

The Great Peril of Self-deception

Matthew 7:21-23

Halifax: 10 October 2004

Introduction

Today we come to one of the most horrible passages in the Bible.

- One of the best things about preaching through a book of the Bible is that you have to preach on passages like this that you might otherwise leave out...
- It is a very unsettling passage about people who are self-deceived...
 - About many people who will come to the judgement at the last day expecting to be admitted to heaven only to find that they are utterly rejected!

But I want you to understand why Jesus presents this to you...

- He does it in love for His elect people—the people the Father has given Him out of the world.
 - You see, He does not want any of them to miss the way of salvation!
 - He will not allow them to miss it!

But the way He works with them is through the word...

- He causes us to hear His voice and follow...
 - What is different about His sheep is that they take Him seriously when He gives these warnings about missing the way...
 - So seriously, that they reject the broad way and take the narrow way!
 - So seriously, that they will not follow the false prophets who lead them to the wide gate that leads to destruction...
 - So seriously, that they wake up out the self-deception that so many live in and come to Jesus now.

You see, it is not that the sheep don't need these warnings because they elect...

- It is rather that because they are elect, they listen to these warnings and heed them!
- The warnings are effectual because they are heeded.
 - And so don't try to avoid this uncomfortable passage today...
 - Let it bit into your heart now instead of biting you at the end...
 - If it bites you now, you can escape...
 - But if it bites you on the judgement day, it will be too late.

And so now, let me urge all you who have ears to hear to consider what the Lord says to you in this passage!

- If you will hear His voice and believe, you will not perish with the many!
- This passage is intentionally given to unsettle you if you are not resting in Christ.
 - And even if you are in Christ, I think it will be unsettling to you because you will know that this is what will really happen to many...
 - You will take it seriously and grab hold of Christ all the more firmly if you belong to Him, shaking off all carnal security.

I. First of all, learn that just because you profess Christ, it does not mean that He will accept you in the end!

- Jesus says plainly in verse 21-22:
 - Mat 7:21-22: “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven.”

A. Now I want you to see clearly that these are people who profess Christ!

- They say “Lord, Lord”

1. The most basic confession of the Church is this: “Jesus is Lord.”

a. There is nothing wrong with saying, “Lord, Lord” to Jesus.

- In fact, there is everything right about it!
- The Bible is very clear that if you refuse to confess Jesus as Lord, you cannot be saved.

b. You must recognise that He is none other than the Son of God who came down from Heaven to save us.

- By calling Him “Lord,”
 - you acknowledge and confess that He is the self-existing One by whom all things were made and in whom all things consist.
 - You confess that He is **your** master to whom you have given all your allegiance forever and ever...
 - You confess that in Him alone is salvation,
 - and that you are looking to Him for the forgiveness of sins and for everlasting life.

c. Though He was Lord from all eternity,

- He was not declared to be Lord as our Mediator until after He had come to earth and completed the work of our redemption on the cross.

- It was not until He was raised to sit at God's right hand that He was exalted to be and declared to be Lord and Christ...
 - Prior to this, He was known as the promised One...
 - After this, it came to pass that whoever called upon His name would be saved.
 - That is why you must confess Him as Lord if you would be saved...
2. And I say, it is by this confession that you are admitted into the church of Jesus Christ together with your children.
- a. As soon as a sinner declares that Jesus is Lord—
 - that sinner is to be baptised and admitted to the visible church...
 - brought into the fellowship of the church...
 - brought under the care and discipline of the officers of the church...
 - and entitled to all the rights and privileges of the church such as the baptism of his children and communion at the Lord's table!
 - b. Peter baptised the three thousand on the day of Pentecost the same day that they confessed the Lord Jesus, and they were added to the church...
 - Paul baptised the pagan Philippian jailer and his household on the very night that he believed.
 - As soon as a person confesses that Jesus is Lord,
 - He is to be baptised together with His children and admitted to the church.
3. When Jesus says, "not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven," He is talking about persons who have made this confession.
- He is talking about church members.
 - a. He is not talking about those who openly reject Him and refuse to confess His name.
 - Of course they will not enter the kingdom of heaven!
 - They have not even attempted to come in—either by the broad gate or the narrow gate!
 - b. Those who say "Lord, Lord," to Jesus are those who have made a profession that satisfies the officers of the church.
 - 1) Now it is true that sometimes church officers are too easily satisfied and admit or retain persons who do not make a credible profession of Christ,
 - that is, persons who do not meet the criteria the Bible gives to receive them...

- such as those who say that Jesus is only one way and not the only way of salvation...
 - or those who live scandalous lives...
- 2) But it is also true that there are many who make an acceptable confession...
- and who, as far as the church officers are concerned, ought to be received into the church...
 - but who in truth are not in Christ.
 - These are admitted to the church militant on earth...
 - but they will not be admitted into the church triumphant in heaven.
 - They will be excluded from the church on the day of judgement.
 - Until then, they are truly part of the church...
 - the wheat and tares grow up together—
 - but on the last day, the angels will root out the tares and gather the wheat into the barn.
- 3) And so you see that they are not condemned for saying “Lord, Lord...”
- They are condemned for saying it hypocritically...
 - The ones who are accepted also say “Lord, Lord,” but not all who say this will be received...
 - In fact, in verse 22 Jesus says that **many** of them will not be received.
 - Not just a few, not just one or two here and there, but **many**!
 - This corresponds to the **many** that He speaks of in verse 13 that enter by the broad gate...
 - Even though they profess Him as Lord, they do not obtain the blessing.
 - This is very terrible, very striking!
 - Here are professing Christians that are cast out to their surprise and horror on the final day!

TRANS> And I want you to see that they do more than **merely** profess Him with their lips!

B. They also claim to have served Him in His kingdom!

- They will say:
 - Matt 7:22: “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders Your name?”
 - Now it is certainly possible that they are just making this up,
 - but it seems much more likely that they really did do these things.
 - They really did do service in the kingdom of God, as members of the church on earth.
 - To make it all the more vivid,
 - the highest form of each of three major areas of Christian service are mentioned...
1. They say, “Did we not prophesy in Your name....”
 - a. Prophecy is the highest expression of the ministry of God’s word...
 - It has to do with those who hear directly from God and then speak His word by the direct inspiration of God’s Spirit!
 - This is the highest form of the ministry of the word...
 - and Jesus is saying that even some who have possessed this highest form will be excluded...
 - b. Of course there would also be those who would plead lesser forms of the ministry of the word...
 - Did I not preach your word?
 - Did I not teach your word in a Bible study?
 - Did I not teach your word to my children?
 - Did I not witness to my unbelieving family about Christ... and the people at work?
 - Did I not encourage and comfort my brothers and sisters with your promises?
 - Did I not guide them in the way of your commandments?
 - Did I not admonish them and rebuke them when they erred?
 - Did I not defend your truth when it was maligned?
 - Basically they are saying, your word was in mouth and I did not hide it as I had opportunity.
 - c. A person may be very diligent about the word and yet be excluded from Christ’s kingdom in the end...
 - You may have a fine reputation on the earth as one who knew the word, and who helped others with the word, but yet be a castaway yourself.
 - You may be very keen about Bible Study, about reading all the great books and discussing all the great sermons, about defending the faith,

about understanding the Bible systematically and knowing the catechisms and creeds, about scripture memory, and all sorts of other things...

- but still not enter the kingdom of heaven at the end.
- Even prophecy is not enough to prove that you will enter the kingdom of Heaven.
 - Balaam spoke the truth of God, but he was a man of iniquity.
 - Your security is not in prophecy...

TRANS> Then these defendants bring forth the next argument...

2. Have we not cast out demons in Your name?

a. This is what we might call the highest expressing of spiritual warfare...

- This warfare would include everything from casting out demons to bringing down strongholds against Christ...
 - Did we not fight against moral decadence and corruption in the church...
 - Did we not insist that church discipline be properly exercised...
- Did we not join sides with those who were standing for the truth against those who brought in heresy to the church?
- Did we not join in on the efforts to reform worship that has been perverted by the traditions of men?
- Did we not discipline and train up our children to follow the truth and to live in obedience to you?
- Did we not rally together with others to oppose abortion and the redefinition of marriage?
- Did we not even expose corruption in the work place, even when it led to the loss of position and status?
- Did we not rescue those who had fallen into sin and pull them out bondage to drunkenness or immorality
- Did we not promote Christian education and help to establish godly schools?
- Did we not overcome in our own life a bad temper, or even a life of debauchery?

b. Jesus is saying that you may have done all this sort of thing even to the point of casting out Devils and still not inherit eternal life in the end.

- God works in the church as a whole, and He can use unbelievers to pull down the strong holds of Satan.

- Judas went out with the other disciples and found that the demons were subject to him also,
 - Yet, in the end, it was demonstrated that he was subject to them and was overcome by Satan.
 - There is no doubt that some of David's mighty men, though valiant in the Lord's battles were not themselves in the Lord.

TRANS> Then there is the third argument...

3. Have we not done many wonders in Your name?
 - a. Wonders are miracles that are performed by supernatural power—healing the sick, raising the dead, calming the storm, casting mountains into the sea!
 - This refers to the highest expression of Christian service to those in need.
 - We are told that Jesus went about everywhere doing good—
 - healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, feeding the hungry, etc...
 - b. Many on the day of judgement may plead that they have done many deeds of service...some that are far less elaborate than these wonders...but still those that are promised a reward...
 - Have we not given a cup of cold water in Jesus' name?
 - Have we not supported widows and orphans in their distress?
 - Have we not given great sums of money to build the church or support missions....
 - Have we not served as missionaries?
 - Have we not done quiet service for others that nobody knew about?
 - Have we not comforted the sorrowing?
 - Have we not administered service to the sick?
 - Have we not shown hospitality to strangers and refreshed our friends with a warm and generous spirit?
 - Have we not gone to the relieve of those that we overburdened with work to assist them?
 - c. All these are wonderful things!
 - All these are things that are done in the church!
 - But all these things can be done by a person who is a stranger to Jesus Christ.

TRANS> The shocking thing about this passage is that Jesus says there are many who have both professed Him as Lord and who have done all sorts of things in His name that will be utterly rejected.

II. Understand, dear Christian, the day is coming when Jesus' light and truth will rudely expose all who are false, no matter how great their profession may have been on earth!

A. How shocked they are when they come before Him!

1. All their life they were self-deceived...

- All their life they deceived others!

a. All along they had been carried along by what other people thought of them and said about them!

- They had a good reputation in the church and were greatly comforted by their excellent reputation!

- Many people wanted to get their counsel...

- Many looked to their example...

- Many highly esteemed them and praised them.

b. But this passage clearly shows us that none of that matters in the end!

- It won't matter what we think of ourselves or what everybody else thinks of us.

- If this passage shows anything, it shows that the only thing that matters is what Jesus thinks of you.

- You will have to answer to Him...

- It is so important that you learn to do that now!

- Do not rest on the opinions of others about you—come before Jesus and see what He thinks...

- Don't wait until it is too late...

- Do it now!

2. Jesus shows you here how thoroughly self-deceived people can be...

a. Even when they came before Him, they are still holding on to their self-deception!

- There they are before His throne, desperately bringing forth arguments to convince Him that they are worthy of His favour...

b. It would seem that at He does not allow His light to break forth to expose them all at once...

- They seem to realise that things are going for them...
 - But they still have enough self-deception to argue that there must be some kind of mistake!
 - “We prophesied in your name, we cast out demons in your name, we did many wonders in your name!”
 - This shows how deep their deception is!
- c. But you can be sure that as soon as the light of His final sentence falls on them,
- they will be compelled to utterly shut their mouths forever...
 - They will know that all their arguments are useless when the light exposes what they truly are.
 - Once the sentence is passed, they will cry out in utter desperation for the rocks to hide them!
- B. And here Jesus presents that terrible sentence after which no more can be said!
1. He says, “I will declare to them...”
 - a. He will speak with powerful final words that can never be reversed!
 - b. It will be like it was when Ezekiel came for his blessing and found that there was none.
 - Ge 27:34 When Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with an exceedingly great and bitter cry, and said to his father, "Bless me—me also, O my father!"
 - c. If you are in this place, it will as it was for the people in Noah’s day when the flood came and the door of the ark was finally shut.
 - It was too late,
 - They were doomed,
 - The way of salvation was shut up forever.
 - How your heart will fail you then!
 2. Hear what Jesus will say to them...
 - a. Looking back, He will declare, “I never knew you.”
 - 1) Now of course He does not mean that He did not know what they were!
 - That is the very problem for them!
 - He knew exactly what they were right to very core of their being!
 - Nothing was hidden from Him by all the layers of deception and pretence!
 - Yes, in this way, He knew them very well...

- And now He causes them to know everything about themselves...
- and everybody else to see what they really were...

TRANS> But when He says, "I never knew you,"

- He speaks of a different kind of knowing...

2) He means that He did not acknowledge them as belonging to Him.

a) The word "know" is often used in the Bible in this way...

- In Amos 3:2, God says to His people:
 - Amos 3:2: "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; Therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."
 - He speaks here of His electing love, not of mere knowledge of their existence...
 - It is His covenant love in which He knows them as His people and loves them.
- In John 10:14, Jesus speaks this way of His sheep in distinction from all others as knowing and being known. He says:
 - John 10:14: "I am the good shepherd; and I know My *sheep*, and am known by My own.
 - It is the knowing that involves communion—of living into each other and of giving and receiving in acts of love.
 - The sheep giving Him trust and praise...
 - And Jesus giving them grace and life.

TRANS> So you see that when Jesus professes that He does not know them...

b) He means that He was not in fellowship with them when they were doing all that prophecy

- and all that casting out of devils
 - and all those wonders.
- They said that they were doing all these things in His name,
 - but they were in fact doing them all in their own name...
 - they were doing them in reference to the people around them and in reference to themselves;
 - They were not doing these things in reference to the true and living God or in fellowship with Jesus.

c) And notice the word **never**...

- Jesus does not say that He knew them at first, but then they turned away and He knew them no more...
 - No, He says, "I never knew you."
 - Once you are in Christ and in true fellowship and communion with Him, there is no way to undo it!
 - He does not know these ones now because He never knew them...
 - Not when they first made their profession...
 - Not when they did their preaching or their good works...
 - He never knew them, He never had communion with them, or He would still know them now.

TRANS> "I never knew you."

- that is what Jesus says about His relationship previous relationship with them...

b. Then He speaks about their future relationship. He says:

- "Depart from Me."

1) These words are the equivalent of "Get out of my sight!"

- From henceforth, He will have nothing more to do with them.
- They had carried about His name for all those years and lived among His people and been called Christians,
 - but now they are cut off from even this connection with Him.

2) These words are the most horrible that anyone can ever hear from the Lord Jesus!

- "Depart from Me!"
 - They are so final—there is no way to come back and try again, no way to appeal—it is over for all eternity!
- Other scriptures tell us where they go when they depart...
 - Matt 25:46: "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."
 - 2 Thes 1:9: These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power,

- In Luke 13:28, these words are added to their sentence:
 - Luke 13:28: “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.”

TRANS> And so you see how horrible it will be when the light of Jesus Christ falls on those kingdom people who never knew Him and exposes them...

III. But why will these who professed Him and served in His kingdom be rejected at last?

- What is wrong with them?
- Why are they cut off who confessed Him as Lord and who did so much?
- Well of course we have seen that it is because Jesus did not know them...
 - But why not?
 - Why not when they professed Him as Lord and did so many wonderful things in His name?

A. Well first because of what they did not do...

- They did not do the will of God.

1. In verse 21 Jesus says,

- “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but **he who does the will of My Father in heaven.**”
- They would have been accepted if only they had done the Father’s will.

a. Well what is God’s will?

- Surely you want to know lest you be excluded...
- God’s will is all that Jesus has been talking about in this sermon!
 - Remember, this passage is part of Jesus’ conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount and in that sermon, He tells us the will of God...
 - He tells us that God considers hatred in your heart murder and lust in your heart adultery...
 - Jesus tells us that God considers every thing you do against union with your wife (or husband) to be separating what He has joined together...
 - He considers all careless use of His name to be an attack against His majesty...
 - He calls you to go the second mile, to go out of your way to reconcile, to love your enemies...

- He hates all your religious service that is not conducted with the purest of motives.
 - He considers the love of riches to be a repudiation of Himself!
 - And He considers all setting yourself up as judge to be a rejection of His place as the only judge!
- b. The light of God's truth and what He requires of you either comes to you now, in this life, or it will come to you at the last day!
- Either you see what the will of God is now, or you will see it at the last day.
 - All of the sudden, those who have carelessly walked contrary to God's will will see themselves as they are!
 - It will be a very clear and very horrible display of what they have been,
 - and it will bring God's judgement down upon them to the darkness of Hell!
 - What they had always looked at in a very superficial way will now be seen with great clarity!
 - They will be condemned because they did not do the will of God.
- TRANS> But what God is it to see all this now when you see how you have failed?
2. How can you do the will of God when the standard is so high?
- a. It is by faith alone that you can do God's will.
- The whole reason Jesus came into the world was to do God's will for us.
 - That is why you are blessed when you are poor in spirit—
 - when you give up on yourself and look to Him for salvation.
- b. God showed clearly in the Old Testament what is required of us as sinners!
- 1) To do His will, you must get a new heart... this was shown by circumcision.
- You have to be changed by God into a new creation because the old man is corrupted.
- 2) And to do God's will now that sin is on your record, you must pay the penalty of death...
- And God showed that He would graciously accept the death of a substitute for you.
 - Jesus is that substitute—

- and it is not by simply professing Him,
 - but by believing on Him that you are saved.
 - You must look to His death as the payment of the penalty of your sin.
- 3) Those who are rejected are rejected because they did not do the will of God...
- Rather than trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ,
 - They trusted in all the Christian things they did.
 - They never became those beggars of Matthew 7:7 who ask and seek and knock...
 - They never came to recognise that they have no righteousness in themselves.
 - God's will is that we would become beggars who look to Jesus for all our righteousness instead of those who think that we are saved...
 - by merely calling Him Lord...
 - by ministering His word
 - by fighting battles for Him against Satan
 - and by doing good.

TRANS> These eminent professors of religion are rejected because they did not do the will of God...

- That is the thing they did not do...

B. Jesus also states what they did do that excludes them:

- They are excluded because they “practice lawlessness.”

1. The word “lawlessness” is **anomia** in the original...

- anomia means to be without law.
- Nomos is law, and the “a” in front of it negates it.

2. So you see then that Jesus accuses these who are rejected before His throne of living apart from His law.

a. Like everyone who pretends to serve God without truly coming to Christ,

- They had replaced God's holy law with their own standard...
- Rather than living before God's standard, they had set up their own standard... a standard that they could keep!

b. A true believer does not do this...

- He continually lives before a standard that He cannot keep: God's standard...
 - That is why He keeps on as a beggar, looking to Jesus.
- c. But what is very interesting about this is that by living before this much higher standard,
 - the true believer actually lives a much more holy life than the one who is boasting in what he has done!
 - It is a holy life that truly lives before the true God, in full communion with Him...
 - Receiving grace from Him to grow to be more and more like Jesus...
 - And receiving forgiveness from Him with heartfelt gratitude.
 - It is a life of true worship and adoration of God for so great a salvation in His Son.
 - It is a life about which God will declare in the end that you have done His will—
 - even in the very ways that these false professors claimed to do His will...
 - God will accept your prophecy
 - He will accept your casting out of demons
 - And He will accept your wonders that are done in Jesus' name.
 - The same works that He will not accept from a proud boaster,
 - He will gladly accept from a humble beggar...
 - Because in reality these works are not at all the same...
 - The proud boaster is rejected because he thinks his deed makes him acceptable...
 - The humble beggar's is accepted because his deed is presented to God as that which is unworthy but for the mercy of Christ...
 - The beggar is dealing with God in truth, because His works are unacceptable apart from Christ...
 - The boaster is all fiction—he does not know God.
 - He does not live in communion with Christ.

Do you see the difference?

- The ones Jesus rejects are doing many religious things, but it is all before the eyes of a fictitious God...
 - They aren't dealing with the true God, but with a god of their imaginations!
 - They have no true communion with Christ... He does not know them and they do not know Him.
- But the beggar is dealing with God in truth—
 - He is living truly before God through Christ.
 - He truly knows the Father and Jesus Christ whom he has sent...
 - And from the Son, he receives eternal life.

Do not, therefore, be deceived!

- Jesus is urging you to deal with the truth!
 - The wide gate that leads to destruction is the way of human accomplishment which is worthless before God...
 - The narrow gate that leads to life is the way of divine accomplishment which is accepted by Him.
 - It is the way of union with the Saviour.
 - Be sure that you are not living under the darkness of self-deception!
 - May the voice Christ break through and give you life.