

Matthew 7:21-23 – “The Danger of Delusion”

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Intro: Ever since verse 13 Jesus has been warning His disciples about the possibility of missing the kingdom and their need for self-examination. Had they entered by the Narrow Gate? Were they bearing good fruit? Implicit in His warnings is the possibility that some who claim to be His disciples will be found to be false on the day of His return. He continued this theme as He spoke the three verses before us tonight, warning His disciples of the danger of self-delusion. As one commentator noted, these are among the most frightening verses in the whole New Testament. As we read these, we tremble, first for the possibility that some we love may be left outside on that day; and again, asking ourselves the question, “Could I also be one of them?” Let’s pay careful attention to our Lord’s teaching tonight as He speaks to us about “The Danger of Delusion.”

Proposition: Saying the right things and doing the right things is not enough to enter the Kingdom of God; only being known by Jesus will assure our presence in His Kingdom.

Each verse of our study tonight will reveal a facet of Jesus’ warning: (v.21) Saying What is Right is Not Enough; (v.22) Doing What is Right is Not Enough; (v.23) Being Known by Jesus is Enough.

(v.21) Saying What is Right is Not Enough – Jesus warned His disciples against choosing the wrong gate, wrong pathway and wrong destiny in verses 13-14, and He warned them again in verses 15-20 to be on guard against false prophets. In the verses before us tonight, He warned them, and us, against the possibility of false assurance. Not everyone who seems to be a Christian will enter His Kingdom: **Matthew 7:21 - 21** *“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.”* Here we have people who say the right things about Jesus, and even seem to be saying it with passion! To call Jesus, “Lord,” is certainly right theology, for He is Lord indeed. The people Jesus is speaking of are making an oral confession of His Lordship; they believe in some sense that He is who the Scriptures claim Him to be. They would not hesitate to confess that Jesus is God’s only begotten Son. They would cheerfully affirm that He died on Calvary to save us from our sins. They seem to joyfully anticipate His prophesied return. And they do all of this with enthusiasm, not just saying, “Lord,” but “Lord, Lord!” They are saying and holding intellectually to the truth about Jesus. What in the world could be wrong with this? But something obviously is wrong, for Jesus said, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven.”* Here we have a heavenly conundrum: All who enter the Kingdom of Heaven will say these things: but not all who say these things will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus went on to further explain: *the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven,”* will be acceptable to enter His Kingdom. We’ll discuss this in depth next week when we come to verses 24-27, but for tonight let’s simply make three observations that emerge from Christ’s words:

- It is possible to put our faith in faith instead of putting our faith in Christ. Some people miss the essential fact of Christianity: that faith is not trusting a set of facts, it is trusting Jesus. True Christian faith is to trust a Person: Jesus, not a system of beliefs or a doctrinal scheme. People who fall into this error make much of doctrine for doctrine’s sake. They are often fixated on a particular system of belief (ex.: Calvinism, Arminianism), denomination (Baptist, Catholic, Methodist, etc.), or even a local assembly. They are sometimes consumed with a particular aspect of doctrine, such as prophecy. These allegiances are often considered crucial for salvation among this type of person. “If you

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don't accept Dispensationalism, I doubt if you are really saved!" Such people are not trusting Jesus; their faith is in faith itself and that faith is based on an insufficient foundation. Saving faith is faith in a Person, not a Program.

- Great enthusiasm for right doctrine is not positively a sign of true regeneration. Some people are excited at the thought that they possess some special knowledge that others lack. They enjoy being the most knowledgeable person in the room when it comes to religious matters. They feel a sense of superiority that is invigorating, and they are desperately opposed to anyone who questions their opinion in matters of faith. The Apostle Paul was one of these fellows before his conversion! Saving faith is a Person, not a Passion.
- Obedience to God's will is the test of true faith in Christ. Genuine belief is always accompanied by genuine obedience. Holiness of life is a sign of holiness of heart. We need not exposit this in depth because we dealt with it in verses 15-20, but we can simply say at this point that, trees produce fruit after their kind. **Matthew 7:17 - 17** *So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.* When a heart has genuinely experienced regeneration it will produce the fruit of a godly life and a godly character, doing all that Jesus commands to the best of its ability. Saving faith in a Christian always results in Christ-like behavior and character in the believer. This is why Jesus said, *"The one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven,"* will enter the Kingdom of Heaven.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Saying what is right isn't enough. Faith in a person, in Jesus, will always result in obedience to God's will and that is the true test of a regenerate heart and readiness for the Kingdom.

(v.22) Doing What is Right is Not Enough – Ironically, having established that principle, Jesus immediately pointed out that not everyone who seemed to be doing His will was necessarily headed for the Kingdom either: **Matthew 7:22 - 22** *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?'* Here Jesus spoke about people who said the right thing, and even seemed to be doing the right thing – wonderful things! And yet on the day of His return, He would declare them false believers (cf. v.23). *"That day,"* will show who was true and who among those who profess faith in Christ were false. And it's quite a frightening prospect: *"Many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord,'"* – not just a few will be found to be false in that day. These will offer their work for Christ as testimony to the genuineness of their profession. They say, "We preached in your name; we cast out demons in your name; we did miracles in your name." Note this well: Jesus did not deny that these people had actually done the things they claimed to do. Apparently, they would actually do the things they claimed to do in His name. What does this tell us?

- It is possible to preach the gospel accurately, powerfully, and with real results, and still remain outside the Kingdom of God. God sometimes does a converting work through His Word, even though the instrument through which it works is impure. Preaching with results is not necessarily a sign of genuine regeneration in the preacher (cf. Philippians 1:15-18).
- It is possible to exercise spiritual power and still remain outside the Kingdom of God. "Preaching, casting out demons, and performing miracles can be divinely inspired, but they

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give no assurance of salvation. It is likely that even Judas participated in some or all of these activities, and yet he was not a true believer.”¹ (cf. Luke 9:1-2,6; 10:17-20).

- It is possible to do miraculous works and still remain outside the Kingdom of God. How are we to account for these things being done at the hands of those who are not regenerate? Lloyd-Jones gives us a word: “These people will be able to say to Him that in His name they have done ‘many wonderful works’ – works of power, miracles, amazing things, almost incredible things.... In other words, a man may be able to point to great results such as healings and so on, and yet they may signify nothing.... The natural power of man can simulate the gifts of the Holy Spirit, up to a point. And, of course, we are reminded by Scripture that God, in His own inscrutable will, sometimes decides to give these powers to men who do not belong to Him in order to bring to pass His own purposes.... Above all we must remember the power of the devil.”²

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Doing what is right isn’t enough. Many will produce impressive deeds, but Christ will disavow them as His in that day if they have no personal knowledge of Him.

Let’s make this perfectly clear: All who belong to Christ will say the right things and do the right things; but not all who say the right things and do the right things belong to Christ. The day of Jesus coming will reveal the truth of what is in everyone’s heart, so Jesus calls all who claim to be His followers to self-examination in readiness for that day.

(v.23) Being Known by Jesus is Enough – Jesus made it clear in this verse that the one necessary qualification for entering His Kingdom was to be known by Him: **Matthew 7:23 - 23** *And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’* From this verse we see a crucial truth with clarity: Only those known by the Lord will be allowed to enter the Kingdom. How can it be that someone could come so close to the truth – preaching the truth; casting out demons; performing mighty acts of spiritual power – yet still remain in an unregenerate condition? Lloyd-Jones gives us the answer, saying, “In many ways the root trouble, even among good Evangelicals, is our failure to heed the plain teaching of Scripture. We accept what Scripture teaches as far as our doctrine is concerned; but when it comes to practice, we very often fail to take the Scriptures as our only guide.... If you want to avoid terrible disillusionment at the day of judgment, face Scripture as it is.”³ Remember Jesus’ words in verse 21? **Matthew 7:21 - 21** *“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.* It’s the one who DOES the will of His Father whom He knows and permits into His Kingdom. It’s the one who takes His Word seriously. Now pair that verse with this verse from **John 6:40 - 40** *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.”* What is the Father’s will that must be done in order for anyone to enter the Kingdom of God? It is to believe whole-heartedly on His Son, and only on His Son. “The one thing that matters is our relationship to Christ. He is the Judge, and it is what he thinks about us that matters.”⁴ What the Scriptures tell us is not that we must preach the right doctrines or perform the right acts of power in order to be

¹ Wiersbe, Warren. Pg. 31.

² Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. Pg. 269.

³ Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. Pg. 280.

⁴ Lloyd-Jones, Martyn. Pg. 280.

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saved, but that we must know His Son if we would be saved. Of course, when we know the Son we will preach the right doctrines and do the right works. But some people are so busy getting their doctrines right and their deeds right that they completely miss the Son! Religion becomes their god; Jesus is left to the side. This is self-delusion at its highest level. Jesus must be at the center of our lives, He must know us and we must know Him if we are to enter His Kingdom.

[DOCTRINAL POINT] Being known by Jesus is enough. Our faith must be in Him; not in His doctrines or in our works for Him. Our faith must be in Him alone.

[ILLUSTRATION] Someone has said that, “The main thing, is to keep the main thing, the main thing.” Today, many who call themselves Christians have set the main thing aside. Many think good doctrine is the main thing. Good doctrine is essential, but it’s not the main thing. Others think that demonstrations of the Spirit’s power are the main thing. Demonstrations of the Spirit’s power are needed, but they are not the main thing. Some think the Church is the main thing. Christ will build His Church, but the Church is not the main thing. Knowing and being known by Jesus is the main thing, and whenever anything else, no matter how lovely and good it may be, takes the place He should have, we are in trouble. That is why Jesus gave us this warning.

[APPLICATION] These closing verses of the Sermon on the Mount are a call to self-examination. How horrible it would be to find out on the Day of the Lord that you have been deceiving yourself about your true condition. Is Jesus your all in all? Is He increasingly real in your experience? Is your love for Him growing day by day? Are your thoughts turning more and more to Him? Do you know the sweetness of His presence as you meditate on Scripture and meet Him at the throne of Grace? If anything is more important to you than Jesus, examine yourself! Seek His face. Find time to be in His presence. Don’t trust your knowledge or your acts of service alone. Nothing less than the Savior Himself will do on that day.

Conclusion: When Jesus would visit the town of Bethany, He often turned aside to spend time in the home of Martha, Mary and Lazarus. On one occasion, you recall, Martha busied herself getting supper ready, while Mary sat listening at the feet of Jesus. Martha fussed at Jesus about this. Somehow, Mary’s neglect of the kitchen was Jesus’ fault in her thinking! “Tell my sister to help me,” she commanded. But Jesus only replied, **Luke 10:41–42 – 41** *“Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her.”* There are many things that we might pay attention to in the Christian life, but only one thing is necessary: it is to sit at the feet of Jesus. May the day of His coming find each one of us sitting at His feet, known by Him and knowing Him as our Savior.