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Three Rivers Grace Community Church

True Professions

I'd like to start off this morning by asking you to consider a question: 'How do you know someone is a Christian? How can you tell if someone is a follower of Christ?' Or conversely, how can you tell that someone isn't a follower of Jesus? In some cases we may think it is easy to tell, by a person's lifestyle or because we've gotten to know what drives them, what motivates them (either in the positive or negative). The answer of course in other cases is that it is impossible to tell. We cannot see the reality of a person's heart. We can try to study the person's actions, or words or any number of outward things that we hope to reveal where their heart is but the reality is there is no sure way to tell a person's motives. We may see them demonstrating what looks like love to their neighbor, but we have no clue whether their real motivation is to glorify God or to glorify themselves.

Now, let me ask you to consider one other question: How do you know that you are a Christian, assuming you claim to be one this morning? What are the things you point to to demonstrate you are following Christ? Let me state clearly the danger: one of greatest spiritual dangers, is that we use the means that we use when we look at others: their words and their actions, when we examine our own hearts. To put it simpler – it's a great danger when our self-examination consists only of asking ourselves 'do I look like a Christian to other people?'

Let's read our text this morning, Matthew 7:21-27

²¹(Z) "Not everyone who ^(AA) says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will ^(AB) enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who ^(AC) does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²²(AD) On that day ^(AE) many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not ^(AF) prophesy in your name, and cast out demons ^(AG) in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³(AH) And then will I declare to them, 'I ^(AI) never knew you; ^(AJ) depart from me, ^(AK) you workers of lawlessness.'

²⁴(AL) "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like ^(AM) a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. ²⁶And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like ^(AN) a foolish man who built his house on the sand. ²⁷And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it."

Quick Summary of Sermon on the Mount

This text is the conclusion to Jesus' longest recorded sermon, what we call the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5-7. Since we're focused this morning on just the last couple verses which form the conclusion of His sermon, I'd like to just quickly attempt to summarize the main points of Jesus's sermon. The sermon starts out with Jesus' description of what new spiritual life looks like in the Beatitudes. Jesus describes the true characteristics of the subjects of the kingdom of God. And this

theme carries on throughout the sermon – this is essentially Jesus’ overall purpose in it: to describe what true righteousness looks like. Of course as he’s describing what true righteousness is we should be thinking that doing those things are impossible. Jesus concludes Chapter 5 with the ultimate impossible command: to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. As Jesus is describing what true righteousness is, he is also contrasting that description with what we naturally try to call righteousness. In our sinful nature, we want to claim glory for ourselves; we never want to admit that we are spiritually destitute or that we are dependent on anyone. We want to be self-sufficient, self-reliant. We don’t think we need God and we certainly do not think we are in need of a savior. And so we try to redefine God’s moral law, or try to lessen its hold on us by trying to limit its scope. We try to redefine it to mean less than it really means.

We are just like the Pharisees that Jesus is speaking against when we think well of ourselves because we haven’t actually killed someone or haven’t committed the physical act of adultery. Jesus’ goal in the sermon is to correct their definition of righteousness and declare himself as the authority by which righteousness is defined. He even speaks against their human traditions that they hold up as authoritative when he says “You have heard it said ‘You shall not murder and whoever murders will be liable to judgment’ but I say to you everyone who is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement”, and five other similar “You have heard it said, but I say to you” formed phrases. Jesus’ fundamental problem with the righteousness of the Pharisees was that it wasn’t real – it was done for show. It was done to look good in front of others and that was it. They talked about God but the reality of their hearts was they were glorifying themselves, not Him. That was why Jesus says in Matthew 5:20, “For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Our righteousness must exceed the Pharisees because it must be more substantive than just outward show. It must be more than just an outward conformity to rules or a to-do list, while our hearts remain unchanged. We must be inwardly righteous to enter the kingdom of heaven.

The Deceptiveness of Sin

The problem of humanity is that this was not unique to the Pharisees. We all have an inner Pharisee living inside of us. We all naturally will seek to be our own authority, and likewise to avoid God’s. Our evil hearts will lie and the deceptiveness of sin will tell us that fundamentally we are okay or that we are basically a good person. The reality is the exact opposite. Our hearts are desperately wicked and sick. We are spiritually dead in our sin. The problem is that unless our eyes are opened by God we don’t know it. It’s like a person with a cancer growing inside of them, with no symptoms they are aware of or at least none that they care to address. One of the worst things that can happen to this cancer patient is that they become convinced that they no longer have cancer! They might cover some superficial signs of the cancer and then declare themselves cured, when the reality is the same deadly disease is eating away at them.

As Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount, he tells us in verse 22 that there are many of these people who are still dead in their sin, but they have convinced themselves that they are saved. What an

amazing warning from Jesus! Jesus doesn't just say it's possible, or that a few or even some will be in this ultimately deceived position but that many will be. What a sobering thought.

Hollow Verbal Profession

Starting in verse 21, Jesus tells us that "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven". What is Jesus saying here? We know that Romans 10:9, 10 says "If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved". So, Paul is saying in Romans that confessing Jesus is Lord is necessary for salvation. And we know that it is and we can never make this true confession without the work of the Holy Spirit to enable us to confess that. 1 Cor. 12:3 tells us "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except in the Holy Spirit".

So, Jesus must be talking about something different. Jesus must be talking about these people claiming to know him but the reality being that they do not. The doubling of the name "Lord" was an address of intimacy, a claim of an intimate knowledge. These people will claim to have intimate knowledge of Jesus, but the reality is that they are completely and utterly deceived. Their calling Jesus 'Lord' was a hollow profession, one that lacked any personal truth. And yet, they may have had great knowledge of truth. They may have been able to answer every question right on a theology quiz. They might be Biblical scholars and know Scripture inside and out. That knowledge does not save. This profession of Jesus as Lord here that Jesus speaks of seems to be a very orthodox one. John Stott writes "Although to call Jesus 'Lord' may mean no more than 'Sir', the present context contains allusions to God as his Father and to himself as the Judge, and therefore seems to imply more. Certainly after his death and resurrections the early Christians knew what they were doing when they called him 'Lord'. It was a divine title, a rendering in the Greek Old Testament of the Hebrew for 'Jehovah'. So from our later perspective we may say that this is an accurate, an orthodox confession of Jesus Christ." But it's not enough to have intellectual knowledge. It doesn't even matter how correct or Biblical it is, if it stops at knowledge. James 2:19 says "You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe – and shudder". So, even demons have at least some correct knowledge of God. But that knowledge is not sufficient to save them and it is not sufficient to save us. If their profession was real, if they did know Jesus intimately, their life would have been changed. That's how Jesus finishes the sentence "Not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but *the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven*". The one who has shown that their profession is real by the fruit of their lives will be saved.

The Will of My Father

So we have to ask ourselves, what does it mean to do the will of the Father? I think there are many ways to answer this question but I will boil it down to two. First, John 6:40 tells us plainly: "For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day". God's will is that He will be glorified. He has chosen to be glorified in this world through the pouring out of His mercy and grace through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. His will is that sinners would turn to Jesus and believe in Him and be saved. They will also hope

in Jesus that they will be saved on the Day of Judgment. This is the will of God looking through a wide-angle lens: the purpose of God in everything that He does. Again, to bring glory to Himself by guilty sinners exalting Christ and his goodness because God has poured out his abundant mercy and love on them and saved them from their sin.

The second way to understand Jesus' description of the "the one who does the will of my Father" is to look at the context in which this statement is made. This is at the conclusion of a lengthy sermon that Jesus has been talking extensively about true righteousness, about what it truly means to obey God's perfect law. To do the will of the Father then is to put into practice what He has just been teaching in the sermon. This is not a separate thing than what we just talked about – about God's will for sinners to believe in God. Obedience to God's perfect law to even the least degree requires a changed heart. There is no possible way for obedience to be faked or produced by a heart that hasn't been regenerated by the sovereign work of God that glorifies his Son. Similarly there is no way for a heart that has been regenerated to not produce the fruit of obedience in some measure. We remain stuck in these fleshly bodies and remain battling sin until the day we die, but if we are his children then real fruit must result to some degree. We are not saved by this fruit, but it is this fruit that demonstrates that God has saved us, that He has given us new birth. John 15:8 says "By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples". The fruit (or obedience) is not what makes us His disciples, but is what shows that we are His disciples.

Let's look further on in the position as Jesus' fleshes out the description of those that are deceived. It is not just those whose verbal profession was hollow; there are also those that did seem to do mighty works in Jesus' name. Verse 22 says "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord' did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" Apparently this person did many amazing deeds. And look at how each clause of this verse ends: "in your name". All of these deeds, prophesying, which is just another word for proclaiming God's truth, and casting out demons were done in "Jesus' name". And yet the reality is that these people have no connection with Christ. From this we learn that it is possible to claim Jesus' name in performing an action, possibly even something spectacular when the reality is far from that claim. The case of the sons of Sceva comes to mind in Acts 19. Seven sons of a Jewish high priest saw the attention that Paul and the other apostles were getting by invoking Jesus' name and performing amazing miracles and casting out evil spirits from people. On one of their attempts, we read in Acts the result: "But the evil spirit answered them, 'Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?' And the man in whom was the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered all of them and overpowered them, so that they fled out of the house naked and wounded". Just because someone names the name of Jesus as they are performing an action – that doesn't say anything about their heart. Just as merely saying "Lord, Lord" does not. What matters is the reality that's taken place in your heart – have you truly been regenerated or not? These people appeared to have "fruit" in their lives. They even tried to make their fruit the most visible and best looking as possible. Much like the Pharisees in the temple they did things for public show – for their glory. While from the outside their actions looked good, in the center of the fruit, the motives, the heart, was rotten to the core. For unless Christ is at the center the fruit is not fruit at all.

"I Never Knew You"

Jesus' response to these people on the Day of Judgment is most telling. Verse 23 says "And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness'". What a terrifying summary of their position: "I never knew you". What matters is not whether we intellectually know to call out the name of Jesus. What matters is that he has known us, that His spirit has given new life to a dead sinner's heart and has called us to cry out to Him in a real way. We are known by God, what an amazing statement. His "knowing" of us is not just a knowledge of who we are, but a personal, *relational* knowledge. Of course God knows everything about us, He is omniscient and knows all things. When the Bible speaks of God knowing us, it's a statement of relationship, a description of an intimate, loving relationship. We are known by God in that we are one of his chosen elect, that his Son bled and died for us on the cross of Calvary. As Ephesians 1 says "He predestined us for adoption through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will... In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace". And Romans 8:29, "For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son". That is what it means for God to know us, that he has chosen to love us in an intimate and saving way. The tragic thing for these people deceived into thinking that they know God, is that He does not know them. He does not know them because Jesus did not know them, because ultimately they are not God's children, they are not his elect. Their desire to say "Lord, Lord" was not one of genuine trust in Jesus as Lord, but a self-serving, self-glorifying declaration, one that lacked any true reality in their lives, and finally one that revealed what their true heart's desire was.

The Metaphor of the Houses

Jesus concludes the sermon with this metaphor of the two houses: one built on the rock and the other built on the sand. We can imagine that both of these houses look identical. They may have identical beautiful facades, perfect brickwork with not a brick out of place. But foundationally they are not identical. One is built on a sturdy and sure foundation of rock, and one is built on sand. When the rain falls and the floods come, the house will be completely destroyed. These houses are of course metaphors for the two types of hearers of Jesus' message. Notice that in verses 24 and 26, both the wise man and the foolish man both hear Jesus' words. The difference is the reality of the action that's taken that determines the result. Does the hearer put Jesus' words into action or are they ignored? The reality of Jesus' sermon is that we cannot do these things. We cannot be perfect as our Father is perfect. We cannot keep God's Holy law. And so we must turn to Jesus. We must turn and trust in Him and his merits. We trust that He has died for our sins and so we have died to sin. We trust that He has kept the law and so in Him we have kept God's law as well. His righteousness is credited to our account, just as our sin was credited to His on the cross. That is building a solid foundation; that is building our spiritual house, our spiritual lives, on the Rock of Christ.

The Seriousness of the Matter – "That Day"

Let me return to one phrase in this passage that we have skipped over thus far. Verse 22 starts with Jesus saying "on that Day", of course referring to the day of Judgment. Paul tells the Corinthian church that "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" (2 Cor. 5:10). The storms that visit the two

houses that we just talked about are also pointers to this judgment. In the Old Testament the storm sometimes serves as a symbol for God's judgment, especially God's eschatological or final judgment (Carson). We as frail and short-sighted humans tend to most often and easily focus on what is in front of us, what we see every day. Our natural inclination is to think that life will continue as it has, and we make ourselves comfortable in our current surroundings. The reality is that life will not continue as it has. Life is very short and ultimately only a blink of an eye compared with eternity to come. If you are in Christ this morning or if you are not, this is something you'd do well to consider. If you are in Christ, you are looking forward to "that Day". That is the day when freed from sinning, we will see Jesus' face. We will be free from the sin and death that plagues this earth; we will be free to enjoy God unfettered. Take great hope in looking forward to that day. Live a life that demonstrates your hope is in eternity, not here on this earth.

If you are not in Christ this morning, take note that you too will one day face the Day of Judgment. You will stand before the throne of God without any perfect substitute, without anyone to answer on your behalf. You will stand condemned before an infinitely holy and righteous God with no answer to give as to why you have lived your entire life for your glory and not His. You have done nothing but hate God and His authority over you, wishing instead to be your own God, to be sovereign yourself. And this is an infinite offense against God that can only be punished by God pouring out his wrath upon you for eternity. Jesus' record in the Gospels speaks twice as much of hell as he does of heaven. Hell is real and God's wrath is very real.

Application

Let me conclude with two points of application for you to think about today. The first I hope is obvious: examine your heart. That is what Jesus is telling his hearers here at the end of the sermon. He warns earlier in the sermon that "the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few". Are you on the narrow, hard road this morning? Are you trusting Christ alone and his merits alone for your salvation? Or have you been deceived into believing that you can make a hollow profession or that you can work your way into pleasing God? We know the result for these people, that Jesus says he never knew them. Does Jesus know you this morning? Do you have a relationship with him? You may have learned a lot of the right Christian words to use, you may have learned the vocabulary, you may even read theological books. You may fool everyone on this earth, including yourself into thinking that you are a Christian. But you cannot fool God. Do you know Jesus and does He know you? Are you trusting alone in Him this morning? That is the only thing that matters.

The second point of application I'd like to make is for God's children specifically. I'd like to exhort you this morning to leave behind any forms of superficiality in your Christian walk. Consider your daily life, consider your witness that you cannot help but show to those lost souls around you. What does it say about what you believe will save your soul? The degree to which you pursue holiness, the degree to which you love Christ are demonstrated by what you do with your short time on this earth. My prayer for this church is that our witness would be purified, that our love for Christ alone would be increased and evident to all.