

Did Jesus Really Say That?

8. Do I Know You?

December 13, 2020

The pandemic made 2020 a stressful year, but people have found ways to laugh at it.

- Earlier in the spring, one guy tweeted: “Day #2 without sports: “I found a young lady sitting on my couch today. Apparently she’s my wife. She seems nice.”
- “I’m not talking to myself, I’m having a parent-teacher conference.”
- “My husband purchased a world map and then gave me a dart and said, ‘Throw this and wherever it lands—that’s where I’m taking you when this pandemic ends.’ Turns out, we’re spending two weeks behind the fridge.”

The day *is* coming when this pandemic will be history and we will be able to travel again. Maybe you’ll feel like getting away to Florida. You might daydream about the beaches, so you pack your sunscreen and swim suit. But if you get on I-79 and head north, you will be end up in Erie, not Ft. Lauderdale. Andy Stanley calls this the “Principle of the Path.” That is: Direction, not intention, determines where you end up in life. We might *want* to be financially free, but if we spend more than we earn every month, we’ll fall into debt instead. It’s the principle of the path.

It is possible to desire one future yet be on a path to something different. After the New Year, some of us might *want* to lose some weight. But that won’t make any difference in what the scale says. If we want to weigh less, we need to adjust our eating and exercise habits. The path we take in life, not our intention, determines where we end up in life.

Jesus told us the same thing. Today we come to the conclusion of our series on Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount. If you have your app or your Bible you can turn with me to Matthew 7. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus describes what it looks like to live as his follower. In Matthew 7 Jesus finishes his sermon by pointing us to a *simple path* toward the Kingdom of God. This path leads to a life where God is in charge, which is a life in which...

- ...we know God deeply
- ...we experience his favor and see him at work in our lives
- ...we become more like Jesus and stumble less into self-destructive sin
- ...and best of all, a life that ends up in heaven, where we enjoy eternal life with God forever.

Most people I know would like a life and future like that. And Jesus finishes his Sermon pointing out the way – the path there. Jesus not only tells us about the rewards

of following this path, he also vividly illustrates what happens when we don't follow that path.

Matthew 7:13-14 *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.*

Following the crowd might like a sound safe path. It is easy to think, “I’ll just do what most of the people I know are doing; all these people can’t be wrong!” But Jesus says “Oh yes they can!” There is a path that leads to life, and Jesus clearly points us to it. He talked about that path in the Sermon on the Mount. He demonstrated the path in his own life. But he said that many people will choose to follow a different path. Jesus said that many people will be surprised about where their path leads.

Matthew 7:21-23 *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!*

Jesus is saying that many will be surprised at the end of their lives. They thought they were going to be with God, but they’ll end up some place else. They were sincere in their belief, but they were sincerely wrong. They thought they were on the right path for two reasons:

1. They claimed to be Christ-followers. They said, “Lord, Lord” to Jesus. In other words, they declared that they believed in Jesus. And they didn’t just say the words...

2. They ministered powerfully *‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’*

If I saw people doing miracles, casting demons out of people, and speaking prophetically for God, I’m sure I would have thought, “Wow, they are sold-out followers of Jesus; they have eternal life for sure.” And yet, Jesus said **v. 23** *Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!* Jesus doesn’t deny that these people prophesied and did miracles in his name. But he surprised them by sending them away saying “I never knew you.” Being used by God is not the same thing as belonging to God. Skye Jethani went through the Bible and compiled a partial list of **Things/People used by God:**

- Frogs
- Murderers
- Donkeys
- Snakes

- Pagan kings
- Traitors
- Prostitutes
- Locusts
- Mud
- Corrupt politicians
- Worms
- Fish

It's pretty obvious that God can use anyone or anything, and he often does. What counts in the end is not whether God used us, but whether Jesus knew us.

When Jesus was training his disciples, one day he sent them out to minister to people. They came back super excited because they cast demons out of people. They were all fired up over that. But Jesus told them not to be. In **Luke 10:20** Jesus said: *do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.* What matters most is not what we *do* for Jesus, but whether we *know* Jesus in a personal way. That is the path to life.

Jesus tells us the difference between people who know him and people who don't: *v. 21: Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.* This is the indicator of whether we know Jesus: we do what God wants. It's not those who SAY "Jesus is Lord" who receive life; it is those who OBEY Jesus as Lord.

We obey not INSTEAD of calling Jesus Lord, but as proof we do.

We obey not INSTEAD of ministering to people's needs, obeying God leads us to serve others.

Obedience to Jesus is the essential indicator that we have submitted our lives to God – that he is Lord. It shows that we want HIS kingdom to come, his will to be done. That's why at Crossroads' we define a Disciple = one who loves and obeys Jesus. In Matthew 28:19-20 Jesus tells us, *go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.*

Simply believing in Jesus does not make us disciples. It is true that we need to believe because we won't obey what we don't believe. But just believing is not enough. Just hearing his teaching and agreeing with it is not enough. Those who are on the path with Jesus do what he says. That's why our church hears Bible teaching at worship on the weekends, then in our small groups that week we focus on how to apply what we've heard. We provide a group guide with several questions, but they are all a variation on these two:

#1 "What is God saying to you in this text?"

#2 "What are you going to do about it?"

That's it. Discipleship is pretty simple: hear what Jesus says and do it. That leads to adventure and growth. And that is a lot more exciting than just a discussion. These days I am reading the Bible with several other guys. Each time, we tell each other what we sense God telling us to do. Then the next week, we ask "How did it go with what you were going to do?" That is leading to growth in my life.

Knowledge about the Bible can be a good thing --- I have a doctorate, so I value knowledge. But knowledge won't help us if we never do anything about it. **James 1:22** *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.* Spiritually, it doesn't matter how much we know about Jesus, it matters whether Jesus knows us. And the indicator that Jesus is our Lord is whether we do what he says. It can be sobering to hear that we can believe that we are on the path to life and be wrong. But don't stress. The reason Jesus is telling us is so that we are not surprised.

Jesus drives the point home by concluding with a parable – which is a story with a point. **Matthew 7:24-27** *²⁴“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. ²⁵The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. ²⁶But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”* Two houses look the same. They both go through the same storms. But one is destroyed while the other holds strong. The difference lies beneath the surface – one has a foundation of sand and one has a foundation of rock. Skye Jethani asks: What does the rock represent in the parable?

- a) correct theology
- b) the Church
- c) Jesus
- d) Obedience to Jesus' commands

If you chose “d” – you got what Jesus is saying.

Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount by emphasizing that he really expects us to do what he says. He isn't just giving us some utopian ideas he knows we can't live up to. He wasn't talking theory – he was pointing to the path to life in the Kingdom of God. The reality is none of us stay on the path perfectly all the time. So does that mean we are going to hear Jesus say, “Be gone?” No – we are saved by grace when we yield to Jesus as Lord. And obeying Jesus is about the trajectory of our lives – our direction. Obedience is not about how perfectly we walk the path, it is about our pursuit of Jesus.

One of the most exciting moments for a young parent is the day their children take their first steps. When you think about it, a child's first steps are not very graceful. They are not confident. They fall down. A lot. Why do parents get so excited over such an imperfect performance? Because those first steps mean their child is growing. Those steps are just the beginning of a whole new stage of life. Their son or daughter might fall down after every 3 steps today, but the parent knows it won't be long until they will be

able to walk together. They know it is just a matter of time until their children are running and having a blast playing with other kids.

Our spiritual steps following Jesus are not always graceful. Maybe we fall into old habits or sin. But if we are learning to follow and pursue Jesus our heavenly father responds to our uncertain steps of spiritual growth the same way a parent does to their child's first steps. He is delighted and encourages us to get up and try again each time we fall.

We stay on the path by repentance

When we wander off Jesus' path, the key is to "repent." To repent means to change our mind and go a different direction. **Matthew 4:17** records the content of Jesus's earliest preaching: *"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven has come near."* "Repent" was literally the first word of Jesus' preaching. He is saying "Change direction – get on my path instead of yours." When we do, he shows us mercy. He will forgive and restore us, helping us to get back on the path again.

We each know what it is like for storms to hit. We're all going through a storm called Covid right now. Maybe you are also going through some other storms as well. It isn't fun. Yet, as you keep saying "yes" to Jesus, your house won't crash. In fact, you are getting stronger. Whether you feel it or not, following Jesus through this year has made you more resilient as you trust in him. That is going to position you well for the future. Keep saying "yes" to Jesus and your foundation in life will hold. And in the end the Lord will welcome you with open arms.