

Finding the Messiah: Have you found Him?

Text: Matthew 7:21-23

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Introduction

1. An illustration about a chemistry experiment
2. Background: Jesus goes to a mountainside to talk to his disciples. However, others have followed them there to hear his teachings. The famous teachings that are presented in this text are commonly referred to as the sermon on the mount. We will be in the last portion of his sermon. Here he provided several illustrations which describe two different types of humans in the world. Those who will enter the kingdom of heaven and those who will not.

Read the text:

21 "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 who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'"

We will learn three truths about finding Jesus. However, the main question we will answer is the very question you see in the title of the message: Have you found Him, [Jesus]?

I. JESUS IS EXCLUSIVE

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 who is in heaven.

Here, Matthew has clearly recorded that not everyone will go to heaven. Therefore, we see that Jesus is exclusive. In other words, Jesus excludes some people from being a part of the Kingdom of heaven. Jesus doesn't desire that anyone be excluded from the Kingdom of heaven. However, as will be discovered in the message, the Kingdom of heaven is limited to those who meet the requirements of God. This text helps us to understand the biblical perspective on the extent of salvation— who all will be saved?

To answer this question, there are typically three positions that can be chosen: pluralism, inclusivism, and exclusivism. Millard Erickson helps us understand these three positions by providing their definitions:

“Pluralism teaches that all religions are actually speaking of the same thing, so that the different religions are simply alternate routes, leading to the same goal. Inclusivism insists that salvation is only through Jesus Christ or the church, but there may be people who are Christians without being consciously involved in Christianity. Exclusivism is the view that Christianity is true and that only those who overtly subscribe to its beliefs and practices receive salvation.”

Exclusivism is the most biblical perspective. Only those who consciously subscribe to Christian beliefs and practices will be saved, or enter the Kingdom of heaven. In other words, a true Christian is one who agrees with the Word of God about what we should believe and how we should live our lives.

This is a difficult teaching found in Matthew 7, but on what authority does this teaching rest? Well, let us remember these are not only the words of Matthew. This direct caution does not rest on the authority of a human. Certainly, we know Scripture is inspired by God. Furthermore, the speaker here, lest we forget, is Jesus, himself, the son of God. Paul told us in Colossians, Jesus has the fullness of God dwelling in him. Therefore, the son who is one with God has said not everyone will enter the Kingdom of heaven. To make even greater stake to the truthfulness of this claim, Jesus said he is the one who will be making the decisive judgment on the eternity of each individual saying, “not everyone who says to me Lord, Lord.” He is the one from whom individuals are trying to request entrance. Yet, Jesus says not all will go.

This is not an isolated verse giving evidence for this belief. No, many additional texts support this truth:

John 14:6 - “Jesus answered, ‘I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.’”

Romans 10:9-10 - “If you declare with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.”

Acts 16:30-31a - “He then brought them out and asked, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ They replied, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.’”

John 3:16 - “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

Each of these verses explicitly refer to a qualification for those people who will be saved: Acknowledging and accepting Jesus and His work on the Cross for salvation.

If you are not a Christian and are still considering the Christian faith, or perhaps you have been brought here today by a friend, you may think that this is extremely harsh. This might be one of the very reasons you do not want to follow Christ. You think God is supposed to be loving and forgiving, and rightly so. God is love. God is gracious. So, how could a loving God send humans to eternal punishment in hell. Well, I could spend time reasoning with you for why God is still loving while condemning people to eternity in hell. Yet, I will not provide reasons for why he is still loving, for no other reason is as convincing as picking up the Bible yourself and reading the story of Jesus, God's son. If you look at the life of Jesus, you cannot help but to be convinced that God is loving.

By contrast, I want to tell you reasons for why God in his judgement is just, rather than why he is loving. God is completely perfect. In his moral perfection, or righteousness, or thorough goodness, he hates sin. He hates that which is wrong, evil, and destructive. In fact, he does not tolerate sin. To dwell with God you must meet his standard of perfection. If you are imperfect, then you are disqualified from being in a relationship with him. As Jesus said, "only the one who does the will of the Father" will enter the kingdom of heaven.

Romans 6:23 confers saying, "For the wages of sin is death." The text does not say sins plural, or specific sins, but sin singular. To do one wrong, to be imperfect, earns you death. Yes, physical death was a result of sin entering the world. But, the death here is referring to being separated from God for eternity. This is the second death as Revelation calls it.

If you are unconvinced, I ask you to remember the Garden of Eden. How many times were Adam and Eve disobedient before they were punished with removal from God's presence. The answer is once.

Therefore, we must recognize as humans— who are all imperfect, who have all fallen short of the glory of God— we do not deserve to enter the kingdom of heaven. We do not deserve to dwell with God. Yet, the biblical perspective of exclusivism shows God's great love in that those who consciously agree to the Christian faith come into a relationship with him.

If you are still struggling with this concept of God's judgement and sentence of eternal punishment that we deserve, I suggest you imagine this scenario with me. You are in a courtroom where the judge is God, and you are on trial for breaking his law. Do you think you would be able to prove to the all-knowing and morally perfect God, that you belong with him?

We see when finding Jesus that he is exclusive, but as we move on we will discover that he is clear.

II. JESUS IS CLEAR

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 who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?'

Jesus is clear about salvation by giving us this truth and example of those who will enter the kingdom of heaven before Judgment Day. From this passage, it might seem that Jesus is not clear. I mean the text says some people will come to Jesus on Judgment Day thinking that they will enter the kingdom of heaven, when they will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Jesus taught that there are people who think they are Christians, profess to be Christians, and even perform Christian activities, yet they will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Those coming to Jesus in this example are certainly confused, and we will come back to clear this up in a moment, but for now I want us to think about Jesus teaching these things before Judgment Day.

It is as if Jesus is a professor, or teacher, who gives you the study guide with all of the right answers before the test. Jesus is giving us forewarning about who will and who will not enter the kingdom. He could have not mentioned this truth. He could try to hide this fact and leave people clueless. Instead, Jesus said clearly to his disciples whom he is teaching, and those around who have also followed Jesus here to listen: "I want you to know this. I want you to know that some people believe they are saved, but should not have assurance of that hope."

Now, let's return to the example itself. Jesus showed that these people coming to him are still unsaved even though they profess Christ, believe they are Christian, and seemingly meet the requirement Jesus gave in verse 21: "only the one who does the will of the Father". The activities mentioned in this example ought to be within the will of the Father: prophesying in Jesus name (which is to speak a message from God), drive out demons in Jesus name, and perform miracles in Jesus name.

So, what is going on? Why do they not enter the kingdom of heaven? We will get there, but first I want to recognize that Jesus did not say doing those Christian activities is worthless. Jesus is not saying that doing good works is unimportant. No, good works are certainly important.

If we zoom out a little bit and look at the rest of Jesus' sermon on the mount we see Jesus discuss how his followers should live. He discussed murder, adultery, stewardship, prayer, fasting, idols, trusting God, and other aspects of living out the Christian faith. Not only does he emphasize living a life of personal holiness and public ministry, but he does so with authority and precision. Clearly, he calls out what is not living a life pleasing to God, and exhorts listeners to repent from such things and live a life which is obedient.

Later on in the same sermon, and immediately before our text this morning, you see him describe an illustration which also emphasizes good works. He was speaking about true prophets and false prophets being like good and bad trees.

He said, "By their fruit you will recognize them." In other words, by what they do you will recognize if they are a true or false prophet. He used the analogy of a tree, which is so simple a child will understand. Children, do you go to an apple tree and expect to find an orange growing on the branch? No, what do you expect? You expect an apple on an apple tree. Jesus was saying the way the prophet lived his life would provide evidence for you about his status as a prophet of God. Similarly, a Christian, even without the calling of a prophet or pastor, will still be noticed by their life. In Jesus' words, You should also be able to tell a Christian from their fruit. This is the very reasoning of Jesus.

Jesus is making it plain to us that if we live a life inconsistent with what we say we believe (Jesus is our Lord and Savior), then we have cause for concern. We have cause for tension and guilt. The inconsistency should cause a guilt not that pushes you away from the Lord, but a guilt that leads you to repent and come back to your savior. Yet, if you live a life inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus and feel no guilt, and feel no tension, you ought to be concerned. Or, if you live a life inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus, feel guilty, but do not repent, then you should be concerned about the health of your relationship with Christ. Concerned to the point where you talk to a pastor, you talk to a trusted believer, you talk to the Lord. This is not a light matter, we are talking about the status of your soul, here.

Yet, this is not the position of the people in Jesus' example. The people in the example do have an inconsistency, but it is not one of their life being out of step. Let's continue and see how Jesus responded and revealed their issue.

III. JESUS IS THE ANSWER

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 who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles? Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

Jesus here explains the will of his father more clearly. Yes, it is to live a life pleasing to God. Yet, that does not start with doing, it starts with being. It starts with knowing Jesus and being known by him. It starts by entering into a relationship with God.

We learned earlier that we do not deserve a relationship with God. We are sinners and have done wrong. Therefore, we deserve separation from God in hell for eternity. However, God in his great love, sends Jesus, his son, to us. Jesus was the only man who ever lived a perfect life on this earth. Jesus was the man who lived the life you could not live. Then, at the end of his life rather than receiving his rightful reward of dwelling with God again, he dies on the cross, taking the punishment you deserve. On that cross, he served as your substitute. But, he didn't stay dead, he rose from the grave defeating sin and death to provide the opportunity of forgiveness for you. He lived, died, and rose to life to provide a right relationship with God.

The question becomes: will you believe upon him and call out to him for forgiveness? Will you trust him and him alone to save you? This final aspect of accepting this truth is necessary and paramount. The people in the example were coming to Jesus to present their works to him as evidence for a right relationship with God. These men understood the importance of living according to God's teachings, but misunderstood thinking that they alone could live up to the perfect standard God requires without receiving a free relationship with him through Jesus. Look at what they said, "[We] prophesied in your name, casted out demons in your name, performed miracles in your name." They were thinking of course we did the will of the Father. However, Jesus responded, "I never knew you." Their works were self-righteous and wrongly motivated, rather than being the outgrowth or fruit of a personal relationship with God!

Will this be you? Will you hear on Judgment Day, "I never knew you, depart from me?" In other words, will you trust in Jesus alone to enter a relationship with God? Or, will you believe you can be good enough to save yourself?

Some of you believe that you are partially good, but have done some wrong, so therefore you need some forgiveness. You are mistaken. You are deceived just as these men in the example. You have no hope but to trust in Jesus alone. For some of you that is what you must do today. As Mark would say, you must "repent and believe the good news." To repent means to change your mind about who Jesus is in such a way that you change your life to align with his true identity: to know Jesus as your savior, rather than living as if he is a silly story; to know Jesus as your Lord, rather than living as if he is a liar; to know Jesus as your friend rather than living as if he is a foe.

To believe means that you trust what Jesus has done for you on the cross is the only way your sins have been paid for and therefore the only way you can have a right relationship with God. Choosing to believe that what Jesus did on the cross paid your punishment in full, and now you are innocent before a holy God. God desires to change your guilt to innocence, your shame to honor, and your fear to power. Will you receive him today? Will you find him today? For he has already sought you?

Some of you may be asking the question, "Have I been trusting in myself or am I trusting in Jesus?" To answer this dilemma, you may need to reflect on your life to see if your life is producing the fruit that Jesus says will come if your faith is genuine. You may need to reflect on your understanding of the gospel and how you think you can be saved. But certainly, you ought to pray that as Paul says in Romans God would have his Spirit testify to your Spirit that you are forgiven in the sight of God. Whatever, you may need to do, please do not leave this question being okay with not knowing.

For those of you who know you are saved, and do not question your salvation when you read this sobering text, you should never forget what brought you into a right relationship with God. Perhaps, you have lost sight of God's love and sacrifice which started this relationship in the first place. Think back to the love you realized at the beginning of your salvation. That love has not been changed, nor mourned over with regret. So, be reminded of God's unconditional love for you which has come not because of who you are, but because of who he is.

You see there are two types of love. One love is a love that is dependent on the object or person that is receiving the love. For instance, I love sushi because it is flavorful, and complex, and filling. However, there is another type of love that is dependent on the person who is the subject of the love, the one who is the lover. The first type of love will disintegrate, the commitment for that person's best interest will be gone, once the object makes any sort of mistake. Oh, but the other sort of love, the unconditional love, is dependent on the character of the giver of the love. This love is the love God has for you. This love is the love demonstrated for you on the cross. This love is the love that has sought you. Have you found this love? Have you found Jesus?