Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Empty Words
Scripture: Matthew 7:21-23
Code: 2255

Today we're going to have the wonderful and yet somewhat sorrowful privilege of finishing The Sermon on The Mount. Wonderful because we see it come to a climax and sorrowful because in a sense I fear that we have not anywhere near plumbed the depths of all that could be said, but as the Lord would have us we move along. Turn with me in your Bible to Matthew chapter 7, our text for today, that is this morning and again tonight will be in verses 21 to 29. Matthew 7:21 to 29.

Let me read this to you as the setting for our day and ask that the Spirit of God would speak to us in these tremendous truths. "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. 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!'

"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 the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell, and great was its fall.' And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes."

Now all through The Sermon on the Mount, in chapter 5, 6, and 7, the Lord has been setting forth the divine standards of His kingdom. As the anointed Messiah, the Christ, the King, He has certain principles which He has demanded of those who desire to enter the kingdom. Now, those principles occupy the thrust of this sermon, but they can all be summed up in one word. The requirement for entering the kingdom is that you be righteous, righteous. And, therefore, the whole sermon is summed up in chapter 5 verse 20, "For I say unto you that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven."

The kingdom of heaven is God's world, God's dominion, salvation, eternal life. And entrance into that kingdom is dependent upon righteousness. Now how righteous are we to be? Well, we're to be more righteous than the scribes and Pharisees. How righteous were they? Well, they were as righteous as

a man could get on his own terms. They had come to the epitome of human achievement in religion. They were obsessed with religious function. As far as the people around them knew, they were exceedingly righteous.

They seemed to do all the right things like praying and giving alms and fasting. They seemed to have all the right standards like not murdering and not committing adultery and making sure they maintained every minute element of the law. It seemed as though they were the ones who were exceedingly righteous and yet the righteousness that Christ demands far exceeds theirs. In fact our Lord is requiring a righteousness that is beyond man's capacity, a divine righteousness that comes from God, a standard that man himself is utterly unable to attain.

In fact, if you want to know how righteous all you have to do is look at chapter 5 verse 48. And here our Lord says, "Be ye, therefore, perfect – " how perfect? –"even as your Father, who is in heaven, is perfect." We are to be righteous, how righteous? More righteous than the most righteous. We are to be perfect, how perfect? As perfect as God is.

Now if you really hear that message you're going to face a fact, and that is that you can't live this standard. You cannot be more righteous than the most righteous people, on your own. Because the most righteous people are as righteous as people can be on their own. You can't be more righteous than that.

And you cannot be as perfect as God is perfect because you're a human being. And so all through the sermon, Jesus is endeavoring to show men the inadequacy of their own human resources to deal with God's kingdom. They can't make it. Therefore, the whole idea of the sermon is to bring them to the very point at which our Lord started, "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn; blessed are the meek; and Blessed are they who do hunger and thirst after righteousness."

In other words the Lord said at the very beginning that the people who enter My kingdom are the people who know their own righteousness doesn't make it, that the standard of perfection is way beyond their capacity, and so they are beggars in their spirit. They can't earn it; they have to beg for it. They mourn because of the total sinfulness that they see in themselves. They are meek and humble because they know they fall so short of the standard of God, and they hunger and thirst for a righteousness they know they can't attain.

The purpose of The Sermon on The Mount then is identical to the purpose of the law of God in the Old Testament. When God gave the law on Sinai, the law was not given in order to show man how good he must be. The law was given to show man how good he couldn't be, how bad he was, how short he came.

And Paul summed it up when he said, “For all have sinned and come – ” what? – “short of the glory of God.” And Paul says that “The law was our schoolmaster to drive us to Christ.” The law was what whipped us. And that is essentially what is going on in The Sermon on The Mount. Jesus is upholding the law of God.

In fact He says at the early part of the sermon, “Not one jot or tittle shall in any wise pass from the law. I didn’t come to remove the law, or to destroy the law, but to fulfill the law.” And Jesus is reiterating the law of God and saying the standard hasn’t changed and you must see how short you come, and, therefore, beg in your spirit as a mourner, meek before God hungering and thirsting for His righteousness. Now that leaves men with two options, you either live your life, you either invent your religion or you come God’s way. You either come on your terms or His terms and that is precisely where the sermon climaxes in chapter 7 verses 13 and 14.

And there our Lord says, “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there be that go in that way. Because narrow is the gate and hard is the way which leadeth into life, and few there be that find it.” Jesus says there are only those two ways. There is the broad gate, leads to the broad way, ends up in destruction. It is the way of easy religion; it is the way of human righteousness; it is the way of the scribes and the Pharisees and those who think they’re good enough on their own.

On the other hand there’s the narrow gate and the narrow way that leads to life and that is the way of those who come with a broken heart, with a contrite spirit, those who come and know they can’t make it. They can’t keep God’s law, they can’t meet His standard. They can’t live up to His righteousness, they can’t be as perfect as God is, and they cast themselves on the mercy of Jesus Christ, who imputes to them His own righteousness. There’s only those two ways and that is the climax of the sermon.

Now having stated that great invitation to enter at the narrow gate – and we’ve covered it in detail – the Lord then shows how difficult that really is. It is not easy. Don’t believe anyone who says it’s easy to become a Christian. It cost God everything, including His own Son. And it’ll cost you the same thing, including yourself. It’s not easy.

And those who would offer us an easy believism, a cheap grace do us no favor at all, they delude us. It is difficult to come to God on God’s terms. First of all, it is difficult because you must recognize your own total inability. And that means the death of pride, and that’s difficult because we are constantly told that we’re the most important thing to ourselves.

Now the Lord points out the difficulty of entering in the narrow gate right in verses 13 and 14. First of all it says in verse 14, “Few there be that find it.” And the word find is important. It’s difficult to enter

the narrow gate because you have to find it, which implies a searching and a looking, and an examining and an effort. It's as the Old Testament says, "If you seek me with all your heart, you will find me." Nobody just stumbles along and falls into the kingdom of God inadvertently. It's a searching, and the idea is that it isn't easily made visible.

Secondly, it's difficult not only because you have to find it – and that means a hard and diligent search – it's difficult because it means it's the opposite way that everybody else is going. Many go in the broad gate, few go in the narrow way. It's what James said when he said, "Friendship with the world is enmity against God." It's what John said when he said, "If you love the world the love of the Father's not in you." In other words, you have to come apart from the system to enter the narrow gate. It's difficult because the crowd is going the other way.

It's difficult also because it is a narrow gate, and that means you come through naked, stripped of all your self, your sin, your self-righteousness. You come through absolutely alone. You don't come through with a group; you don't come through with a family; you come through alone. And it is a constricted way and you know it's going to be a narrow life and you must count the cost.

And Jesus said further, it's not only difficult because it's hard to find, it's away from the crowd, it's a narrow gate, but because you must agonize to enter it, He said in the gospel of Luke. In other words there must be penitence and confession and repentance and soul-searching and brokenness.

And then in our last study, we saw that there is another reason why it's difficult to enter the narrow way, another reason why it's difficult to admit that your – you don't make it. You can't live up to God's standard, you're not as perfect as you have to be, and that is because of false prophets, verse 15. And in 15 to 20, the Lord says, "False prophets add to the difficulty because they stand in the way and they chase people onto the broad road." They're the ones trying to divert everybody for Satan's purposes and Satan's ends, telling people they can go through the wide gate with all their sin and selfishness and they can flop from side to side and wander all over a great big wide road and there's little price to pay.

And so the Lord offers a choice and a verdict, a decision. But He says the right decision is to enter the narrow gate and it won't be easy, and He says, "Few there be that find it." Mark that people, few. Not many but few. And there's one other reason why the few is only a few. Not only the deception of the false prophets, but listen to this, self-deception. Self-deception keeps people from entering the narrow gate.

J.C.Ryle, Bishop Ryle, wrote, "The Lord Jesus winds up The Sermon on The Mount by a passage of heart-piercing application. He turns from false prophets to false professors, from unsound teachers to unsound hearers." And Tasker, the commentator, adds, "It is not only false teachers who make the narrow way difficult to find. It is a man may also be grievously self-deceived that adds to the difficulty."

In other words not just the false prophets, but we can deceive our own selves into believing we're Christians when the fact is we're not.

Now that precisely is the issue the Lord takes up in verses 21 to 27, self-deception. And what a fitting climax it is to the sermon. Having stated all the principles and having warned about the false prophets the Lord says, "Now, let Me warn you one other thing, make sure you're not kidding yourself. Are you really a true member of the kingdom of heaven?" And the Lord warns us about two categories of self-deception. Number one is a mere verbal profession, and number two is a mere intellectual knowledge.

In verses 21 to 23 it is a verbal profession. Verse 21, "Not everyone that saith." Verse 22, "Many will say to me." Now, these are the people who make the verbal profession; they say they're Christians. And then in the second paragraph it is the ones who have only an intellectual knowledge. They hear. Verse 26, "Everyone that hears these things." Now listen, then in verses 21 to 23 you have the people who say and don't do, and in verses 24 to 27 the people who hear and don't do. That's the issue and they're deceived.

On the one hand it's a verbal profession. On the other it's an intellectual knowledge. And I call it Empty Words and Empty Hearts, and that's what we want to speak to in our study today. These deal with the matter of self-deception, mere verbal profession, mere intellectual knowledge is, as John Stott puts it, "A camouflage for disobedience."

Now you will notice that at the end of verse 21 you have a key word there. "But he that doeth the will of my Father, who is in heaven." It is not the ones who say and it is not the ones who hear, it is the ones who what? Who do. In other words the Lord is saying, "If you do not live a righteous life I don't care what you say or what you hear. You're deceived."

Now this is a very, very strong word, and I want you to listen as the Spirit of God speaks. Both of these closing paragraphs, verses 21 to 23, and 24 to 27 contrast a right and a wrong response to the invitation of Christ, and they show that our eternal destiny is determined by the choice we make. One, as I said, deals with what you say over against what you do and the other what you hear over against what you do.

Now keep this in mind. The Lord is not speaking to irreligious people; He is speaking to people who were literally obsessed with religious activity. They're not apostates, they're not heretics, they're not anti-God, they not atheists or agnostics. They are utterly religious people but they're damned because they're on the wrong road and they are self-deluded. Now, maybe their self-delusion is a result of sitting under a false prophet or maybe they've actually sat under the truth but have deluded themselves. They are not a lot unlike Israel of whom Paul said, "They had a form of godliness but denied the reality of it."

And I really believe, people, that this is a message that needs to be spoken today because I am convinced that the Church of Jesus Christ is literally jammed full of people who aren't Christians and don't know it. I mean when I hear statistics like two billion people in the world are Christians and two billion are not, then I wonder who in the world has established the criteria. That isn't what the Bible says. It says many and few.

When Gallup says, according to his poll, that 52% of the American population are born-again Christians that doesn't square with the Scripture. And who is going to live under the delusion that because you sign a line on a survey that says you're a born-again Christian you really are a born again Christian. Certainly Jesus is saying many of those who think they're in aren't in, and only a few are. This is the ultimate delusion, people. You could be deluded about a lot of things but to be deceived about whether you're a Christian that's really getting at your eternal destiny. And so Jesus says you better check it very carefully.

We have all kinds of people I'm sure, even right here in Grace Community Church, who are connected to the right religion and utterly devoid of the righteousness of God through Christ. We have multitudes of deceived people who are in the church, who are on the Jesus bandwagon, who think everything is well and for them judgment is going to be one big surprise. Frankly, there's no better way to undeceive them than by this particular sermon of our Lord. Now some of these people I believe that are deceived are false prophets. I think some false prophets aren't deceived. They know they're phony.

But I think some of them probably are self-deceived so we'd see some of them in this group. But I think the many in verses 21 and following is not just false prophets but all of those who are self-deluded and deceived about whether they're really redeemed. You know I don't have time to get into it because our time is so limited, but the Bible literally is filled with warnings to people who are deceived. Let me just give you one other illustration, Matthew 25. And it's very similar and I think you'll get the picture. And the reason there are so many warnings, listen, is because there are so many people deceived,

"Many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord.' And I'll say I never knew you." Not a few, not an isolated bunch but many. And because there are so many that are deceived there are many warnings. Matthew 25:1 says, "Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto ten virgins, who took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom." And, of course, the virgins are symbolic of people who are attached to Christianity and the bridegroom is emblematic of Christ. "Five of them were wise, and five were foolish," like the people who build on the rock and the sand.

"And they were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them." In other words they had a form of godliness but they didn't have the power. They didn't have what they needed, they didn't have the

heart of it, they didn't have salvation, they just had churchianity. "But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. And while the bridegroom tarried, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight there was a cry made, 'Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go out to meet him.'

"And then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish ones said unto the wise, 'Give us of your oil; for our lamps are gone out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'Not so, lest there be not enough for us and you; but go rather to them that sell, and buy for yourselves.' And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage; and the door was shut. Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.' But he answered and said, 'Verily I say unto you, I know you not.' "

Now, there is a similar text. Go back to Matthew chapter 7. That's saying the same thing. There's going to come a day when people are going to expect the door to be open and it's going to slam shut forever in their faces. "I don't know you." What a fearful thing. So many people think they're saved, think they're safe and judgment for them is going to be a shock. What lulls people into that deception, what makes people really think they're saved? Well let me give you several suggestions.

First of all, I think many times it's because they have a false doctrine of assurance. In other words, let's assume that when you were led to Christ somebody said to you, "Now, all you have to do to be a Christian is pray this little prayer and say this little formula based on certain statements."

Well, you prayed it, you said it, you signed on the dotted line, and as long as you said it and as long as you prayed it and as long as you went through the thing, why you're saved. And I don't want anybody to ever question that and so forth and so on. And that very often happens and you have a false sense of assurance.

You want to know something? When you lead a person to Christ you should never say, "Now, I know you're saved and don't you ever doubt it, and don't you ever let anybody else cause you to doubt it, boy, you're saved." And I've heard people even say, "If you ever ask Jesus into your life a second time you are denying something that belongs to God, you're denying the permanence of His salvation. You are questioning God's integrity. You are, in a sense, casting against God that which He has said as if it weren't true. Don't ever do that. Just accept it, you said it, you signed the dotted line," and that's a lot of baloney.

Listen if you feel in your heart that you want to invite Jesus Christ to become the Lord and Savior of your life and you've done it before, do it again. Don't let somebody's false assurance, somebody's false certification take the place of the convicting work of the Spirit of God. And I think a lot of times in our evangelism as long as somebody says the prayer and prays the little thing and signs on the line and has the card stuck in their Bible, we give them this little psychological game that they don't ever have to worry about whether they're saved or not, when the Spirit of God never did that in the

beginning because they never were really right.

I can't ever say to someone, "Well now, boy, I know you're saved and don't you ever doubt it and don't you ever ask again. It's all settled and it's done because you said the little formula. If I do that I give them a psychological assurance of something I don't even know is true. When Jesus said, "The seed of the word is cast on four soils," only one out of four turned out to be true.

Don't go around certifying people's salvation. You give them a false assurance. Let God give them assurance through His Spirit witnessing with their spirits that they are the children of God and crying Abba Father. Let God give them assurance when they add to their faith virtue. And as they add to their faith virtue and patience and godliness and love, then shall their election be sure, then shall they know they've been forgiven of their sin, then shall they not be blind to the reality of salvation. That's God's work not some certification by some human being. But I think a lot of people have been told they're saved so they believe it.

Another thing that I think lulls people into this deception is a failure of self-examination; they never really examine themselves. They get into such a grace concept, that everything is grace and everything is forgiveness that they never really bother to face their sin. They hear somebody say, "Well, you don't have to confess your sin; your sin's already forgiven. It's all taken care of. Everything is set aside. Don't even worry about that; just go on live your life. It almost borders on what is called antinomianism or an attitude against the law of God, and people can get to the place where they don't even bother to examine their lives.

Why do you think the Lord brings us to His table, in First Corinthians 11, over and over and over and over again? In order that a man may examine himself. Second Corinthians 13:5 says, "You better examine yourself, whether you be in the faith." If you don't you're in danger of self-deception. You need to look at your sin; you need to look at your motives.

Why do you do what you do? And believe me, if you're really genuinely saved God will confirm that, by His Spirit witnessing with your spirit. But if that confirmation isn't there you shouldn't be under the illusion that just because it isn't there you're okay, by some certification by somebody or some little prayer you prayed.

Thirdly, another thing that I think causes people to be under the delusion that they're saved is a fixation on religious activity. In other words, they go to church, they hear sermons, they sing songs, they read the Bible, they go to a Bible study, they take a class. And because they're all wrapped up in religious activity they think they are saved. But that's, that's a very, very great illusion, a very great illusion. There are many in the church that are not, tares among the wheat.

And then a fourth area that I think lulls people into deception is what I call the fair-exchange approach. And this is where when-ever you see something wrong in your life, instead of really dealing with it and examining whether you're really a true Christian, instead of dealing with what's wrong in your life you find something right with your life and you make a fair exchange. "Oh, I can't be that bad. I mean look what I did over here, see."

And you're always trading off the negatives and the positives, and instead of really evaluating your life honestly with integrity and saying, "Am I a believer?" And if I am, can I be doing this?" You say, "well I know I do that, but oh look what I did over here," and you make a fair exchange and you whitewash the deal. You can be lulled into deception by some false assurance, by a failure to examine yourself, by a fixation on religious activity or by a fair-exchange approach. But in all those cases you're deceived.

I mean it's amazing to me how many people are deceived. I, I can't believe how many times I've entered into a situation of talking to people in the homosexual movement, who say to me, "Well we're Christians and we're born again." And they can recite the creed, and they can tell you the day they were saved and they can show you the card where they wrote the line, and they can say, "We believe in Jesus," and so forth and so on.

But the bottom line is this. With all of your false assurance, with all your failure to self-examine, with all this fixation on religious activity, and with the fair exchange principle in operation, the bottom line that you'd better examine is this. Do you live in total obedience to the Word of God? And when you disobey it, is there a sense of conviction and remorse that draws you to confess it to God? And if that isn't there, there's a fair question about whether you're even a Christian.

Because the one who comes into the kingdom, verse 21 says, is the one not who says, but the one who does. And when these homosexuals or whoever come along and say, We're Christians," my answer to that is, if you were you wouldn't do what you do, and defend it. We have the same thing,for example, take the women's lib movement which is so much connected with homosexuality and its origins and at the front running levels. Here are women who are going around saying, "Well we don't believe the Bible anymore. The woman is to be elevated," and so forth and so on, and over the man and all of these other things. And they say, "We are Christians."

In fact, I just read a book by a woman who says she's a psychologist of religion and she wants the world to know that religion is to be altered and changed so that the woman gets her rightful place. And they say they're Christians. They say they believe, so many of them, and yet if you get down to it they are unwilling to submit to the Lordship of Christ as revealed in His Word. And it is a lack of obedience that reveals the illusion.

And I always wonder you know, just take for example that, that whole idea of the women's movement I get in a lot of trouble on that issue so I might as well go ahead on it. At least it won't be anything new. But I am amazed how many Christian women are lead astray by believing these people who just may claim to be Christians but are so utterly deluded. And then there are some who don't claim to be Christians at all and they're actually leading the parade. And here are Christian women following the parade led by godless kinds of people.

For an illustration, there's a new book out called *The Changing of the Gods*. *Feminism And The End Of Traditional Religion* is the subtitle, written by Naomi Goldenberg. Listen to what it says, "The feminist revolution will not leave religion untouched. Eventually, all religious hierarchies will be peopled with women. I imagine women functioning as rabbis, priests and ministers, I picture women wearing clerical garb and performing clerical duties. And suddenly I saw a problem. How could women represent a male God? Everything I knew about Judaism and Christianity involved accepting God as the ultimate and male authority figure.

"Congregations would have to stop seeing God as male. And what could these women priests and ministers and rabbis read to their communities? They certainly could not use the Bible. A society that accepted large numbers of women as religious leaders would be too different from the biblical world to find the Bible relevant, let alone look to it for inspiration. God is going to change, I thought, we women are going to bring an end to God.

"As we take positions in government, medicine, law, business, in the arts and finally in religion we will be the end of God. We will change the world so much that He won't fit in anymore. I found this line of thought most satisfying. I had no great tie to God anyway. He never seemed to be relevant. Reflection on His cultural demise left me with no sense of loss yet there was a magnificence attached to the idea of watching Him go. I felt part of a movement that would challenge religions that had been enforced for millennia.

"What will happen to God in His last years? The end of God and the transformation of religion was of major significance to human life so I returned to graduate school to study the end of God. The feminist movement in Western culture is engaged in the slow execution of Christ and God. All of the roles that men and women have been taught to consider as God given will be reevaluated. All feminists – " listen to this line – "All feminists) are making the world less and less like the one described in the Bible, and are thus helping to lessen the influence of Christ and God on humanity."

Now at least she's honest enough to admit that. And there are feminists in the church that are claiming that this is the truth of God when the facts are she knows that this is a denial of everything the Bible teaches. And yet Christian people are buying this in disobedience to the Word of God.

Let me read you a couple of other quotes, “Jesus Christ cannot symbolize the liberation of women. In order to develop a theology of women’s liberation feminists have to leave Christ and the Bible behind them. We have to stop denying the sexism that lies at the root of Jewish and Christian religion. It is likely that as we watch Christ and God tumble to the ground we will completely outgrow the need for an external God.” Then she says, “We have to see the inner goddess as our psychic force. In the new age of changes for our gods. Christ and God will no longer behave as egotistical spoiled children in our psyches.”

In the book there’s a section on feminist witchcraft. And, by the way, the feminist movement is attached to witchcraft. It goes way way back. I don’t have time to develop it. But all through the book it talks about the goddess is alive. And in April, the 23rd of April 1976 they had their first national all women’s conference on women’s spirituality, and Naomi Goldenberg describes the conference. “The women chanted the goddess is alive, the goddess is alive, magic is afoot. They ended the goddess is alive chants with dancing, stamping, clapping and yelling, they stood on pews and danced bare breasted on the pulpit Communion Table and amid the hymn books.”

All this in a church. And she says, “Why not display your breasts in a place that has tried to teach you that they are things to be ashamed of, features that make you unlike God or His Son.” The chapter on witchcraft said, “That what the women’s movement is going to demand in America is female deity, nature is sacred, human will is supreme, no original sin, no good and no evil, the absence of a sacred text, no laws of discipline, sex to follow its own course, and omnipresent in everything we do is play, PLAY.” Now, you tell me that Christian women can line up with a movement like that and be obedient to the Word of God?

I think there are a lot of people who are deluded about who really is a Christian. When so-called Christians advocate following that kind of movement, and I’m sure many of the Christians who advocate the ERA are not advocating that. They just don’t know what’s really leading their movement. That’s part of the delusion. If you argue with Scripture, if you twist the Scripture, if you manipulate the Scripture, if you force the Scripture to say what you want it to say you are not doing the will of the Father, you’re imposing your own will on the Word of God. And you may be a part of the many, not the few.

You have failed, perhaps, to come through the narrow gate. You come through the narrow gate. You know the law of God is perfect and you’re imperfect. You come through the narrow gate; you know there is a righteous standard that you can’t live up to. And instead of coming through with pride and egotism and demanding your rights, you come through with repentance, confession, humility, brokenness, contrition of heart and submission to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. There are many people deceived, beloved, many, many. Few find it.

And the deceived come in a couple of categories, I think in the church, apart from the hypocrites who aren't deceived. They're phony and they know it, but they're trying to live up to their wife's standard or trying to appear religious for whatever reasons. But apart from hypocrites, there are two categories of the deceived in the church, the superficial and the involved. The superficial are the ones who call themselves Christians because when they were little they went to church or Sunday School or they got confirmed or made a decision, quote/unquote, "for Christ."

And you hear very often people when they get baptized say, "Well I received Christ when I was 12. But my life was a mess after that and now I want to get back to that. Well, the truth probably is that they never received Christ at all when they were twelve. They went through some religious activity. And these are the superficial. They come to church now. They were somewhere in the background, raised in religion and they come on Christmas and Easter and they come to weddings and funerals and think they're Christians. They're the superficial who are deceived.

Then there's the involved who are deceived and they're a much more subtle and serious group. They're in the church up to their neck involved, and they know the gospel, they know the theology but they don't obey the Word of God. They live in a constant state of sinfulness. Now, how does a deceived person know he's deceived? How can we spot such a person? Let me give you some keys, and I want you to think these through.

Now, not everybody in these keys that I'm going to give you is really deceived but these are good indicators that someone might be deceived. If you want to spot someone who's deceived, look first of all for someone who's seeking feelings, blessings, experiences, healings, angels, miracles. Why? Chances are they're more interested in the byproducts of the faith than they are the faith itself. They're more interested in what they can get than the glory God can get. They're more interested in themselves than in the exaltation of Christ.

Secondly, if you're looking to see who might be deceived, look for people who are more committed to the denomination, the church, the organization than to the Word of God. Their kind of Christianity may be purely social. "I'm a Presbyterian. "Well, I've been a Baptist all my life." "I'm a Lutheran, I belong to the – " whatever. More committed to the organization than they are to the Lord and His Word.

Thirdly, look for people who are involved in theology as an academic interest. And you'll find them all over the colleges and seminaries of our land. People who study theology, write books on theology, absolutely void of the righteousness of Christ. Theology for them is intellectual activity.

Fourthly, look for people who always seem stuck on one overemphasized point of theology. This is the person who bangs the proverbial drum for his own little area, some crazy quirk. And it usually is not some great divine insight. They'd like you to think that they are so close to God they have a great divine insight no one else has. The fact of the matter is they're seeking a platform for the feeding of

their ego. Watch for people with a lack of balance.

And one other thought. When you look for somebody who might be deceived, look for someone who is overindulgent in the name of grace, overindulgent in the name of grace. Lacks penitence, a true contrite heart, and so forth. Now, they all may be deceived and on the broad road to destruction, thinking all the while they're going to heaven. Now our Lord warns these people in verses 21 to 27. We're going to draw this to a conclusion in a few minutes, I want you to listen.

The Lord says in this passage that these people are the deceived. These people think they are on the right road but they are not. And first, in the paragraph verses 21 to 23, is the folly of empty words, and in verses 24 to 27, the folly of empty hearts. Notice again in verse 21, "Not every one that saith," in verse 22, "Many will say." The claims are amazing. The claims are beautiful. But they don't do what they claim.

Elton Trueblood has said, "That our main mission field today as far as America is concerned is within the church membership itself. Karl Bart, who is by no means an evangelical but, did say some things that were true, said, "The true function of the church consists first of all in its own regeneration."

We've got to get our own act together. We're loaded with people who are filled with empty words. They say, they say, they say, they say, but they don't do God's will. Now, there's nothing wrong with saying. I mean, "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you'll be saved." So you've got to say, confession is necessary, but confession without obedience is a sham

Now look with me for a minute, very briefly at their confession in verse 21. They say, "Lord, Lord – " verse 22 – "they say, 'Lord, Lord.' And we heard the virgins, didn't we? "Lord, Lord," in Matthew 25. This is an interesting phrase. The first time they say Lord it could be their respect, the word means Master, teacher, sir. It's a term of dignity, respect, recognition. They're saying, Lord in a sense that we respect You. The second time, "Lord, Lord," may emphasize the orthodoxy of their claim for the word Lord, *Kurios* is the word translated in the Septuagint of the Old Testament for the name of Jehovah.

They're saying, "We know You're God, we know You're Jehovah. We accept all that Your deity involves, Your virgin birth, miraculous life, substitutionary death, powerful resurrection, intercession, second coming. They are respectful, they are orthodox, they use the right terms, the right attitudes. And then notice, "Lord, Lord," the fact that they say it twice indicates their zeal and their passion and their fervency and their commitment and their strength of devotion.

And, by the way, if this is occurring at the great white throne judgment and they're saying this at the great white throne judgment; if this is the day of which He speaks when He says, "in that day," then it's very possible that those who come there have already spent centuries in a place of judgment and punishment, and that even adds to their fervency. "Lord, Lord," what have we been doing being where we've been. And so there is a fervency and an orthodoxy and a respectfulness.

And then in verse 22, they say three times, "in thy name, in thy name, in thy name." I mean, they aren't even so self-centered in that sense. We've been doing it for You, we've been preaching for You, and we've been casting out demons for You, and we've been doing miracles for You. That's an amazing claim. It is respectful, it is orthodox, it is fervent, it is zealous. They proclaim and they do works. Boy, that sounds good. And we say, "These have got to be Christians." I mean, they are respectful, they're orthodox, they're fervent in their private devotion, they're zealous in their public ministry of word and work.

It sounds so good. But, verse 21, "Not everyone that says that is going to enter." Because not everybody who says that has been doing the will of the Father who is in heaven. And so the Lord will confess in verse 23, here's My confession, *homologe*, "I never knew you; depart from me, ye that work iniquity." What a shock. He says, "I want to give you a confession." And, by the way, this is taken right out of Psalm6:8. "1 want to confess this to you, I never knew you." It's like He said to the virgins banging on the door, "I don't know you."

Well, you say, "What do you mean, that God doesn't know who they are?" No, of course He knows who they are He knows everything. They're not talking simply about an awareness, not talking about mental comprehension, the word "know" is used in the Bible – and you have to watch this – of an intimate relationship. For example, in Amos 3:2 God says of Israel, "You only have I known among all the nations." Does that mean the only people He knew about were Jews? No. It meant that He had an intimate relationship with them. "My sheep hear my voice and I know them."

To even put it more intimately – I think this will help you understand it. In the Old Testament it says, "Cain knew his wife and she bore a son." Now it doesn't mean he knew who she was or he knew her name. It means he knew her in the absolute intimate act of marriage. And you'll remember that when Mary was pregnant with our Lord as He, as the divine seed, was infused by the Spirit of God, Joseph was shocked. And the Bible says he was shocked because "he had never – " what? – "known her." You see the word know embodies an intimate relationship. And Jesus says, "I never had any intimate relationship with you. Oh, you were around the fringes but I never had that intimacy with you."

And then He says, "depart from me," get out of My presence forever. Why? Because the end of the verse 23, "You do always continue to work lawlessness." That is a present participle. Why? "Because instead of doing the will of My Father – " by the way that is a term that picks up all of the rest of The Sermon on the Mount – "instead of living by these righteous principles you do always continue to do

lawlessness." And instead of doing God's will, His righteous standard, you do continually, always work lawlessness.

You know what it means to profess Christ? Absolutely nothing, if your life doesn't back it up. That's why Peter said what he said. "If you can't add to your faith, virtue, then you're not going to know you're really redeemed." That's what James meant when he said, "Faith minus works equals zero." It's dead. Profession is valueless.

In fact, I believe that to profess Christ and to claim Christ, invalidly, is taking the Lord's name in vain in the ultimate sense. I don't think taking the Lord's name in vain is saying, "Jesus Christ" or "God" out on the streets. That's one way. But the epitome of violating God's name is to claim Christ when He isn't yours.

G. Campbell Morgan has well said it, "The blasphemy of the sanctuary is far more awful than the blasphemy of the slum." It is a Judas kiss to say, "Lord, Lord," and then disobey. That is a Judas kiss. We must be consumed with doing the will of God. That's why the prayer says, "Thy will be – " what? – "done." not only in heaven but where? – "in earth." And that means through me, through me. You say, "Well, John, what about if I don't do it, if I fail?" The prayer goes on to say, "Forgive us our trespasses – " our debts – "as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Yes, we know that we're going to fail but that's where we come for forgiveness, and that's part of the righteous act. The righteous standard Jesus speaks of assumes we'll fail, but when we fail we'll be there confessing. That's why First John 1:9 says, "if we are the ones continually confessing our sins, we give evidence of the ones that are being forgiven." In other words the ones being forgiven are the ones confessing. You see, He's not saying, "Here's the perfect standard. If you ever fail you're out." He's saying, "Here's the perfect standard, and part of the perfect standard is that when you fail you deal with it."

That's God's standard. And I would dare say that if The Sermon on The Mount is not the direction of your life, not the perfection of it but if it's not the direction of your life, I don't care what confession you've made, I don't care if you've been baptized or whatever you're not a Christian. You remember in John 6 they said to Him, "Well, what do we do to work the works of God?" And He said, "This is the work of God that you believe on Him that sent Him."

Where do you start with the will of God? Believe on Christ. The only thing acceptable to God is a righteousness that is the product of repentant faith in Jesus Christ, and that produces good works. And if that's not there no matter what you say it doesn't matter. It absolutely doesn't matter. And so the Lord says in verse 23 if I can paraphrase, "Not for one single moment have I acknowledged you as My own or known you intimately. You are forever expelled from My presence because you continue to work lawlessness.

Now, what makes this so shocking? And I want to just do this in closing. What makes this so shocking is that the claims they make are amazing. Look at verse 22, “Lord, Lord, we’ve prophesied, cast out demons, done wonderful works.” Three words, prophecy, exorcism, and miracles. It sounds like much of what’s claimed in the Charismatic movement today.

Now, you know something? Some people who claim that will be legitimate, there are…have been some who were true prophets, some who truly in the name of Jesus Christ cast out the enemy, some that God used to do marvelous things, mighty things. But there are plenty who are going to claim it and it isn’t true. It isn’t true. That’s not going to do it.

Now, the question always comes up and I want to deal with it just briefly. Just relax. We’re going to be here for another couple of minutes so don’t be itching to go. This is my last time. But I want you to hear this. Some people say, “Well I mean, boy, did they really do this? Did they really preach, prophesy? Did they really cast out demons? Did they really do mighty works? There’s three alternatives. Number one, they did, by God’s power. Number two, they did, by Satan’s power. Number three they didn’t, they just faked it. All three could be true.

You say, “Even if they’re unbelievers it could be true?” Yes. Do you know that God has worked through unbelievers? Well, look back in the Old Testament, and you’ll find that God has actually worked His work through unbelievers. For example, in Numbers 23:5 it says, “And the Lord put a word in Balaam’s mouth.” “And Balaam – ” says Peter – “loved the wages of unrighteousness.” He was an unrighteous evil prophet for hire, but God used his mouth. There have been times when God has even worked through unregenerate people.

I suppose you would have to say the crucifixion of Christ was one of the most monumental ones. In First Samuel 10:10 and 11, the apostate king of Israel who was by no means righteous, of him it says, “The Spirit of God came upon him and he prophesied.” Amazing. Of Caiaphas, in John 11:51 and 52, the Lord put a prophecy in the mouth of that vile high priest, so that he prophesied the death of Christ for all men. It’s very possible that some of these self-deluded people were actually used by God, did actually speak God’s truth. I mean that’s within the realm of possibility.

Secondly, it is possible that they may have done wonderful things and cast out demons and preached under the power of Satan. For Satan can express his power. Oh, Satan expressed his power on Job, didn’t he, in death, destruction, disease? No question about it. Do you know that there were the sons of Sceva, in Acts 19, that actually went around casting out devils? Jesus even acknowledged that the Jews had this ability when Jesus said, “If I cast out demons by Beelzebub, who do you cast demons out through?” He was recognizing that perhaps they had even done that and that you could cast out demons.

Perhaps some righteous Jews did it by the power of God. Perhaps some unrighteous Jews did it through the power of Satan. You say, “Well, why would Satan cast out Satan?” Because he’s confused to begin with, his whole system’s a mess. Do you know that in Deuteronomy 13 it says, “There would come false prophets and they would prophesy certain things, certain signs and wonders. And they would come to pass and you still weren’t to believe them.” And maybe they were Satanically energized.

Do you know that it tells us in Matthew 24:24, false Christs, false prophets will come and do signs and wonders, Second Thessalonians 2 verses 8 to 10, “that the Antichrist is going to come and do false signs and wonders.” Satan can do some amazing things. And then there’s the whole area of just plain fakery, and I think that’s what was cooking up in Egypt. I think the, the magicians of Egypt who were trying to mimic the miracles of Moses were just pulling off fake things. When they reproduced what Moses did, I think it was just chicanery, just their own little magic. I call it magic shop stuff, tricks.

Now, the point is this, people. These people are going to say, “We preached and we cast out demons and we did mighty works.” And maybe some of them were used by God to do that. If God will use Balaam’s ass He’ll use anything. Maybe they did it by the power of the devil, masquerading as God, white magic. Maybe it was just plain old hocus-pocus like most healers that you see today. The point isn’t how they did it the point is they were deceived. They thought it was God but it wasn’t God, it wasn’t God.

I think there are a lot of people today preaching, a lot of people casting out devils, a lot of people healing and a lot of people doing other stuff that they believe is God and it isn’t God. And a lot of people believe that. They say, “Oh yes, it’s the Lord, it must be God.” And it’s nothing but Satanic or trickery.

But the point is simply this, no matter what they say, no matter what they claim and no matter what miracles and wonders and stuff they’ve said they’ve seen, Jesus says, “You are not qualified to be in My kingdom.” And that’s the shock, because they never came through the narrow gate, never. What a devastating thing. Well, to make a mere verbal profession is not enough. Tonight we’ll find out to hear is not enough either.

Father thank You this morning for this Word to us. We hear the words in our hearts of Jeffery O’Hara’s anthem, “Why call Me Lord, Lord, and do not the things I say. Ye call Me the way and walk Me not. Ye call Me the life and live Me not. Ye call Me Master and obey Me not. If I condemn thee blame Me not. Ye call Me bread and eat Me not. Ye call Me truth and believe Me not. Ye call Me Lord and serve Me not. If I condemn thee blame Me not.”

And we cannot blame You Lord for condemning those who say but don’t do, for they give evidence of not being apart of the kingdom. May no one go from this place in that category. Oh Lord, what a wonderful morning we’ve had. We pray that it’ll be all that it could be as we honestly examine our own hearts, that we might know we’re in the faith. Bring into the prayer room those that need to come Father. Do Your work in all our hearts. In Christ’s name, amen.

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