

## A Frightful Thought (Matthew 7:20-23)

Every human being lives forever. Every human being is eternal. And after this earthly life is over, we will live forever. We will live consciously, we will live personally, and we will live intelligently. We will be fully aware of every detail of our eternal existence. We will experience every moment of our eternal existence in a sense that we have never experienced at any moment in this life.

Our life after this life will be without distraction, we will have full comprehension of our surroundings, and full understanding of every moment and every experience that eternity holds. We will have in our eternal and final form fully functioning minds and bodies. We will feel, we will think, and we will be fully conscious of every detail in the eternal experience of heaven or hell.

The biblical description of hell makes this obvious. It is described as a place of a relentless accusing conscience, unrelieved guilt, unrelieved remorse, unrelieved sorrow, unrelieved regret, complete isolation, untold agony, and untold suffering. Hell is described as fire, it is described as darkness, and it is described as a place of gnashing of teeth and weeping and wailing forever.

On the other hand, however, the biblical description of heaven is stunningly attractive, unending, unlimited joy, bliss, happiness, satisfaction, no pain, no sorrow, no suffering, no loss, no remorse, sheer joy forever.

Therefore, it should be obvious that heaven is the place to be and hell is the place not to be. The most important choice a person makes is the choice of heaven. And it's a challenging choice. And sad to say, according to Jesus, there are many people who think they have made the choice for heaven, but in reality they have not. They think they are set to avoid hell and enter into heaven, but they are mistaken according to the teaching of Jesus.

Note these words from the lips of our Lord in Matthew 7:20-23:

“Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them. Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?”

Now note very carefully verse 23: “And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

Surely there are no more horrifying words than these that comes from the lips of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

There are no more serious words for religious people to hear than these. No more serious words for people who profess Christianity than these. Our Lord says, there will be “many” who are mistaken about their future destiny. He points out in this passage the folly of a dead, false faith. And then He points to its tragic end.

Personally, I do not think there's a more sobering text of Scripture than this one. I can understand that there are people who reject religion, people who reject Christianity, people who want nothing to do with Jesus Christ, people who want nothing to do with the gospel of Christ, and people who want nothing to do with the Bible. But it's a far more sobering and stunning thought to realize that there are many who are going to say, "Lord, Lord," to Jesus Christ, but He will declare, "I never knew you." That's frightening.

Every conservative theologian that I have read after realizes that Jesus taught that the church would be full of people who say that they are Christians, but in reality they are not. Their prayer of salvation was empty because their words were empty, and their life styles should prove this to them.

But the truth is, most are unwilling to examine their salvation experience by Scripture, most are unwilling to examine what they believe by Scripture, and most are unwilling to change. They will take their chances and end up in hell.

In fact, Jesus said in vv. 13-14 in this chapter, "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it." According to Jesus, there are "many" on the broad road of religion which leads to "destruction" (hell), but only "few" on the "narrow" road which is the right road that leads to heaven. Again, these are very shocking words.

Now these people in Matthew 7 have a confession of some attachment to Jesus, and they function in His name, but they do that only to hear that they will not at all enter heaven.

Therefore, it must be true that one's final destiny is not determined by what you say. It is not all about profession, it is about obedience. Now that is not to say that verbal profession of Christ is not needed, it is necessary.

Paul said to the church at Rome, "That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation" (Romans 10:9-10). But profession does not stand alone.

Now let's notice the phrase in verse 21 that says, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord." The operative word in this phrase is "saith." And understand that there is nothing wrong with what they say: "Lord, Lord." It is correct to call Jesus Lord. And to say "Lord, Lord," twice is to affirm a certain level of respect and devotion. Theology would teach us that this is orthodox, and it would teach us that this is fundamental because it is true. And you add to that that this person is convinced that in the name of Jesus they have "prophesied," they have "cast out devils," and they have done "many wonderful works" (v. 22), it's hard to imagine that Jesus will say unto them "I never knew you."

This is not somebody on the edge. Three times in verse 22, "in thy name" appears. In language we call this emphatic. Meaning that it is performed with emphasis. There is devotion here. There is an open confession that has passion and zeal. And backing up that confession and that profession is a

life given over to ministry associated with the name of Jesus Christ. And even the activities themselves are done in the name of Jesus. They have taught, they have spoken, and they have proclaimed it all in the name of Christ.

They have engaged in spiritual conflict, they claimed to have actually exercised power over demons in that name, and they have claimed to even have done some miracles in the name of Jesus. Here is a life that could basically be defined as the life of a true Christian.

This is not then some superficial marginal person making the claim, Lord, Lord.

How stunning then to hear in verse 22 many saying that. And then in verse 23, in response to their confession, the Lord makes His confession, “And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

They may claim Jesus, but Jesus doesn’t claim them. This is horrifying! If you look a little closer into the last part of verse 23, you can see that these people are not known to the Lord because they are doers of “iniquity.” Jesus said, “depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”

The word “work” that Jesus uses in this verse, is a word that means that these people “practice lawlessness.” In other words, they are good in not following the teaching of Scripture. They give very little thought to their faithfulness concerning the things of God. They say, well God understands, God knows that I mean well.

Professing Christ and living a sinful life will expose you one day as a hypocrite. Profession is valueless if it stands alone. The world is full of people who call Jesus Lord, who say it with emotion and passion. And yet never ever do they turn from their sin and submit to the lordship of Jesus Christ, never do they obey the will of the Father who is in heaven. The church is full of people like this.

That is why we are told in 2 Corinthians 13:5, “Examine yourselves to see whether you’re in the faith.” Understand, that Scripture is not concerned with a past event in your life, but it is concerned with the present character of your life now. If you are truly a child of God you should see in your life a pattern of obedience to the Word of God, and that, and that alone, is the product of repentance and genuine faith in Jesus Christ.

James said, “Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have works: shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well: the devils also believe, and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead” (2: 18-20).

One writer of the Greek language said, “In the text in the original language, if you just look at that statement, “I never knew you,” if you drew out all the components of that, it would probably be better to read it this way, “Not for a single moment have I acknowledged you as My own. I have never known you.” That doesn’t mean He doesn’t know who you are. The Lord knows who everybody is.

He not only knows who everybody is, He knows everyone's heart and He knows what everyone is thinking. You remember in John 2 it was said of Jesus that He didn't need to ask anybody a question because He knew what was in their hearts. When He says, "I never knew you," it doesn't mean I don't know who you are, you're a stranger to me. It means I have no intimate personal relationship with you. That's knowing in the biblical sense."

It's a scary thing to think about this, folks. It's a frightening thing to think about, that there are going to be people cast into hell who have spent a great portion of their life giving testimony to their faith in Jesus Christ. But they're only empty words.

You don't build a tower without counting the cost. You understand what the Lord is asking. He's asking for your life, for your whole life. Deny yourself, take up your cross and follow Him. If you say this is going to cost me my family, then let it cost you your family, your father, your mother, your wife, your husband, your sister, your brother, your friends. If it means you have to be persecuted even to a cross, let it be. But you deny yourself and all other things and follow Jesus.

One writer said it like this, "Listen, you may be respectful of Christ. You may have orthodox views about Christ. You may see yourself as fervent and zealous. You may be active in some level of devotion to the church. You may make a public proclamation. You may be busy building your little religious house, but have it smashed into a million pieces in judgment.

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