

**THE LORD'S WARNING TO SPIRITUAL COUNTERFEITS**  
**Matthew 7:21-23**

In 1947, news spread quickly that the Ford Motor Company was selling new cars for any copper penny minted in 1943. Car dealerships around the country were inundated with requests for further information. But the population soon discovered it was all a hoax. In 1943 there was not enough copper available for coinage. All of the more than one billion pennies minted that year were made of a zinc-coated steel. None were made from copper. What seemed to be a great deal was nothing but a big joke. But this hoax is nothing in comparison to the deception of those who think they have received eternal life and have not.

**Matthew 7:21-23** is a part of the closing section of THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT. The Lord Jesus calls his hearers to trust and obey his message with a series of alternatives. Verses 13-14 present TWO WAYS: the broad and populated way that leads to destruction and the narrow, difficult, and hard to find way that leads to life. Verses 15-20 present TWO TREES: which contrasts false prophets from true prophets. Like trees, the two can be distinguished by the fruit they bear. Our text presents TWO PROFESSIONS: the professing believers who enter the kingdom of heaven and the ones who do not. Verses 24-27 present TWO BUILDERS: the wise man who builds his house on the rock, and the foolish man who builds on the sand.

Our text is the most disturbing of these contrasts. The other passages contrast those who are truly righteous from those who are obviously wicked. Our text contrasts the truly righteous from the seemingly righteous. Everyone in our text confesses Jesus as Lord. Many of them have prophesied, exorcised demons, and performed miracles in the name of Christ. They assumed they are on their way to heaven. But they are on their way to hell. This warning about spiritual counterfeits is a wake-up call for every professing believer: Make sure your claim to salvation is real. **2 Corinthians 13:5** says, "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Our do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless indeed you fail to meet the test!" The greatest thing in the world is to be saved. The second is to be sure you are saved. God the Father wants you to be saved and sure you are on your way to heaven. The Lord also wants to disabuse those who are walking in a false presumption of salvation. It is time for a spiritual reality check:

- **Are you sure you are saved?**
- **Are you sure that you are born again?**
- **Are you sure you are free from the eternal penalty of sin?**
- **Are you sure you are on your way to heaven?**
- **Are you sure you will enter the kingdom?**

The Lord's warning to spiritual counterfeits gives three ways to test your claim to salvation.

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## I. TEST YOUR CONFESSION OF THE LORD'S NAME.

**Judges 12:1-6** records a civil war that erupted over a petty dispute. Jephthah the judge defeated the Ammonites, a perennial enemy of God's people. Then the men of Ephraim took up arms against Jephthah for not seeking their help against the Ammonites. Jephthah had informed them that he and his people – the Gileadites – had a dispute with the Ammonites. When he asked the Ephraimites to help, they did not respond. So he had to do what he had to do. This resulted in a civil war between the Gileadites and the Ephraimites. The Gileadites captured the fords of Jordan. And when the fugitives of Ephraim tried to cross the Jordan, the men of Gilead asked, "Are you an Ephraimite?" When they answered, "No," the Gileadites ordered them to say, "Shibboleth." Because of colloquial differences, the Ephraimites pronounced "Shibboleth" as "Sibboleth." This gave them away and the Gileadites put them death.

The term "Shibboleth" is used today to speak of passwords by which people are allowed or disallowed. Within the church, we have Shibboleths that identify those who are in from those who are out. **Matthew 7:21-23** is about one of the great Shibboleths of the church. It is the title "Lord," which is used four times in these three verses. Jesus warns that just because you know the password does not mean you will enter the kingdom of heaven. Verse 21 says, "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." This verse contrasts the deception of a false profession and the demonstration of a true profession.

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### A. THE DECEPTION OF A FALSE PROFESSION OF FAITH.

One of the major theological controversies in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century was over what is called LORDSHIP SALVATION. On one side, men of God were concerned about easy-believism that offers forgiveness of sin without repentance. On the other side, men of God were concerned about legalism that denies the scandalous freedom of amazing grace. Both sides argued their concerns in response to this basic question: Can one receive Jesus as Savior without accepting him as Lord? In **Matthew 7:21**, Jesus says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." Jesus makes it clear that all who enter heaven will call him Lord, but not all who call him Lord will enter heaven. Everybody talking about heaven ain't going! **JOHN MACARTHUR** wrote: "Mere professed devotion to Christ is but another Judas kiss."

We should pray for those outside the church who deny the lordship of Christ. We should also pray for those in the church who only pay lip service to it. Anyone can take the name of Christ and identify himself with the Lord and not be born again; just as anyone can buy a Jacksonville Jaguars jersey and wear it proudly without having any affiliation with the team. Merely saying something does not make it so. What we say we believe has no real meaning by itself. It is how we live that bears testimony that we are a new creation. If your life does not honor the lordship of Christ, it does not matter how

much you say or sing or shout, “Lord, Lord.” In **Luke 6:46** Jesus asks, “Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” The engraving on the cathedral of Lubeck, Germany, reads:

THUS SPEAKETH CHRIST OUR LORD TO US –  
YOU CALL ME MASTER AND OBEY ME NOT.  
YOU CALL ME LIGHT AND SEE ME NOT.  
YOU CALL ME THE WAY AND WALK ME NOT.  
YOU CALL ME LIFE AND LIVE ME NOT.  
YOU CALL ME WISE AND FOLLOW ME NOT.  
YOU CALL ME FAIR AND LOVE ME NOT.  
YOU CALL ME RICH AND ASK ME NOT.  
YOU CALL ME ETERNAL AND SEEK ME NOT.  
IF I CONDEMN THEE, BLAME ME NOT.

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#### **B. THE DEMONSTRATION OF A TRUE PROFESSION OF FAITH IN CHRIST.**

The title “Lord” was used in Jesus’ day as a sign of respect, much like we use the terms “Sir” or “Mister.” But the context here indicates that more than respect is being expressed when Jesus is addressed as “Lord.” This is a reverent, orthodox, and passionate profession of faith in Christ. These professing believers do not just call Jesus “Lord,” they call him “Lord, “Lord” – expressing fervent devotion to Christ. Yet verse 21 says, “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.” The tension is between what you say and what you do. To enter the kingdom of heaven, mere confession of Christ as Lord is not enough. We must do the will of the Father who is in heaven. **W.H. GRIFFITH-THOMAS** wrote: “Nothing is sadder or more disastrous than orthodoxy of lip without orthodoxy of life.”

Mark it down. You will not enter the kingdom because of your obedience to the will of God. **Ephesians 2:8-9** is clear: “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” But you cannot get to heaven without obedience. When a guy keeps boasting and bragging, his friends call his bluff by saying, “Put your money where your mouth is!” That is what Jesus is saying here. If you call me Lord...

- **Put your money where your mouth is.**
- **Put your time where your mouth is.**
- **Put your relationships where your mouth is.**
- **Put your devotion where your mouth is.**
- **Put your obedience where your mouth is.**

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## II. TEST YOUR COMMITMENT TO THE LORD'S NAME.

Verse 22, Jesus says, "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?'" This verse gives two details about the day of judgment. First, the Lord Jesus Christ will be the judge on that day. We may assume this fact. But the Jewish audience that heard these words fall from the lips of Jesus choked on this statement. They were anticipating what the Old Testament calls the Day of the Lord, when God will reward the righteous and judge the wicked. But Jesus says he will occupy the seat of judgment on that great day. The New Testament agrees with this claim. In **Acts 17:29-31** Paul says, "Being then God's offspring, we ought not to think that the divine being is like gold or silver or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of man. The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead." Jesus will be the divinely appointed judge on the day of the Lord."

The second detail about that day is the pre-report the judge gives. Verse 22 says, "On that day many will say to me." Jesus says many so-called Christians in the church will be in for a big surprise on judgment day. These false believers will be so shocked and surprised that they will challenge the validity of the Lord's judgment: "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?'" Interestingly, Jesus does not answer that question. The absence of a direct response suggests they were telling the truth. They had prophesied, exorcised demons, and performed miracles in his name. Yet they will not enter into the kingdom of heaven. In fact, the good works they appeal to in verse 22 are the things that keep them out of the kingdom.

These false believers did not know good works do not impress the Lord. The issue is not that many people who have prophesied, exorcised demons, and performed miracles are on their way to hell. The issue is that you and I have not done anywhere near those kind of good works, yet we are depending on our conversion experience, church membership, spiritual disciplines, ministry activity, or moral living to get us into heaven. But God is not impressed with our commitment to him. Your goodness is not enough to save you. **Isaiah 64:6** says, "We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a polluted garment. We all fade like a leaf, and our iniquities, like the wind, take us away."

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## III. TEST YOUR COMMUNION WITH THE LORD'S NAME.

Verse 22 records what false believers will say to the Lord on the day of judgment. Verse 23 records what the Lord will say to false believers on the day of

judgment: “And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.” The word “declare” indicates a solemn, formal, and public announcement. The Greek term is usually translated “confess” in the New Testament. It was a legal term that referred to official testimony. On the day of judgment, the judge himself will testify against unconverted believers. The Lord’s testimony determines eternal destiny. It is not what you say about the Lord. It is what the Lord will say about you. Verse 23 outlines three aspects of the impending judgment of spiritual counterfeits.

#### **A. THE LORD WILL EXCLAIM YOUR LACK OF RELATIONSHIP.**

Verse 23 says, “And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you.” You can prophesy, cast out demons, and perform miracles in the name of Christ; yet stand before the Lord and have to introduce yourself. We make a big deal about the importance of knowing the Lord. But it is more important that the Lord knows you! Jesus is God, which means that he is omniscient. He knows everything known, unknown, and knowable. Yet the all-knowing Christ will say, “I never knew you.” Jesus does not lack information about people. The Lord knows us perfectly. **Proverbs 15:3** says, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.” When Jesus says, “I never knew you,” he is talking about the intimacy of personal relationship. The Lord made us and knows all about us. But that will not get you into heaven. You must have a personal relationship with God by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone that results in obedience to the will of the Father. If not, you and the Lord are strangers to one another and he will say to you, “I never knew you.”

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#### **B. THE LORD WILL EXTEND YOUR LIFE OF REJECTION.**

Verse 23 says, “And then will I declare to them, ‘I never you, depart from me.” This divine dismissal alludes to **Psalms 6:8**, where David says, “Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the Lord has heard the sound of my weeping.” David spoke these words in a prayer for vindication against his enemies. Jesus speaks these words as a sovereign command that executes divine judgment. The Greek term translated “depart” is in a grammatical emphasis that denotes continual action. Jesus does not just zap the condemned into hell. He refuses them entrance into the kingdom of heaven and commands them to spend eternity departing from him. That’s hell. **C.K. CHESTERTON** said it well: “Hell is God’s great compliment to the reality of human freedom and the dignity of human choice.” On judgment day, Jesus will say to the unconverted unbeliever, “You chose to spend your life without me. Now you can have it your way forever.”

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### C. THE LORD WILL EXPOSE YOUR LABORS OF REBELLION.

Verse 23 says, "And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" In verse 22, the spiritual counterfeits appeal to their good works for entrance into the kingdom. In verse 23 Jesus exposes the true nature of their works: "You workers of lawlessness." They spent their lives in a cloak of religiosity. But underneath the skin they were the direct opposite of righteous. They were lawless. There is a difference between breaking the law and practicing lawlessness. It is one thing to break the law. It is another thing to try to abolish the law and act like it does not exist. This is not human weakness. It is blatant wickedness. And Jesus exposes them for what they really are. **Matthew 13:41-42** says, "The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all law-breakers, and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

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**How can you avoid this dreadful fate on the day of judgment?** In verses 24-27, Jesus says, "Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it." The only way to escape the peril of the spiritual counterfeits on the day of judgment is to seek refuge in the word of salvation.