

Matthew 7:21-23 – “True and False Assurance” – Feb. 12, 2023

1. The question of assurance is one that many Christians struggle with
2. Can we have assurance? If so, how? How do we understand the assurance of salvation in light of today's text?
3. Roman Catholicism has taught assurance which is limited to those saints which have done works of 'supererogation' can have a form of assurance, but because grace requires our cooperation to be effective, assurance of salvation is fairly limited – it is never certain because we're not sure if we've cooperated enough or if we may make shipwreck of our faith before our death
4. Aside from the doctrinal clarity and simplicity that came about through the Protestant Reformation, pastorally one of the warmest and most comforting ideas that appealed to the average person was that they didn't need to live in fear but they could have full assurance that they belonged fully to Christ and that He would guide them all the way home
5. Unfortunately, this is an area of struggle for many Christians
 - a. Perhaps you know someone who struggles with gaining assurance
 - b. Perhaps you've had those struggles yourself
6. We will see at how it is that we can know that we are Christ's, and it is against the backdrop of what I personally find to be the most sobering passage in all of Scripture
7. It has been said that there are only 3 kinds of people in the world
 - a. Those that can count, and those that can't
8. Others have suggested that there are 2 kinds of people in the world
 - a. Those that can predict the next sentence

9. When it comes to the assurance of salvation, there are 4 types of people (*explain each*)
 - a. Those who are lost and know they are lost
 - b. Those who are saved and have full assurance of salvation
 - c. Those who are saved and don't have full assurance of salvation
 - d. Those who are lost and have full assurance of their salvation

10. It is the existence of this last group that I personally have found unsettling at times in my own life, and this is the group that Jesus has in view in today's passage

11. V.21 – *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”*
 - a. These false professors use language that conveys intimacy and closeness
 - b. *“Lord, lord”* being repeated has an echo through Scripture
 - i. *“Abraham, Abraham”* when God stops the sacrifice of Isaac (Gen. 22:11)
 - ii. *“Moses, Moses”* about taking off sandals (Ex. 3:4-5)
 - iii. *“Samuel, Samuel”* when God calls him (1 Sam. 3:10)
 - iv. *“Absalom, Absalom”* when David hears of his death (2 Sam. 18:33)
 - v. *“Martha, Martha”* when Jesus calms her (Luke 10:41-42)
 - vi. *“Jerusalem, Jerusalem”* when Jesus mourns even amid rebuke (Luke 13:34)
 - vii. *“My God, my God”* when Jesus is forsaken (Matt. 27:46)
 - c. The doubling of a name shows an intimate and an emotional connection
 - d. So when these unbelievers face the judgment of Christ and they say *“Lord, Lord”*, their lips are suggesting that they know Him in a close intimate way, but not all who do this are true believers

- e. V.21 shows that believers and unbelievers alike are able to address Jesus in the “*Lord, Lord*” manner
 - i. The follow-up test here is if this profession of faith is real or not
 - ii. It is crystal clear in Scripture that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, so when Jesus examines those who *are doing the will of His Father*, He is emphatically *NOT* adding a condition to salvation; He is describing the result of salvation
 - iii. Ephesians 2:8-10 makes this cause-and-effect relationship clear
 - 1. “*For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, 9 not a result of works, so that no one may boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.*”
 - iv. Doing the will of the Father is the evidence of true salvation, it is not a condition of true salvation
 - v. A few verses earlier Jesus showed us the same principle with a metaphor
 - 1. Vv.17-20 – “*So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit. 18 A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.*”

2. The fruit is a picture of the root. An apple tree doesn't become an apple tree because it starts producing apples. Rather, the apples start coming because of the nature of the tree.

a. Root, then fruit.

b. The outward visible signs are the result of the nature of the thing, or in this case, of the person.

i. Those in Adam show themselves with their unrighteous deeds

ii. Those in Christ show themselves with their righteous deeds

vi. Jesus' brother James speaks in His epistle of faith without works as being dead

vii. To switch language yet again, Luther spoke of this relationship of faith and works when he said "*We are saved by faith alone. But this is not a faith that is alone.*"

1. It comes together with the righteous fruit that Jesus and Paul and James all speak about

f. The closeness of the "*Lord, Lord*" language will either be genuine, and demonstrated by godliness, or it will be flattery, and shown to be a farce by lawlessness

12. VV. 22 – "*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 mighty works in your name?'*"

- a. Jesus presses further on describing those who are lost yet have deluded themselves into some form of assurance of their salvation before Him
- b. These are the frauds and the disingenuous fakers who seem to genuinely believe they are saved even though they aren't
- c. They're naming the name of Christ, but denying His power
 - i. The so-called fruit that they're appealing to isn't the real kind that comes from a changed nature, but is more like the plastic fruit that your grandma used to have for decoration on her dining room table.
- d. You'll also notice that these false professors get the relationship between root and fruit backwards
 - i. When genuinely saved people stand before Christ in judgement, the only plea that they'll be able to make is that their sin has been taken away by Christ, and His righteousness has been given to them as a covering
 - ii. These people aren't claiming the blood of Christ as their defense – they're claiming to their own deeds as though this is what saved them
- e. They're appealing to so-called signs and wonders that they had performed
 - i. Prophesying
 - ii. Casting out demons
 - iii. Many mighty works
- f. The fact that this is what they immediately appeal to is proof that they have failed to understand the gospel
- g. Not only this, but the things they're appealing to really aren't good works – they're signs and wonders

- i.* It is true that in those times when God has very obviously intervened in history to move His plan of redemption forward, He raises up prophets and apostles to interpret and record these events
 - 1.* When He's done this, He's frequently validated the authenticity of these messengers with miraculous signs that aren't there in ordinary times
 - 2.* Even when we think of the biblical working of miracles, it's not like they're happening all the time
 - 3.* They are clustered around Moses in the Exodus, the prophets Elijah and Elisha, and then around Jesus
- ii.* By suggesting that they are performing these kinds of works, they are putting themselves in pretty significant company
 - 1.* But by the end of v.23, not only is Christ unimpressed, but He calls them workers of lawlessness
 - 2.* These men are infatuated with the supernatural gifts of the Spirit but not the fruit of the Spirit
- iii.* All of this is coming on the heels of Jesus' warning about false prophets (v.15) who come in sheep's clothing but are really wolves
 - 1.* These people are counterfeits, and their signs are lying signs
 - 2.* The devil offers his own set of counterfeit signs and wonders, and he has been at this game since at least the time that Moses and Aaron found themselves in a contest with Pharaoh's magicians

3. Matthew Henry – *“That in thy name we have cast out devils? That may be too; Judas cast out devils and yet was a son of perdition. A man might cast devils out of others, and yet have a devil, nay, and be a devil himself”*

iv. False teachers both then and now seem drawn to the limelight

1. These men are not content to teach the gospel, nor to instruct people in godly living

2. Rather, they prefer to draw attention to themselves with spectacular displays, with their lying signs and wonders, and this is why Jesus condemns their work as being lawless

3. Our false teachers today still generate interest and it’s almost hard to believe that people still are attracted to these tricks

a. Bethel – gold dust in ducts

b. Todd White – leg lengthening

c. Benny Hinn – curing non-verifiable illnesses

d. Kenneth & Gloria Copeland – needing a \$65M jet, and ‘controlling the weather’

e. None of these men are showing the way in how we ought to love each other well in the local church, or in how to put lust or anger to death, or this type of thing

f. Rather, they’re getting people onto a treadmill of excitements and tricks that is keeping them from the gospel and its fruits

4. Their profession of faith is not the same thing as the possession of faith
 - h. Between the appeal to their own works, and then the fact that these so-called good works are of the flashy, showy kind, what we have is a picture of self-righteous people
 - i. People who would rather be represented by themselves than by Christ in God's courtroom
 - ii. As the old saying goes, "*A man who defends himself in court has a fool for a client*"
13. V.23 – "*And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'*"
- a. This is a terrifying thing to hear
 - b. Whether these unbelievers went to bed each night knowing they were frauds, or whether they were genuinely self-deceived, they seem to enter God's courtroom with the expectation of gaining entrance, and here it is Christ Himself who casts them to the outer darkness
 - c. Christ has been entirely unimpressed with their pretend plastic fruit, He knows they don't belong to Him and this is evident in the fact that they've appealed to the sinking sand of their own works instead of to the solid rock of Christ's work
 - d. Their deeds are not righteous fruit that has grown out of a changed heart and a new nature; rather it is lawless self-righteousness
 - i. It's a show that doesn't go deeper than the surface
 - ii. These people have professed faith, but they clearly do not possess faith

- e. As He sends them away, Christ also tells us that He has never known these people
 - i. It's not that they once belonged to Him, but then after a few wrong turns, He let them go, as though a genuine believer can lose their salvation
 - ii. Christ *never* knew them
 - 1. Like Judas, they were devils from the start
14. And this is the point at which we can actually be encouraged as we pursue the assurance of our own salvation
- a. Christ did not lose these people – they never belonged to Him
 - b. Christ is not trying and failing to get His sheep safely home, they will indeed make it
15. But how do we gain true assurance, so that we are not deceived like these lawless people whom Jesus never knew?
- a. There are two aspects to assurance
 - i. Objective & Subjective
 - b. Objective has to do with the reality of the matter, and the reality of the matter is not at all impacted by how we're feeling about it.
 - i. This is rock bottom truth. It's not moving, it's not changing, it's not going anywhere. It's not at the whims of our experience.
 - c. Subjective has to do with our inner state of heart and mind
 - i. This is important because this is a gauge of our own inner peace
 - d. In an ideal world, our subjective experience would line up with the objective reality
 - i. In a fallen world this doesn't always happen

- ii. Many genuine saints struggle deeply in this area
- iii. One especially compelling example of this is the poet and hymn writer

William Cowper

1. *William Cowper (pronounced “Cooper”) was one of the few hymn writers that was also a recognized secular poet. This much-beloved and yet tormented literary figure was born in his father’s rectory at Great Berkhamstead, England, on Nov. 26, 1731. His father, George II, was a chaplain. His mother died when he was 6 years old. Cowper was first sent to a boarding school at Markyate. It was here he first began suffering from frequent emotional difficulties. He was transferred to Westminster where he was much happier. After graduating, he was apprenticed to a solicitor. In 1754, Cowper was called to the Bar, yet he never actually practiced law. He was nominated in 1763 to the Clerkship of Journals of the House of Lords. Just as Cowper’s career seemed assured, tragedy struck. When he was interviewed for the position, he suffered a panic attack. As a result, he was not awarded the position, a loss that led to a state of deep depression. He was treated at St. Alban’s Hospital and took up residence with the Rev. Morley Unwin in Huntingdon. During this time, his depression slowly lifted and he developed a lifetime friendship with Unwin’s wife. Unwin passed away in 1767, and John Newton, author of the famous hymn, “Amazing Grace,” persuaded Mrs. Unwin and her*

family along with Cowper to move to Olney, where he was the vicar of a small parish. Newton and Cowper developed a close friendship over the years, and began a joint publication that became very influential, The Olney Hymns. During his depression, Cowper wrote one of his most beloved and most controversial hymns, "There is a Fountain Filled With Blood." It was most likely written in 1771, first published in Conyers's Collection of Psalms and Hymns in 1772 and republished by Cowper and Newton in 1779 for The Olney Hymns. Based on Zechariah 13:1, "On that day a fountain shall be opened for the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, to cleanse them from sin and impurity," the hymn is a meditation on the saving power of the blood of Christ. An unsuccessful, major alteration in 1819 sought to make the hymn less graphic by changing the first line to "From Calvary's Cross a Fountain Flows." Hymnologist E. E. Ryder says this alteration "forgets that what they [the offensive graphic language] express is not only poetry, but the poetry of intense and impassioned feeling, which naturally embodies itself in the boldest metaphors." In 1773, two years into the Olney Hymns project, Cowper's brother died, and the poet relapsed into his deepest state of depression. He became convinced that God wanted him to commit suicide. He tried three times to kill himself, but each time something prevented him from carrying through. Cowper believed

God had stopped him. Cowper said the next years came with a “full realisation of God’s favour” and were the happiest, most lucid years of his life. It was during this time he wrote his most famous secular poem, “The Task,” which received much acclaim. He was so overwhelmed by God’s “overruling providence” for him to live that he was led to write his famous hymn on God’s providence, “God Moves in a Mysterious Way.” In 1796, his dear friend Mrs. Unwin died. He suffered her loss so deeply that he went into a permanent state of despair. This led to sickness from Dropsy and his eventual death on April 25, 1800.

- e. A case like Cowper is the polar opposite of the people Jesus casts out
 - i. Those men were unsaved and had assurance
 - ii. Cowper was saved and struggled deeply with assurance
- f. The wonderful part about the objective nature of assurance is that it’s settled in the counsel of God no matter how we feel
 - i. One way to think of this is with air travel
 - 1. Black and white footage with confident pilots who slammed into ground
 - 2. A nervous passenger on a commercial jet with experienced pilots
 - ii. The confidence level doesn’t impact the outcome
 - 1. If someone has put their faith in Christ, it is not the strength or the confidence of their faith that will see them through – it is the object of their faith that will get them home, namely Christ

- g. We learn about the objective nature of assurance as we read the Scriptures
 - i. When we read in John 6:37 that “*All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out*” we see it
 - 1. God has given a mass of humanity to the Son, and they will not fail to come to Him. And those who come will never be cast out!
 - 2. Jesus ends with the same people He starts with. No dropouts. No one is forgotten.
 - 3. Those who believe that we are the ones wh activates salvation have a difficulty here
 - a. If we are the decisive movers, we can move ourselves back out too
 - b. If it’s possible for me to objectively lose my salvation in the future, assurance is something I can only have right now
 - c. It’s a very limited assurance. I can be assured I’m in a state of grace today.
 - i. But if I can walk away tomorrow or 15 years from now, I can’t actually be assured of my final salvation
 - d. Thankfully the Bible presents this like unbreakable links in a chain. We do not grab hold of grace with our free will; rather, our will is freed when grace grabs a hold of us

- e. Once again, sound doctrine is tested in how pastoral it is –
how it can be a balm to an anxious heart
- ii. We read about the “Golden Chain of Redemption” in Romans 8
 - 1. *“Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. 27 And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. 28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. 29 For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. 30 And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.”*
 - 2. The “foreknew” in v.29 isn’t that God is reacting to what He sees us doing in the future, as though He learns things
 - a. Rather, the Word shows an intimacy, a closeness, a bond
 - b. When a man ‘knows’ his wife, this intimate connection is in view
 - c. When Amos 3:2 says that *“You only have I known of all the families of the earth”* he’s not saying God isn’t aware of the other nations or that God learned of something they did, but

that God set His tender compassion and grace uniquely on them

3. So in this “Golden Chain” of Romans 8 we see one thing naturally lead to the other, again with nobody missing and no dropouts
 - a. Foreknew – predestined – called – justified – glorified
 - b. The group God starts with are glorified with Him in the age to come
 - c. Assurance is clearly something the believer has, and this is a doctrinal truth regardless of how we’re feeling
- h. So the actual state of our salvation is objective. Like a light switch, it’s either on or off. For those who have placed their faith in Christ, the switch is on.
- i. But our experience of that truth works more like a dimmer switch. Sometimes it’s stronger, and sometimes it’s weaker. Sometimes we have joy and assurance, and sometimes we have struggle and doubt.
 - i. This can have many causes
 - ii. Sin and disobedience will suck our joy and dim our assurance
 1. This is why, when David repents of his adultery and murder in Psalm 51, the greatest Psalm of personal repentance, he writes *“Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.”*
 - a. He doesn’t say restore to me the *fact* of your salvation, but rather the joy of it

- iii. Sometimes there are emotional and mental struggles which are not the result of specific sin which keep us doubting and struggling
 - 1. I have had this a few times in my life
 - a. This is one of the things which prompted me to question some of my ideas about what Scripture taught on this matter
 - 2. Other great Christians have struggled greatly with depression, doubt, and struggle with assurance
 - a. Luther, Spurgeon, Lloyd-Jones
 - 3. In these cases, trying harder and looking deeper for sin isn't the answer, because those things aren't the problem
 - 4. In these cases, there is a disconnect between the feelings and the truth
 - a. It's often said that the furthest distance in the Christian life is the 18" from head to heart
 - b. The best cure for this is to prayerfully immerse ourselves in the truth of God's Word
 - c. Pray for assurance, pray for peace
 - d. Read your Bible knowing this is God speaking to you
 - i. What is more sure? Your troubled heart? Or the unfailing Word of God?!
 - ii. Go to Isaiah 42:3 and see how tenderly Jesus deals with the broken and the downcast

1. *“a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench”*

iii. Read Romans 8 until it's in your bones

1. What can separate us from the love of God?!
2. How many times did I read this chapter to my dear grandmas as they reached their final days?!
3. If life and death, angels or rulers, things present or things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation cannot separate us from the love of God, there is no chance that my failing heart and my clouded mind will be able to!
4. Even when the darkness seems like it will never lift, God's promises are just as strong

e. Sometimes, in a strange way, the turmoil and the struggle can be a positive sign. Struggle is a sign of life.

- i. My own struggle as a kid if I had committed the unpardonable sin – am I cast out forever?
- ii. This was a considerable battle in my mind until I realized that if I was outside of the kingdom, with a hardened heart, I wouldn't be asking myself these kinds of questions. I wouldn't care.

iii. Friend, if you are struggling with this – if you are scared that you might be one of the people whom Jesus casts out, saying he never knew them, consider this

1. Those whom Jesus cast out didn't have inner turmoil. They weren't bothered as they approached Him. They came in swagger and in pride. They were those of whom we can say "*Often wrong, but never in doubt*".
2. When Jesus warns His disciples that one would betray Him, it was not Judas, but the 11 innocent men who struggled knowing if it was them or not.
3. Your struggle is a sign that your heart is soft. There is life. Stay in the Scriptures until your heart gets strong. And then stay there longer.

16. SUMMARY

- a. As Jesus brings His Sermon on the Mount to a close, He has warned His followers to be aware of false teachers. He says that the fruit we see matches the nature of the tree. False teaching necessarily breeds pride, presumption, works righteousness, and self-sufficiency. When those who have been corrupted by another gospel approach Christ, they do so with a sense of self-confidence, self-

assurance, and self-righteousness. Trusting in our own fake fruit, our own man-made righteousness marches us straight into the anger of God. A flattering tongue means nothing, and Christ will tell the proud man that He has no part in Him, and never did.

17. CHARGE

- a. The presumption of pleading our own righteous deeds when we stand trial in God's courtroom is as clear a demonstration of rejecting the gospel as blatant sin is. The grace of Jesus shows us our need, and then covers us with His perfect righteousness. The proud man sees no need, and hides behind the filthy rags of his own righteousness. The proud man doesn't know Christ, nor is he known by Christ. Jesus' warning here is meant to jar the proud man, and not to break the bruised reed. The contrite, the humble, the repentant, the struggling saint can find comfort here because even amid Jesus' warning is the reminder that He loses none of that which is His, and that the showy displays of the proud are not righteous but lawless. The righteous fruit of a new heart often looks like seasons of struggled prayer, days of battling for joy as we learn to believe God's Word. Let's commit ourselves this week to putting pride and self-sufficiency to death, to grounding our assurance in the blood of Jesus Christ and nowhere else, and to pray for and encourage others who are in a season of needing to fight for joy.

18. BENEDICTION

- a. Numbers 6:24-26 – *“The LORD bless you and keep you; 25 the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; 26 the LORD lift up his countenance³ upon you and give you peace.”*