

Summary

Many assume that miracles, prophecy, and casting out demons indicate divine approval—but Jesus warns otherwise. In Matthew 7:21-23, He delivers one of the most sobering statements in Scripture. This message takes an in-depth look at His warning, examining how our understanding of salvation shapes our interpretation of this passage. Specifically, it explores: the danger of empty professions of faith, why true faith should produce obedience to Jesus' words in the Sermon on the Mount, what it means to do the will of the Father, and the call to develop inward righteousness that surpasses the external righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees. This message lays a crucial foundation for understanding what Jesus, Peter, and Jude taught about false prophets and teachers.

Introduction

a) Jesus' First Warning About the Last Days

- Jesus' first warning about the last days was not about wars, disasters, or persecution—it was deception (Matt. 24:4-5).
- Many will come in His name, preaching in His name while leading multitudes astray.

b) Recognizing False Prophets

- Matthew 7:15-20 teaches that false prophets are known by their fruit, not their words, charisma, or miracles.
- Key questions this series will answer:
 - How do you discern false prophets and teachers?
 - How do you judge rightly—without becoming cynical or dishonoring true messengers of God?
 - What actually makes someone a false prophet or teacher?

c) Key Takeaways from Matthew 7:15-20

- Discernment is essential—guard against both naivety and a critical, cynical attitude.
- Deception is subtle—small errors can lead far from truth, like a plane that's off course.
- False prophets are actors—gifted and polished but lacking Christ's nature.
- They prey on the sheep instead of praying for them—serving their own appetites.
- Many start with good intentions—but without brokenness, uncrucified desires lead to deception.
- A rotten root produces rotten fruit—true character is revealed over time.
- Don't suspend critical thinking—test everything against Scripture.

The Warning to False Prophets

a) Matthew 7:21-23 as a Warning

- Unlike Matthew 7:15-20, which warns disciples about false prophets, Matthew 7:21-23 warns false prophets themselves.

- Jesus makes it clear that miraculous works do not prove divine approval.

b) The Contrast Between Outward Performance and Inward Reality

- Many will point to miracles as proof of legitimacy, but Jesus will declare, "I never knew you."
- Spiritual gifts do not equal divine approval.
- True issue: public influence but private disobedience.

c) The Passage's Warning to All Believers

- Not just for leaders—every believer must examine their hearts.
- Faith should produce obedience and a relationship with Christ.

An Overview of Matthew 7:21-23

a) A Sobering Warning

- Not everyone who calls Jesus "Lord" will enter the kingdom.
- Faith should lead to obedience, not just religious works.
- Saying the right words or doing religious works does not guarantee salvation.
- True faith produces obedience and alignment with God's will.

b) Public Influence, Private Defiance

- Jesus confronts spiritual leaders who operate in power but live in disobedience.
- Miracles, prophecy, and deliverance are not proof of divine approval.
- A person can walk in supernatural power yet be far from Christ.
- Outward performance does not guarantee inward transformation.
- Their priority was power over purity, gifting over godliness, and miracles over obedience.

c) Read Matthew 7:21-23

21 Not everyone who says to Me, "Lord, Lord," will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.

22 Many will say to Me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?"

23 And then I will declare to them, "I never knew you; DEPART FROM ME, YOU WHO PRACTICE LAWLESSNESS."

d) Key Questions from Matthew 7:21-23

- Were these false prophets never regenerated, or did they fall away?
- Does Jesus teach salvation by works?

- Was their power from God, demonic influence, or mere soulish power?
- What does "I never knew you" mean?
- What does it mean to practice lawlessness?

Goal of This Message

a) Two Goals in This Message

1. Provide a crucial foundation for understanding what Jesus, Peter, and Jude taught about false prophets and teachers.
2. Answer some of these tough questions with Scripture.

b) Important Note

- This message doesn't drift from our examination of false prophets and teachers.
- It lays the necessary foundation to fully understand it.

Your Soteriology Determines How You Interpret This Passage

a) Understanding Salvation First

- The meaning of Matthew 7:21-23 depends on one's view of salvation.
- This applies to other passages also.
 - Revelation 2-3
 - The parable of the wedding feast (Matt. 22:1-14)
 - The parable of the ten virgins (Matt. 25:1-13)
 - The parable of the talents (Matt. 25:14-30)
- Without a clear grasp of salvation, these passages can be misinterpreted.
 - Are these teaching you can lose salvation?
 - A test of true conversion?
- You also can't grasp what Peter (2 Pet. 2) or Jude (Jude 1) taught about false prophets without a clear grasp of salvation.
- I've spent the past two years studying and writing a book about soteriology because it's such a vital subject.

b) My View of Salvation

- Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone—not by works.
- At salvation:
 - The spirit is regenerated and fused with the Spirit.

- The believer is declared righteous in Christ.
- Justification is more than a pardon; it's a permanent status.
- Sanctification follows—becoming what God has already declared us to be.

Faith Without Works Is Dead

a) The Relationship Between Faith and Works

- Genuine faith results in obedience, but there are exceptions (e.g., thief on the cross, carnal Corinthians).
- While obedience doesn't cause salvation, it's evidence of it.
- James contrasts intellectual belief with saving faith that transforms.
- Mental assent without transformation is "dead" and "useless" (Jas. 2:17, 2:20).

b) The Reality of Self-Deception

- If someone professes faith but shows no fruit, their faith may not be genuine.
- True faith produces 30-fold, 60-fold, or 100-fold fruit (Matt. 13:23).
- A believer may struggle with sin, but complete lack of change suggests regeneration never happened.

Can You Lose Your Salvation?

a) Confident Security, Not Eternal Security

- Scripture teaches confident security rather than "once saved, always saved."
- Salvation is like being on a plane—guaranteed to reach the destination unless one jumps out.

b) Apostasy is possible in four ways:

1. Rejecting Christ for another god or religion.
2. Departing from the apostolic faith.
3. Denying Christ's deity or work on the cross.
4. Persisting in unrepentant sin.

c) The Danger of Denying Christ Through Sin

- Hebrews 10:26-31 warns against willful, ongoing sin.
- The passage condemns those who reject Christ's authority, not struggling believers.
- Persistent sin tramples Christ underfoot, dishonors His blood, and insults the Spirit of grace.
- There's a critical difference between struggling with sin (like Paul in Romans 7) and embracing sin in defiance.

- Hebrews 10:26 parallels Numbers 15:30-31, where presumptuous sins had no atonement under the law.

d) Practicing Lawlessness Denies Christ (Tit. 1:16)

- To reject Christ's commandments is to reject Christ Himself (John 14:15).
- Apostasy often happens gradually—hardened hearts reject conviction.
- Those who practice sin won't inherit the kingdom (Gal. 5:21).

In Summary . . .

a) What Is Saving Faith?

- It's not mental assent.
- It's not a one-time event or for a season.
- It's a continuous trust in Jesus Christ from the beginning to the end.

b) Justification Saves You

- You are justified by a one-time act of faith and by continuing in faith.
- If you are justified, God doesn't count sin against you.
- If you are in Christ and justified, you can't out sin God's grace.

c) Don't Cross the Line into Apostasy

- If one practices a sinful lifestyle, they are rejecting Christ for sin and self.
- This is not by profession but by actions.
- Without repentance, one's in danger of God removing them from Christ (Jn. 15:2).
- If this happens, they cross the line from defiant disobedience into apostasy.

Beware of Empty Professions

a) Matthew 7:21: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven."

- Saying "Lord, Lord" is not enough—mental assent does not save.
- Saving faith involves repentance, trust, and surrender to Christ's lordship.
- Jesus asked why do you call Me Lord but don't obey (Luke 6:46).
- Christ—not us—determines who belongs to Him (Jn. 5:22-23).

b) Saving Faith Should Produce Fruit

- Faith without obedience is dead (Jas. 2:14-17).

- Genuine faith should produce love, holiness, and obedience.
- Those who claim to know God but don't obey Him are liars (1 Jn. 2:3-4).

Entering God's Kingdom

a) Matthew 7:21: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven."

b) Two Components of Entering the Kingdom

- Initial entry (salvation)—Begins at conversion through regeneration.
- Final entry (death or second coming)—A life of continued faith that should produce obedience.

c) Initial Entry at Salvation

- Requires surrender, repentance, turning from sin, and trusting in Christ.
- Requires regeneration (Jn. 3:5).
- Requires surrendering and submitting to the King (Mark 1:15).

d) Final Entry at Death or the Second Coming

- Obedience as the fruit of faith is vital.
- Without it, will one enter the kingdom?
 - Never regenerated?
 - Haven't continued in faith?
 - Rejected Christ for sin and self?
 - Saved but through fire?

e) Faith Is the Root and Obedience the Fruit

- Obedience doesn't save.
- No obedience means we have serious issues.
- Faith may not be genuine, or it may be dying.
- Disobedience and sin are like the check engine light on a car.

f) Jesus Is Removing Tares

- Those who practice righteousness are regenerated (1 Jn. 2:29).
- All stumbling blocks and those who practice lawlessness are being removed from the kingdom (Matt. 13:41-43).

What Does It Mean to Do God's Will?

- a) Matthew 7:21: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter."
- b) Important Questions to Ask
 - Must salvation be maintained by obedience?
 - Is Jesus teaching salvation by works?
 - What does doing the will of God mean?
- c) Doing God's Will
 - Beholding and believing in Jesus Christ (Jn. 6:40).
 - Obedience from a transformed heart, especially keeping the Sermon on the Mount.
 - Living in love and holiness.
- d) Is This Salvation by Works?
 - Obedience is the result of salvation, not the cause of it.
 - Good works and obedience are evidence of salvation, not the means of it.
 - Those who are truly saved should naturally do the Father's will as evidence of their faith.
 - We are saved by faith alone but the faith that saves is never alone.
 - Saving faith is not passive—it is an active trust in Christ that naturally produces obedience.
 - Disobedience should not characterize a believer's life, but obedience is not the ultimate test of salvation (2 Tim. 2:19).
- e) Faith and Obedience Are Inseparable
 - Faith is not just professed but practiced (Rom. 1:5).
 - True faith produces obedience, just as a healthy tree bears fruit.
 - Faith and obedience are two sides of the same coin—one cannot exist without the other.
 - If faith does not lead to obedience, it may not be genuine (Jas. 2:18).
- f) Faith Comes First, Then Obedience.
 - Some try to obey their way into faith, but this leads to legalism.
 - Obedience must flow from faith, not precede it (Jn. 14:15).
 - Obedience without faith mirrors the Pharisees—striving for righteousness through works.
 - True obedience is Spirit-empowered, joyful, and freeing, not a burden.

g) A Righteousness Greater Than the Pharisees

- Jesus said, "Unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 5:20).
- Scholars debate whether this means initial or final entry.
- I believe it applies to both, but I will focus only on the final entry.
- Jesus warns against external righteousness without an unchanged spirit, heart, and soul.

e) The Warning: Don't Reject Christ

- Those with external righteousness without a transformed inner life will not enter the kingdom.
- When you are justified and regenerated, your righteousness already exceeds that of the Pharisees.
- But the warning is not to reject Christ through practicing lawlessness.

f) Obedience to the Sermon on the Mount

- In context, internal righteousness is obedience from the heart to His words in the Sermon on the Mount.
- We don't obey the Sermon on the Mount to be saved but because we are saved.
- These commandments are impossible to keep apart from regeneration and the empowerment of the indwelling Spirit.
- Obedience to the Sermon on the Mount is a major part of our sanctification.