

Known By the rock  
Matthew 7:21-29

Please turn in your Bible's to Matthew 7. Today we will finish Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. I want to begin with a quote by Bible scholar and teacher, Dr. Dale Bruner who captures the flows and transitions of Jesus' sermon perfectly. He writes, "*Jesus began His sermon with unqualified tenderness, embracing in the Blessings those who felt least embraceable. He concludes with unqualified toughness, warning us that His sermon is not an intellectual option, a set of suggestions we may take or leave, one philosophy among several others, but that it is the exclusive way to life.*"

Dr. Bruner powerfully captures the essence and power of Jesus' sermon. Jesus is speaking to His disciples, the crowds are present, but this is a message for those who have decided to follow Jesus, and an invitation to others to taste and see that the Lord is good. And indeed what starts with a salve and balm of blessing, soothing the wounds of those weary from dealing with the harsh realities of this world, moves to a true understanding of God's word with a critical examination of the internal attitudes of our hearts. Then in chapter 6 Jesus begins to apply the sermon to the lives of His followers looking at three spiritual disciplines, giving, fasting, and prayer; and expanding the applications to the interpersonal relationships we have with one another. Then in this final movement of the sermon, Jesus challenges His followers and any who would lay claim to Him as Lord and Savior to search their souls deeply because life is in the balance – life today as well as life in eternity.

In 7:13 Jesus says, I am the gate to life, which gate will you enter? The narrow, difficult gate leading to spiritual life, or the wide, easy gate leading to spiritual death? Two weeks ago we looked at 7:15-20, true and false prophets and teachers, in which Jesus says, I am the source of truth, will you be nourished by me?

Today we come to the final warnings Jesus makes as He closes His sermon. And we need to understand, these are warnings, and primarily warnings to not be self-deceived. One of the most insidious sources of lies we have to deal with in our world is our own hearts. To be self-deceived is to lie to myself, and because of sin's power to twist our hearts, self-deception is an ever present pernicious problem that we as those who profess to follow Christ need to be constantly aware of.

The Bible is well aware of this bent to self-deception. Jeremiah 17:9 says, "*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? I the LORD search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds.*" The prophet Obadiah warns in verse 3, "*The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rock, in your lofty dwelling, who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?'*" James 1:22-25 speaks directly to the ease at which we can be self-deceived saying, "*But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like. But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts, he will be blessed in his doing.*"

And this is Jesus' final warning as He closes the Sermon on the Mount. He is asking us to examine ourselves, to scrutinize our claim to be His disciples, to examine our claims to be following Christ challenging us by saying **I am the only Lord and Savior, but do you truly know me**. And further, **I am the true and secure foundation, but what are you building on?** Jesus says in 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. 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.'* Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 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. 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. 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.” And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.”*

What controls everything Jesus is saying in this passage is found in the second half of verse 21, “... *the one who does the will of my father who is in heaven*”, Jesus says, is the one who will enter into the kingdom of heaven. There’s a significant and deep connection Jesus makes between our confession or profession of faith, and the necessary binding of obedience to God’s will resulting in an actual change of life from truly following Jesus. As we work through Jesus’ words here I want to do so by making several observations to help us understand what Jesus is saying and warning us about.

The first observation is that **profession of faith is a vital part of salvation – we need to confess faith in Jesus**, we need to be vocal and bold in saying that we are Christians and that we follow Jesus as Lord and Savior. Romans 10:9 tells us, “...*if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.*” The problem Jesus is addressing is not that someone isn’t saying the right words, it’s that words are not in themselves sufficient. It’s easy for anyone to profess loyalty, but to practice it is quite another thing.

We see this at the end of the Sermon on the Mount in the crowd’s response. Look at verse 28, “*And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.*” **The crowds are astonished, impressed with Jesus and his teaching, but they’re unmoved.** And that’s where a lot of people, people that would even say they are Christians are at. Jesus is just alright with me, but I’m not going to change my life. That was a good sermon, they might be saying, but they are not moved to action. Jesus is a great teacher, but their lives remain unchanged.

And that’s the warning Jesus is driving towards. **Profession without obedience and transformation of life is a false profession, or a self-deceived profession of faith.** “*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 see this point illustrated in the letter of James. James 2:14 says, “*What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, and one of you says to them, ‘Go in peace, be warmed and filled,’ without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. But someone will say, ‘You have faith and I have works.’ Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!*” We can sit in church for years, listening to sermon after sermon, but if we never allow the Word we hear preached change us, then we are self-deceived. We can read the Bible from cover to cover, but unless we put its commands into practice, we deceive ourselves. It’s doing the will of the Father that matters, not the words we profess. Claims to Christ are of no avail unless our lives back it up. Now some of you might be saying, well that sounds like works righteousness. But the contrast I’m making here is not between merit and grace, but between profession and way of life. If people really trust Jesus for salvation, their lies will no longer be self-center, as we looked at last week in seeking to maintain the Spirit of unity in the bond of peace. Jesus is not saying that those saved will have earned their salvation, but that the reality of their faith will be made clear in the fruit of their lives. (Marriage illustration)

What makes self-deception so difficult to see sometime is that **religious activity can be impressive, but it can be done without truly knowing Jesus.** Verse 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?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.*” The Bible again has many examples of those who would claim to know the Lord, and do religious work in the name of the Lord Jesus, but are themselves not known by the Lord. Acts 19 tells the story of some itinerant Jewish exorcists who, verse 13, “... *undertook to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, ‘I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims.’ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. But the evil spirit answered them, ‘Jesus I know, and Paul I recognize, but who are you?’*” Using signs and wonders that seem to come and are blessed of God, but are really of the Devil is nothing new. 2 Thessalonians 2:9 says, “*The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends*

*them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.*” Jesus is saying in warning us of our own bent to self-deception, don’t let signs and wonders fool you. People can do those without ever knowing me, they can claim to know me and even do signs and wonders in my name, but in the end are they doing the will of my Father?

This is critical. As people who would claim to be Christians, claim to be followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we need to **assess our profession of faith by asking that very question, am I doing the will of the Father?** Paul reminds us bluntly in 2 Corinthians 13:5, *“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.”* What is the fruit of your life in Christ? Where has knowing Jesus and following Jesus challenged and changed how I live my life? Am I any different because I have encountered Jesus? Does my life look any different from someone who does not know Jesus?

You see, **doing the Father’s will is an active response to God’s work in a Christian’s life.** You see numerous scriptures listed there in your notes, and I encourage you to go through and read them later. But they are all speaking to the active response a Christian is to have to Jesus. If we say we follow Him, that He is our Lord and Savior then our lives will reflect that. John 14:15, Jesus says, *“If you love me you will keep my commandments.”* Verse 23, *“If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him. Whoever does not love me does not keep my words.”* 1 Thessalonians 4:3 says, *“For this is the will of God, your sanctification: that you abstain from sexual immorality; that each one of you know how to control his own body in holiness and honor, not in the passion of lust like the Gentiles who do not know God; that no one transgress and wrong his brother in this matter, because the Lord is an avenger in all these things, as we told you beforehand and solemnly warned you. For God has not called us for impurity, but in holiness. Therefore whoever disregards this, disregards not man but God, who gives his Holy Spirit to you.”* Again, this is not a salvation BY works, it is a salvation THAT works.

Wrapping up, Jesus gives one last illustration to drive this point home. What we truly believe is not usually on display when things are good, but when trouble, difficulty, tragedy, hardship, whatever you want to call it – when life gets hard is when what we truly believe about Jesus is revealed. The religious veneer is pulled away and what our real faith is, is exposed to all. Jesus gives a parable about building our house on the rock or on sand. **Building on rock was a frequent metaphor used in the Old Testament for the security Israel could have in God, and interestingly, this security in God was when they obeyed Him.** Deuteronomy 32:4 says, *“The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he. They have dealt corruptly with him; they are no longer his children because they are blemished; they are a crooked and twisted generation.”* Building upon the rock, means we are building on a secure foundation, the Lord Jesus Christ, and what holds that brick together is the mortar of our obedience to the rock.

Why is this important? Friends, **when the storms of life come, and they will, will my faith be shown unswerving or undependable?** Am I building upon the solid rock of Jesus Christ, or the shifting sand of self-deception? **Will the Lord know me from my activity or from my obedience?** When I call upon him as Lord is it from a position of personal relationship or religious pandering?

Some of you are here today, and you’re not self-deceived, you simply don’t know the Lord Jesus Christ at all. You have never admitted you are a sinner, that you in your own efforts you can never be good enough or do enough to deserve God’s gift of grace and forgiveness. For you, you simply need to come in repentance, turning from your sin and coming to Jesus, surrendering your life to Jesus, confessing your sin and receiving by faith alone His grace alone to forgive your sin and cleanse you from all unrighteousness; to call upon Him as Savior and begin to walk with Him as Lord.

For others of you, you are needing to make a searching inventory of your verbal claim to follow Christ, and measure that against how you actually live your life. Religious activity no matter how spectacular, good, and beneficial to others, does not save. Coming in repentance to Jesus and obeying the will of the Father does. You may say, but I prayed a prayer, great, but are you living in light of that prayer. Religious activity and religious responses don’t save, only believing and following Jesus saves.

Friends, the call to discipleship is a high calling, it demands not merely our intellectual ascent, but the totality of our lives. When Jesus calls a man He calls Him to take up His cross and follow Him – those are not the words of a mere passing verbal commitment, that is a call that bids a man to come and die. Friends, will we follow Jesus with all of our heart, with all of our mind, with all of our strength? I pray we will to God's glory and fame.