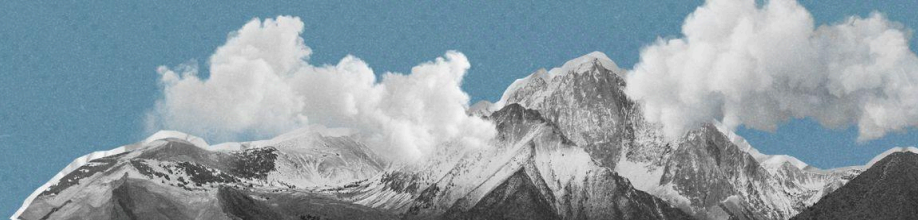


THE GOSPEL OF MATTHEW



Believing and Doing **Matthew 7:21-29**

Let's start by reading today's passage. These are the words of Jesus, the last words of the Sermon on the Mount:

Matthew 7:[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. [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?’ [23] And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’[24] “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. [25] And 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. [26] And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. [27] And 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.”[28] And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, [29] for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.

These are obviously some heavy words, some of the hardest sayings of Jesus. This passage brings up some questions that we're going to have to look at here: questions about how we are saved, or forgiven and granted access to heaven - it seems at first like Jesus might be saying that you are

saved by hearing and doing (verse 24). That brings up other questions about our assurance: can a Christian be sure they'll still be ok and be on the right side of this coming judgment? Can we know for sure we are Christians?

These are important questions for us to look at.

So today we'll tackle the main theme of this passage: how we are and aren't made Christians. And just because there won't be enough time to do it all justice today we will have a conversation about how we can know or whether we can know for sure we're Christians - the assurance of salvation - on the midweek podcast this week.)

But one big risk when we look at a passage like this is we treat it like an interesting passage, and we look for answers to some controversial questions, but we miss the weight of the whole thing.

There was a story in the news a few years ago about a woman who researched cures for rare diseases for a living. Her days were probably spent looking at samples under a microscope, data in a spreadsheet, and heading home at 5. But then on a trip to the Nile, her husband came down with the kind of rare disease she studied. And that changed everything.

Because now it wasn't just a sample in a petri dish, it was a deadly disease taking over her husband's body. The data became life and death. And she scrambled and worked and eventually found the right combination of drugs to cure her husband. But the job ceased to be a 9 to 5 when someone she loved was diagnosed, and the job couldn't be sealed in one compartment of her life anymore.

And a risk for us as we read a passage that is difficult theologically is that we just analyze. That verses become samples under a microscope, and theology becomes only disconnected facts. We look at the *data* in the bible, we look at the *interesting* texts under our microscopes, but it all remains

sterile and when we clock out of church at the end of the morning, it doesn't affect much. We walk away saying, "That was interesting" at best, or "that was boring" at worst.

So we need the Spirit of God to illuminate this for us. This is real, so we don't ask Him to make this real - it's real whether we feel it or not. But we do need to ask Him to make us feel how real this is, to enable us to experience the weight of it, to really believe it. To open our eyes to this, to cause us to tremble appropriately at this, to respond accordingly.

>>>>PRAY

Jesus here is describing a day when He will judge the world. Now we might read right past that part of this story, Jesus is judging and deciding who is and who is not coming into heaven. But the people who heard him would have been shocked. Because he was describing, not the judgment God would carry out with Jesus in the stand with everyone else, but the judgment JESUS would carry out. So He is putting Himself in the place of God here.

If I were to say to you, "If you do that I'm not going to let you into heaven," you'd hopefully say, "You don't have that authority!"

So (to cover the last two verses first), Jesus putting Himself in the place of God and judge on judgment day is probably one of the many reasons for verses 28 and 29:

Matthew 7:28-29 "[28] And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, [29] for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes."

I'm sure the style was different - the scribes would cite sources and teachers and scholars to say why they think certain things, Jesus didn't cite any of

them. Just the Bible and his authoritative interpretation of it. He made clear claims of saying what the Bible really meant - "that command not to murder, that applies to the heart: don't be angry without cause."

And then when He describes a day when we are judged, He says He will be the one doing the judging. He is claiming a level of authority no good scribe or religious leader would ever claim: He is not only a teacher of the law of God, but the giver of the law, the judge of the heart, and He'll be enthroned as judge on what He calls "that day" in verse 22, judgment day.

And its important that the sermon on the mount ends with this talk of coming judgment. Jesus gives this teaching and says, "I will judge whether you lived this way." Jesus isn't just some good teacher dude that had some really profound wisdom, but the one who knows hearts, knows our lives, knows all things, and will judge. To know all of that He must be God Himself.

So on that authority, he He tells us how that day will go - look at verse 21:

Matthew 7:[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.

So Jesus here holds out a distinction between those who *say* and those who *do*. There will be many who say to Jesus on that day, "Lord Lord," but will not enter heaven, and instead those who do the will of the Father will enter. (Now all this talk of "doing" to get into heaven should bring up a big question - don't we believed we are saved by the cross of Jesus and faith in Him, not by our works? Yes - but it'll be about 5 more pages of sermon until we get there, so let's just keep that question on the back burner for a few minutes.)

So notice what they're saying.

They seem to know who Jesus is, that He is the Lord. Now the word Lord by itself could just mean “sir,” it isn’t necessarily an expression of His deity. But it could be an expression of His deity. And here, they see Jesus on the judgment throne and they seem to think He’s right to be there. They don’t say, “You don’t have any right to judge us!” They say, at least, “sir” and probably “Master” to Jesus who is judging.

So it seems their theology is right. They know who The Judge is.

And they are not just saying “Lord,” but “Lord, Lord.” And when a word was used twice, it was to add emotion and emphasis. When Jesus prayed, “*My God, My God,*” from the cross, it was to pack the phrase with passion and emotion. When David cried, “My son, my son”¹ over his son Absalom that had died, he was crying out with intensity.²

They said, “Lord, Lord,” they expressed knowledge of who He was and a corresponding emotion. But they were rejected because it isn’t those who say the right things, or feel the right things, but the ones who do the will of the Father in heaven who are accepted.

Their daily doing didn’t line up with the profession of their faith. They said the right things, but didn’t do them. (To use the metaphor from last week’s passage, their lives bore bad fruit.) There was nothing wrong with what they were saying, but their lives didn’t match it.

There will be many on that day who say all the right things about Jesus but who do not enter the kingdom of heaven. So we don’t go to heaven by making a profession alone. It isn’t just by our verbal confession.

But He goes on:

¹ 2 Samuel 18:33

² I believe I heard the idea of this paragraph from a Tim Keller sermon.

Matthew 7:[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?’

According to His words here, **many** church people will not be welcomed into his kingdom, but will instead hear the terrifying words “Depart from me, I never knew you.”

And it seems in this passage it will catch them by surprise. They will go marching in with their heads held high, and their spiritual resumes are loaded with accomplishments, every Christian merit badge on their vests, and they will be surprised that their lifetime of Christian service doesn’t get them in.

There will be a lot of church people who spent their lives doing things in the name of Jesus who will be rejected by Jesus at the judgment.

They will say, “Lord, we did mighty, spectacular, works in your name.” We prophesied - we preached in the name of Jesus. We cast out demons. Lives were changed as a result of our service. So surely, those spectacular works are our ticket in!

Matthew 7:23 [23] And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

They did many big things for God. But they were workers of lawlessness. Their day to day lives didn’t reflect the will of the Father, only their showy religious lives did. They did big works to be seen by people and received their reward. But when it came to what only God saw, they were still evil.

So there will be many who are all in on the Christian movement, whose lives revolve around church, who go on the missions trips, give to the campaigns,

preach the sermons, never miss a Sunday, see big results, but are not known by the Lord.

And again, don't let this be just data.

The people who are most at risk of fitting this description are the people who are the most involved in church and Christian activities. They know the facts, they are involved in the programs. They get big things done. But He doesn't know them.

So it seems that, for us, there will be a lot of surprises on that day.

We get little tastes of this as we go through life. Any time a Christian leader is revealed to be living a double life here on earth, it is surprising. It isn't necessarily surprising what they do, it's surprising who does it. We think, "Really, him too?" And these little exposures, these little judgment days here on earth, when we are surprised by who isn't real, are just a small sample of what that day will be like. There will be some big Christian names that don't make it.

There's a difference between doing big outward things for show and really following the commands of Jesus.

It's so easy to do the big outward things: start a program, lead something, preach, sing, build ministries, but when push comes to shove, not be willing to follow the commands of Christ.

We talk a good game, but in the end, we are just "Meatloaf Christians." We say, "I would do anything for love, but I won't do that."

So we'll get involved in the programs and sing the songs. So we sing about how our hearts are abandoned to Jesus. Then Jesus says what He says in the sermon on the mount. For example:

Matthew 5:23-24 “So if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there before the altar and go. First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

And we say, “But I won’t do that. I’ll volunteer for some ministry programs.”

Matthew 5:32 “But I say to you that everyone who divorces his wife, except on the ground of sexual immorality, makes her commit adultery...

And we say, “I’m a follower of Jesus, but I won’t be kind to my spouse or fight for my marriage.”

Matthew 5:44 “But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

I’m too proud for that.

We can say, “Lord, Lord,” but if there’s not an effort to live out the commands of the sermon on the mount, we should stop pretending He’s our Lord!

He goes on to say there’s a difference between hearing and doing:

Matthew 7:[24] “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. [25] And 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. [26] And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. [27] And 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.

So now there's a contrast between those who hear and do, and those who hear and do not do.

There are fake Christians and real Christians. And, for awhile, they look the same. You could walk by the house built on the sand and the house built on the rock, on a nice sunny day, and they'd look about the same. The one on the sand might even be preferable - it's beachfront property.

The difference isn't evident until the storm comes. Jesus isn't contrasting here people who claim to be Christians and people who do not claim to be Christians. They look very different, hopefully - you can see very different builds of those houses. He is contrasting here real Christian and fake ones. And, for awhile, they look similar.

They're learning the same things. Both groups hear the words of Jesus, so they're both part of the visible Christian community. They're in church, reading their bibles, hearing the words of Jesus.³ And both houses look the same until the storm reveals what they're truly built on.

Sometimes small storms happen in this life and reveal whose life is built on the rock. There are often little judgment days along the way. But everybody eventually faces the ultimate test at His throne.

So right doctrine doesn't get you to heaven. Passionate affirmation of Jesus doesn't get you to heaven. Spectacular religious results don't mean you're a Christian. Lots of Christian activity, serving in ministry, even successfully doesn't mean you're His.

So it is no stretch of this passage to say that many, here, will say on that day,

³ Stott, John. *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount (The Bible Speaks Today Series)* (p. 227). InterVarsity Press. Kindle Edition.

“Lord, we went to Grace Road. We learned the Bible - we really cared about the Bible at that church. We understood the gospel. Our services were centered on Christ, the Bible was open. We gave in your name. We worked and served - we accepted the stress of ministry involvement, we gave our time, we ran the programs, we taught in your name. We went on missions trips on our breaks from school and served the city. We sang. We even pastored.”

And He will say, “Depart from me, I never knew you, you workers of lawlessness.”

Learning and being involved in the church community doesn't get you there.

In fact, those things can all numb you to your need for Jesus.

They can convince you you're OK. You hear it in the words of these people on judgment day: “Lord, Lord, DID we not prophesy. Did we not DO mighty works” (22). They were trusting that the things they did would force God's hand and punch their ticket into glory.

Beware of thinking that being a true Christian is just about being involved in outward activity. Beware of thinking that your doing big things gets you in. You can do the big outward stuff and not know Christ!

Read the words of the older brother in the story of the prodigal son - the good brother, the one who didn't run away, and who was convinced he was acceptable as a son because of his works. He needed to learn and experience the love of the Father as much as the prodigal did.

So these people come, claiming they did big things to get into heaven.

And if we're protestants, we'd expect Jesus to say, "It is not your work that gets you here, it's faith. You never believed, you just trusted in your works, so depart from me. It's by grace through faith you're saved, not your doing!"

But Jesus doesn't exactly say that. He doesn't contradict that, but He gives a surprising answer.

Jesus *seems* to say throughout these paragraphs that the way to enter into heaven is by doing good:

Matthew 7:[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....

[23] And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

[24] "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.

...[26] And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.

It sure seems that the way to stand on judgment day is to DO the right works. Do the will of the Father, do the works of the law, do what Jesus's words require. So is Jesus telling us to be good to go to heaven?

Certainly none of the people Jesus appointed to carry his message, the apostles, taught that:

Romans 3:20 "For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin."

Following the commands doesn't save. And this is all over (Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5-6, it is the message of all of Galatians, of Romans, the apostles in Acts said, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved") We are only saved by grace through faith.

Our best works can never merit a pardon of sin, or eternal life. The good works that we do, if they are good, were gifts from His Spirit anyway. So we can't pay God off with them, we'd be paying him with his own money. And our good works are also never perfect, they're always defiled, and can't make us worthy.

So we are saved, not by our good works, but by the works of Jesus.

He lived the sermon on the mount, as well as every other command of God all the way to the heart. And died on that cross so that if we believe - the works of Jesus get credited to us and ours were put to death in Him.

Jesus accuses these people on judgment day of not doing the will of His Father, but the ultimate will of His Father is this:

John 6:29 "Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'"

Belief gets the works of Jesus credited to our account.

And it gets the lawlessness and wickedness in us destroyed. So that on that judgment day, those who believe are not lawless. Our works couldn't save us, so we had to have the works of Jesus to make it in.

But is that all that Jesus has in mind in today's passage?

Throughout the sermon on the mount, He is clear we won't obey fully, because He teaches us to pray for forgiveness, and teaches us to forgive others (so they don't obey fully either.)

But there is an expectation that those who are forgiven do good works.

Ephesians 2:8-10 “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

We are saved through faith. And it's important that we never believe that our good works contribute to our salvation - in whole or in part. We don't contribute to our own forgiveness with our works.

To think that we do is to stand at the foot of the cross and say, “That isn't enough for me.”

But when we come to faith in Jesus, we are created in Christ Jesus for good works. The westminster confession calls our good works *“the fruit and the evidence of a true and lively faith.”*

On judgment day, Jesus judges a tree by its fruit.

If we are, to use Jesus's metaphor from last week, truly good trees, renewed by faith in Jesus, then there will be the good fruit of true, but imperfect obedience to Jesus in our lives.

And to lack true obedience is evidence that we don't have faith at all.

The reformers said “Faith alone saves, but the faith that saves is not alone.”

True saving faith begins, however slowly, to produce the fruit of good works in our lives. And if it is producing mainly some other kind of fruit, then the problem is the tree - the faith isn't real.

Transformation of your inner person bubbles up and spills out into your life, inevitably, given enough time.

Our works can never save us, but they can be evidence that we are not saved.

And while obedience doesn't get us to heaven, it isn't that it doesn't matter. Because true faith produces obedience and also:

Westminster goes on:

By these good works then believers manifest their thankfulness, strengthen their assurance, edify their brethren, adorn the profession of the gospel, stop the mouths of the adversaries, and glorify God, whose workmanship they are...⁴

⁴ Expanded from Westminster Confession of Faith Chapter 16, Of Good Works:

“These good works, done in obedience to God’s commandments, are the fruits and evidences of a true and lively faith, (Jam 2:18, 22): and by them believers manifest their thankfulness, (Psa 116:12-13; 1Pe 2:9); strengthen their assurance, (1Jo 2:3, 5; 2Pe 1:5-10); edify their brethren, (2Co 9:2; Mat 5:16); adorn the profession of the Gospel, (Tts 2:5, 9-12; 1Ti 6:1); stop the mouths of the adversaries, (1Pe 2:15); and glorify God, (1Pe 2:12; Phl 1:11; Jhn 15:8); whose workmanship they are, created in Christ Jesus unto, (Eph 2:10); that, having their fruit unto holiness, they may have the end, eternal life, (Rom 6:22).

We cannot by our best works merit pardon of sin, or eternal life at the hand of God, by reason of the great disproportion that is between them and the glory to come; and the infinite distance that is between us and God whom, by them, we can neither profit, nor satisfy for the debt of our former sins, (Rom 3:20; Rom 4:2, 4, 6; Eph 2:8-9; Tts 3:5-7; Rom 8:18; Psa 16:2; Job 22:2-3; Job 35:7-8); but when we have done all we can, we have done but our duty, and are unprofitable servants, (Luk 17:10): and because, as they are good, they proceed from His Spirit, (Gal 5:22-23); and as they are wrought by us, they are defiled, and mixed with so much weakness and imperfection, that they cannot endure, the severity of God’s judgment, (Isa 64:6; Gal 5:17; Rom 7:15, 18; Psa 143:2; Psa 130:3).”

Works can't save us. But they can condemn us.

John describes a judgment day scene in Revelation 20:

Revelation 20 11 Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. 13 And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. 15 And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.

So the way John frames the judgment for us here is we all stand before the judgment throne, and there is a set of books open out of which the dead are judged. And they were judged according to what they had done.

Then another book was opened, called the book of life. And in that book, there are names. And if someone's name is found in the book of life, they make it.

So the works we do condemn us. But our name being written in the book of life saves us.

And you can notice the same thing in Jesus's sentence in

Matthew 7:23 “[23] And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

https://www.blueletterbible.org/study/ccc/westminster/Of_Good_Works.cfm

Notice that they are lawless - they live like Jesus never gave commands. And as a result they are rejected.

But Jesus doesn't say, "If you had kept the law I would have accepted you." The fact that they didn't was evidence for their judgment. But trying to keep the law to be OK isn't in view here.

Jesus says, "I never knew you."

It is knowing Christ - and to "know" is to know intimately, to know with closeness. That's where salvation is.

So if we know that Christ is Lord and died and rose for us, if we know that had the power to save, and we trust in Him - we really know Him in that way, we will be saved and welcomed on the day of judgement.

And, if that's real - not just "Lord Lord" knowledge and emotion, there will be imperfect but true obedience in our lives as evidence of a true and lively faith.

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Prayer of Confession:

Adapted and modified from a prayer entitled, "God's Law" on page 60 of the prayer book, Streams of Mercy by Barbara Duguid.

Father,

You have graciously given your perfect and wise law as a lamp to guide our steps. Every part of your creation delights to do your holy will— except for us. Our affections are turned away from you, and none of our desires or motivations are pure. We continually try to patch together our own rags of righteousness, to prove to you that we are worth loving, worth saving, worth keeping. Father, have mercy on us.

Jesus, though our sins are vast in number, your grace is greater still! You are our Rock and our Redeemer and have provided everything necessary for our salvation. Though our guilt rises to the heavens to condemn us, your righteousness soars above it to plead on our behalf. Each of our sins is paid for, past, present, and future, and your perfect record of holiness is credited to us, as if we had never sinned. Thank you.

Holy Spirit, help us not to use grace as an excuse to sin more. Instead, delight a us with the love of our Savior until our hearts change and we desire him, and obedience to him, above everything else. We pray that the outrageous joy of the gospel would free us to keep trying to put off sin and put on obedience, knowing that Christ's goodness in our place is all that we need in order to win your approval.

Thank you that we will not be like this forever. Although in this world we will make only small beginnings in truly loving your law, a day is coming when we will be new creations, inside and out, and will stand before you in sinless perfection. We can't wait. But sustain us until then in Jesus name.

Assurance:

If you've trusted in Him and confessed your sins, here this verse as the truth that it is:

Galatians 4:4-7 “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. 6 And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” 7 So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”

Sermon Discussion Questions:

- 1) What role do good works play in a Christian's life according to Ephesians 2:8-10?
- 2) How do good works relate to our salvation?
- 3) How can heavy involvement in Christian ministry numb us to our need for Jesus?
- 4) Discuss the books in Revelation 20:11-15. What does this scene tell us about the way to salvation?
- 5) How can we avoid being among the ones who are surprised not to "make it" on judgment day?