

Pastor Don Nelson

Sermon: 5/24/2015
Beverly E.C.C., Chicago, IL

**“TO ENTER THE KINGDOM”
Matthew 7:21-23**

? We call Jesus **“Lord”** and we do all kinds of good works in his name. But will we **“enter [his] kingdom”**?

To put it another way:

? Do we think, speak, and act according to his Father’s will?

? Does the Lord Jesus even know us?

Some believers never wrestle with these questions. Some never consider that they might not be on good terms with God. Some assume they have entered the kingdom because they prayed the Sinner’s Prayer, got baptized, affirm true doctrine, and are involved in the church.

If that describes you, wake up! Life is too short, and eternity too long, for false confidence.

▣ Please turn to Matthew 7:21-23. Messiah declares:

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

What do we know about these individuals?

① First, they profess to be Christians.

{Ro 10:9} They state **“with [their] mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord.’”** They affirm **“that God raised him from the dead.”** They call Jesus **“Lord”** in prayer, in song, and in conversation. They say **“Lord, Lord.”**

② Second, they do big things for God.

They prophesy, expel demons, and perform **“miracles”** in Jesus’ name. Has God acted through them? Is their impact psychosomatic? Are demons working through them? We are not told. But there is no evidence that they are lying about their exploits.

③ Third, they sincerely believe that they are saved.

{Mt 7:13-15} They are not deliberate hypocrites, much less **“wolves” “in sheep’s clothing.”** They are sure that they have **“[entered] through the narrow gate”** and are on **“the road that leads to life.”**

Put it all together and these people are not pagans or Moslems or heretics. They look and sound like Christians, because they think they are.

They are terribly mistaken. In the end, the Lord of the Church will turn them away.

{Amos 5:18-19; TNIV/NLT} Amos might have had these tragic figures in mind when he prophesied,

Woe to you who long for the day of the LORD!

**Why do you long for the day of the LORD?
That day will be darkness, not light.**

**...you will be like a man who runs from a lion
– only to meet a bear.**

**After escaping the bear,
he leans his hand against a wall in his
house
– only to be bitten by a snake.**

▣ Hear again the word of the Lord:

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

Does this make us feel ill at ease? If hope so! If not we haven’t been listening, or we do not understand the text, or we are too complacent for our own good.

In Matthew 5:29-30 the Savior advises,

“If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to stumble, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell.”

It is equally easy for a one-eyed, one-handed person to be damned as for one whose body is intact, so

literal self-mutilation is not the solution. Still, it is worth any cost not to **“go into hell.”**

? Self-deception is difficult to detect. How can we avoid being counted among those who will be so grievously shocked **“on that day”**?

We can discern the two-fold answer in Messiah’s verdict against the self-deceived.

✈ First, they will not enter his kingdom, for they do not obey him. Eternal life is for those who do the Father’s will (verse 21).

What is God’s will for us? In the plainest terms, it is *αγαπη* [agapē] love.

{Mt 22:36-40} According to Jesus **“the first and greatest” “commandment in the Law”** is to **“Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” ...And the second is... ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”**

For practical ideas about how to do this, read the Sermon on the Mount. It depicts active, intentional love for the Lord, one’s spouse, one’s neighbor, the needy, and one’s enemy in every circumstance. It challenges us to put our minds, mouths, bodies, and possessions under the governance of God’s *αγαπη* love.

If that sounds too simple, if it seems that God’s will must be more complicated, contemplate this interchange:

{Lk 10:25-28} When a scribe tested Messiah with the question, **“What must I do to inherit eternal life?”** Messiah turned the tables on him.

“What is written in the Law?” Jesus asked. **“How do you read it?”** In response, the man quoted the Lord’s own teaching about the love commands.

“You have answered correctly,” Jesus replied. **“Do this and you will live.”** Eternal life is for those who do God’s will. Doing God’s will boils down to thinking thoughts of *αγαπη* love, speaking words of *αγαπη* love, and doing deeds of *αγαπη* love.

Have you noticed that it is possible to do big things for God without doing his will? Here it is prophesying, driving out demons, and performing miracles in his name. In another setting it might be helping the poor, growing a megachurch, or leading thousands of people to Christ in evangelistic crusades.

Of course, these ministries can be done in the power of love and in surrender to God’s call. Yet they are not more important than basic obedience, and they can never substitute for it. Those who forget this inflict terrible damage on individuals and the Church.

These unfortunates in our text will not enter the kingdom of God, for they do not obey him. Eternal life is for those who do the Father’s will.

✎ Second, they will not enter his kingdom, because Messiah does not know them. Eternal life is for those who are known by Christ.

{Jn 15:4-5} The Lord Jesus says, **“I am the vine;”** (the trunk or the stalk) **“you are the branches.”** **“Remain in**

me, as I also remain in you.” **“If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit.”** To be a Christ Follower is to enter into, and remain in, an organic, life-giving connection with him.

{Jn 6:54-56} The Lord Jesus says, **“My flesh is real food and my blood is real drink.”** **“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life.”** **“Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.”** To be a Christ Follower is to partake of his essence, receiving sustenance from his life force.

{Jn 15:15; 14:7} The Lord Jesus says, **“I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.”** **“If you really know me, you will know my Father as well.”** To be a Christ Follower is to be connected to him by strong bonds of affection and shared experience.

{Mt 12:47-50; 1 Jn 3:1} The Lord Jesus says, **“Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.”** In Jesus **“we are children of God.”** To be a Christ Follower is to be united to him as a member of his family.

These teachings illustrate the personal, interactive nature of kingdom living. They also reveal how critical this relationship is to abundant, eternal life.

{Jn 15:5-6} If Messiah is **“the vine”** and we are **“the branches,”** then disconnection is fatal. He says as much: **“If you do not remain in me, you are like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.”**

{Jn 6:55-56} If Messiah **“is... food and... drink,”** then the failure to partake of him is spiritual starvation. He says as much: **“unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you.”**

{Jn 14:7} If Messiah is the Friend who speaks God’s mind, then apart from him we are cut off from the Truth that gives life. He says as much: **“No one comes to the Father except through me.”**

{Jn 8:43-44} If Messiah gives the **“right to become children of God,”** then denying him is to deny oneself a place in God’s family. He says as much: **“Why is my language not clear to you? Because you ... belong to your father, the devil.”**

Our knowledge of the Son is important, but it is secondary to his knowledge of us. If we do not “get” this distinction, the theological information we have is liable to create more distance between us and God, rather than drawing us closer to him.

These unfortunates in our text will not enter the kingdom of God, for Jesus does not know them. Eternal life is for those who are known by Christ.

Eternal life is for those who do the Father’s will and are known by the Lord Jesus.

If this depended on our efforts eternal life would be a hopeless fantasy and we would be doomed to death, for this is beyond us. We cannot do it in our own strength.

Thank God, it is not beyond the Spirit of Christ *in us*, and it depends on him! He is able to do God’s will in and

through us. He is able to make us known to the Father and the Holy Spirit, as well as to himself. He is able!

Life is too short, and eternity too long, for false confidence. Yet by the grace of God we can have true confidence: we can obey him and be known by him.

Matthew 7:21-23 is the Word of the Lord.