

Only Those Who Do the Will of God July 19, 2020

Matthew 7:21-23

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 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' (NRSV).

I think we're in trouble. I want to make sure we get this. Jesus said that not everyone who calls him Lord will get to enter heaven. I must have misread that. Let me read it again. It is Jesus Christ himself that said not everyone who calls him Lord will get to enter heaven. This is red letter Bible words of the Lord. I think it is in our best interest to find out why Jesus said this.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus laid down a solid foundation where he delivers the word of God to the people. Whenever someone preaches, it should match, or closely match, what we know the word of God to be from the Law of Moses and the word of the prophets. So, what Jesus teaches is not new; they already have the scriptures. They have the word of God. The problem is that the people fail to follow the word of God and the religious leaders stray from the word of God. In the *Secret Place Devotional* on July 12, in reference to the era of the Judges, the author asks "What if the Israelites always obeyed God?" The same question is applicable during all times; when they received law, during the period of the judges, the exile, in New Testament times, and in the world today.

What Jesus teaches is different from what others taught because his focus is on the will of God. Let's look at how this lesson develops. There are a lot of lessons in the Sermon on the Mount. It starts in Matthew chapter five with the beatitudes. You are blessed. Praise the Lord, hallelujah, thank you Jesus. That's what we want all along is to be blessed. But you are blessed even when a whole bunch of bad things are happening to you and around you. That's because the problems here on earth are a contrast to the kingdom of heaven. The focus is on the kingdom of heaven regardless of problems here on earth, your goal is to be heaven bound.

Jesus' formula for instruction is warning followed by good news. The warning is harsh. If you break the commandments and teach another to break them, you will be called least in the kingdom of heaven. The good news is a direct contrast to that. Obey the commandments and teach others obedience and you will be called great in the kingdom of heaven. It is a matter of obedience and teaching obedience to the word of God. Then Jesus gives a series of lessons. Jesus teaches your righteousness must excel beyond that of the religious leaders. Jesus emphasizes reconciliation, love, forgiveness, and human relations. This is a direct contrast between the feigned public pieties of the religious leaders who were focused on attention seeking when they should have been focused on pleasing God. Then there is a lesson on forgiveness where God's forgiveness is positively correlated to how much you forgive others. This is followed by a lesson on your treasure. Store your treasures in heaven not here on the earth, your heart is where your treasure is, and you cannot serve God and wealth. The fundamental principle is to strive first and foremost for the kingdom of God. These lessons lead to the Golden Rule, which applies to absolutely everyone and in everything, treat everyone else as you want them to treat you. After building up all of these powerful lessons on righteousness, the kingdom of God, and the Golden Rule, comes the hard part. The gate to righteousness is narrow and the road to eternal life is hard. The gate to destruction is wide and the road to destruction is easy.

Jesus addresses a problem within the society of the day. Beware of false prophets, they will lead you astray. You will know them by their fruits; whether or not they teach the true word of God. You can tell if preaching and teaching is true to the word of God if it matches the law, the prophets, or the scriptures. Preaching and teaching must connect positively with the will of God. If you want to get into God's good graces, obey the will of God. It is not about what you want the word of God to be. You can't pick and choose, or take the scriptures out of context, by condemning things that the Bible does not condemn, or approving of things that the Bible does not approve of. Each person has to discern whether you follow the teaching of humans or follow the teachings of the Bible.

Today's lesson is extremely important. It is a very difficult lesson for us because according to Jesus not everyone is getting into heaven; only those that do the will of God. People are going to protest "We called your name! We preached in your name. We acted in your name." Then Jesus declares "I never knew you." Jesus rejects those people that do not follow his commandments such as love your neighbor, treat the alien as equal, care for the disadvantaged, feed the hungry, the list goes on. It's not just a matter of lip service, saying you are in the Jesus group; it is a matter of following what Jesus teaches. Jesus is firm about this, he says "I never knew you, get away from me, you are evil. Jesus addresses the hypocrisy of the religious leaders who were strict and authoritarian and neglected to care for humanity. Jesus also relates to the hypocrisy of today where people claim to be with Jesus but do not follow his teachings. The crowds were amazed because the teaching of Jesus did not match what they had been hearing from the religious leaders. Jesus teaches the word of God. We must follow the word of God.