

Sermon preached at Woodbury Community Church, Woodbury, MN on Sunday,
October 16, 2011, by Rev. Brian D. Schulenburg

MATTHEW 7:21-29

21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he 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 perform many miracles?’ 23 Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

24 “Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT: LIVING AS CITIZENS OF GOD’S KINGDOM #33 **DISCIPLESHIP ISN’T A GAME**

I read a fun story this week. “The bride was very nervous. It was right before the wedding and she wasn’t sure she could even walk down aisle. So her father gave her some words of wisdom. He said to her.

‘There’s only three things you need to focus on. If you focus on these three things, you’ll be fine.

The first is walking down the aisle. Just focus on walking down the aisle of the church. I know it’s rather long, but just concentrate on that. Don’t get caught up with those on either side of the aisle. Just focus on getting to the end of the aisle.

Next, focus on the altar. It is your destination today. Make your way down the aisle to the altar. There you will stand before God with the man you love and will make vows to God and him. Focus on the altar – for the altar represents the love God has for you in Jesus Christ.

Lastly, focus on the hymn just before signing of the Register. In poetry and song, the hymn embodies God’s love for you in Christ, your love for your husband and his love for you.

So, to help you not be so nervous, focus on those three things.

Walking down the aisle,
Standing before the altar and
Listening to the hymn.’

The bride was very thankful to her Dad for his words of advice.

The family and friends gathered watched as she walked down the aisle and noticed a look of calm determination on her face.

But as she passed them, she was heard mumbling three words over and over again to help calm her nerves.

‘Aisle, Altar, Hymn... Aisle, Altar, Hymn... Aisle, Altar, Hymn.’¹

I’ve been thinking a lot lately about a line that I share with the bride and groom in most weddings that I preside over. There is a point, towards the end of the wedding ceremony, where I will look the bride and the groom square in the eyes and say, “May your marriage be a reflection of a man and a woman profoundly in love with each other and profoundly in love with God.”

In thinking about this week’s sermon, I’ve been asking myself how much I live those words out. It’s easy to tell a groom to love his wife; it’s another thing to live it. It’s easy to tell someone else to be profoundly in love with God; it’s another thing to live it. This past Friday, my Aunt Marijean passed away after three long bouts with cancer. For the better part of this past year, my Aunt has been in and out of the hospital. A few weeks ago, she was entered hospice care. My Uncle has been by her side throughout this entire ordeal. It’s what a loving husband does. He has lived his life as a man profoundly in love with his wife. In close to 50 years of marriage, my Aunt and Uncle were a testimony to the world around them of a husband and wife who were profoundly in love with each other, and in their case, profoundly in love with their God.

Today, we reach the conclusion of Jesus’ spoken words in the Sermon on the Mount. As Jesus brought the Sermon to an end, He challenged those listening about the authenticity of their commitment to living as citizens in the Kingdom of God.

I believe that all of Matthew 7 serves as a practical application to that which Jesus has already taught in the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus began His conclusion to the Sermon on the Mount by telling us not to judge. We need to be more concerned about the condition of our heart than the condition of our brother or sister in Christ’s heart. He then challenged us to pursue Christ-like character with everything that we have. Our prayers should be a reflection of someone who is committed to living the radical lifestyle that Jesus demands of His followers. He continued by telling His listeners that they could

¹ <http://www.sermoncentral.com/sermons/wedding-2-martin-dale-sermon-on-marriage-commitment-62627.asp>

walk on one of two roads. One would lead to everlasting life and one would lead to death. We are to be people of the narrow way, which leads to life. He wasn't done there. Jesus wanted His followers to understand that there would be false teachers who would come and seek to lead His followers away from the truth. We need to constantly guard our hearts and mind against deception in the church. And now, Jesus ends His message with a stern two-fold warning for all of us who call ourselves followers of Jesus Christ.

1. True Discipleship Isn't Lip Service To God – (vs. 21-23)

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he 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 perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

I read this passage to you two weeks ago. It is one of the most somber passages in all of Scripture, for it describes the heart of many people who profess to be followers of Jesus, but in actuality are just playing lip service to God.

These are people who have no problem calling Jesus, "Lord," but have major issues with allowing Him to be "Lord."

I suppose it is important at this point to ask ourselves, "What does it mean for Jesus to be Lord of my life?"

Some of you can remember a day when after years of going to church, reading your Bible, or serving in various roles within the church or community you realized that you were just playing religious lip service to God. Maybe it was because you grew up in a Christian home, and you just kind of always thought you were a true follower of Jesus. Maybe it's because you felt so comfortable hanging around other "Christians," that you adopted the language and culture of the church but never adopted the heart and demands that Jesus requires of a true disciple. Maybe you grew up in the "Bible Belt" where it seems that Christianity is embedded in the culture. "Of course I'm a Christian," you might say, "I go to church every Sunday, I tithe ten percent of my income to church, I serve on committees, I support missionaries."

Is lordship doing lots of good things for God? Or is it something more?

I began to realize my depravity in college. I was eighteen years old. I had grown up in a Christian home. I had led campus Bible studies at my high school. I spent almost every Sunday of my life at church. But, God was an "add-on" when it came to my life. My faith in Jesus was more based on fear of hell than it was in love for what He had done for me. My service for Him was cultural. My best friends were from church, my family were all professing Christians; being Christian was almost expected of me. I'm not sure I completely understood what it meant to love Christ until much later in life. At age

eighteen I went forward in a church service to commit my life wholeheartedly to Jesus. I told him, "I don't just want you to be my Savior, I want you to be my Lord." It was then, that I think I truly understood what it meant to be a genuine disciple of Jesus Christ, but I need to be honest with you. I'm still learning. I'm 42 years-old and God is still teaching me every day what it means to love him with my entire heart.

For years I said the right things, and did the right things out of fear. I want to say the right things and do the right things out of love. I want to be a holy person because I have a heart that his wholly in love with Jesus. Do you too? I hope so.

John Newton has been called the father of Evangelicalism. He lived in the Eighteenth Century. He once wrote the following about Matthew 7:21-23.

"If I ever reach heaven I expect to find three wonders there: first, to meet some I had not thought to see there; second, to miss some I had thought to meet there; and third, the greatest wonder of all, to find myself there."²

True discipleship isn't lip service to God. Jesus said in verse 21 that only those who do the will of His Father will enter the kingdom of Heaven. This isn't about working your way to heaven. None of us can do that. I've read you many verses over the years to attest to this fact. One of those is passages is Titus 3:5-7, which says, "5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life."

"Doing things for God," won't save you. Jesus saves us when we place our trust in Him, based upon His grace and His grace alone. We prove that we are truly His when we the life described in Matthew 5-7.

When you look at some of the descriptions of those Jesus said will someday stand before God and hear "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" it is a bit scary. I want you to see first the description of the amount of people who will hear, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"

a. Many will hear "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!"

Only God knows the true condition of our hearts. All of us probably shudder at these words because we all know that deep down inside our hearts are terrible places. I grew up hearing some terrible theology when I was a teenager. Some youth speakers would come to the camps that I attended and say things like, "Imagine going to heaven and seeing God play a video tape of your entire life before everyone in heaven. It's going to happen," the speaker would say. "God is going to play a video tape at the judgment seat

² Kent Hughes, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Message of the Kingdom* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), p. 254.

and everyone in heaven is going to know the true condition of your heart. So, get things right!” the speaker would say. “Or else you’ll be humiliated in heaven.”

That sounds a lot more like hell than it does heaven. It sounds like the accuser of the brethren, whose name is Satan, more than our great Advocate, Jesus Christ.

All of our hearts are incredibly wicked. It’s when we admit that, and stop trying to make cosmetic changes without giving God the little we have to offer Him, that true change happens. When we offer God our junk, our sin, our pain, He takes it and transforms us. We can’t enter the Kingdom of Heaven until we recognize our spiritual poverty. Unfortunately, too many of us are too proud to admit that we need Him. And that pride will cause *many* to someday hear, “I never knew you.”

b. Some “*Christian*” Workers will hear “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”

Jesus describes some of these false Christians who will hear “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” We’ve already talked about those who give God lip service; those who say, “Lord, Lord.” Kent Hughes, by the way, gives a great quote about those who say, “Lord, Lord,” but aren’t true believers. He writes, “All true Christians say, ‘Lord, Lord.’ But not all who say ‘Lord, Lord’ are true Christians. Intellectual orthodoxy does not indicate saving faith. You can be absolutely correct about your belief in Christ’s nature and person, his substitutionary atonement, his resurrection, and his return, you can have even fought against heretics, and yet not truly be saved.”³

Some prophets or preachers will also hear, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!” Not all prophets and preachers, but many will. And to me, that is so sad. There are many pastors I know who admit to me their personal struggle with holiness, loving God, allowing God to lead them as they should. Pastors are people, just like you. I have a pastor friend who God allowed to be used in incredible ways for a number of years. He had a ministry with over 1,000 members. After many years of blessing, this man had an affair with a woman in the church. It ripped apart his church, his family, and caused many followers to doubt God. The man’s wife eventually forgave him. He and his wife went through an intensive therapy program and are back on track. Recently he told me, “Brian, I’m not sure I was a true believer when I was preaching all those sermons. I liked the stage. I liked the admiration. I liked the respect.” He was in essence a cultural Christian, leading some astray. He said, “If I had died at that point in my life, I’m sure I would have heard God say, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoer!”

Some of these “Christian” workers that Jesus described will have even driven out demons and performed miraculous signs, and yet they will still hear God say, “I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!”

You might wonder how this could be. God used Balaam in the Old Testament to give a prophecy to the people in Numbers 22-25. He was a reluctant servant at best, who

³ *Ibid.*, p. 254.

didn't love God. King Saul was not a believer, but God used Him to prophecy to the nation of Israel.

Hughes writes, "In other words, a man may be able to do great things and get great results, but that says absolutely nothing about his salvation. We need to hear this truth in a day when there are thousands who are claiming that in Christ they have supernatural powers. People say to me that they have heard of some bizarre things going on and will comment that it is okay because the individual uses Jesus' name every time he does it. Using his name does not prove anything.

Satan is still 'the ruler of the kingdom of the air, the spirit who is now at work in those who are disobedient' (Ephesians 2:2), and he will do anything to keep people under his bondage, even if it means getting them to say, "Lord, Lord" and endowing them with evil supernatural power.

Jesus says that orthodoxy, zeal, and spectacular displays of spiritual power do not prove a thing . . . There will not be a few, but many who do these things to whom he will say, I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers! . . . How can this be? Part of the answer is that they 'practice lawlessness.' Jesus gives the parallel, more positive reason at the end of verse 21, where he says that 'he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven' will enter the kingdom of heaven. Multitudes of religious people, evangelicals included, are lost because they do not do God's will . . . The way to test yourself is to look below the surface. Do not look at the apparent results or at the miracles or at your creedal orthodoxy, but rather look to see if your life- conforms to the character of the kingdom – the Beautiful Attitudes of the kingdom of God. Are you poor in spirit? Are you meek? Do you have the positive quality of strength in saying, 'Yes, I am a sinner. No matter what others do to me, I will stand up for truth and for God and for others'? Do you have a merciful spirit? Are you compassionate to those who are hurting and lost and in physical need? Do you forgive, or do you hold on to your grudges as your dearest possession? That is what Jesus is saying."⁴

2.True Discipleship Isn't Religious Hypocrisy – (vs. 24-27)

Jesus teaches another huge lesson to close the Sermon on the Mount. True discipleship isn't religious hypocrisy. The Jews of Jesus' day knew a lot about religion without love. Jesus wants our love more than He wants our commitment to a set of rules that hasn't changed us on the inside. We adhere to God's commands because we love Him. It's always been about a love relationship with Almighty God.

24 "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. 25 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. 26 But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. 27 The rain

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 256, 257.

came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

James captured the essence of Jesus’ words in James 1: 22-25.

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does.

I love the picture that Jesus gives a life that is built upon the foundation of the rock. How have you built your spiritual house?

Two people can attend the same church, use the same words, teach the same classes, go on the same mission trips, have the same friends, pray the same prayers; and one can end up in heaven and the other in hell.

There are many people who have grown up in church, served God in ministry, taken on vows of poverty and done all sorts of good things in the name of being a Christian that will spend eternity separated from God. Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:21-29 challenge all of us to take a serious look at our lives and how we are living them. Religious lip service and lifestyle are not enough. We need to examine our hearts and compare them to the standards that Jesus set down. A true disciple is devoted to God, devoted to His people and devoted to His mission.

A true disciple builds his house upon the Rock, who is Jesus Christ. This is the person that won’t be swayed by false teaching. This is the person who will love like Jesus loved. This is the person who will stand true to the end and hear, “Well done, Good and faithful servant.”

Listen to how Matthew concludes this chapter:

28 When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, 29 because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

I hope you’ve been amazed at Jesus’ teaching these past 33 weeks. I hope you have allowed yourself to look with fresh eyes at the Sermon on the Mount.

I want to close this segment of our service today with a video clip that Kara Doten showed me earlier this week. It’s the story of one of our most beloved modern worship songs, “How He Loves.” There will be times that we are disappointed with God, frustrated that our spiritual lives seem stagnant, times we don’t understand God, times we don’t feel in love with God. I’m so glad that our salvation isn’t dependent upon us, it’s

dependent on Him. We need His grace. We can't live the impossible righteous demands of the Kingdom. This ought to cause us to celebrate what God has done for us! He has given us what we could never give ourselves. Build your life upon Him.

Video: (John Mark Macmillan – How He Loves Story – 5:22)