

Reading: Matthew 7:21-23

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² Many will say to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?’ ²³ Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

Preaching notes:

These three verses appear on many people’s mental list of “most shocking, uncomfortable and challenging” verses in the New Testament, but they needn’t be. Whilst these verses have been described as “heart piercing” they are said by Jesus for us to be completely sure of our motives in the things we do. Is our relationship with Him “lip service” or “heart service”? The things we do, are they from a sense of duty (doing or saying the right thing) or as an expression of our deep love of God?

The term “not everyone”, that Jesus begins with, means that some will enter the kingdom but some (many?) won’t. Remember the audience -perhaps this audience- these are people who believe themselves to be on the correct path, the Kings Highway but find themselves, in the end (on that day) to have been on the wrong path all along. Jesus helps us -if we are willing to accept his words- in knowing which are which. The key is seeking to do God’s will with all of our hearts -how? By knowing God’s heart and Him knowing ours.

The sub-title inserted prior to this short text in the NIV translation emphasises the continuation of last week’s passages (verses 15-20), the “false and true” comparison. Here it is again: “false and true disciples”, in verse 21 Jesus makes it clear who will enter the kingdom of heaven -another way of saying receive eternal life- “only those who do the will of my Father who is in heaven”. Do we still think that it is about attending a church service, by having Christian parents, attending a Christian organisation, doing more “right than wrong” like a moral balance sheet, by piling up good works? No, whilst those things are fine, it is not enough, to believe this is “self-deception”. Instead it is about putting into practice all that Jesus has taught throughout this long sermon (the “Sermon on the Mount which begins at chapter 5). Bible expositor Matthew Henry states: “we have here (in chapter 7 in general and these verses in particular) the conclusion of this long and excellent sermon, the scope of which is to show the indispensable necessity of obedience to the commands of Christ”.

Jesus is talking here in these verses to those who may have an outward appearance of religion but not a heartfelt deep love and desire to be close to God. He is introducing the concept of self-deception or delusion and the idea that some (He says many) are living under a false sense of security by assuming that their religiosity will lead to their salvation - which Jesus says very clearly it will not.

In his early ministry as a Church of England Minister John Wesley, was very devout, very observant, pious and diligent, out of duty he made the long and dangerous journey to America and ministered amongst the settlers and natives but looking back on that time he admitted that he did not truly know God, He had no assurance of his personal salvation. One evening whilst attending a Bible study in Aldersgate, London, he describes his heart being

strangely warmed and he received God's Holy Spirit into his life. Some may say: "he was already a Christian, he was a minister, tested and trained" - he was not, because despite the clerical collar, he did not fully and truly know God nor did God truly know him. The anointing from God is surely far more important than the ordination from men (good as that is).

As we conclude please consider the words of Jesus that none of us wishes to hear: "I never knew you", do we only turn to God in times of trouble, as a last resort when all else fails? Humanly, what type of relationship would that be with a family member if that were our attitude?

God, through Jesus, offers us a close relationship, a family relationship, in which we are adopted as children: "He gave the right to become children of God to all those who believe in His name" (John 1:12). Seeking to do our own will (whilst calling it God's for effect or credibility) will not end well and no one can say they were unaware of the consequences. If you have not done so yet, prayerfully consider beginning a closer relationship with Jesus today, do not put it off to another day.

Amen.