

# Sermon on Matthew 7:21-29

## Introduction

When I was a college student, at the university I attended, class attendance was not mandatory, and with some courses if you did well on the midterm and final you could still get an "A." But I used to have a recurring nightmare back then. I would dream that I discovered in finals week a course I had registered for and forgotten to attend. If you did that with all your classes you would fail and be forced to leave. Once in a while I still have dreams like that—in my absent mindedness I get to church on Sunday morning, or even a larger church where I'm supposed to conduct a wedding, and discover I am still in my pajamas!

That is the stuff of comedy, of course, but Jesus' teaching was full of stories like that. There were 10 young women awaiting the night time arrival of the bridegroom for a wedding, but only 5 took oil for their lamps, and when the Bridegroom arrived, the other 5 were shut out of the wedding. Another parable speaks of a wedding feast to which one guest forgot to wear the special wedding clothing, and he was thrown out of the banquet hall. **AND WHEN JESUS TOLD THOSE STORIES OF PEOPLE WHO COULD NOT COME TO THE WEDDING, HE MEANT PEOPLE WHO WOULD NOT ENTER HEAVEN, BUT WHO THOUGHT THEY WOULD. AND WHY IS IT? THEY FAILED TO ACT ON WHAT THEY HAD HEARD.**

Since the days of the Reformation, many Protestants have said that the Church of Rome is not a true Church, and that Catholicism is a false religion. But from the days of the English Reformation until the 1920's, my Catholic ancestors in Ireland were oppressed by Protestant kings, parliaments, nobility, soldiers and landlords. I have never actually heard or read someone saying this, but I suspect that the Irish rejected the Reformation, at least in part, because of the hypocrisy of English Protestants. What should you make of the supposed Christianity of those who would drive the people off their fertile ancestral lands to starve on Ireland's barren western coast, or carve Ireland into estates for wealthy English nobility, and make the Irish poor tenants on their own land, or keep them from getting any education or a decent job? Or ship them off to Australia when they protest, or make it a capital crime to speak their own native language instead of English? Of course these things pale compare to what English slavers, planters and others who profited from the slave trade did to so many Africans. Please don't misunderstand me. My point is not a blanket indictment of the English. There is no shortage of sinners among the Irish, or anywhere else on earth. My point is just to illustrate that many who would call themselves Christian have acted in a most un-Christian way.

In the Middle Ages, there was a Crusade whose soldiers never actually made it to Palestine. Instead, the ships captains persuaded them to land at Constantinople, and sack the city of their fellow Christians. How is this? After all, isn't it true that Jesus commanded his followers to be honest, to honor marriage, to keep oaths and promises, to pray for those with whom we don't see eye to eye, and even to love their enemies?

In America, if I am not mistaken, polls done by Barna Research and other like organizations indicate that more than half the population of the USA still claims to be Christian. Yet we see that it makes next to no difference in the lives of so many who make that claim. We hear of and see people we know who say they are Christians, and then we see dishonesty,

immorality, stealing and cheating, and worse. They live like their pagan neighbors. How is it that these people could be Christians and yet live just like the pagans?

There are three big truths that Jesus is teaching here right on the surface, and a fourth that is implied but NOT QUITE SO FRONT AND CENTER. FIRST, NOT everyone who claims to be a Christian truly is one. Many people, perhaps even someone here could think himself or herself to be a Christian, and discover at the last, discover too late, that it just wasn't true. They had a wrong idea about what it means to follow Jesus, and now it's too late. We may be disappointed or disgusted with the way supposed Christians act, and it is a sobering thought to consider that people we know and love who call themselves Christians may not be Christians. But it is all the more sobering because of the SECOND TRUTH that Jesus first teaches plainly, and then reinforces with the parable of the two houses: These people who HAVE BEEN DECEIVING THEMSELVES ABOUT THEIR OWN SPIRITUAL CONDITION, WILL BE EXPOSED FOR WHAT THEY ARE, AND SHUT OUT OF HEAVEN ETERNALLY. THE THIRD TRUTH, THE ONE THAT IS IMPLIED, IS THAT JESUS HIMSELF IS THE ONE WHO PROCLAIMS THE CONDITIONS OF ENTERING HEAVEN, AND WHO AS JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH WILL MAKE THE DECLARATION TO THESE SUPPOSED CHRISTIANS WHO ARE REALLY UNBELIEVERS. And the Fourth Truth is the one that is so obvious in the text, which it is that those only who hear and act on Jesus' words are true followers of Christ, those who one day will hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of the Lord."

Last week we looked at what Christ said about false prophets. Today we look at what He says about false believers, perhaps people who have listened to false prophets. And Christ is saying, "TAKE HEED THAT YOU ARE NOT SELF-DECEIVED. TAKE HEED THAT YOU ARE NOT LIKE THE PEOPLE I AM DESCRIBING. IF YOU ARE, YOU WILL SHARE THEIR FATE, THEIR ETERNAL SEPARATION FROM GOD IN HELL.

What Christ was saying in this concluding part of the Sermon on the Mount does not contradict the fact that God is the Author of Salvation, AND it does not contradict the teaching that SALVATION IS BY GRACE THROUGH FAITH ALONE. BUT THE FOCUS IN THIS TEXT IS ON OUR RESPONSE. GOD IS THE ONE WHO DOES THE SAVING, BUT NO ONE WHO HAS NOT RESPONDED IN FAITH AND REPENTANCE IS SAVED. THE SUM OF WHAT OUR TEXT HAS TO SAY TO US I PUT THIS WAY:

***THOUGH MANY THINK THEMSELVES TO BE CHRISTIANS,  
CHRIST ONLY OWNS THOSE WHO ACT ON WHAT HE SAYS.***

## **I. Self-Deception about one's state and standing with God, about being in a state of Grace, is Common.**

We don't have difficulty marking a distinction between those who say they are Christians and those who make no such claim. We know there are people of many other religions, as well as people who claim not to have any religion.

But what Christ is speaking of here isn't that. He is talking about people who would answer, "YES," if you asked, "Are you a Christian?" And if you asked these people, "Are you

expecting to go to heaven?” they would probably either answer, “YES,” or, “I HOPE SO.” But here, he says, there are those whose expectation of heaven will be disappointed. And in fact He goes on to say that there are **MANY** who are like this, **MANY** who will hear Him say to them that they WILL NOT ENTER HEAVEN.

I want you to notice something more about how Jesus says this. Notice that in speaking of them He describes them as saying to Him, “Lord, Lord,” and He says twice here that that is how they address Him. What He means is that THERE IS A DEFERENCE AND RESPECT THAT THEY SHOW TO HIM. AND THERE IS A CERTAIN EARNESTNESS, SERIOUSNESS IN THE WAY THEY LOOK TO HIM AND APPEAL TO HIM. THERE IS AT LEAST AN APPEARANCE THAT THESE PEOPLE ARE SERIOUS, EARNEST CHRISTIANS, PEOPLE WHO LOVE JESUS.

So these of whom Jesus spoke are people who would not only say, “Yes, I am a Christian,” but “Yes, I confess Jesus as Lord,” or even, “Yes, I love Jesus.” Beyond that—at least as Matthew records it—these are people who have enlisted. Some are saying that they have prophesied in Jesus' Name, even performed miracles, and cast out demons in Jesus' Name. In other words, you could say that they have gone beyond the stage of just occupying a seat in the worship service. These are people who have actually signed up to be engaged in Christian service. **THE PEOPLE JESUS IS DESCRIBING ARE NOT JUST CHURCH ATTENDERS, BUT PEOPLE WHO ARE INVOLVED IN CHRISTIAN SERVICE!**

BUT JESUS HAS A DIFFERENT EVALUATION OF THEIR CHRISTIANITY. HE SAYS THAT THEY ARE EVILDOERS. SOME TRANSLATIONS SAY, “WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.” Either translation is fine. It means people who do the wrong thing, people who do evil, people whose lives are not regulated by the Word of God. SO, ON THE ONE HAND, THEY THINK THEMSELVES TO BE CHRISTIANS, WHILE JESUS, ON THE OTHER HAND, SAYS THAT THEY ARE NOT, AND IN FACT ARE EVILDOERS. AND BEING EVILDOERS, THEY WILL NOT ENTER HEAVEN. However much an involvement in ministry may be valuable, Christ is pointing out that these people have deceived themselves. THEY ARE NOT TRULY HIS CHILDREN OR SERVANTS, **AND HE DOES NOT OWN THEM.**

From what He says, it seems unavoidable that these people have been fooling themselves about their spiritual condition. They think they are saved, when in fact they are lost. They think they have assurance of salvation, when in fact that assurance is false. AND, AGAIN, THESE ARE PEOPLE WHO IN SOME WAYS DO APPEAR TO BE SERIOUS, COMMITTED CHRISTIANS. AND BEYOND THAT, JESUS SAYS THAT THERE WILL BE MANY OF THEM! MANY. MANY. SO HE IS, IN EFFECT, SAYING THERE WOULD BE MANY PEOPLE IN THE CHURCH WHO ARE SELF-DECEIVED, MANY SELF-DECEIVED, WHO WILL HEAR THESE TERRIBLE WORDS ON THE LAST DAY, HEAR THESE WORDS FROM THE GREAT JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH.

Now if this is true, even, of some or many who have been engaged in Christian ministry, then how much more is it true of the many who have sat uninvolved in the pews from Sunday to Sunday, and year to year. There are many who are there in Church, but unconverted, and more or less passive. Luke records that Jesus addressed people like this. There, we hear Jesus speaking of this same awful truth, speaking to the self-deceived in the second person:

Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets'; and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; DEPART FROM ME, ALL YOU EVILDOERS' (Luke 13:26, 27).

In other words, in this case they are merely pleading that they were there to hear Jesus when He taught, when He preached. There are people who have made an orthodox and believable profession—people who can recite the Apostle's Creed and Lord's Prayer, people who have been baptized, confirmed, admitted to the Lord's Table and other privileges. There are many who, once admitted, just don't participate in the life of the Church. And many of these, too, like the more active ones, Jesus speaks of in Matthew 7, are people who are self-deceived about their spiritual condition. What is their condition?

MANY, MANY ARE SELF-DECEIVED! COULD YOU BE AMONG THEM? I HOPE NOT, BUT I URGE YOU THAT YOU SEARCH YOUR HEARTS. COULD IT BE SOME OF YOU MAY BE TRUSTING IN THE FACT THAT YOU RAISED YOUR HAND, OR WENT FORWARD AT SOME EVANGELISTIC EVENT? YOU REMEMBER THAT DAY, AND ARE SURE YOU GOT SAVED, BECAUSE YOU RAISED YOUR HAND, OR WENT FORWARD, OR SIGNED A CARD, OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT. SOME ARE CONFIDENT BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN BORN INTO CHRISTIAN HOMES, OR BECAUSE THEY WERE BAPTIZED, BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN CONFIRMED, BECAUSE THEY HAVEN'T ENGAGED IN SCANDALOUS BEHAVIOR, BECAUSE THEY HAVE BEEN AT CHURCH ON SUNDAY MORNINGS. ALL OF THESE THINGS MAY BE GOOD. BUT THEN LET ME ASK: HAVE YOU REALLY LISTENED TO JESUS? HAS WHAT HE TAUGHT, WHAT HE PREACHED SO LAID HOLD OF YOU THAT IT CHANGED YOU?

IT IS NOT MY PURPOSE TO UNSETTLE YOUR FAITH. UNLESS YOU ARE TRUSTING IN THE WRONG THING. UNLESS YOUR ASSURANCE OF SALVATION IS A FALSE ASSURANCE.

***Self-Deception about one's state and standing with God, about being in a state of Grace is Common.***

HOW SERIOUS THIS IS IS INDICATED BY THE FACT THAT IN THREE DIFFERENT WAYS IN THIS TEXT JESUS OUTLINES DISASTROUS CONSEQUENCES.

## **II. Sifting Will Come and Separate the False from the True.**

In the opening words of this text, Jesus says,

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven;

Two verses later He goes on to say to those who are self-deceived,

I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME.

Finally, the same awful truth, more or less, is driven home in a different way by the parable of the two houses, which reinforces the idea: every house will be tested, every life sifted by a storm. Those who build on the sand are the self-deceived, and their false hope will perish with them. They will be driven from the Lord's presence. Into Hell.

THREE TIMES CHRIST REPEATS THIS LESSON. THERE ARE THOSE WHO THINK THEY ARE BOUND FOR HEAVEN, AND IF THEY CONTINUE IN THEIR PRESENT SELF-DECEIVED CONDITION THEY ARE, IN FACT, GOING TO HEAR THOSE TERRIBLE WORDS AND BE CAST INTO HELL. THERE WILL BE A SIFTING. ANY PROCLAMATION OF THE GOSPEL THAT OMITTS THIS IS PROBABLY BEING DELIVERED BY A FALSE SHEPHERD, BY SOMEONE WHO IN ALL LIKELIHOOD WILL BE AMONG THOSE WHO HEAR THESE TERRIBLE WORDS.

DOES THIS NOT IMPRESS ON YOU THE NEED TO ASK, THEN, HOW CAN I KNOW THAT I AM TRULY SAVED? HOW CAN I BE SURE? THE CONSEQUENCES ARE ETERNAL. THOSE WHO ARE SELF-DECEIVED, THOSE WHOSE HOPE ISN'T BUILT ON THE RIGHT FOUNDATION WILL BE SWEEPED AWAY TO HELL, ALONG WITH ALL THE PEOPLE WHO ARE OPEN UNBELIEVERS AND PAGANS. THERE WILL BE A SIFTING. IT IS SURELY COMING. JESUS SAYS THAT STORM WILL COME BOTH TO THE ONE WHOSE HOUSE, WHOSE LIFE IS FOUNDED ON THE ROCK, AND TEST IT, AND TO THE ONE WHOSE HOUSE IS ON THE SAND, AND IT WILL FALL TO UTTER RUIN. THERE WILL BE A STORM, A SIFTING, AND RUIN TO THOSE WHO ARE NOT TRUE CHRISTIANS.

***Sifting Will Come and Separate the False from the True.***

### **III Salvation is to Those Who Truly Believe the Savior.**

The next point is not quite so obvious, but it is vital.

For many centuries there have been people who predicted all sorts of disasters. So, in that sense, to predict some disaster wouldn't be altogether unique. Some of you may remember seeing the name Nostradamus on the covers of scandal sheets in the supermarkets twenty or thirty years ago. He was a court physician in France in the 1500's who published a collection of supposed prophecies, which he had, in fact, gathered from a variety of ancient sources. And that book is full of predictions of all sorts of disasters. BUT WHO IS NOSTRADAMOS? HE WAS A MERE BORROWER OF THE DOOM AND GLOOM OTHER MEN HAD PREDICTED. HE BORROWED A GOOD BIT OF IT FROM THE BIBLE. AND HE MIXED IT ALL TOGETHER IN HIS BOOK, AND MANY COPIES HAVE BEEN SOLD.

I understand that today there is a sort of fad on the internet. People are saying that the calendar of the Incas ends in the year 2012, and so the world must be coming to an end. I hear there are all sorts of apocalyptic things predicted. But why should we believe the Incas?

I want you to notice the very last words of the text we read in Matthew 7:

The result was that when Jesus had finished these words, the multitudes were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as *one* having authority, and not as their scribes (Mat 7:28, 29).

What Matthew is saying is that Jesus didn't preach and teach like someone who was just quoting other people's words. There was something authoritative about what and how He spoke.

Now, let's take another look at verses 21-23:

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS.'

The text gives us an impression of people who are standing before a Judge, and that Judge IS *JESUS HIMSELF*. THE PEOPLE ARE APPEALING TO HIM, PLEADING WITH HIM. They are calling Him, "LORD, LORD." And notice, Jesus says that HE HIMSELF WILL PRONOUNCE THE SENTENCE OF DOOM ON THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN DECEIVING THEMSELVES. IN A WAY IT IS A MARVEL THAT MATTHEW'S NARRATIVE DOESN'T TELL US AT THIS POINT THAT THE PEOPLE PICKED UP STONES TO STONE HIM AS A BLASPHEMER—JESUS WAS CLAIMING FOR HIMSELF SOMETHING THAT BELONGS TO GOD. GOD ALONE IS THE JUDGE OF ALL THE EARTH, AND CHRIST HERE PLAINLY SAYS HE WILL EXERCISE THAT ROLE. THIS IS A VEILED REFERENCE TO HIS OWN IDENTITY, AT LEAST AS THE MESSIAH, BUT AS LIKELY TO HIS BEING THE GOD OF ISRAEL.

IT IS ALSO NOT INSIGNIFICANT THAT, IN DESCRIBING THE PLEADINGS OF THE LOST THAT THE PLEAS JESUS DESCRIBES REPEATEDLY INCLUDE THAT THEY HAD DONE THINGS "IN YOUR NAME." WE MAY SPEAK OF ACTING ON BEHALF OF OR IN THE NAME OF ANOTHER PERSON, BUT OBVIOUSLY SOMETHING MUCH MORE WEIGHTY IS IN VIEW HERE. THIS IS ANOTHER VEILED ALLUSION TO HIS STATUS AS MESSIAH.

Finally, consider this: in verse 21 he says that it is only those who have done the "WILL OF MY FATHER IN HEAVEN," who will enter the kingdom. But in verse 24 He speaks of the "Will of the Father in Heaven" with a different set of words: "THESE WORDS OF MINE." In other words, THE WORDS OF JESUS REVEAL, OR EXPRESS THE WILL OF the FATHER IN HEAVEN UNIQUELY.

Jesus is the REVEALER OF GOD'S WILL. JESUS HIMSELF WILL ACT AS THE JUDGE WHO DETERMINES THE ETERNAL DESTINIES OF THOSE WHO STAND BEFORE HIM AT THE GREAT JUDGMENT. ALL MANKIND.

There is one final thing. It is VERY SIGNIFICANT that He quotes from Psalm 6. The Psalm expresses the ANGUISHED PRAYER OF A SUFFERING AND TORMENTED MAN, BUT AT THE PRAYER'S END, WITH THE WORDS JESUS QUOTES HERE, WE SEE THAT MAN HAS BEEN VINDICATED BY GOD. IN OTHER WORDS, JESUS QUOTING THE PSALM HERE IS SPEAKING IN A VEILED WAY OF HIS SUFFERINGS ON THE CROSS. HE IS THE ONE WHO SUFFERS THE WRATH OF GOD FOR SINNERS, AND THOSE WHO ARE DISMISSED FROM HIM ARE THE ONES WHO NEVER TOOK IT SERIOUSLY ENOUGH.

ALL OF THIS IS TO SAY THAT JESUS SPEAKS TO US AS THE PROPHET OF GOD, AS THE SUFFERING MESSIAH. AND IF WE DO NOT HEED HIS WORDS HERE, BY IGNORING THEM WE PUT OURSELVES IN THE PLACE OF THOSE WHO WILL HEAR HIM SAY, "DEPART FROM ME." THIS IS GOD'S PROPHET, THE FINAL REVELATION OF GOD'S WILL, THE ONE WHO WOULD SUFFER FOR SINNERS ONCE. AND ONLY THOSE WHO TRULY BELIEVE, ONLY THOSE WHO TRULY HEED HIM WILL ENTER THE KINGDOM. ARE YOU LISTENING? DO YOU BELIEVE?

### ***Salvation is to Those Who Truly Believe the Savior***

***BUT WHAT IS THE TEST OF TRUE FAITH? AFTER ALL, THOSE WHO HEAR THE AWFUL WORDS ARE CALLING HIM, "LORD, LORD."***

## **IV. Salvation's Evidence is Acting on What Jesus Said.**

We come now finally to the final point. This is something that is taught all over the New Testament.

The Sermon on the Mount begins with a blessing pronounced on those WHO KNOW THEMSELVES TO BE SINNERS, WHO ARE SO DISTRESSED BY SIN THAT THEY MOURN OVER IT, DESIRE TO BE FREE OF IT, AND WANT TO BE CHANGED BY GOD.

***IS THAT YOU? DO YOU KNOW THAT YOU, YOURSELF HAVE FALLEN SHORT, AND HAVE NO HOPE with GOD APART FROM GOD'S MERCY?***

The Sermon on the Mount goes on to show that Jesus followers, the Poor in Spirit, who have come to truly know Him, are called to point others to this same truth. We are called to be the Light of the World.

The Sermon on the Mount goes on to show that holiness must become central in our lives. It must be a pervasive concern. Christ shows us that we have to be as much concerned about the thoughts and intentions of our hearts as with actions, that we must be more true to our word, more honest, more gracious, and more like God than we ever knew. NONE OF US CAN MEASURE UP, BUT EVERY TRUE BELIEVER DESIRES THIS KIND OF HOLINESS AND PURSUES IT.

***IS THERE EVIDENCE OF THE PURSUIT OF HOLINESS, OF GROWING IN GRACE IN YOUR LIFE?***

Jesus went on to show that TRUE DEVOTION TO GOD IS CONCERNED WITH KNOWING

GOD, WITH COMMUNION WITH GOD, AND WITH SEEKING IN PRAYER THE THINGS THAT GOD DESIRES, AND, EVEN, WITH DESIRING THE THINGS THAT GOD DESIRES.

*IS THERE EVIDENCE OF THIS KIND OF PRAYING IN YOUR LIFE?*

Jesus went on to show that our Heart's desires, the things we go after in this Life should be MAINLY the things of the Kingdom, and that if that is true of Us, we should also be TRUSTING that God will provide and take care of Us.

*IS THERE EVIDENCE IN YOUR LIFE THAT GOD'S KINGDOM IS FIRST WITH YOU?*

Jesus also went on to teach that we must abandon a judgmental and condemning spirit, that we must become people who seek God in Prayer.

BY NOW THE POINT SHOULD BE CLEAR. IF WE TRULY BELIEVE JESUS, THEN WE WILL LATCH ON TO HIS PROMISES, TREMBLE AT HIS THREATS, OBEY HIS COMMANDS, AND ADORE HIM AS OUR SAVIOR.

IN JOHN'S GOSPEL HE SAID,

'IF YOU CONTINUE IN MY WORD YOU WILL BE MY DISCIPLES, AND YOU WILL KNOW THE TRUTH AND THE TRUTH WILL MAKE YOU FREE.'

HE ALSO SAID,

"IF YOU LOVE ME YOU WILL KEEP MY COMMANDMENTS."

AND IN JOHN'S FIRST LETTER, JOHN SAYS,

BY THIS WE KNOW THAT WE HAVE COME TO KNOW HIM, IF WE KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS.

THIS IS WHAT IT MEANS TO BUILD ON THE ROCK. THOSE WHO BELIEVE JESUS BUILD ON WHAT HE TAUGHT AND WHAT HE COMMANDS. THEY TRUST HIM, AND DO HIS WORD. AND HE OWNS THEM AS HIS OWN. THEY ARE HIS, AND THESE ARE THE MARKS. THEY LOVE HIM, AND SO OBEY HIM, AND THEY SHOW THUS THAT THEY ARE LOVED BY HIM, AND ONE DAY HE WILL WELCOME THEM TO GLORY.

***Salvation's Evidence is [NOT JUST AN ORTHODOX PROFESSION, BUT ALSO] Acting on What Jesus TAUGHT AND COMMANDED.***

***THOUGH MANY THINK THEMSELVES TO BE CHRISTIANS, CHRIST ONLY OWNS THOSE WHO ACT ON WHAT HE SAYS.***

This is sobering teaching. But the up side of it is that if we know Christ we are listening to

Christ, and Christ is growing us in Holiness, in Obedience. And we can be confident if there is some evidence that we are not what we were before we first heard, that Christ has persuaded us, then we are indeed built and building on the Rock, and our House will stand firm. ***Amen.***