

Matthew 7:21-23 (NKJV)

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

22 Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?'

23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

This is one of the scariest passages in the Bible. Have you seen it that way? Last week Jesus talked to us about false prophets who have flawed character, flawed creeds and flawed converts. Jesus said we would know them by their fruits.

Well we may not always get it right. We may not always discern them correctly. I think of a person like Ravi Zacharias who may have been one of those false converts. We cannot know for sure but if he was false, he is a good example of someone that would have been hard to spot, hard to discern. He did a lot of good ministry. He could hold that up on judgment day and say, look at the souls I won for your kingdom. And if he truly was false, Jesus will say this to him- **I never knew you. Depart from Me you who practice lawlessness.**

Jesus is moving from the life and so called **ministry** of the **false prophet** and **false sheep** to **their destination**. First he tells us how to **deal with them**. Then in verse 19 in our last text he moves to what will ultimately **happen to them and those who are the fruit of their false ministry**.

Matthew 7:19 (NKJV)

19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

If our **character** and **creed** and **converts** are founded upon fleshly principles, if we could be motivated to do all these things even if there were **no Jesus Christ**, then we are lumped right in with all the other citizens of this world. We are a **bad tree** that does **not bear good fruit** because we are **incapable** of it. If someone copies what we have in that state, they will not be the better for it. They might get off drugs or alcohol, they might straighten up their family, they might be a better employee. They may get financially solvent. But they will not **get to heaven** because all of their motivations would be "this world" focused. That is what happens with bad trees. They produce bad fruit.

But in our text this morning Jesus moves from the false **leaders** to also include the false **followers**. He includes with those who **deceive others**, those who **deceive themselves**. These are the **Lord Lord say-ers**.

We might want to pause here and ask ourselves this question.

What do you do in this life that, if you became convinced that Jesus Christ was a myth, you would **stop doing right now**?

What do you do where your **primary motive** is to please your Lord? You don't care who is looking. You don't care how people respond. You feel no need to broadcast your activity. You only do it to one day hear the Lord say, "**Well done my good and faithful servant.**" Or you do it because you **enjoy fellowshiping** with the Lord and His people.

These kinds of questions help us get to the core of why we do what we do.

A true Christian has to go beyond a psychological explanation. I learned about **group dynamics** in college and it was fascinating. It is amazing how much people will do to be part of a group. It was interesting to see how **people's behavior** changes in a group due to human interactions. But if we are relying upon those changes for **our spirituality** we are deeply deceived. If we act like a Christian and buy into Christian norms and learn acceptable Christian behavior, and learn Christian language and learn to avoid non Christian language, and learn how to **look** like a Christian and **act** like a Christian because we are in a **Christian group**, we are in terrible danger. It would be better that we were committing notorious sins than fitting into the sheep herd while being something other than a sheep.

I think that sufficiently gets us ready for our text.

This sermon could be titled **the danger of self deception**.

Let's look at our text.

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23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

Ok who is Jesus describing here. Who are these **Lord Lord say-ers**?

The Greek word for **Lord** here can be simply a title of respect, similar to how we might use the word "**honorable**" when introducing a judge. It would have only been used for highly respected people. So we need to look very closely at the context here to get the intention of the Lord Lord speakers. The word

itself has a broad use. It could mean respected teacher. It could be a term applied in worship to God. Which is it here?

Lets look at the evidence.

First look at the **nature** of what the Lord Lord say-ers are **doing**.

They are **prophesying**- speaking a truth that they would not have known unless it was revealed directly by God.

They cast out **demons**- exhibiting the power of God that is superior to the forces in this world.

Done **many wonders**- Basically these are supernatural deeds that are impossible to do with earthly resources.

Everything that they say they are doing reflects a **direct act of God**.

Supernatural power.

And then look at **how** they are doing these things, **who** they ascribe them to. It is all in **Jesus name**. It is **Jesus authority**. They are doing supernatural deeds, deeds only God can do, by the power of Jesus.

I think it is very safe to say that these people are people who are ascribing **deity to Christ**. When they say Lord, it is a worshipful use of the word. They are essentially referring to **Jesus as God**.

Now look at the difference in the two statements.

The first says, "**Not everyone who says Lord Lord**"

The second says "**Many will say Lord Lord**"

We can learn from this that there **ARE** people who say **Lord Lord** who **will not** be part of the condemned group. Not **all** the people saying **Lord Lord** will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. But some will.

Many will say Lord Lord and be condemned. But not **all** will say Lord Lord and be condemned. We have to understand that **no one** who **does not** call out on Lord Lord as savior and Lord of their lives can be saved. We should all cry out Lord Lord. We should all recognize and submit our lives to the Lordship of Christ. [Rom 10:9 NKJV] says **that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved**. So we must call out to the Lord. No one will be born again without doing such a thing. No. The issue is not that people call out Lord Lord.

What Christ is describing again is the difference between the **narrow gate** and **narrow path** and the **wide gate** and the **wide path**.

The **many** are the ones on the **wide path**. They have not properly entered in through Christ and they are walking a wrong path, even though it might look ultra spiritual. They are **calling out** Lord Lord but they are **not living** Lord Lord.

Wow. Doesn't that make it scarier?

These condemned "**many**" are people with the proper understanding of who Jesus is, at least to some degree. These are people with much of the right theology. These are people with a **knowledge of God** that is not **lived by**. They believe **in** God but they do not **believe** God.

This is scary because Jesus is not talking about your typical person off the street. This is not the person who **knows nothing** about God. These are not the agnostics or atheists or hedonists or humanists. These are not even some of the false teachers that Paul fought against, the false teachers who denied the deity of Christ. No. These are people who know that **Christ is God** and who **think** they are in good with Him. They are actually **doing things** in His service, in His name.

This just goes to show how **close to salvation** a person can get without **having it**.

James brings the same kind of thing to our attention.

James 2:19 (NKJV)

¹⁹You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble!

There is a kind of belief in God that is damned. It is doomed. Because it does not exhibit **faith in God for salvation**, not the faith once delivered to the saints.

It **looks** spiritual. But it is **not** spiritual.

It may use the words of **grace** and **love**, but it misses the mark on how that grace and love reaches us, how it **counts for us**, how we **receive** it.

It takes more than an intellectual assent to the truth to save a person. These people believed in Jesus in an intellectual sense. But they were as lost as lost could be.

Brother Jones says this

Nothing is more dangerous than to rely only upon a correct belief, and a fervent spirit, and to assume that, as long as you believe the right things and are zealous and keen and active concerning them, you are therefore of necessity a Christian.

Now let's take a quick look at what these false converts are doing. And keep in mind that Jesus never said they were **not** doing them.

First they were prophesying in Jesus name. We mentioned before that this is actually the proclaiming of something that had to be revealed by God. It is a supernatural proclamation.

Think about the implications of that for just a second. A person can preach the perfect word of God and do it with complete accuracy and with great fervency, and be **completely unregenerate**. He might actually get the creed right. He might have the right kind of convert as well. But he may be lost himself.

We have the example of Balaam and of Saul in the Old Testament that spoke with perfect accuracy the word of God but they were in an awful spiritual state when they did it.

Paul tells us about those who preached Christ for the **wrong motives**. It was the right message for the wrong reasons.

Philippians 1:15 (NKJV)

15 Some indeed preach Christ even from envy and strife, and some also from good will:

I tend to be less questioning than I should be. I do not ask as many hard questions as sometimes need asked. I do not want to make people uncomfortable because when they are uncomfortable that makes me uncomfortable. But sometimes it takes hard questions to get to the heart of the matter. Sometimes, even though people are doing good things, that is not an indicator of where their hearts are at.

We cannot allow ourselves to be gullible. We must be kind where we can be. But we must be on our guard for wolf-ishness in ourselves and others. And we must be aware that these traits will not be obvious. We cannot be overly impressed with external results. Maybe there are healings. Maybe there is supernatural future telling. Maybe there are dramatic conversions. We cannot be overly impressed by those things. Clearly Jesus is not. There are things that we do not understand about **how** and **why** God exerts his power. And the devil has a degree of power as well. So we cannot jump to conclusions on limited proof. We must look deeper. We must look at the “why” people do things. We must look at the overall fruit of a person’s life. That is telling. We must see the bigger picture.

I think there is a very interesting comment of Christ’s that really helps us put things into perspective.

Tell me this. Do you not long sometimes for God to use you in some dramatic way? I know I would like that. I would like to preach and have God’s Spirit dramatically work and have hundreds come to Him in true repentance.

But look at what Christ told his disciples when they came back from a preaching trip. These guys were seeing God doing **AMAZING** things. And keep in mind these guys were mostly very simple people. They were not normally around supernatural miracles.

Yet here they are preaching and seeing God casing out demons through them. They are the spiritual big shots in town doing stuff that the Pharisees and Sadducees **could not** do. They were seeing miracles. And this is how Christ told them to think about it. This is how Christ told them to process it.

Luke 10:20 Nevertheless do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rather, rejoice because your names are written in heaven."

Do you see what Christ calls attention to.

The most profound and important miracle that **can** happen, and **must** happen, in a person's life is not the stuff that we might think. It is not that stuff that happens on the **outside**. It is not the stuff that impresses the crowds. It isn't even the stuff that impresses us. It is the stuff that **changes one's spiritual state**. It is the thing that moves us from being **in the devil** to being **in Christ**. It is that thing that **saves our soul**.

The Lord Lord sayers have that backwards. They think the thing that makes the biggest splash is the biggest deal, the biggest reason for rejoicing, the thing to give the biggest headlines. But it is not.

Our biggest reason to rejoice is that God has done the astronomically impossible feat of putting us **in Christ**. He has **forgiven** the sin without **annihilating** the sinner.

Anything other than that is simply a bonus. It is something **smaller** than the miracle Christ has done in us.

So who **DOES** enter the kingdom of heaven? What must be true of those who enter the kingdom of heaven. What cannot not be true of those who enter the kingdom of heaven?

What is an essential?

but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

Note this. If someone presents to you a theology where a person **can be saved** and yet **never do the will of God**, you can be sure that doctrine is false.

Do **you** do what God says?

Do **you** do what God says?

Some people calculate in God's grace in such a way that they deny what Jesus clearly says here. They say that God can **save you** without **changing you**. That is unbiblical. It does not matter how much they may accuse all other theologies as being legalistic. They are wrong.

When God saves a person, when God puts a person in Christ, that person is put **on a new path** that leads to a **new destination**. They are given a **new heart**. Their life is new. Oh yeah, there is baggage. There is sinful muscle memory.

There are old habits that need to be broken. There are **ways we think** that cause **things we feel**. They need changed. But there is a fundamental change. He or she will have a change from **resisting** the will of the Father to **submitting** to the will of the Father.

We all here have different stories about our salvation. We may have had dramatic experiences. We may have had no experience at all. We may know the date and the time. We may have no idea when faith happened to us. But the one thing that truly gives us the best indicator of when salvation has truly happened is **when we surrendered our will to God's will**. Lots of salvation prayers happen with no understanding who King Jesus is or what King Jesus requires. There is very little surrender to Christ. Sometimes a person's decision for Christ kind of accepts all the good things that Jesus adds to our lives. Maybe he gives our lives the direction we craved or the purpose we longed for, or help with some life problem we needed help with. But when the day comes that we want some fleshly thing really really bad, something we feel that we must have in order to be happy, when that happens and we say, **NO**. We say, **I will not pursue that thing for one reason. King Jesus says no**. On that day we are seeing evidence that a miracle has happened. Until that day happens, a wise counselor will offer great assurance of our salvation. But as we see **that kind of decision making** in our lives, we can be confident that our salvation is true. Certainly our salvation may have happened earlier than that. But it could not be affirmed until then.

There is a lot of talk about being **on fire** for Jesus when we first came to Christ. But a lot of that is largely focused on our strength of emotion for Christ. It is enthusiastic about Christ. But when we think of our first love for Christ we are often not describing a heightened degree of commitment. That kind of first love is not a first love worth going back to. It is like describing my love for my wife as being **the best** in the first years of our marriage. Like I loved her the most in my early years of marriage. I certainly had the most enthusiastic emotions for her back then. But those emotions had little substance. Carla would be foolish to want me to go back to that state. My love for her now is so much more **proven**, more **dependable**, more **educated**, more **committed**. It does not rely as much on how attractive she remains. I now love her more for **her sake** and less for **my own**.

That is what growth in the Christian life is like as well.

With Christ we always love Him more for **our sake** than **His**, but I think there is an element of realness that is appealed to here.

he who does the will of My Father in heaven.

A true believer is asking the question in every known area of His life. The question is, **“What does Jesus want me to do?”** And to a large degree, the true Christian does it. He aligns his life to what Christ wants. And where he does not know, he finds out. And where he has trouble finding out, he searches harder.

That is not describing the **super** Christian. That is the **normal** Christian. That is the **real** Christian. That is **common** Christianity.

Are there areas of your life where you justify **doing things** that Jesus forbids? Are there areas of your life where you justify **not doing things** that Jesus commands?

The question at this point is not to start out with how much that might cost in eternity. The question to ask is, **are you a Christian at all?**

Yeah, I know that none of us are perfect. I say that often. And we should not expect that **we will be** perfect in this life. But if we have an attitude that **willfully commits itself** to a path other than that which Jesus allows or commands, we should not be talking about **the confession of sin Jesus that provides for our restoration**. We should be asking, **do I love Jesus at all?** We really need to do business with this fact. If we are not **doing the will of the Father in heaven**, we have **no reason to believe we are saved**.

We do not want to be one of these people:

²³ And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

You see, the most important thing is not that we **know things** about God. It is not that we have **good intentions** toward God. It is not that we have what **we** regard as a **sincere faith**. What matters most is that **God knows us**. And if God knows us, we will not be people who practice, continually, consistently, an attitude that says that **we do not want to know** what God says.

The words for **practice lawlessness** are interesting.

The word translated **practice** usually means to work. It means intentionally doing something over and over with effort.

The word for lawlessness means **the condition of one without law — either because ignorant of it, or because violating it**.

So the person is described as working without applying the law. It seems to apply to **working and practicing** a course of action that goes **against the law**. And it can be because a person **knows it is wrong**. Or it can be because they do not care enough to find out **what God wants**.

So who are the people to whom Jesus will say- “Get lost. I don’t know you?” It will be those who are **choosing a path**, either knowing it is the wrong path or not caring enough to find out what God thinks.

What path are **we** choosing? Are **we** working at living obediently and fully submitted to the Lordship of Christ? Are **we** living by His rule over our lives. Or are we **making our own rules**, picking and choosing **which** of God's laws we **want** to obey and which we want to **disobey**, or ignore, or not investigate? Now it is important that we recognize that the word practice means something that is done continually. Every believer sins. But no believer can continually practice sin. We can **backslide** into a sin. But we cannot **remain** there. There is no sin that a believer is incapable of sinning other than the unpardonable sin. In other words, a Christian at a single point of time can commit horrible sins. The Bible gives us many examples. But there is also no sin that a believer can **persist in**. We do not know what the length of time is for that. But we know that it is **a truth** that we don't want to **trifle with**. So if you are wrestling with sin, there is comfort if you are not persisting in it, continually staying in it, planning how to continue in it. If your greatest efforts are to overcome that sin, keep up the fight. Don't be discouraged. But if there is **no** fight. If you are **comfortable** in your sin and you plan to do it again today and tomorrow, **take heed**. You are in GREAT danger. If you are **making accommodations** for your sin for later, you are practicing your sin now. Your sin is premeditated. The thing to do now is repent. It does not matter what works you can bring out on judgment day. This is clear from our passage. Are you in Christ or are you not? If you are in Christ, you will **not practice lawlessness**. If you are not, no matter what things you do will be an act of lawlessness. Even the best ones. At the end of the day there are only two kinds of people. The ones who do the will of the Father. Or the ones who practice lawlessness. There will be many who will deceive themselves because they focus on the **good things** they do. But the works are not the primary concern. One's heart toward God is. One's **receiving of the work of Christ on our behalf is**. Our **attitude toward Christ** is. Our response that is **prompted** and **empowered** by the Holy Spirit is. The new life **given to us by Christ** is. The new creature is. If we love Christ, ultimately we will obey Christ. And if we love Christ it is because He first loved us. And we can one day look forward to Him saying, Well done my good and faithful servant. You have pleased me.