

I Never Knew You

Call to Worship: Psalm 125

1st Scripture: John 2:23-3:8

2nd Scripture: Matthew 7:15-23

Introduction

We have been working through the closing warnings that our Lord gives here, at the end of His Sermon on the Mount. Last time, we considered the second of these four warnings, which was to “Beware of False Prophets.” This morning, we move on to consider the third warning, which is to beware of putting your stock in a false conversion.

Those of you who are familiar with FB know that people often post various questions on their walls, soliciting the opinions of their FB friends over any given number of issues. Well, recently, I can recall an individual who asked the question, “What Bible verse terrifies you the most?” And I thought, “This is an interesting question, let me open up the thread and see what people are saying.” One of the first verses that I came across was the one found in this text, where our Lord says, “I never knew you; depart from Me...” And immediately, I thought to myself, “Yup, that would be the one!” Because, I honestly can’t imagine any more terrifying reality than dying and standing before the Lord with a sense of anticipating His favor, only to hear that I am not one of His! Throw me in a pit of snakes, cast me in a shark tank, electrocute me, burn me alive, behead me, bury me alive...whatever is necessary, but let it never be the case that such words from My Lord would ever enter my ears!

Suffice it to say that this is definitely one of the most frightening texts in all of Scripture. And yet, brethren, it is so, so, good that we find it in the Scriptures, because it compels us to examine ourselves *now*, in the present, before it is too late, so that we don’t get so comfortable that we over-presume upon the grace of God. I’d rather be shaken with a little fear on this side of the grave, while recognizing full well that there is such a thing as a false conversion, which would give me the time to consider if I am in the faith, than presume that all is well, only to find out when it is too late, that there are many who call Jesus “Lord,” but don’t really know Him. These kinds of warning texts do well to keep *true* Christians away from the ledge of apostasy.

And the good news is, that we can have, and it is God's desire for us to have, full assurance of our salvation. And to this end, there are ways to test the authenticity of our faith, even when examining this text closely, which we will now endeavor to do.

I. The Sobering Assumption of the Warning

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven...” (vs. 21a). What is the sobering assumption that our Lord is making by this statement? That there are some professing Christians, who confess with their mouths that Jesus is their Lord, who will not enter the kingdom of heaven. To be sure, obviously, every true Christian will call Jesus “Lord,” but here we find that all *true* Christians make up a circle of people, who are within a larger circle of all “professing” Christians, and that larger circle extends into the circle which contains the damned. There is a category of people who profess faith in Jesus; baptized members of churches, who take the Lord's Supper regularly; those who would wear the label of “Christ-follower” on their sleeves, who are no better off (and, in fact, having more light, are probably worse off) than Muslims, Buddhists, Atheists, Mormons, JW's and every other cult and false religion out there. This is the sobering warning which our Lord gives here.

And notice, such people will stand before the Lord on the Day of Judgment, assuming that they will be welcomed into His embrace and kingdom; having done all manner of works and even prophesied and proclaimed truth in the Name of Jesus; having performed wonders in His Name; having been involved in all manner of outreach and ministry in His Name... who will *not* enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Jesus will turn them away into the place of everlasting darkness and destruction. Verse 22- “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me,...’”.

You see, they honor Him with the title of “Lord,” which implies that they proclaim Him as their King, and they have done very visible works and services that would suitably meet the description of all kinds of ministry, and yet, they are turned away, declared to have never really known the Lord Jesus Christ! What a frightening reality! You see, what makes this so disturbing is that this category of individuals contains a large slate of people who have been actively part of

visible churches. While I would never wish this, nor desire to even imagine it, would it be far-fetched to consider the very real possibility that there are some even within the membership of our church, Grace Reformed Baptist Church, who would be among this category of people?

Friends, this is why we must, with the utmost sincerity, ask the question, “How can we distinguish between the true and false convert; between the true and false profession of faith, in Christ’s visible church?” And most importantly, we must insert ourselves into the equation, asking ourselves, “How can I discern if *I* am a true or false convert, and if my profession of faith in Christ is genuine or not?” You see, we can’t see each other’s hearts. Ultimately, this is going to come down to an honest assessment of yourself before the Lord. Are there hypocrites who ultimately expose the spurious nature of their faith to the body, at some time or another? Yes. But, are there some, who can sneak underneath the radar, even receiving great encouragement and praise from the brethren and the leadership of the church, up until their dying day? There are. And so, it behooves all of us to carefully hold our own hearts up to the grid of Christ’s words here (and all of Scripture for that matter), to see where we really stand in our professed walk with Christ.

This then leads us to answer the question, “What is the distinguishing mark of the true Christian convert, which would affirm that his/her profession of faith is indeed genuine?”

II. The Distinguishing Mark of the True Christian Convert

There are four critical statements found within this text and its immediate context, which will help us get to the bottom of discovering the distinguishing mark of the true Christian convert. Let us then first address these four statements, before merging them into one overarching, general principle, from which we will pull out a relevant concrete charge.

1) Last time, as our Lord warned us to beware of false prophets, you may recall that He also highlighted a general principle, which provided the gateway into our present warning. Listen again to verses 18-20. And so, here we can begin to work toward the general principle of discovering the distinguishing mark of the true Christian convert by simply stating that the true Christian convert absolutely must bear good fruit. If the tree is *truly* planted in Christ, the profession of faith in Christ must and will be confirmed by the fruit that is born. To this end,

while a Christian can, at times, act carnally, there is no such thing as a “carnal Christian.” The notion put forth by several evangelical churches today that there are a class of Christians, who may bear a mere profession of faith in Christ alone (unto eternal life), while not having matured to the place where there is any visible fruit coming about, is an absolute lie! The good tree; the tree that is *truly* planted in Christ, will and must produce fruit. To deny this, is to deny the absolute and necessary work of the Holy Spirit, who works in all of those who are truly in union with Christ. Does that fruit vary in size? Yes. Are there times when the fruit is more plenteous than at other times? Yes. But, there must and will be fruit, nonetheless.

2) In verse 21, we are told, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, *but he who does the will of My Father in heaven.*” And so, here we find that the one who will enter the kingdom of heaven is “he who does the will of [our Lord’s] Father in heaven.” Now, interestingly enough, what is the will of the Father? Well, for one, in accordance with what our Lord has stated in John’s Gospel, in a text that very much parallels this one, the will of the Father (not surprisingly) is that we “bear much fruit.” [Read John 15:1-8; emphasis on verse 8]. Here again, we also see the connection that, “bearing fruit,” has with “abiding in Christ,” and with “doing the will of God” (glorifying God). In a few moments, all of this is going to come together for us, so that we will have a clear understanding of the general principle, within which, all of these statements merge. Suffice it to say for now, that, the mark of the true Christian convert is “fruit bearing” and “doing the will of God,” the first of which (fruit bearing) is the very essence of the second (doing the will of God).

3) In verses 22-23, we are told, “Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, *you who practice lawlessness!*’” Here we see that those who are told to depart from our Lord; those whom He avows to have never known, are those who “practice lawlessness.” It is their general habit to neglect the law of God. To this end, the concept of holiness and the critical life of pursuing holiness on the part of those who profess faith in Christ, comes to the foreground. And again, as we will see in a few moments, this likewise, ties into bearing fruit and doing the will of God.

4) In the the final section of the Sermon on the Mount, which follows this one, and into which, this one inevitably spills, notice, we are told in verse 24, “*Therefore* (that is to say, “in light of the previous warning that I have just given you, *therefore...*”) whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock...” And so, those who are true Christian converts are those who “hear *and do*” what Jesus has stated throughout the entire course of this Sermon on the Mount. And ultimately brethren, we come full circle here, saying what we have been saying all along. This Sermon contains Jesus’s true exposition of the Law, which gets down to the condition of the motives of the heart through and through. It is a description of what all must and will look like, who are truly in the Kingdom of God, being indwelt by the Holy Spirit of God, having exhibited a true and genuine faith (and not merely a profession alone) in the Lord Jesus Christ. This sermon, itself, which contains the true Law of Christ, which has always been the true Law of God, is the grid, by which, we can measure the genuineness of our faith.

Now, understand what I am not saying. And we have repeated this throughout the course of our study of the Sermon on the Mount, as well. I am not saying that by keeping the commands that are given throughout this sermon, one will obtain eternal life and the genuine conversion which Jesus is here speaking about. I am saying that this Sermon provides us with a true description of all who have truly come to Christ by faith. This Sermon provides us with a grid, whereby, we can discern a hypocritical from a genuine faith.

Now, before we move on to apply what I have said here, let me further solidify the certainty of what I have said, bringing us to the place where our unifying principle is clear and concise. It is that important, isn’t it, when we consider the nature of our Lord’s warning here?

III. The Unifying Principle Herein Provided

Stringing this altogether, we find that the distinguishing mark of the true Christian convert is that he does the will of God, which is diametrically opposed to lawlessness, and which is ultimately to submit to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, by obeying His commands, the sum of which, is given throughout the course of this Sermon on the Mount, which gets down to the motivations of our heart and not mere outward obedience.

In Luke's parallel account to this text, he adds something significant which clearly affirms exactly what we are saying here. For the sake of context, I will read a few verses before and after the relevant portion of the text, showing how it lines right up with our present context.

In Luke 6:43-48, our Lord states, "For a good tree does not bear bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. For every tree is known by its own fruit. For men do not gather figs from thorns, nor do they gather grapes from a bramble bush. A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks. *"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?* Whoever comes to Me, and hears My sayings and does them, I will show you whom he is like: He is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently against that house, and could not shake it, for it was founded on the rock..." (Luke 6:43-48).

And so, in the midst of this section which clearly lines right up with where we are in the Sermon on the Mount, our Lord states, "But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say?" And so, here again, we find that critical principle which ties all that we have been saying, together. What is the will of God and how does one bear fruit, affirming the genuine nature of his/her profession of faith? And what does it mean to be lawful, contrary to being a worker of lawlessness? Bringing it all together, we find that it all comes down to this principle, which will carry over into the last section of the Sermon on the Mount that we will plan on addressing next time. The distinguishing mark of the true Christian convert is that he obeys the Lord Jesus Christ. He sincerely seeks to do what He says.

And doesn't the Father affirm this to be the very summation of His own will, when He addresses the Apostles Peter, John and James on the mountain, where our Lord was transfigured, exposing the true nature of His divine glory in the presence of Moses and Elijah, representing the Law and the Prophets, which serve and point to Him? What did the terrifying voice of God command from the cloud, while the three apostles were atop that mountain? "This is My Beloved Son. *Hear Him!* (Luke 9:35)." Was not the Father expressing the very central aspect of His will, when He commanded three of the Lord's closest Apostles; those who would serve to lay the very foundation of the church, to "Hear His Son?"

And again, recalling what we've read back in John's Gospel, when Jesus labelled Himself as the vine, what did He say was the only way that His true disciples could ever bear fruit? By abiding in Him! Without Him, we can do nothing! And what is it to *abide* in Christ? It is to continue to exhibit a whole-hearted faith in Christ *by obeying and submitting to Him as our Lord!* You see, merely calling Jesus, "Lord, Lord," means absolutely nothing, if we do not do what He says. That is exactly what Jesus is illustrating at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, and that is why He will conclude the Sermon with the analogy of the two houses, one built on a stone foundation (able to withstand all opposition), and one built on the sand (unable to withstand all opposition), with the house built on the stone foundation representing those who hear *and do* the things that Jesus has taught. And in this context, this especially relates to what He has taught in the Sermon on the Mount, where He has given us a description of the true nature of God's Law, as it relates to the heart, and not the mere actions alone.

Remember earlier in the sermon, before our Lord began to open up the heart of the Law, what was the stark statement that He had made, which would have really impacted His Jewish audience? He said that unless they had a righteousness that was greater than the righteousness of the Scribes and the Pharisees, they would not enter the Kingdom of Heaven. You see, the righteousness of the religious leaders was a "lawless" righteousness, even though they made every claim to be servants of the living God, because their righteousness was merely outward, and did not proceed out of a sincere heart that loved God and others. It was a self-righteous, plastic observance of the letter of the Law, to the neglect of the very heart of it. Well here, our Lord carries that over even into the realm of those, who unlike the religious leaders, would profess to call Him Lord. And in essence, He says what He said to Nicodemus (in John 3). Unless you are born of the Spirit; unless you are born again and changed from the inside out, you will not see the Kingdom of heaven. True subjects of Christ's Kingdom, affirm the authenticity of their faith by not only *hearing* what Jesus has said, nor by merely professing faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. But rather, they must live out that faith by obeying Him. And that, my friends, is the very heart and principle of all that our Lord is saying here in this text. The will of God, bearing fruit, being lawful... all of these are tied into, and proceed out of a genuine faith in Christ, which is so overcome by the love of Christ that it drives you to commit

your life to obeying Him. And were you to take a snap shot of the life that is in obedience to Christ, though imperfect (though ever improving and growing), it must and will look something like all that we have gone over in this Sermon that our Lord had delivered atop the mountain. And therefore, let us never diminish the importance of, or neglect to drink from the wellspring of glory that is provided throughout the entirety of this Sermon, from the beginning of the beatitudes, to the very last letter. It is a unit, and what God has joined together, let no man separate!

IV. Closing Applications

1) I ask you first, brethren, do you bear the marks of a true Christian convert? If your answer to this question is “yes,” then let me further ask, “Do you strive to not only *hear*, but also to *obey* the Lord Jesus Christ?” Is it your desire to follow Him and to obey His commands? Is your faith a living faith? Does it have a heartbeat, or is it a mere lifeless profession?

It is so important that we all consider our lives within the scope of the whole of God’s Word, and not just the parts that make us feel comfortable. And there are several churches out there that will convince you to put all of your stock in a mere profession. Now, don’t get me wrong, the profession is critical. We must be willing to state that our hope is in Jesus Christ alone, for the forgiveness of all of our sins, and reconciliation to God, unto eternal life. That is extremely important. But such a profession must be genuine, leading us to wholly submit ourselves, in truth, to the Lordship of Christ, and not merely in word. This is precisely what James was saying when he avowed that a faith that does not produce works is a dead and useless faith.

And so, let us be certain that as we are trusting in Christ alone for salvation, that we are also submitting ourselves to His dominion, as Lord of our lives, striving by grace to obey His commands. [Note: As Lord over *every area* of our lives]

2) If you are indeed outside of Jesus Christ, then you cannot even begin to please God, in any sense, let alone do His will. The Word of God very clearly teaches, “He who has the Son, has life, and he who does not have the Son, does not have life, but is presently condemned and

God's wrath abides on him." There is no other way to the Father, but through the Lord Jesus Christ, who is the only worthy sacrifice that can redeem naturally condemned sinners!

Amen!

Benediction: Jude 1:24-25