

Title: If it's a dog, it will bark.
Text: Matthew 7.21-23
Theme: Who you trust determines what you are.
Series: Matthew #44
Prop Stmtnt: Genuine faith will produce genuine fruit.

Read Text:

Geometry and I were not good friends. I was a sophomore in high school and true to the definition of sophomore (a "wise" moron) I asked the teacher if she could explain the relevance of any of this postulates and theorems to actual life. To her consternation, and additional fuel to my ill-founded arrogance, she could not produce an example of how this was going to be helpful. To say that I disengaged would not be honest, because that would pre-suppose that there had been a point in which I had actually engaged. But, her inability to answer my question gave me, what I thought, was an excuse to not pay attention. Today, I regret my shortsighted foolishness. But in the moment, I saw no need to listen and no urgency to learn.

As the master Teacher, Christ does not make that mistake. Everything that he teaches is not only relevant, it is eternally relevant. This is not "an interesting talk." If you are paying attention to anything that Jesus is saying in this sermon (Matt. 5-7), he is blowing up your world and rocking your boat. Who of us, in reading these words (7.21-23) do not feel threatened, or unsettled? Is Jesus just trying to get our attention? Is he just yanking our chain for the sake of stirring the pot a bit? But Jesus does not say things simply to get your attention, or, as they say, for effect.

But, let me explain what we are used to. We tend to look at Jesus, and the Bible and church as a religious club. In other words, it is something that we join, or add to what we do. We join it because we perceive that there are some benefits. So, we want to become part of it. Now, if there is something that we want to be part of, and we are going to be examined, we want to know what questions we are going to be asked, don't we?

Just tell me what I need to say.

I knew a lady who was applying for a job once as a teacher in a Christian school. The lady was a nice person, religious to a degree, but not a genuine follower of Christ. She was clueless about the gospel. So, on this application form she was asked when she had been saved. She had no idea what this was about and so she asked me. In fact, her words were something like, "Hey, you're a religious guy, what does this being saved mean?" Which was a great opportunity to explain the gospel, which I did. But, she was not interested in actually hearing the gospel, she just wanted to know what she needed to put own on the application in order to get the job. So, I got done with explaining the gospel, (and frankly, I thought that I had done a pretty decent job of it) and she looked at me a bit blankly and said, "so what am I supposed to put down on this form?" To her, it was not reality. It was not who she was, it was just words. As long as you say the right words,

you're ok. Right? Wrong! This is what is so captivating about authentic Christianity. It is not a formula that we memorize.

In the early days of the church, the Caesar was considered to be a god. Now, everyone knew that he wasn't really a god, but it was the tradition and the teaching of the Roman Empire. It was a point of unity for everyone to say, "Caesar ha Kurios." (Caesar is Lord.) Early believers would not say that. They would say, Jesus ha Kurios. (Jesus is Lord.) and they would in some cases be threatened with their lives. In some cases their captors would tell them, "just say it (Caesar ha Kurios)." You don't have to believe it, just say it. Which is very similar to what goes on in the Islamic religion. Many people are considered to be Muslim, not because they really believe it, but they live in a land where the Islamic religions rules. So, they conform. They say, "There is no god but Allah; (and) Muhammad is Allah's messenger." It does not matter if you really believe it, just as long as you say it.

This is what we are used to. If we are going to be interviewed for a job, or interviewed for acceptance into college, we want to know, "what am I supposed to say?" Hold, the phone! What do you mean, what am I supposed to say? What is the thinking behind that question? When I ask a question like that, I am revealing the fact that I want to know what you want to hear so I can use words that will match your expectations. Jesus does not play that game. Following him is not a matter of saying the right formula, or repeating historical phrases in unison in a worship service. It is not a matter of being told what you are supposed to say.

Just tell me what I need to know.

If you are going to apply for college you take the ACT test. If you want to be a Certified Public Accountant, you have to take the CPA exam. If you want to be doctor, you have to pass your boards. If you want to be a lawyer, you have to pass the bar. If you want to be a minister, you have to pass the examination of those who are ordaining you. Each one of those positions is a position of public trust. At a minimum, the public is assuming that you knew a basic amount of information and are proficient with it.

So, it is easy to assume this approach with "religion." A couple comes to me because they like our building and they want to get married here. There are some nice courtyards, great place for pictures, etc. So, they say, "Hey, we love your church and want to get married here, but we understand that you only do weddings for members, so, tell us what we need to know. I.e. just give me the information, I will take the test and pass it, and we are all good – right?"

Just tell me what I need to do.

I am going to rabbit trail for a second because this text provides an excellent example of bad Bible study technique, poor preaching, and terrible application. Proof-texting is very popular. Proof-texting is when I pick a verse out of its context and use it to support my point instead of using it to support its point. For example, Jesus says that the person who

will enter the kingdom of heaven is the person who does the will of my Father in heaven. So, what is it that we want to know? We want to know "what are the things that we have to do so that we can say that we fulfilled that." And this is how lists are made. Do these things and you will be fine. THAT is NOT the POINT!!! When you look at the entire context of this statement (and this sermon) Jesus is blowing up religion as most people know it! What makes you think that you are ok? I'm a Jew, right?! Not good enough. I'm a Baptist, right? Not good enough. I'm a Catholic, I'm moral, I provide for my family, I am generous. Not good enough. This statement on the part of Christ (21b) is brilliant! It is brilliant because on your own, you cannot do the will of the Father. We fall short of God's revealed will for our lives, which is why the will of God is that you might know God and trust Him, which you can only do through Christ. But, when you come to the point in your life where you recognize that you cannot save yourself, you cannot earn the favor of God through your morality or religious efforts, and instead of trusting in yourself, you trust in Christ alone because he lived the life you could not live, in your place and he died the death you could not die in your place, then, you are born into the family of God, and the Spirit of God takes up residence within you. The Spirit of God now enables you, empowers you, motivates you, draws you, encourages you, convicts you, corrects you all to pursue the will of God in your life. So, doing the will of God is the fruit of knowing God. But, at this point in the ministry of Christ, he is simply attempting to get the people to understand that they have a need that they cannot solve and it is a serious need!

What is bad fruit? Is it murder, perversion, hatred, greed, pride, or immorality? What does Jesus say is bad fruit? What is good fruit? Here is the hard truth. Religious activity including religious words and sacrifice can be bad fruit.

I. Just words are just words. (21-23)

A. Profession without genuine belief is useless.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven."

Jesus is not only ascribing to himself a title of immense respect (Lord, Lord – doubled for emphasis) but he is making it clear that he is the Judge who pronounces the verdict on the final day of judgment. Not only that, but Jesus speaks of his Father who is in heaven which means that he is presenting himself as the Son of God. What I am saying is that the person who says "Lord, Lord" to Jesus is being more than polite. This person is making a public profession. But, a profession of faith does not automatically mean one is in authentic possession of faith.

B. Profession without genuine belief is blinding.

v.22 is sobering, isn't it? Jesus is describing a person who is shocked to find out that he/she is denied entrance into the kingdom of heaven. These people assumed amongst other things, that because they said the right things, that they were fine. But, just because you are able to articulate the right teachings and say the correct answers, does not qualify

you for the kingdom of Christ. You can learn all of the right doctrines, but if you trust your learning, instead of trusting Christ, you have missed the entire point. Your learning about Christ cannot save you. Only Christ can save you. Beloved, we must grow in grace and in knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. But the danger of growing in knowledge is that we can so easily trust our knowledge instead of trusting in Christ.

When I preach, I do not “dumb it down.” I really seek to give it to you straight. A sermon is a serious event. I try not to impress you with big words, but I will use big words, and define them when I think it will help us understand a truth a bit better. And we all know that we gather together, we are not in a hurry. We don’t bring watches; we bring calendars. We are here for a while. You regularly sit for 60 minute sermons. In our culture, that is impressive to some. You will sit for 60-minute sermons, with your children in a verse by verse study of an entire book of the Bible. What on earth is wrong with you? And while, I/we think that there is great benefit to giving ourselves to this, there is also a great danger. My salvation, my hope, my acceptance before God is NOT based on the fact that I preach long, doctrinally robust sermons and your salvation, your hope, your acceptance before God is NOT based on the fact that you endure them. But, we can so easily slip into thinking that saying it right, saying it loud, saying it long is good enough. But, if the weight of our belief rests only on what we say, then our profession is blinding us to our real need. In fact...

C. Profession without belief is damning. (23)

Jesus says to these people, *“I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.”*

Now, we begin to see the root of the issue. The people in question never knew Christ. They talked a good game and as we will see in a minute, they even looked good before others. Their religious actions were impressive. But, they did not know Christ.

True belief in Christ is the basis of a true relationship with Christ which is the source of true fruit (doing the will of my Father who is in heaven) by Christ. This is why you have to look at everything that Jesus is saying here. If you only looked at v.21, what would your conclusion be? Would you not conclude that the problem was, these people were not doing the will of the Father? Yes! But Jesus does not stop there and say, “OK then, straighten up and fly right.” Kids, quit giving your parents lip. Make your bed, pick up your clothes, stop acting like you have the cruelest parents in the world. Cause, if you don’t, you are not doing the will of my Father and you will never get into heaven. Jesus does not give a list of 10 things that you have to do in order to qualify as one who “does the will of my Father.” He goes deeper. The ultimate problem is not your actions. Your actions and attitude are only the fruit. The real problem is that I do not know you.

II. Religious activity does not replace genuine faith. (21b-23)

Charles was a senior ministries study major at a good Christian University. He openly professed his faith in Christ. He participated in church events. He was engaged. His

fiancée was a music studies major, they planned to be married in August. Two weekends ago he helped lead a retreat for high school students. Two days later it appears that he murdered his fiancé and then tampered with the evidence to make it appear as if she committed suicide. He was arraigned this past week. I have family that knows the family of the girl. Our hearts are heavy. I hesitated to share this with you because this event is so grievous that the grief and heaviness may distract you from the point I am trying to make. It is the point that Jesus is making. Religious activity does not replace genuine faith. Going to a Bible college, serving as a leader in the church, prophesying, performing exorcisms and even miracles does not, in and of itself mean that you are a genuine believer.

Have you ever heard of the word salvific? It simply means having the power or ability to save. For example: the gospel is salvific. Religious activity is not salvific.

Ok, let's recap. Jesus has said that not everyone who thinks they are followers of God are followers of God. He then says that true followers of God are those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven. So, from his explanation it initially sounds as if, the basis of our acceptance by God is on what we do – right? We must do the will of God. But, as I said earlier, Jesus does not give us a list of things to do so that we can measure up. In fact, he really throws what seems like a curveball doesn't he? He points out three specific actions and states that just because you do these actions does not mean that you are right before God.

What is going on in v.22? The people who have been rejected by Christ are protesting. They are saying, "Look at what we have done!" But, what we have done, is obviously, not good enough.

A. Prophesying is neither salvific, nor is it convincing fruit.

Prophesying can mean foretelling events (apparently supernatural), or it can mean forth-telling (like preaching). I am guessing that Jesus is using it here in the more supernatural sense. I think this is the same point that Paul was making in 1 Cor. 13.2. You may have "prophetic powers" and you may be amazing. But, possessing and exercising prophetic powers does not make you a genuine follower of God.

B. Exorcism is neither salvific, nor is it convincing fruit.

Dealing with demons is a serious subject that should not be joked about. Therefore, exercising authority over demons and casting them out of a person is no small matter. But Jesus says, that just because a person has done this, does not mean that he/she is a true follower of God.

C. Miracles are neither salvific, nor is it convincing fruit.

Now, a couple of cautions are in order. Some of you come from backgrounds where you experienced religious fervency and intense worship gatherings. You witnessed some of

these kinds of things that Jesus is talking about, and yet there were other things that went on that caused you to question whether any of it was from God. The basic pattern is this: If an individual is able to bring about a supernatural effect on others, then that person must be anointed by God. Acclaim and authority are then given to this person who often uses that authority for his own power and purposes. As a result, the followers get really messed up. Just because a person, or just because people are prophesying, performing exorcisms and doing miracles, does not mean they are of God. The other position to avoid is the opposite extreme and that is to say that all supernatural evidences must be of the devil. Jesus and the disciples did all three of these. The point is this: Just because a person performs these does not, in and of itself mean that the person is a genuine follower of Christ. So, when Jesus says, that the one who does the will of my Father in heaven is the one who will enter the kingdom, what does he mean? He obviously means that the ones who know him (the opposite of I never knew you) are the ones who do the Father's will.

III. Genuine faith is the only ground for knowing Christ.

John 17.1-5; 20-26

A. **Genuine faith (root) produces gospel fruit.**

Faith in Christ is the root. The tree is an authentic Christian that is evidenced by gospel fruit (fruit that is consistent with the gospel). So, what is gospel fruit? Is being a bold proclaimer of truth, gospel fruit? Not necessarily. Is casting out demons undeniable gospel fruit? No. Is the performing of miracles a sure sign that you possess the anointing of God on your life? No. So, what is it? It is something that you cannot will yourself to do. It is something that Christ, through the Spirit of God does in you. It is fruit that the Spirit produces in your life, which is: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

B. **Works-driven faith is self-worship.**

The people who perform many amazing things "in the name of Jesus" but who are not actual followers of God are only adding to their own condemnation. Jesus calls them "workers of lawlessness."

For many years I have taught you that "if it's a dog, it will bark." What I mean is that if a person is a genuine believer, there will be evidence that will support it. But what if there is no convincing evidence? Do you fake the evidence? Do you attempt to create evidence to support what you hope for? That's dishonest!! And yet, that is what most religions are willing to settle for. Here, do these things so that you look like a good little Christian, or a good little Muslim, or a good little person of faith! If your hope is rooted in what you are doing, you have no hope. But if your hope is grounded in what Christ has already done for you, then you are secure. So, how do you know IF your hope is grounded in what Christ has done for you?

- 1) Do you believe the right things about Christ and the gospel?
- 2) Do you believe from your heart?
- 3) Is there compelling evidence that would support your claim to believe?

If there is little evidence to support your claim to believe, then remember, the real problem is not with the lack of evidence. The real problem is with the authenticity of your belief. But, do not be deceived. If you hear the words of Christ, but you fail to embrace them and thereby fail to act upon them, you are destroying your life, like a fool who builds his house on sand.

If you are making excuses for yourself, you are already deceived.