

The King's Sermon

The Test of a Kingdom Citizen (Matthew 7:21-29)

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on August 20, 2017

Introduction

- ❖ The worst form of deception is self-deception. No one likes being deceived. It hurts to be lied to whether it's done by a friend, a spouse, or a child. But at least in those situations, you have the opportunity to confront the deception and get at the truth.
 - ▶ But if you end up deceiving yourself – and others around you are equally convinced – then you're really in trouble. **Because you can't confront deception that you don't know about.** So you might end up being stuck in a self-constructed web of lies never knowing the truth about yourself.

- ❖ I bring up the reality of self-deception because Jesus does so in today's passage. It's how he concludes the Sermon on the Mount. He ends with a warning. So as we finish up our sermon series today, we'll finish with a similar warning – **a warning to all who claim to be citizens of the kingdom, who profess with their mouths that Jesus is their Lord and King.**
 - ▶ I don't think there is a more frightening passage than ours today. Throughout my years of ministry, I've had more than a few people come to me for counseling, utterly disturbed by this passage. "Is there a chance that I could go all my life calling Jesus my Lord and yet be rejected by him in the end?" "Is there a possibility that I've built up my life on sinking sand without even knowing it?"

- ❖ I realize those questions may sound strange to you – maybe even inappropriate. Christians are rarely challenged in this way. **In the church today, we're so quick to offer assurance of salvation to anyone who says the right words.** So long as you answer the diagnostic questions right and pray the Sinner's Prayer, then we immediately assure you that you're in the kingdom of heaven. We tell you you're now a Christian and then leave you to it. Any notion you may have deceived yourself when you said 'Jesus is Lord' is quickly brushed aside as an unhealthy form of doubt.
 - ▶ But if you never ask "Am I truly saved?" – if you're never open to self-examination – then how do you take seriously Jesus's warnings? **How do you obey the biblical commands to examine yourself?** Like **2 Corinthians 13:5**, "*Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?-unless indeed you fail to meet the test!*"

- ❖ Examine yourself. That's a biblical command. **Socrates famously said that the unexamined life is not worth living. I think Jesus would say the unexamined life is not wise living.** It's foolish. Because you could go on living in self-delusion thinking you're a citizen of the kingdom of heaven. But after you die, standing before the judgment seat of Christ, you hear the King say, "*I never knew you; depart from me, you worker of lawlessness*". Can you think of anything worse than that? That is a horrifying thought.
 - ▶ And that's why Jesus's warning at the end of his Sermon is grace to us. It's going to be hard to hear. It might hurt. But it's worth it – if it leads to a self-revelation. If it means we have a clearer picture of who we are and where we stand in relation to the kingdom of God. So what I want to show you in the text is 1) the necessity of obedience, 2) the warning of self-deception, and 3) the discipline of self-examination.

The Necessity of Obedience

- ❖ Let's begin with the necessity of obedience. In most translations, vv21-23 is separated from vv24-27, and they're often taught independently of each other. But the common thread between two is 'doing' the will of the Father (v21) and 'doing' the words of Jesus (v24).
 - ▶ In both sections a failure to obey is the main problem. In the first section, you can sum it up as '**saying without obeying**'. A person says all the right things about God but fails to obey God. In the second, the problem is slightly different. It's about '**hearing without doing**'. Where you hear the words of Jesus taught to you, but you don't do anything about them. Both sections are stressing the necessity of obedience.

- ❖ Let's start in v21 and the problem of saying without obeying. Let me read it again, "*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.*" Now the word for 'Lord' (*kurios*) could be used as a polite way to address someone, like calling him 'sir'. But the next verse mentions, "*on that day*", which most take to mean Judgment Day. Given that context, the person saying, 'Lord, Lord' to Jesus is not just saying 'Sir, sir' but 'Lord God, Lord God'.

- ❖ **So we're talking about a person with an orthodox, biblical view of Jesus.** This person recognizes Jesus as more than an exalted teacher – but as divine, as One with the Father. That belief is essential to the Christian faith. If you do not (and cannot) confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord (as in the Lord God Almighty), then you are not saved (cf. Rom. 10:9).
 - ▶ **So calling Jesus 'Lord' is necessary for salvation – but in itself it's not sufficient.** That's the point being made here. **You say you believe Jesus is the Son of God – the Second Person of the Trinity, the Lord and Savior – but your profession of faith means very little if that profession is not validated by the way you live.**

- ❖ In Luke's account of the Sermon on the Mount, he records Jesus as saying, "*Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you?*" (Lk. 6:46) To call him Lord is to affirm Jesus as Master, and masters, in biblical times, had absolute authority over their servants. **So if you don't actually do what Jesus tells you, then in what sense is he your Master?** It would seem that you are still your own master and lord.

- ❖ **So the problem here is when you say one thing but do the complete opposite.** Later on in Matthew 21:28, Jesus tells a parable of two sons. He says, "²⁸*What do you think? A man had two sons. And he went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work in the vineyard today.'*²⁹*And he answered, 'I will not,' but afterward he changed his mind and went.*³⁰*And he went to the other son and said the same. And he answered, 'I go, sir,' but did not go.*³¹*Which of the two did the will of his father?"*
 - ▶ And the answer is the first. Yes, he initially said the wrong thing. He was disobedient. But he changed his mind. He repented (which in Greek literally means 'a change of mind') and he ended up working the vineyard, fulfilling his father's will. Contrast him with second son who says all the right things – but doesn't go. He doesn't obey. **The point here is that what you say means nothing if you don't obey.**

- ❖ **Now if we keep reading in vv22-23, Jesus says – not only is what you say about me not enough – but what you do for me in my name is not enough if you don't obey me.** Look at v22. Jesus says on Judgment Day many will say to him, *“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’”*.
 - ▶ That’s a scary thought. I could be preaching powerful sermons *in his name*. Opposing evil spirits *in his name*. Performing mighty miracles *in his name*. And if I did that, no doubt all of you would be impressed. But there’s a chance God won’t. There’s a chance he might say, “I never knew you; depart from me.” **In the final analysis, the fruitfulness of my life will demonstrate the truthfulness of my words and deeds.**

- ❖ That's the same principle from last week’s passage. The health of a tree’s fruit validates any claim of that tree to be healthy. *“Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.”* (7:20) **Our problem is that we have this tendency to equate good fruit with a fruitful ministry.**
 - ▶ But the good fruit that Jesus has in mind – the kind that reveals who we really are – is not the outward manifestations and results of our ministry. The good fruit is our daily obedience to God’s will that flows out of a good heart, a redeemed and regenerate heart. **So saying all the right things about Jesus and saying all the ways you’ve served in his name – amounts to very little if you’re living in disobedience.**
 - Let that sink in. Are there areas of your life – especially the private areas – that are not aligned with God’s will? Are you in disobedience, in any way, to his Word? If so, don’t take any comfort in having right theology and having lots of ministry experience under your belt. That’s what vv21-23 are saying.

- ❖ Now in vv24-27 the problem is hearing without doing. Look at v26, *“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’s like what James says in his letter, *“Be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.”* (Jas. 1:22) **You’re deceiving yourself if you store up all these words of Jesus in your head but they never translate to your heart and hands.** You can listen to sermons every week, read the Bible every morning, listen to Christian podcasts every day. But if all that biblical knowledge doesn't translate into biblical living, then you're deceiving yourself. You're not who you think you are.

- ❖ Now before we move on, let's be clear. Jesus is not teaching salvation by works (and neither are we). **We are saying obedience is necessary to be a Christian but not as the cause for why you're a Christian.** It's like saying having good fruit is necessary to be a good tree. Not because the good fruit makes the tree good. No, a tree is only good because its Creator made it so. And if it's a good tree it will by necessity produce good fruit.

- ❖ **In the same way, what makes you a Christian is not your obedience to God. What makes you a Christian is God and his sovereign grace in making you new.** And now as a new creation, you will by necessity produce an overall life of obedience.

- ▶ Now no one is saying it'll be a life of perfect obedience. But in the final analysis, come Judgment Day, a true Christian's identity will be revealed by his fruit. **His life will have the taste of Christian obedience.**
- ❖ **I can't understand why some Christians ignore the necessity of obedience.** A man might die and leave behind a legacy of worldly indulgence and sinful disobedience, but just because he prayed a Sinner's Prayer as a child – because he confessed with his mouth that Jesus is Lord – they'll say at least he died saved. They'll say he died an immature Christian.
 - ▶ But that makes no sense to me. I understand not every orange on an orange tree is going to be equally sweet. A few might even be sour. But they're still oranges growing on an orange tree. **If a tree only produced a bunch of lemons, you wouldn't conclude, in the final analysis, that it was just an immature orange tree.** No, it was always a lemon tree. And the only way it'll ever produce oranges is if it dies and gets reborn (recreated altogether) into a brand new kind of tree called an orange tree.
- ❖ That's how you become a Christian. That's how you get saved. You die to yourself and you're born again by the grace of God and power of his Spirit. He makes you a new creation. So don't take comfort or give comfort based on what you said or did in the past. **Instead base your assurance on this simple question: Am I obeying Christ in the present?**

The Warning of Self-Deception

- ❖ You're better off asking that question now – no matter how painful the answer might be – than to continue in a state of self-deception. This leads to our second point. I want to continue warning you about the reality of self-deception because, according to Jesus, it can be so hard to detect from all outward appearances.
- ❖ **That parable he tells about two builders building on one of two foundations is often treated as a lesson on how much better and wiser it is to be a Christian than a non-Christian.** Wouldn't you rather build a life on the solid rock of Christ? If you build your life on anything else, one day a storm will hit and wash it all away.
 - ▶ Now that's certainly true, it's an important lesson. But if you read that parable in context, it becomes clear that Jesus is *not* contrasting religious versus non-religious people. **He's *not* pitting the Christian against the atheist.**
- ❖ If we read these two sections together as a whole, then starting in v21 it's clear **Jesus is telling this parable to people who would call him Lord.** So the second man building his life on sand is not just the man living an obviously godless and worldly life. In this case, Jesus is picturing a pious, devout religious man who could easily pass for a true Christian.
 - ▶ These two houses probably looked identical, and they were located in the same place since they were exposed to the same weather conditions. **So on a sunny day, the casual observer wouldn't know the difference between the two houses since their only difference lies far beneath the surface in their separate foundations.**

- ❖ The house that weathers the storm is the house built on the rock. V25 says, *“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.”* But as for the house built on sand, Jesus says, *“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.”*
 - ▶ **Now the obvious question is what does it mean to build your house (your life) on the rock?** Jesus tells us in v24, *“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.”* **So the rock is apparently the words of Jesus, and building on the rock means doing or obeying his words.** And the point being made is that we're talking about a deep-seated, heart-level obedience that won't be obvious to the casual observer.

- ❖ Who knows how long those houses stood there before that big storm finally hit? It could've been days, months, even years. **When things are going great no one can tell the difference. It takes a storm to reveal the truth.**
 - ▶ In the same way, professing Christians tend to look the same. Our lifestyles, our routines, tend to look the same. We're located in the same church. But whether we're genuine or false in our profession of Christ as Lord is often unknown until God puts us through a storm.

- ❖ Of course the storm that Jesus is referring to is the storm of God's just fury and wrath come Judgment Day. **On that day there will be a great revealing. Matthew 25 says the Son of Man will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats** (25:32). That's a sobering thought.
 - ▶ Let me stress again, your obedience to Christ (your doing of his will) is not what makes you a sheep. **You're a sheep if God, by his grace and through your faith, makes you a sheep.** Your only hope, come Judgment Day, is not in yourself but in another Sheep, in the Lamb of God. Your only hope of surviving the final judgment is the blood of Christ, which was shed on the cross to atone for your sins. That's how you're saved. That's what makes you a sheep. **But your heart-level obedience to Christ still matters because that's how you're distinguished from a goat.**

- ❖ Let me ask, what's your foundation? What's underneath your house? What are you building your life on? Solid rock or sinking sand? If you're going to ask these questions, it's best to start early. **The time for examining is at the beginning when the foundation is being laid.**
 - ▶ That's why I think it's so important to disciple new believers. To follow up with them. It's also why we need to invest in children and youth ministries. **When they're young in the faith and their foundation is still being laid, we've got to help them establish a firm foundation of obedience to God's Word.**
 - We've got to inoculate them from an easy-believism that just focuses on knowing the right things about the gospel and making the right professions. **Let's be sure to present a gospel that puts forth Jesus as more than just a Savior for the future but a Lord for the present.**

- ❖ **We need to teach more about the lordship of Christ.** So that Christians (especially new ones and young ones) actually know what it means to call Jesus your Lord. It means you serve only one Master. It means you've sworn your full allegiance to him. **He gets to tell you how to live your life. Jesus has complete control over you.**
 - ▶ Now if that sounds like utter nonsense to you – if it's completely foreign to you and to the way you're living your life – then there's a good chance you'll knock and say 'Lord, Lord', and he won't recognize you as one of his.
- ❖ So what kind of foundation has been laid in your Christian life? What about your own children or those students in your D-group or your peers in the small group? What kind of foundation is being laid?
 - ▶ If you wait too late to examine and ask about Jesus's lordship over your life, then it get much harder to tell. And you may have to wait for a storm to hit before you find out what kind of foundation is underneath the surface.

The Discipline of Self-Examination

- ❖ That leads to our final point, the discipline of self-examination. If you recognize the dangers and folly of the unexamined life, then what do you do? I like what it says in Luke's account of this same parable.
 - ▶ In **Luke 6:47-48** it say, *“⁴⁷Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: ⁴⁸he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.”*
- ❖ **What sticks out to me in this version is where it says the man “dug deep” in order to lay the foundation on the rock.** I'm sure it was a lot easier and a lot faster to build the second house because you could just bypass the long and hard work of digging down deep.
 - ▶ But the point is that it's worth it. It's worth it to dig deep in the Word of God (to know it deeply) and to honestly examine your life and your obedience in light of it. That's the discipline of self-examination. **It's where you're regularly holding up your life and comparing it to God's Word.** It's where you're asking yourself if you're living in line with the will of God?
- ❖ If you call Jesus your Lord, then I wonder: How do you respond to God's Word? **How do you respond to the Sermon on the Mount? Are you merely astonished at Jesus's teaching?** That's what we read in vv28-29, *“²⁸And when Jesus finished these sayings, the crowds were astonished at his teaching, ²⁹for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes.”*
 - ▶ They noticed that Jesus didn't quote other rabbis and ground his authority in the teaching of teachers before him. That was how the scribes preached. But Jesus had a different style. He kept saying, “I say to you”. So the crowds were amazed.

- ❖ But that reaction is not enough. I hope you go further than that. **Don't be like the crowds, just analyzing Jesus's preaching style.** Just admiring his skill, his profundity, his beautiful words. Astonishment is not enough.
 - ▶ Many of us would say we love the Sermon on the Mount. We'd say it's one of our favorite passages of Scripture. We've studied it and analyzed it through and through. It amazes us. We're astonished every time we read it.

- ❖ **But the real question is not just do I love the Sermon on the Mount but am I living the Sermon on the Mount?** Have I applied my Lord's warnings and instructions to my life? Through the course of listening to the Sermon on the Mount being preached Sunday after Sunday, have any of my routines, my habits, my practices changed or adjusted at all?
 - ▶ If the answer is no, then I hope and pray that Jesus's warning in today's passage gives you pause. Don't just give his Sermon a passing glance and approval and move on unchanged. Don't leave this place without probing your heart. Am I actually doing God's Word or am I merely hearing it? And if I'm merely a hearer and not a doer, then what does that reveal about me?

- ❖ Friends, if you're regularly examining yourself (and if you're like me), then you're regularly finding yourself falling short of God's Word. In those moments you can despair over whether you're really a Christian – **or you can respond like a Christian by repenting, by believing in God's forgiveness through faith in Christ, and then by praying for the grace and strength you need to obey.**
 - ▶ That's how a man or woman grounded on the solid rock of God's Word responds. Turn away from yourself and to Christ your Savior and Lord. His oath, his covenant, his blood / will support you in the whelming flood / so when all around your soul gives way / he then will be all your hope and stay.