, James 2. This passage is consistent with the tenor of that passage from James that is also well-known. I encourage you as you leave today to grab a copy of that message out in the outer lobby if you didn't hear it because I can't repeat what I said then now. The point of this passage, Matthew 7:21 through 23 is this: Jesus is impressing upon everyone who heard him in his day and who now reads these words, to take him seriously; that there are eternal consequences to the way that each one of us respond to what has been said in the Sermon on the Mount, to what has been said in this more narrow passage. Ultimately there are eternal consequences to the way that you respond to the Lord Jesus Christ and there is no way to make that a matter of light, fluffy discussion. There is no way to make that a breezy discussion, a breezy topic of conversation that leaves us feeling warm and gooey inside. Jesus isn't dealing with us on that level here this morning, he is telling us that the risk of deception is great and it is important for you to seek the narrow way.

Just by way of review, we've said this so many times and I don't mind saying it one more time because we may never come back to this passage again during the course of my pastorate at Truth Community Church, and so I realize that we are bidding a crucial passage of Scripture farewell this week and next, and we'll move on to other things that are also important to teach for the full counsel of God, but here in this passage, we have words of Christ that are uniquely filled with eternal consequences for everyone who hears and that's what I want to remind you of. Remember that we said and we pointed out how Jesus said in verses 13 and 14, that comparatively few people will be saved. Verses 13 and 14, look at them with me, he said, "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. For the gate is small and the way is narrow that leads to life, and there are few who find it." Friend, I say this in love, I say it as graciously as I know how from my imperfectly sanctified heart, the consequences of these words are just staggering. They are immense and Jesus is telling us that many many people, more than not, are going to miss the way to heaven. How can we talk about this in a superficial way? We could put it this way: Jesus has put us on notice that the way to heaven is narrow, it's not particularly easy to find, and also many people will miss it. Well, the question that bubbles up in any thinking mind is: how do I know that I am included with the few rather than on that broad path that leads to destruction? I want to go through the narrow gate that leads to heaven because the eternal consequences are so great. It's either the eternal consequences of bliss and being with Christ, glorified with him forever, or it's the consequences of being sent away with the devil and his angels to participate in their miserable company and punishment forever and ever with no relief, with no alternative, with no possibility of appeal.

This is black-and-white distinctions that Jesus is drawing here and he warns us as he goes on, he warns us about the nature of deception; that there is so much deception that would make us think one way when actual reality was another. As we've pointed out in verses 15 through 20, he warns us about the dangers of false teachers. Look at verse 15, right after he had said the way is broad that leads to destruction, the way is narrow that leads to life, right after that he says, "Beware of the false prophets." That tells us that there are an abundance of teachers from generation to generation across the millennia, there are an abundance of teachers that will teach false ways about salvation and thereby be blind men leading other blind men into a pit. We have to know the truth for ourselves. We can't simply rely on what any one teacher says to us. We can't simply rely on what the masses do. We can't simply look and say, "What's the biggest church or what's the biggest denomination? Surely I'm safe in there." It does not work that way at all. That is not the basis upon which we find safety. Jesus says beware of the false teachers that would lead you astray. The risk of deception is great from outside. Here in the passage that we're looking at, Matthew 7:21 through 23, he tells us it's more than just an external deception that we need to be concerned about, however, there is the risk of an internal deception; that we are self-deceived about where we are at spiritually, about the position of our relationship with the Lord, have our sins been forgiven, is our claim to faith in Christ real or not, because it's only the real faith that saves. It's only the real faith in the real Christ that saves. False faith does not save. A false Christ does not save. So we realize that there is just a multiplicity of spiritual dangers here.

Now, I realize that all of us come in with a lot of different kinds of temporal matters that are on our mind, things of work, things of family, I get all that, and one of the difficulties of being a preacher of God's word is trying to pierce through the things that naturally preoccupy men in their thinking so that for once in their life they would think about what actually matters, the eternal consequences of the word of Christ. So Jesus here goes in length with what he says and what we find in verses 21, 22 and 23 is this: it's not just that false teachers can deceive us, our own hearts can deceive us. We can think that it is well with our soul when in fact it is not, and that's what Christ is leading us here to consider, and that's what we're seeing here. Our own hearts can deceive us, false teachers can deceive us, and behind all of this, operating in a realm that is outside our perception, is the reality that there is a great deceiver at work in the world, Satan himself, who is actively blinding people, actively blinding them and stopping their ears from seeing and hearing the true Gospel and being properly able to assess their situation.

In 2 Corinthians 4, you don't need to turn there, 2 Corinthians 4:3 and 4, the Apostle Paul, that great preacher of the Gospel, said this, he said, "even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Let me say that one more time, "in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God." Beloved, what we're doing here is trying to show you some of the different realms where deception can take place. It can take place externally on a horizontal level with false teachers. It can take place inside you as you take spiritual matters lightly or you think things are true about yourself when in fact they are not, and then we see that there is this unseen realm where the supernatural enemy of our souls is actually blinding people so that they are not able to see the truth of the Gospel and how it applies to them.

Do you see how great the risk and how great the danger is? And when you multiply that by infinity, you multiply that by eternity and realize the consequences of what we are talking about here will echo forever and ever without end, then you realize that we are standing, as it were, on holy ground. We are standing in sacred territory where men often do not go and where men need to think carefully and they need to think with reverence. Scripture says that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. It would be the beginning of wisdom for your own soul to deal with these things earnestly, if you never have; to deal with these things seriously and to ask yourself questions and to go to the word of God that these things might be made plain to you.

You see, churches and men are far too careless with eternal truth. They do not take sin and eternal judgment seriously and there is no denying the truth of that matter. What Jesus is saying here, my friends, my brothers and sisters in Christ, for those of you that know him like I do, beloved, what Jesus is saying here is a mortal threat to the nominal superficial so-called Christianity of our day that is content to go through the motions of external ritual, as if they could offer a few moments with a wafer and a cup for the satisfaction of the sins of their souls, or let's put it this way, a mortal threat to that kind of

ritualistic Christianity and a mortal threat to the nominal Christianity that is so prevalent and dominant in our country, and particularly – dare I say it, I sure do – in the Cincinnati region. The fact that many many people attend rock concerts and motivational speeches that are disguised as church services, is no sign that they have been truly converted. The fact that people seek healing from a charismatic teacher wanting God to give them their private miracle, but all the while not repenting of their sins and taking up their cross and following Christ, this is not the mark of conversion at all. You can go to the rock concerts without any love for Christ. You can want healing for your body without any love for Christ. And you can do it all in the name of Christianity, you can do it all in the name of Jesus, and find in the end that it has done your soul no good at all. There is too much deception for us to play games with the words of Christ here today.

So, last time we saw Jesus warn us against empty words in verse 21. Look at it there with me. He says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." Empty words. They name the name of Lord, they call him Lord, but there was no corresponding life reality; there was no corresponding heart affection; there was not a deep heart commitment to him; there was not a willingness to forsake all and to follow him. It was just something superficial on their lips. And what we saw was that true faith, and I'm going to come back and circle onto some of these issues in future weeks in other passages, what we see Scripture teaching us is this: true faith, true faith that saves is a repentant faith. True faith that saves is a faith that transforms your life from the inside out. As you go through the fullness of the Sermon on the Mount, you see that it produces a sorrow over sin. It produces sincere devotion and trust in God the Father, not as a mental nod to a higher power but as the defining reason for your existence, the defining affection of your heart. That's what true faith produces. That's what a repentant faith produces. True faith is willing to forsake sin and not only willing to, it does. It doesn't keep private sins in a closet to be cherished and not to be battled against or forsaken. True faith, repentant faith, comes to Christ unreservedly and says, "You are the Lord. I bow before you. Reign over my life, reign over my heart. I leave everything behind. I forsake this world. I forsake my sin that I might have you." You can go to a rock concert and not do that. People do it every Sunday, every Saturday night. So this true faith produces a heart that makes the kingdom of heaven the first priority in life. Jesus says, Matthew 6:33, "seek first His kingdom and His righteousness."

Beloved, somewhere in the truly redeemed heart there is pulsating that desire. Perhaps it is covered up at times with distraction, but when you blow the dust away there is in the redeemed heart this sense that, "What matters the most to me is Christ. I love him more than all else. I love his kingdom. I want his kingdom more than all else." And what Jesus is saying is only those who have a life that has been transformed by that kind of faith are truly redeemed, and that, beloved, here's the point, the faith like that is a far smaller subset of the greater whole that flippantly name the name of Christ in the name of religion, in the name of seeker friendly, in the name of speaking in tongues, or whatever else you want to put in the blank. And what Christ is teaching us, that those who come to him without a life that has previously been transformed like that, will be exposed as an impostor who never loved him, who never belonged to him, and they will be exposed and sent away on the final day.

So we have to beware of the empty words. Is there a heart affection, a life transformation that somewhere, someplace, somehow, at some time, corresponds with that claim to know Christ as Lord, to love him as Lord, as King, as Master, as Owner? Something like that, does that have any place in your heart when it comes to Christ or not? Jesus said, Luke 6:46, "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" Why do you call him Lord and refuse your obedience? That inconsistency is exposed by Scripture as being a false faith, and if you go into eternity with that false faith, you'll find you're going someplace that you do not want to go.

But Jesus goes on and it's not just empty words that will deceive us, many people will find that their religious deeds do them no good. Look at verse 22 with me as we go into our text for this morning. Matthew 7:22, Jesus says, "Many," not a few, not an isolated exception, this will be more the general pattern than the exception.

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.'

Do you sense, beloved, as you read this text, the bewilderment, the shock, the amazement, the disbelief that is present in verse 22? There is even a sense of underlying indignation. "How can you do this? Who do you think you are to send me away after all that I've done?" And according to their own testimony, they did so much in his name that had a supernatural bent to it even.

And I want you to see something, three times in this verse they say, "in your name." Look at it here with me. "Did we not prophesy in your name? In your name cast out demons? In your name perform many miracles?" The emphasis in this verse is on that phrase, "in your name." It's highly emphatic. It's highly emphatic by its threefold repetition in the verse which you can see in your text for yourself. In the Greek text, it is highly emphatic by word order. It's put to the front of each of these phrases, even though the English doesn't translate it this way. It's more like, "Did we not in your name prophesy? In your name cast out demons? In your name perform many miracles?" They are protesting, "Jesus, here you are, you're saying that you're going to judge me but look at what we did in your name!"

And as I've said often when I've taught on this passage, this is one passage that makes me really glad that there is not a charismatic bone in my body. This is a verse that should make every continuationist, make every charismatic tremble in their boots if they think that this is what manifests that they actually know God, an ability to cast out demons and to make prophecies, to perform miracles. If he was here today trying to describe charismatic phenomena, what else would he have said than what he said 2,000 years ago? And he says, "There are going to be many who participated in that that I'm sending away." Oh, I get no satisfaction out of pointing these things out. I have a heavy weight, a heavy rock wrapped around my heart pulling it down as I speak to you this morning,

talking about these things, but it's the word of God. It belongs to him. We are here as his representatives. We are here gathered in his name. We have to honor his word and give voice to what he said earlier. It's not ours to change. It's not ours to redirect. It's not ours to mitigate. It's not ours to minimize. This is the kingdom of the Lord Jesus Christ of which he is speaking and the Lord, the King of the kingdom, do you know what he gets to do? He gets to define his terms. He gets to tell us who is in and who is out. It doesn't belong to men to make up their own rules and then expect the Lord to comply with what they made up on their own when they would not comply with what he said originally. This is grievous.

So they are protesting against the King, "In your name we spoke forth the things of God. In your name we exercised control over demons. In your name we performed mighty miracles." And their argument is this, and picture the most august setting before the throne of Christ where this is playing out. This isn't a conversation at Starbucks. This is the eternal judgment seat being played out before our eyes in advance. And they are acting as their own attorney. They are acting as their own advocate, which tells us a lot. They are acting as their own advocate and making their own case as to why Jesus' judgment is a big mistake. "Lord, you've made a really big mistake here. Let me remind you of some things of what I have done in your name." Do you see, beloved, even as you see it, do you see the hostile accusation that they make? They are making a not-so-subtle accusation of injustice against the King in what they are saying. "You are condemning me wrongly! And let me remind you of some things about yourself and what I have done to show you, Jesus, that your judgment is faulty, that your judgment is unjust, that you are behaving wickedly by sending me away!" And they lay it all out and they say, as it were, attorney making final argument on his own behalf, "How could I have done all of that in your name and yet be condemned?" Thinking that he's made a conclusive argument.

Do you know what's interesting? Many things that are interesting about this passage but one thing that has always stood out to me since I studied it more closely, Jesus here, he doesn't even bother to contest the point. He doesn't even respond to what they say. He doesn't say that those were false miracles, he doesn't say they were true miracles, he just ignores the point because it's not the issue. It's not even important whether it was real or not. Whether those things happened did not even enter into his response.

Now, for somebody who is new to the Bible, who is filled with carnal worldly thinking, this passage might seem to be grossly unjust but it's not. But it's not. This is missing, as Jesus is going to show in verse 23, this is missing the whole point of his kingdom. Let me remind you that this is about the kingdom of God and it's about Jesus inaugurating the kingdom of God, the kingdom of heaven. Look back at Matthew 4:17, "From that time Jesus began to preach and say, 'Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.'" Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Verse 10, "Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Verse 19, toward the end, "Whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven." Verse 20, "Your righteousness has to surpass that of the scribes or Pharisees or you will not enter the kingdom of heaven." The

kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven, the kingdom of heaven. Verse 33 of chapter 6, "seek first His kingdom." Jesus has been talking about emphasizing the kingdom throughout this sermon, describing those who are a part of the kingdom and by implication those who are not.

So when he comes in chapter 7, verse 21, he says, "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven," so this is the predominant theme here. Let me ask you a question that's woven throughout this and which exposes the wicked hearts of those that he is condemning here and going away: what is the preeminent thing about a kingdom? Who has the place of preeminence in a kingdom? The king. The king. It's not about what you do, it's about how you respond to the king. Christ is the King. Christ is the King. He's the King of kings and the Lord of lords and the question is how do you respond personally to the King? It has nothing to do with these external exterior things that they were throwing up. It has nothing to do with that. What you are seeing here in Matthew 7:22 and 23, is the fact that ultimately their lives showed that they did not love the King no matter what else they had done. They did not have a heart love and affection for him. They might have done things but their heart was far from him. They might have gone through rituals but there was no affection, no priority, no love for the King.

Look at Matthew 7:23 and see the grounds upon which Jesus sends them away. He brushes aside their self-promoting closing argument, and as the King and as the Judge, he doesn't even accept the evidence. He says that doesn't matter. Here's what mattered, "I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; Depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" What he's saying is, "All of your stuff that you did, the miracles, the demons, the prophecies, all that stuff, it was just a head fake. It was like you wanted to go one direction but you never went there. It wasn't real. It wasn't an expression of your deep inner man and where your affections lie. All of this stuff was just a fake because it was not joined to a love for the King, an affection for the King." They had no intention, no love for Christ at all. When Jesus says, "I never knew you," he's not saying that before this moment he had always been unaware of them. That's not the point here at all. Jesus is omniscient. He knows everything. He knows everyone. It's not that suddenly strangers were standing before him, "Where did you come from? I never knew you." That's not the sense in which he is saying it.

Why were their works empty? Why does Jesus say, "I never knew you"? It's because they never knew Christ personally. They never loved him. They never bowed the knee to the King. They used his name to advance their own agenda, to put on their own shows, but it was never about Christ himself, Christ to their hearts. Stated differently: why were their works empty? Why were they meaningless? It's because they did not flow from a heart that had been transformed by grace. They weren't doing this out of a love for Christ himself. Whatever else their motivations were, it wasn't grounded in a love for Christ and so Jesus rightly says to him, "Depart from Me, I never knew you." Beloved, to state this another way as all of this stuff was going on that they were doing, they were strangers to Christ even as they used his name to do their business. That's how great the deception can be, and in the end, in the judgment, Jesus is going to lay it all out straight and there will be no successful accusation of injustice. When everything is laid out bare for all to see,

humanity will fall silent him. Humanity will hush in the obvious manifestation of the completely righteous judgment of God and the completely righteous work of Christ.

Back in 1 Corinthians 16 tucked away at the very end of that letter, the Apostle Paul says, "If anyone does not love the Lord, he is to be accursed." The defining mark of a true Christian is not a miracle, it's not a prophecy, it's not babbling away in some supposed tongue that you don't even understand. That's so much foolishness, beloved. The defining mark of someone who is truly in the kingdom, the defining mark of one who truly belongs to Christ is preeminently that he loves the Christ of the Bible. The Bible reveals Christ for who he is and the one who truly belongs to Christ says, "I see that. I understand that. I believe that and I love him and I am committed to him. He is my all in all. He is my Lord. He is my God," as Thomas said in John 20, "My Lord and my God."

The true love is seen in Peter. Yeah, he denied him three times but he wept bitterly after he did. He went to Christ and was restored. In John 21, "Peter, do you love Me?" "Yeah." "Do you love Me?" "Yeah." "Do you love Me?" "Yeah." Do you see in that familiar passage from John 21 what Christ is making the preeminent issue as he restores Peter? "Peter, do you love Me? Do you love Me? Do you love Me?" And the question echoes in our walls here this morning, do you love Christ? Not a Christ of your own imagination but I Christ as he is revealed in Scripture? Christ, the eternal Son of God. Christ made flesh. The word of God made flesh. Christ, the one who offered his life as a penal sacrifice, a penal substitute for sinners who would believe in him. Do you love him like that? Do you know him like that? Everything else is false faith. And knowing him and putting your faith in him like that, has it produced in you some kind of affection somewhere in your heart where he is the Lily of the Valley, he is the most precious thing to me? Let goods and kindred go, this mortal life I'll sow. The body they may kill, but God's truth abides still. And I love Christ more than all of that. I know that some of you have left family behind for the sake of Christ. They wouldn't have you afterwards. God bless you. That's the mark of the real thing. Jesus says no one has lost houses and family for my sake but will receive 100 times more in the kingdom to come. Now in the present age and also in the kingdom to come.

But it's imperative for us since Jesus is warning people here, it's imperative for us to warn, to point out danger. And I can't, it's really hard to find a passage of Scripture that compares to this one in danger for what it means to people like you. That is going to be an awful awful moment when Jesus declares to someone, "Depart from Me."

Look over at Matthew 25. He uses this language at the end of this Gospel as well. And those of you who have been spiritually careless, those of you who are indifferent, who are dismissive, who are cynical, who flatter yourself by saying, "I'm sitting on the fence. I'm a seeker here, you know. I'm not ready to make a commitment," cloaking your rebellion in words of ambivalence. No. No, beloved. No, you cannot go on like that because this moment is coming for many just like you.

Matthew 25:41, "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.'" I don't know



what that moment is going to be like for those that are sent away. I don't know what their conscious thought process is going to be, but it's obvious that there is going to be some kind of conscious realization of the reality that is happening to them, and I want you to put yourself, if you would for a moment, in the shoes of one hearing those words and just how awful that will be. This is unimaginable. That is unimaginable. Your standing before Christ at some point, you had thought you were going to heaven and you find out you're not, and Christ says, "Depart from Me." What? What? "Into the eternal fire." What? "Prepared for the devil and his angels." What? What? How can this be? That means that I'm not going to heaven? That means that the fire has been reserved for me? That means that my companion of the ages is going to be the great deceiver and his wicked angels and my lot is with them forever and ever?

That will be an awful moment, unthinkable. Unthinkable except the Christ has said here it is and that it will be this way. Beloved, it does not make it go away by pretending that he didn't say it. It doesn't make it go away by plugging your ears and saying, "I don't want to hear this." Sooner or later you have to pull your fingers out of your ears and do you know what you'll find? These words are still in the Bible. So we have to come to grips with the reality and what Jesus tells these, as you go back to Matthew 7, what Jesus tells these ones is their works did not even begin to compensate for their unbelieving hostile hearts toward the King.

On the other side of it, the Apostle Paul gave us a picture of what the other side of it is like in Philippians 3:8. The redeemed heart, you wonder, "Well, how do I know? What does the redeemed heart look like, then?" Paul says in Philippians 3, "whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith." The redeemed heart says, "My faith is in Christ and in Christ alone. I have no righteousness of my own. I plead no works of my own. I plead my faith in Christ. I plead the righteousness of Christ which satisfies the demands of God's holy law." And you see as Paul describes this, you see the affections of the truly redeemed heart that the surpassing thing above all others is knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord. I've lost everything else. I've lost my job. I've lost my friends. I've lost my future. But do you know what? I have Christ. I have it all. And that other stuff by comparison, rubbish. Fit for the dung heap by comparison to what I have in Christ. My affections, my love, my desires are all rooted to him. Seek first the kingdom of God, of course, what else would I want by comparison? And yes, we carry those desires in earthen vessels, yes, we carry them imperfectly and we stumble along the way, but the redeemed heart knows something about this. The redeemed heart is alive to Christ. The redeemed heart loves him with an affection that is reserved for him alone.

These people that were sent away trusting in themselves, boasting in their works, "Look what I did in your name. I did it. I did it. I did it." Scripture says, no, no, in the true realm of salvation, there is no boasting at all. The testimony of the one truly redeemed is,

"Lord, you did it. You did it. You did it with your life. You did it with your death. You did it with your resurrection. You did it with your ascension. You did it with your converting work in my heart. You showed grace to me by name and it was grace, it was undeserved favor, nothing that I did." That's the way the truly redeemed think. That's where their affections are. It's what they feel somewhere inside. It's not abstract. It's not a mere mental acknowledgment, "Yeah, Jesus is Lord, now let me go on with my life unhindered." No, Jesus is Lord and that changes everything for me.

So, my beloved friends, we see in Matthew 7 that empty words profit a man nothing. Faith without works is dead. We see here that works without faith, dead. Empty. Nothing. Zero. A mere spider's web that cannot stop you on your plunge into eternal destruction. Only the strong and mighty arms of Christ stop that fall for the one who casts himself for mercy upon Christ alone. "Lord, I am unworthy. Lord, you're the King. I give myself to you unreservedly. You're the one I want and I want no others beside. I've said it once, I'll say it again, let goods and kindred go, O God, let my prosperity go, let my family go, Lord, as long as I have you, that is enough." Beloved, do you know Christ somehow like that? Does he have that place in your heart affections and priorities somewhere? Somewhere is there evidence of that? Or is all of this church and religion stuff just a show that you don't really care about? Are you trusting his shed blood and perfect righteousness alone as your hope to be received by a holy God?

There are some passages that I don't want to leave but sooner or later you have to leave them. It's just the nature of things. It's time to close the book on this one. We've been in and out of it for many weeks now. Let me say this to you that are true Christians, and you realize this is all convicting as it is to me, convicting that my life doesn't measure up to that but you know in your heart that that's where your affections truly are. Let me say this to you about our gracious and loving Lord. Jesus did not speak these words to undermine the confidence of those who were truly his. That's the furthest thing from his mind as he said these words. Go back to the Beatitudes which open Matthew 5. Go back to the Beatitudes and you can see this for yourself. Jesus is not trying to frighten his own children with these words. These are not a whip by him to encourage you to live a more moral life. He is speaking these words of warning in Matthew 7 to the hypocrites, to those who have not been truly converted. To those that belong to him, he is pronouncing blessing after blessing after blessing.

Look at Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." No qualifications. No conditions there. The people that are like this belong to me. They are my subjects in my kingdom and I gladly own them. "Blessed are those who mourn. Blessed are the gentle. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness. Blessed are the merciful. Blessed are the pure in heart. Blessed are the peacemakers. Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness." What's my point here? The point is that for those who are truly disciples of Christ, he is pronouncing blessing and assurance and promises upon us. He would not have his children walk out of this room fearful and downtrodden, rather he would have them walk out rejoicing in his goodness, rejoicing in the perfection of a salvation that delivered them from such an awful moment as that which said, "Depart from Me. I never knew you." If you know

Christ, you will never hear those words. Ever. He never sends away his own. He never sends away his children. And not only that, he says not only will I not send them away, John 10, he said no one will pluck them out of my hand because I'm going to guard them, protect them all the way to the end.

You see, it's not that Christ is reluctant. Christ is a glad Savior. He is a willing recipient of every sinner who comes to him. He said in John 6:37, "The one who comes to Me, I will certainly not cast out." It's not that he's reluctant, it's not that he's hiding things, he's just making things clear and we are left with a question as we look in the mirror: where do I stand before this Christ? If you know him, you can face his judgment with confidence because Jesus will lead you safely into his heavenly kingdom. We will cling tightly to the robe of his majesty and it will carry us all the way through and judgment will not singe us. Not a hair. The point today in today's passage is that he rejects the rebels who do not really love him. He knows who sets aside his truth for their own agenda. In grace he warns them to repent while there is still time.

Christian friends, just continue to rest in Christ. Nothing about this passage changes your salvation, but at the same time, wouldn't it be the better part of wisdom for all of us not to take our souls for granted? Wouldn't it be the better part of wisdom for you not to give rest to your mind until you know that Christ has delivered you from sin? Not to give rest to your heart until you know that he has delivered you from those awful words, "Depart from Me, I never knew you"? The issue is do you know him? Do you love him? That's the issue, not what you've done. How do you respond to Christ? Who do you say that he is? Who is he to you?

*Father, give us grace to sort these things out in our minds. While there may be many that are sent away, Father, it won't be because you didn't disclose yourself and make the way of salvation known. You have revealed yourself in the skies. You have revealed yourself in the Scripture. You have made it plain. You have warned that there are consequences and that there is a day of judgment coming. And not only that, Lord, you have made a free offer of the Gospel to everyone, that everyone who comes to Christ can be saved regardless of nationality, no matter how bad their sin has been, no matter how long they have been deceived. Everybody can come to Christ, believe in him and be saved immediately, completely, permanently, eternally, by putting their faith in Christ. So God, we thank you for this evident act of mercy that you have made these things known to us, that you have brought us to a place where we could hear these things clearly for ourselves. And now, Father, what can I do having declared the word except to thank you that the lives and destiny of these dear people are in your hands. May you work out your will and be gracious to each one now and throughout all of eternity. May you lead each one safely into your heavenly kingdom, safely under the reign of our great King Jesus Christ. Amen.*

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