West Salem
BAPTIST CHURCH

Matthew: The King and His Kingdom

Series: The Manifesto of the King, Part 27: The Most Sobering Words Ever Spoken

Matthew 7:21-23 August 21, 2011 Pastor Nick Shaffer

Introduction: We are in the warning section of the Sermon on the Mount. The section of the sermon where Jesus is demanding a response to the words that He has just preached. Jesus is not merely interested that we hear what He has to say, or only that we grasp the content of his message, but also that we heed His words and respond to His teaching with faith and obedience. We come today to some of the most difficult words that Jesus ever said, some of the scariest and sobering words ever spoken by Jesus. Listen to them again: ""Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" (Matthew 7:21–23, ESV)

Jesus speaks these words deliberately to shake any notion of false assurance of salvation, to call all who are listening to Him to examine themselves and the condition of their souls and they are preserved for us for the same reason -- to examine if we are truly saved and if our lives bear evidence of true salvation and that Christ knows us. Jesus probably would not get a good grade in the preaching class at our modern seminaries. Unlike the majority of preachers in our own day who do all they can to avoid causing anyone to question their salvation, the Lord Jesus Christ is purposefully seeking, with His words, to destroy any false assurance in anyone who falsely believed that they were redeemed. Jesus' purpose is not to make people feel comfortable. He never encouraged anyone not to examine themselves in light of the truth, but rather encouraged the right evaluation of their soul's condition.

This stands in direct contrast to the modern depictions of Jesus Christ and the modern presentations of what is passed off as His gospel. The contemporary pattern of modern evangelism seems to be to give people a pleasant and an undemanding message and to lead

them through some simple procedure: get them to pray a prayer, sign a card, walk an aisle, check a box, raise a hand – whatever – and then tell the person that he is saved and should never, ever, no matter what question if they are saved and that if they do, that is just the devil talking. That kind of foolishness, in actuality, is a striving against God the Father whose ministry is to draw people to Christ the Son and it is a fighting against the Holy Spirit who ministry is to bring both assurance to those who are truly saved -- (Romans 8:16, ESV) – and conviction to those who are not saved -- (John 16:8–9, ESV) By way of contrast, none other than the Apostle Paul, a true prophet, a true teacher in the mold of the Lord Jesus Christ said: (2 Corinthians 13:5, ESV) The point being that we should examine ourselves on a regular basis to see if we pass the test – and Paul's hope is that we do.

Jesus is telling us in no uncertain terms that there are those – many, do you see that? not a few, not a handful, not hardly any, but many -- who claim to be Christians, who think themselves to be saved and to be bound for heaven when they die, who truly believe that they are saved people who, nevertheless, on the day of Judgment will find themselves banished from the presence of Christ with the words, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness, forever ringing in their ears. They, of all people, will be most unpleasantly surprised and forever grief-stricken. The very reason that we have these words from Jesus today is so that we will not experience the shocking discovery that we never belonged to Him on the Day of Judgment. He is telling us now, in advance of that day, that there are those who are deceived will be banished from His presence and He tells us what is required for us to be received by Him, in advance of the day, and He does this, church, because He is a merciful and gracious and compassionate and kind Savior and He is not willing that any of His people should perish. He wants us to rightly discern the condition of our souls before Him. Self-delusion is a danger for all of us. So even if these words seem hard and difficult to hear and you feel the desire in your flesh to turn away from what Christ has to say to us this morning, it is my sincere hope that you will not. Instead I pray that all of us will hear these words and examine our lives in light of them and allow them to reveal to us the true condition of our souls before God. As we look at these words, we need to see the setting of them.

1) The Setting: The Day of Days. Jesus sets these words on the Day of Days, the day when all things will be revealed, when all things will be judged in light of the glory of God and the truth of Christ and when all things will be put in their proper relationship to Him. He is setting His instruction in the light of the final judgment, that last great day when the hearts of all will be revealed – when some will enter into the everlasting joy of heaven and others will be sentenced to eternal hell. This is the day like no other, the day toward which all of human history is

progressing. Charles Spurgeon spoke accurately if this day when he called it "that terrible day, that last great day, that day for which all other days were made, that day by which all other days must be measured and judged." Jesus spoke of this day saying: (Matthew 25:31-34, 41, ESV) Notice, too, how he stresses the personal nature of the judgment as well. Jesus says the personal nature of it -- On that day many will say to me. This is a personal reckoning with a personal Christ. In light of the Day of Judgment, Jesus tells us this truth.

2) Not Everyone Who Believes They Are Saved Are Truly Saved. Jesus says in verse 21, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." It is not hard to understand what Jesus is saying here. Not everyone that claims to be a Christian or who calls Christ Lord will actually be saved. There are many for whom their words are worthless expressions of something that just is not true. They are false professions of faith in Christ as Lord. Get the picture of what Jesus is saying here. He is not speaking of atheists or Muslims or Buddhists who will come to the Day of Judgment and try to pull fast one on Jesus. These are people who, in life, have called Christ: 'Lord, Lord', and generally speaking have lived so-called nominal Christian lives. Jesus is telling us that on the Day of Days, the claim of being a Christian will mean absolutely nothing. Giving lip-service to Christ as Lord will mean nothing.

Don't misunderstand, it is right to call Christ Lord. Paul said in Romans 10:9ff, (Romans 10:9–11, ESV) Amen. Praise God, that is true. We must believe that Jesus of Nazareth is the indeed the Son of God, that He is the eternal Son of The Father, that He took on human flesh and dwelt among us, that He perfectly fulfilled the Law of God and that he lived a perfectly holy and righteous life. We must believe that He came forth from heaven by the will of the Father to suffer the wrath of Father God against the sin of all who would repent of sin and believe in Him for salvation and rose from the dead on the third day, and because of that He has been given a name that is above every other name – the name Lord – before whom all will one day bow to the glory of God the Father. To be a Christian is to trust our whole salvation, our entire eternal destiny, upon the Lord Jesus Christ. We must believe these things. We must confess Him as Lord.

Jesus is not banging on orthodox, accurate, right confessions of faith, but Jesus' point here is that this confession cannot be one of merely words, it must have substance to it. Talk is cheap. Anyone can talk a good game. That is why He says: 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. We'll unpack the last half of that verse in a minute, but clearly Jesus is making a point that there

is more to saving faith than just mere words – even theologically accurate words. Real saving faith has substance to it; that is what Jesus is explaining to us. Words, by themselves, are worthless. Just because someone claims to be a Christian does not make him or her one. Beloved, we must:

3) Beware False Foundations of Assurance. We must beware of false sources of confidence of salvation. Jesus sets the scene of what it will look like on the Day of Judgment. "On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness."

The Lord is telling us that there will be many, expecting to be received into heaven who will be turned away and they will protest of all that they did in the name of Christ. Some will say, "We prophesied in Your name – we preached, we did it for you sake and for you name." They will claim to have preached for the sake of the kingdom and the sake of Christ's glory. Many will expect because they preached or taught in Christ's name that because they did so they will enter the kingdom of heaven. They will point, perhaps, to their power to cast out demons the name of Christ or even to a host of mighty works or great endeavors, of ministry accomplishments and undertakings, great activities that should certainly pass as evidence of belonging to Christ and deserving heaven.

This is a terrifying word from Jesus. There will be people on the last day, religious people, people who claim to be Christians who claim to have prophesied in His name, to cast out demons in His name, to perform miracles in His name and they will say to Christ, "We did all of these things in Your name." They got results, they accomplished much in the name of Christ and so should rightfully expect to be received into the kingdom of heaven and yet despite all of this, He is going to say to them these horrifying words: I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. He will say these words to them because for all of their speaking and despite whatever extraordinary things they may be able to claim, Christ will reject them because their lives did not reflect, their lives had no evidence of the reality of the gospel of grace. They may confess Christ as Lord, but Christ will confess – that's the word here – that He never knew them. He never knew them as His sheep. (John 10:14, ESV) These are fearful words. They are terrifying words. These people were self-deluded and I have to tell you that same danger faces us. We have our own temptations regarding deceitful substitutes and sources of false confidence of salvation. Some will point to

Intellectual orthodoxy. Some people believe they are Christians because they have the right body of knowledge, they believe certain things. You can be absolutely correct in your belief about Christ's nature, the plan of redemption, the aspects of the atonement, the impact of the resurrection, the implications of his return. You can have read all of the latest books and have highly developed opinions regarding certain pastors and teachers. You can be an expert on all of the tenets or true Christianity. You can believe right things, you can love reformed theology, love church history, love apologetics – you can love all of those things and yet lack saving faith and its fruit.

Zeal and fervency. Zeal and fervency for the church, zeal and fervency perhaps to defend certain theological positions, the profound experience of emotions in worship, zealous and fervent proclamation of the truth -- you could have fought with heretics and still not be saved.

Spiritual experience. Some people will appeal to things that they have experienced or done in the past as their confidence regarding their spiritual state. They prayed a prayer once, or went forward during a revival, or felt some feeling, or spoke in tongues, or were baptized. They may even attach some significance to the preacher – it was a Billy Graham crusade or such and such led me in the prayer. Jesus does not appeal to any of these things here in this text today.

Church work. There are people who will take confidence in the positions of service they have held in the church – elder, deacon, Sunday School teacher, choir member, praise team, band, missionary, children's worker, student ministry, care ministry, or trips they have been on, or things they have done in the church, money they have given. None of these things by themselves indicates real salvation.

Well-crafted reputation. Merely having the appearance and the reputation of being a Christian, of being a follower of Christ, is no guarantee that it's true. The issue is not what people may think of you. The Pharisees had a reputation as godly men but they were the farthest things from it. Having a well-crafted reputation of being a faithful follower of Christ, of being a godly man or woman is no guarantee of salvation. Reputation is not always reality.

Well-defined morality. Some people think they are Christians because they have a very highly developed sense of right and wrong, because they have a clear idea of what is acceptable and what isn't. a moral code, or even a legalistic code that they follow. But morality by itself is no evidence that you are a child of God. On the contrary, I like what Spurgeon says about this: Morality is a neat cover for foul venom, but it does not alter the fact that the heart is vile, and the man himself is under damnation. Men will be damned with good works as well as without them, if they make them their confidence (rather than Jesus Christ).

Causes you support or oppose. There is the danger of thinking that you are a Christian because of the causes that you support – prayer in school, the teaching of Creation, feeding the hungry, helping the poor. Maybe you oppose abortion, social injustice, racism, socialism, the teaching of evolution –none of those things are evidences of salvation.

Christian legacy. Some find their security in the fact that they come from a long line of Christians or were raised in church and see that as reason for confidence with God.

Certain relationships. If you are tight with Christians, tight with the pastor, etc., then you must be saved.

Beloved, some of these things may well be evident in the life of a true believer, of a true disciple, of an authentic child of God. Some of these things may indeed be evident, and should be evident, in the life of someone who is truly saved, but none of them by themselves are any reason for confidence and assurance before Christ. If that is the case, then what is? Jesus tells us. That is what I want us to see last --

4) Behold the Proper Foundation for Assurance

Jesus tells us that proper foundation for assurance of salvation and that proper foundation is composed of two things – doing the will of the Father in heaven and knowing and being known by Christ.

Jesus says: 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. And when he sends the false disciples away He says: 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. So we see these two key concepts joined together – knowing and being known by Christ and doing the will of the Father in heaven. How are we to understand the relationship of these two?

Well, they are really just two sides of the same coin. The foundational issue here is that we know and are known by Christ. This is a word that speaks of personal intimate knowledge. Knowing Christ and being known by Christ speaks of and intimate personal knowledge, the knowledge of relationship. To know Christ is not just knowing stories about Him, or having a general concept about what He has done, it is not to be well versed in theology. Knowing Christ is something far deeper.

The sense of the word that is translated as "to know" speaks of a permanence, a continuity of relationship -- "to know, to become acquainted with, to be familiar with, and to grow in knowledge of." That's the idea. That's why the Bible says that "Adam knew Eve", not because it is too shy to speak openly about sexual matters, but because this is what knowledge between persons is. Deep, intimate union.

Beloved, you get to know Christ through a supernatural encounter with the living In Lord himself. When you believe and receive that he is the only Son of God who died on the cross for your sins and has risen from the dead and you submit your life to him. In John chapter 6, Jesus told is hearers what the will of God was for them: (John 6:28–29, ESV) This is the work of God – that we believe in His Son. That we know Christ – really know Him. Saving faith, knowing Christ is not just a moment in time transaction with no continuing effects. Real saving faith is real personal trust and knowledge of and relationship with the Christ whom you love because He first loved you and give His life as the propitiation for your sins. It is a relationship of love. That is the first side of the coin – knowing Christ and the second is doing the will of the Father.

In other words, unlike the false professors, who lives do not show any real evidence of saving faith, the one who knows Christ, really knows Him as Savior and Lord – his life will show it. We are saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ, but once in that relationship of faith and trust and love with Christ, we know we know Christ by the way that we live in obedience to Him. The Apostle John said: (1 John 2:3–6, ESV)

The Lord Jesus Christ is saying to us here that those who truly profess Jesus are not simply those who profess Him verbally but those who profess Him with lives. Grace not only saves us from the penalty of sin, it changes our hearts and lives and desires and will. The proper foundation for assurance, the way we know that we truly belong to Christ is that we truly know Christ by faith and long to know Him better and more and that our lives are characterized by obedience to the will of God.

What does that life look like? Jesus has just described it. Look back with me – start in the beatitudes ... Are you seeing these things in your life? True salvation, Jesus says, produces these things in us.

DA Carson's words are so helpful here: It is true, of course, that no man enters the kingdom because of his obedience; but it is equally true that no man enters the kingdom who is not obedient. It is true that men are saved by God's grace through faith in Christ; but it is equally true that God's grace in a man's life inevitably results in obedience. Any other view of grace cheapens grace, and turns it into something unrecognizable. Cheap grace preaches forgiveness without repentance, church membership without rigorous church discipline, discipleship without obedience, blessing without persecution, joy without righteousness, results without obedience. In the entire history of the church, has there ever been another generation with so many nominal Christians and so few real (i.e., obedient) ones?

Beloved, these words from Jesus are sobering words. Listen to them again: ""Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" (Matthew 7:21–23, ESV)

5) Application

I think the application here is very clear, isn't it? it is a call to examine our lives in relationship to Christ. Is your profession nominal or is it real? This passage calls for each of us to examine ourselves. Of course we see our sinfulness and inadequacy. None of us finds perfection. Jesus is not speaking of sinless perfectionism here. But can you honestly see that your desire and practice is to do the will of God, which are the commands He has given to us in His Word?

Jesus says, look at your life, are you living under His lordship? Does the fruit of the Spirit reign in your life? Is the bent of your life a kingdom bent? Beloved, I have had to really examine my own life, my own heart as we have been working our way through this sermon. These words have been hard. They have been pointed, but I am thankful for them and thankful for the way they have caused me to examine myself. It is necessary and it is good. It is possible to backslide. It is possible for love to grow cold. It is possible to fall into sin. It is also possible to falsely profess Christ and to never have truly experienced the salvation of Christ. But the answer for both is repentance at the foot of the cross.

The answer for both is to come in repentance and confession to Christ – to come in faith and humility. Jesus is a Savior who delights in saving and forgiving and receiving sinners.

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