

The Sermon on the Mount

Session 14 – “Final Warnings” – Matthew 7:21-29

Verses 21-23...*Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father 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 deeds of power in your name?” ²³ Then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.”*

This continues to deal with false prophets, but it is also a warning against self-deception. Many of the false prophets will do and say wonderful things.

1. Do you think a person can be “religious” and still not follow Christ? You have undoubtedly heard the term “nominal” Christian. Some take that to mean someone who is “a little bit Christian.” But in reality, the word is best defined as “existing or being something in name or form only.” That is what Jesus is referring to here.

2. The people Jesus is talking about had the right words and works, the right creeds and deeds, the right profession and expression, but still something was missing. What do you think it was? This relates to the previous verses that talked about the fruit of a person’s life. It reminds me of a peach tree I once had growing in my yard. The peaches looked wonderful, but for some reason they had no taste! I was rather disappointed. The outside was deceptive of what the inside was like.

The Apostle Paul warned Timothy (2 Timothy 3:5) about those who exhibited *a form of godliness but denied its power.*

In his day, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said that one aspect of this problem in the church was what he called “cheap grace.” That is, there was an understanding of grace, but without real conversion. These are the ones Proverbs 30:12 describes as *those who are pure in their own eyes and yet are not cleansed of their filth.*

In The Cost of Discipleship Bonhoeffer writes, “Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance, baptism without church discipline, communion without confession, absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship, grace without the cross, grace without Jesus Christ, living and incarnate.”

James Montgomery Boice also makes an insightful comment on this passage when he writes: “...it is evident that Christ’s words are a particularly pertinent warning to those who blithely believe a few doctrines, or who perform a smattering of so-called good works and yet have never entered into that kind of true commitment to Christ which results in increasingly costly obedience and in true discipleship.”

When a person says, “Lord, Lord,” they are using the word that denoted divinity in the Old Testament, especially since the Jews would never utter the personal name of God aloud. This is why Christians refused to say “Caesar is Lord,” and suffered because of it. Thus, Jesus is saying there are those who will confess His divinity, but have never entered into a true personal relationship with Him. James, the half-brother of Jesus underscored this fact when he wrote, *You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that — and shudder. (2:19)*

Jesus ends this section by stating the crux of the problem: *I never knew you.* One could say the reverse is true as well. In the Bible, when it is said that someone “knows” someone else, it is more than just knowing

about them, it indicates that they have a relationship with them. Interestingly, when Martin Luther translated this passage into German, he used the verb “kennen”. In German, there are two verbs that mean “to know.” “Wissen” means to have knowledge of certain facts, while “kennen” means to be familiar with a person or place from first-hand experience.

Can this really happen – that someone would feel they believed all the right things about Jesus – maybe even being in a position of service, and still not really “knowing” the Lord? Martin Luther would say, “Yes! For that was me!” Luther left his training in a secular occupation to enter a monastery. There he made good progress and was ordained to the priesthood. He studied Scripture and became a doctor of theology. He gave lectures on various books of the Bible. If anyone had asked if he believed in the divinity of Jesus Christ, he would have quickly affirmed that he did. Boice writes, “Yet at this point in his life Luther did not know the Lord personally. Jesus was God, but not his God. Jesus was Lord, but not his Lord. Jesus was Savior, but not his Savior. Before the peace that he craved became his and before he could be used of God as the great Protestant reformer, he had to confront Jesus Christ himself.”

While those who said “Lord, Lord” did good works, that is never the starting place of true faith. (Review Ephesians 2:8-10 for the true way of salvation and the place of works.)

Verses 24-27...Hearers and Doers

Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. ²⁵ The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. ²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. ²⁷ The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!

Jesus ends his teaching with a rather simple dichotomy: those who hear His words and do them, and those who hear but do not do what he says. Basically words that “fell on deaf ears.” Palestine is an area very much like the southwestern United States. There are many “wadis” which are dry stream beds subject to flash floods.

Here’s what happened in St. George, Utah in a flash flood in 2005:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Fk5XvOlyHoU>

3. Are you aware of any structures that had “foundation issues”? What happened?

4. What does Jesus say is the foundation on which we should build? Why is that important?

Jesus indicates that there are two things needed:

(1) Listen. Do you know what Jesus said? Is it from Scripture, and not a version that someone may have distorted. There are many possible foundations, but having the right foundation is most important.

The Apostle Paul also talked about foundations in 1 Corinthians 3:11-13 *For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each one’s work.*

** If you haven’t already watched it, I would encourage you to look at this week’s hymn devotional (you can see it here: <https://www.palisadespresbyterian.org/sermons/>).

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand;
All other ground is sinking sand.

(2) Do it. Obedience shows complete trust. (♩ “Trust and Obey”) If you participated in the study in James, you might remember these two verses: James 1:22 – *Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.* and James 4:17 – *Anyone, then, who knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, sins.*

This applies to us with every sermon, Bible study or class. Someone has said, “A worship service is of little value unless it leads to worshipful service.” Medical doctors' biggest complaint is that patients come to them for medical advice and then don't follow the instructions they give.

5. What are some “sandy foundations” people build their lives on today?

6. What are some things that could be the metaphorical “storms” that could threaten the “house”? The life built on the foundation of Jesus and His word will ultimately stand. Even when the rains of disappointment fall, the floods of tribulation rise and winds of opposition blow, it will, like the house, stand.

Verses 28-29...*Now when Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were astounded at His teaching,²⁹ for He taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes.*

7. How do you think that scribes would have reacted to this last statement? These verses tell us that there was something intrinsically different about the teachings of Jesus. The scribes relied on memorized Old Testament passages, and various commentaries over the previous 500 years. Jesus' teaching was fresh and powerful.

8. To you, what is the most significant or amazing thing that Jesus ever said? From these two verses, it would seem that the crowd was more impressed with Jesus' authority than with the content of the Sermon on the Mount itself. But that may not be a bad thing. In the introduction (15 weeks ago!) I told of when I was a student at SDSU, and my professor for “Introduction to Philosophy” assigned us a number of various readings, including the Sermon on the Mount. The professor said he was an agnostic, but thought that these words of Jesus were “good philosophy.” He was one who focused only on the teaching, not the authoritative source. He was aware of Christ's ethic, but not willing to acknowledge or receive the new life that Christ offers.

Also, think back to when Jesus said that his hearers would experience persecution “for His sake,” not for his teaching's sake, but because of their relationship to Him. When Jesus said He had come to fulfill the law and the prophets, He was essentially making the claim to be the Messiah, as that is who the law and the prophets pointed to.

Jesus not only spoke authoritative words, He was *the Word* which was the ultimate expression of God. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God... The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace*

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and truth. (John 1:1,14)

