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“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,” Matthew 7:21.

Hear and Obey

Lesson Aim: To arouse glad obedience to the Scriptures.

L263. Date: March 1978. **Text:** Matthew 7:21-29.

Topic: Christ: Parables of.

“In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for so it seemed good in thy sight,” Luke 10:21.

What did Jesus mean by that statement? He was saying that the Bible was not written to the theologian and scholar (even though it is beyond the thoughts of any of them); it was written to the common man. The statement suggests that the most evident and logical meaning of Scripture is the correct meaning. That principle must be followed in the interpretation of parables.

How can the true Christian be identified from the pretender? The parable for study in this lesson answers that question.

Man would judge a person as a “good” Christian if he were doctrinally correct, emotionally aroused, and faithfully active in religious duties. Jesus told of such people. (1) Doctrinal soundness was indicated in their calling Him “Lord.” (2) Emotional intensity was indicated in their repetition of His title, **“Lord, Lord.”** (3) Religious activity was indicated in their prophecy, exorcism of demons, and other works of wonder.

Yet, Jesus said to them, **“I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity”** (Matthew 7:23). That means God's judgment of what constitutes a good Christian is different from man's judgment.

I. THE DIVINE PRINCIPLE, 7:21

The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God are the same. The term, “kingdom of heaven,” is used by Matthew because he was writing to Jews who would not pronounce the name of God. The term, “kingdom of God,” is used by Mark, Luke, and John because they were writing for Gentiles who did pronounce the name of God. The kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of God means the dominion over which God reigns as King. Jesus uses it to refer specifically to those who are saved.

One who is in the kingdom must call Jesus “Lord.” That title carried strong implications in the Jewish culture of New Testament times. The Jehovah of the Old Testament would be called by the title, LORD, but no mere man would be so named. To call Jesus “Lord” meant that one acknowledged His unique relationship with God.

The mere statement, “Jesus is Lord,” is not enough to place one in the kingdom. Jesus said life commitment must accompany the verbal confession. **“Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?”** (Luke 6:46). To say one is committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and not live a life of obedience to His will, is to lie (I John 2:4). No one respects the person who professes Jesus Christ if his life does not bear witness to the truth of his testimony.

Salvation is not by works. The teaching of Matthew 7:21 is not that one is saved as he lives right. It is rather that he who is truly saved will live a different life. He who does not live a different life is not saved. It is the teaching of James 2:17, 20, 24, 26, which may be summarized in these words: “A faith which does not produce a life of righteousness is not a faith that saves.”

Actors on a stage will use words which sound fitting but which they do not mean. Compliments or insults spoken one to another are without real meaning. So are the words and actions of one who speaks religious words and does religious deeds, but whose heart is not committed to Jesus Christ. There is no substitute for a personal relationship with Jesus because that alone gives true meaning to one's words and deeds.

II. THE HISTORICAL ILLUSTRATION, 7:22, 23

Jesus foretold of a coming time when men will stand before Him in judgment. Some will point to their words of prophecy, acts of exorcism, and works of wonder as proof that they were true men of God. He predicted that He would reject them in spite of their religious activities.

Can a person prophesy without being a true Christian? Deuteronomy

18:18-22 answers “yes.” Can a person cast out demons without being a Christian? Luke 11:20 answers “yes.” Can a person do great works of wonder without being a Christian? Acts 8:9-22 answers “yes.”

Jesus did not deny the statements of those who stood before Him in judgment. He did not say, “You did not prophesy, or cast out demons, or do works of wonder.” He rather said, **“I never knew you.”**

How different is God's judgment from man's judgment. The religionists would have called themselves workers of righteousness. Jesus called them workers of iniquity. The distinction is not in **what** they did but the relationship with God which was behind it. Those who desired to hear God's “Well done, good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your Lord,” rather heard, **“Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”** God looks for people who both hear and do His commands.

III. THE PARABOLIC ILLUSTRATION, 7:24-27

Jesus gave a parable to illustrate the principle expressed in verse 21, **“Not everyone 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.”** That parable is one of the most familiar in all the Bible. Even little children are taught to sing, “The wise man built his house upon the rock . . . And the house on the rock stood firm. The foolish man built his house upon the sand . . . And the house on the sand fell flat.” That familiar parable contains sobering truth.

Consider the points of agreement between the two houses. (1) They had the same purpose — to be a home and shelter for a family for many years. (2) They each had proper planning and good workmanship — no reference to any difference there. (3) Each was subjected to the same storm and stress. From all visible appearances, the two houses were alike.

There was one great difference between the two houses. The foundation of one was sand; the foundation of the other was rock. The choice of the foundation marked one man as “foolish” and the other man as “wise.” No building is worth more than its foundation. It was the foundation, not the superstructure, which made the difference in the two houses.

The foundation must be laid before the house is built. Commitment to Jesus Christ must come before any service done in His name. The order can never be reversed.

What tragedy follows one's building upon a poor foundation. Jesus did not mention it, but what do you suppose happened to the man whose house fell in the storm? He lost his investment in the house, that is sure. What

about his family? Did they suffer injury? Were some of them killed when the house collapsed? They had no choice about the foundation, but they had to suffer the results of a wrong choice. Tragedy came upon all as a result of the mistake of one.

Each person is building some kind of spiritual house. God has laid in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation (Isaiah 28:16). Jesus Christ is the foundation, the only foundation, upon which a successful life can be built (I Corinthians 3:11).

Storms will come. The Christian will experience them just as the non-Christian does. The foundation of Jesus Christ is essential to stand in the day of testing. To build the stable house which will stand the storms, some need to be restored and some need to be redeemed.

One can have every thing exactly right, but without the proper foundation collapse will surely come. Relationship with Jesus Christ, expressed in hearing and obeying Him, is the only foundation which will endure. Where are you building your life?

IV. THE HUMAN REACTION, 7:28, 29

“That is too strong,” some of the people reasoned. Some were surprised. Others were repulsed. Some received and some rejected His teaching. It was so different from what they were accustomed to hearing. The scribes taught by appealing to the opinion of some honored rabbi. Jesus taught by declaring plain truth and demanding that people accept it because He said it. It was strong teaching.

“Here is what constitutes citizenship in the kingdom of heaven,” Jesus said. “Hear my words and do them.”

Each reader should ask himself, “Where am I in relation to the kingdom of heaven? Do I hear and obey? Do I know and do? Do I acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus and submit to it? Do I depend on a past experience or a present relationship as a basis for pleasing God?” An honest answer to those questions will enable each one to see what he is using as the foundation for his life.

Does that teaching seem too strong? It seems so because it is contrary to the way a natural man or a carnal man thinks. It is the delight of the spiritual man.

V. THE CURRENT APPLICATION

What is the central truth of the passage? It teaches that citizenship in

the kingdom of heaven does not consist of words and deeds, but of a true relationship with God which manifests itself in words and deeds motivated by the Spirit of God.

Apply that central truth to your life. It is not enough that you had a religious experience some years ago. Is there a personal relationship with God today? Is your life marked by words, attitudes, ambitions, and deeds which are motivated by the Spirit of God living within you? If so, praise the Lord. If not, stand in fear.

To be “religious” without a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ is to build your house upon the sand. For your religion to be the expression of a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ is to build your house upon the rock. Keep that truth before the eyes of your heart.

Full obedience is important. **“He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us”** (I John 3:24).

God made this solemn statement through the lips of His prophet, Samuel, **“Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry”** (I Samuel 15:22, 23). There is no substitute for joyful obedience to God.

James joined his inspired epistle to the teaching of the parable when he wrote, **“Be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves”** (James 1:22). The profession which is not accompanied by a spiritually-prompted lifestyle of obedience is not valid. **“For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also,”** James 2:26.

More than mere works is involved in the divine requirement. Take heed! The people of whom Jesus spoke in Matthew 7:21, 22 were busily involved in religious works. They had **“prophesied . . . cast out devils . . . done many wonderful works.”** They were doctrinally correct in proclaiming the Lordship of Christ, emotionally involved in the profession of that Lordship, and busily engaged in activities which seemed to proclaim His Lordship. What more could be expected of any person? God expected more.

Here is the principle: **“The LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart”** (I Samuel 16:7). God looks for more than deeds. He looks in the heart to see the motive which prompts those deeds. Jesus condemned the prayers of some of the Pharisees, for instance, not because it is wrong to pray but because they were praying to be seen of men. A wrong spirit within

can destroy the works of religion without.

What men called prophesying, casting out demons, and doing works of wonder in the name of Jesus, the Lord called a work of iniquity (Matthew 7:22, 23). God is concerned with the “why” of religious activity as well as the “what” of it.

Why do you read the Bible? Why do you pray? Why do you attend church? Why do you give of your financial resources to support the work of God? Those questions strike at the heart of your religious life. It is not enough that you do those things. What is the spirit in which you do them?

Duties of religion can be performed in perfect detail and not be acts of service toward God. A little lad was required to sit in the corner of the room as an act of discipline. His mother called, “Johnny, are you sitting down?” He replied, “I’m sitting down on the outside, but I’m standing up on the inside.”

Even in the service of God, attitude is the key. **“For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not,”** II Corinthians 8:12.

Questions for discussion

1. What does Luke 10:21 mean to you?
2. What qualities would you expect to see in a good Christian?
3. How do those qualities relate to Matthew 7:21?
4. What does God require besides right words and deeds?
5. What does Matthew 7:22, 23 mean to you?
6. What was the one difference between the two houses in Matthew 7:24-27?
7. How can one be sure his life is built on the right foundation?