

"Profession"

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[0 : 00] Well, good morning, church. Would you turn with me to Matthew chapter 7. We are looking at verses 21 through 23. That's page 762 in the Pew Bible. Let me pray for us, and then I'll read.

Father, we ask for Your help and for Your presence as we come. I come near to You in Your Word. God, bless the reading and the preaching and the hearing of what, Lord Jesus, You have said to us in this passage.

God, help us not just to be hearers of the Word, but to be doers by Your Spirit. We pray this in Your mighty name. Amen. Amen. All right. Matthew chapter 7, verses 21 through 23.

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.

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?

[1 : 23] And then I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.

Well, we've come almost to the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Next week will be our last sermon on this great section of the New Testament.

And here, in this part of the sermon, as we've said, Jesus is driving everything home by way of application. And this text here, this second to last paragraph, in this part, we have perhaps one of the most sobering passages in the whole sermon.

Sobering because it strikes at the root of what most of us naturally put our confidence in when it comes to our standing with God.

You see, the great question that hangs over this passage is this, on what basis do you hope to enter God's coming kingdom?

[2 : 38] You see, in this passage, according to Jesus, there are three things. There's a kingdom to enter. There's a coming kingdom to enter. And then there are some things that won't guarantee you entry.

And then there's one thing that will. There's a kingdom to enter. There are two things that won't guarantee you entry. And there's one thing that will. So let's consider each of those points in turn. First, Jesus says there's a kingdom to enter. Jesus mentions this in the first verse of our text, verse 21. And, you know, until we get this point, we don't really understand the gravity and the importance of the rest of the passage.

We won't understand why the stakes are so high in the rest of what Jesus has to say until we pause over this kind of underlying reality that Jesus talks about here, that there is a coming kingdom to enter.

So what does Jesus mean when He talks about entering the kingdom of heaven? Well, to really understand this, you have to see it in the context of the big storyline of the Bible.

[3 : 46] You know, it's easy to read a phrase like entering the kingdom of heaven and think that Jesus is simply talking about some sort of spiritual, ethereal afterlife.

But that's not what Jesus is intending. You see, the biblical story is more robust than that. It begins with God creating all things out of nothing and creating humans to be His image bearers in the midst of creation.

Humans, we were meant to love and to serve God and to spread His glory and His reign throughout the material order. But through the sin of Adam and Eve, that project was seemingly thrown completely off course.

Instead of life abounding in creation, there was now death. Instead of joy, there was now sorrow. And instead of God's blessing, there was now God's just curse on sin.

But the rest of the biblical story is about how God intervenes to rescue both His creation and His image bearers.

[5 : 04] You see, the hope running through the Bible is that one day God would overthrow sin and death. In other words, the great hope of the Bible is that one day heaven, that dimension of reality where God dwells in fullness, would one day come to earth and make all things new.

That's what the prophets of Israel all spoke of at their core. And that was the burning hope of God's people. It's what they longed for throughout years of exile and suffering and confusion and failure. What they longed for was the kingdom of heaven. So the kingdom of heaven wasn't just, on the one hand, merely some human political arrangement that we could sort of set up.

But, you know, neither was it some sort of disembodied afterlife that abandoned the material creation. No, the kingdom of heaven was the flooding of creation with God's presence.

A presence so holy and so good that evil and suffering and sin and death would have to flee. God the creator, the rightful king, would at last judge and save.

[6 : 43] The kingdom of heaven would mean perfect justice and healing. It would mean a new creation. Now, this hope for creation, this arrival of God's reign in fullness, this is utterly integral to the biblical story and worldview.

You can't really be a Christian in the biblical historic sense without it. But just consider how wonderful this hope is.

The biblical hope that we've just been talking about is neither the kind of nihilism of a pure materialism, right?

Nor is it the nihilism of just sort of a pure spiritualism either. Here's what I mean. On the one hand, if everything is just matter, time, and chance and nothing more, if that's all there is, then the future is just beyond bleak, right?

At all. Everything amounts to nothing. Whatever meaning we create is like the sandcastle on the shore, just erased by the waves of a passing tide.

[8 : 02] But if there is a God, and if this God has a future in store for His creation, if He has not abandoned His good world that is deeply flawed through sin, if He's not abandoned it, but promises to release it from its bondage to decay, and promises to place, bring it to a place of real freedom even from death, and if God promises that His image bearers will participate in that freedom, being resurrected into the eternal life of this kingdom, if that's who God is and what He has in store, then suddenly this life is full of meaning.

But do you see how this biblical hope is different from the opposite view as well, this sort of purely spiritual view? You know, if God's future just sort of leaves creation behind, if we're just souls in an afterlife, then that ends up being pretty meaningless as well, doesn't it?

After all, what was the point of this life if God's future is just heading towards something that just leaves it all behind? But you see, when Jesus speaks of the kingdom of heaven, He's not talking about God abandoning creation and taking His image bearers out of it.

No, Jesus is talking about God consummating His plans for creation and resurrecting His image bearers to take their rightful place in it, reigning with Him forever.

Okay, so there's a coming kingdom to enter. And to miss entry into this kingdom, to be on the outside when this kingdom comes, is to be separated from the fullness of life itself.

[10 : 01] To miss this kingdom is to be left in darkness and sorrow. It is to be left in death and judgment. Entrance into this kingdom is entrance into the greatest joy and the most thrilling adventure.

Entering this kingdom ought to be our deepest desire and our burning hope. For when that kingdom comes, when that reign begins, the reign of heaven on earth, that will be the freedom we've longed for.

Freedom not just from sin and death, but freedom for all that we've been created for. To bear God's image in glory and to participate creatively in His reign of unending joy.

So there's a coming kingdom to enter. But tragically, according to Jesus, not everyone will enter it. There are some who will be excluded from this kingdom. Jesus says so in verse 21. Not everyone, He says, will enter the kingdom of heaven. And that brings us to our second point.

[11 : 19] According to Jesus, there are two things that will not guarantee you entry. And if we're honest, they are quite surprising. And they are not what we expect. Consider the first one in verse 21.

Jesus says, Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. Now, what does that mean? Well, to boil it down, it means that you can have the most orthodox beliefs about Jesus.

You can say that Jesus of Nazareth is Lord of heaven and earth. But that is no guarantee that you are a member of God's kingdom.

Even the most orthodox profession, the most biblical head knowledge will not guarantee you entrance into the kingdom.

You can believe all the right things. You can believe intellectually that Jesus was the Son of God. You can believe with your head that He lived and died and rose again. You can profess all these things to be true.

[12 : 27] You can even believe these things with a lot of vigor and energy. Notice in verse 21, they say, Lord, Lord. The repetition is a sign of enthusiasm, of passion, right?

You can love theology. You can devour apologetics. You can debate and argue the truth of these things. You can be praised for your acumen and skill in teaching the Bible and articulating the faith. Yes, your head can be full of all the right ideas, but that won't guarantee you entry. The rightful judge could still say, depart.

I never knew you. Now, let's not draw the wrong conclusion here.

Some have read this passage and said, see, according to Jesus, it doesn't matter what you believe so long as you're a loving and just person. It's not doctrine that matters.

[13 : 32] It's your deeds. But don't you see, that's not the conclusion Jesus intends for us to draw. Doctrine does matter.

Ideas do have consequences. Calling Jesus Lord is absolutely essential. We should seek to bring all of our thoughts into line with God's thoughts.

That's a good and worthy desire. And God is pleased when we do so. But, a mere profession from the lips, a mere head knowledge of the truths of the gospel, this will not guarantee you entrance into God's coming kingdom as good as they are.

But it's not just that. We said there are two things that won't guarantee you entrance into the kingdom. Consider the second one in verse 22. On that day, many will say to me, Jesus says, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and cast out demons in your name and do many mighty works in your name?

And then Jesus says, I will declare to them, I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness. Now, what is Jesus saying here? Well, if on the one hand, Jesus has said in verse 21 that even the most orthodox profession is no guarantee of kingdom citizenship, he goes on to say that even the most extraordinary performance is no guarantee of kingdom citizenship.

[15 : 03] Here are people who have prophesied, who have cast out demons, who have done many mighty works, and they've done it all in Jesus' name.

They've done it publicly for His sake. But even performing miraculous deeds is no guarantee of being a member of God's kingdom.

In fact, no outward acts of ministry are a guarantee. Becoming a missionary, giving time and energy to serving the poor, volunteering tirelessly in a local church, you can do all of these things with great zeal, with great amounts of sacrifice, and still be outside the kingdom when it comes.

Now, again, we mustn't draw the wrong conclusion here either. Just like in verse 21, here in verse 22, we shouldn't draw the conclusions that our deeds don't matter at all.

No, that's not the point. These actions in verse 22 are commendable. It's good and right to prophesy, to proclaim God's truth in a timely, edifying, and courageous, and encouraging way.

[16 : 24] It's good to cast out demons and to pray for spiritual liberation and to stand against deception and the evil one. It's good to do mighty works in Jesus' name. It's good to serve Him with all the strength that He provides.

But listen, your gifts, your works, your performances, promises, even if they are done in Jesus' name, they will not guarantee you entrance into God's kingdom.

Just as your head can be full of all the right beliefs, so your hands can be engaged in all the right activities, and you can still be lost. Of course, God wants your mind and God wants your actions, but you can say the right things and do the right things.

You can profess and you can perform and still not truly be saved on the last day. So if these things can't guarantee entry into God's kingdom, what can?

Well, it's not merely your head or your hands that God is looking for. He wants your heart. This is our third point.

[17 : 48] There's a kingdom to enter, Jesus says. There are two things that cannot guarantee you entry, but there's one thing that will. Look again at verse 21. 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.

You see, God wants your heart. He wants the very center of you. That's what Jesus means by those who do the will of my Father in heaven. He doesn't mean sort of external adherence to a list of rules.

He means those who have surrendered their will to the Father's. Those who can say, I no longer run my own life. I've actually ceded the throne of my life to God the Father and to His Son, Jesus Christ.

Of course, no one can do that perfectly. You are not going to be completely sanctified in this life, but it means you have entrusted your life to Him. This is the question.

As Jesus comes to the end of this Sermon on the Mount, have you surrendered your will to His? And as a result, are not just your words and your actions different, but is your character beginning to change?

[19 : 09] That's what Paul means when he says, I can do all these things in 1 Corinthians 13, but if I don't have love, it means nothing. Surrendering your will to God the Father now is the only guarantee of entering His kingdom then.

It's not just professing or performing. It's a change of heart that results in a change of life. That's what the Bible means by repentance, by the way.

Real repentance isn't just being sort of sorrowful for disobedience. It is that. But it means surrendering one's whole will to God. But here's where we have to be really careful.

Because if we're not careful, we can begin at this point to get very introspective, can't we? And we can start to get very anxious.

We can start to ask questions like, have I surrendered enough? Is my character really beginning to change? And while there is a time and place for self-examination, these sorts of questions asked on the wrong footing can lead us to despair.

[20 : 34] Because we'll always see areas of our life in need of change. And we'll always see ways in which I still try to keep control and make myself the Lord of my own life. And it's in these moments that we have to remember who we are surrendering to.

Who is it that calls us to give ourselves completely to the will of the Father? Who calls us to be poor in spirit, to hunger and thirst after righteousness, to seek God's kingdom and His righteousness? Who are we inviting to sit down on the throne of our hearts and to take control? Who are we surrendering to?

We are surrendering to the one who is and who has demonstrated Himself to be perfect love. We are surrendering to a God of perfect love.

And of course, doesn't that show us the utter absurdity of the human condition and the irrationality of sin? Right? God is infinite goodness, but for some unexplainable reason, we reject Him.

[22 : 00] We reject the stream of eternal life and we turn and we dig a well that can't hold water, the prophet Jeremiah says. Do you see how absurd sin is?

But to us sinners, God sends His only Son and Jesus Christ comes and is not ashamed to call us brothers and sisters.

The eternal Son of God took our very flesh and blood, endured our sin and guilt on the cross, and rose again in power to defeat sin and death on our behalf so that now all who surrender their lives to Him are forgiven and granted eternal life.

You see, this is why merely professing Jesus as Lord intellectually or performing good deeds in His name aren't enough. They're not sufficient guarantees of entrance into the kingdom because Jesus didn't come to merely give us new ideas and He didn't merely come to give us new laws.

He came to enter into a deeply personal relationship with us, a relationship where He would take all that's true of us and give to us all that's true of Him.

[23 : 24] He would take our sin and our death and give us in return His righteousness in life. And this is where the last part of our passage is so important.

Jesus says to those who merely rely on head knowledge or merely on good works, He says, depart from Me, I never knew you. I never knew you.

the real question is, does Jesus know you? Of course, the sense of know here is very personal, very intimate.

Have you stepped into that sort of relationship with Him where you can say of Him and more importantly, He can say of you, I know you.

You can know a lot of facts about someone and not really know them, right? You can know a lot of, you can know a lot of facts about someone, you can do a lot of stuff for someone and not really know them.

[24 : 35] What will matter on that day is not what you know about Him, or all the stuff you've done for Him. What will matter is whether you know Him and whether He knows you.

As we wrap up then, let's apply these things. First, as we consider surrendering our wills to His and entering into this personal relationship with Christ as our Lord, it follows from that that we should be seeking to live this out.

And we do this in the power of the Holy Spirit that He provides and in the grace that He gives. We should be asking ourselves, how do I live today with Christ as my Lord?

How might I pray and live today, Father, Thy will be done? George MacDonald, writing about these verses, put it this way. He said, what have you done this day because it was the will of Christ?

Have you dismissed an anxious thought for the morrow? Have you ministered to any needy soul or body and kept your right hand from what your left hand did? Have you begun to leave all and follow Him?

[25 : 54] Did you set yourself to judge righteous judgment? Are you being aware of covetousness? Have you forgiven your enemy? Are you seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness before all other things?

Are you hungering and thirsting after righteousness? Have you given to someone who asked of you? Tell me something you have done, are doing, or are trying to do because He told you.

I wonder, friend, how would you answer that question? Perhaps you might share that with someone in your small group this week or with a friend over coffee. You might engage that question together.

Where has Jesus' teaching in the Sermon on the Mount been connecting with your life? And where in that new life that He's invited you into, where are you listening to His voice and seeking to do or try to do because He told you, because He's your loving Lord who cannot lead you astray?

His words are meant to be lived. How are you living them? Second point of application.

[27 : 12] Christian, I wonder, who is it that you admire? Who do you look up to? Who are you seeking to imitate or commend? You know, it's easy, isn't it, to be immediately attracted on the one hand to those believers who are intellectually prominent, right?

Or on the other hand, those who are accomplishing great works. We look up to those who have published great works of theology or have pioneered great mission endeavors.

believers. And yes, we should long for wisdom and truth and we should aspire to do great things for God's kingdom. It's good to read the biography of great saints and missionaries and be inspired to follow in their footsteps.

But who should we ultimately emulate in our sort of celebrity culture? who should we seek to pattern our lives after?

Our real desire should be to look up to the Christians who display genuine humility of heart and closeness to God and Christ.

[28 : 36] Those who walk as He walked in obedience and trust. Those who long simply to do what Jesus says here, to do the will of their Heavenly Father.

Those whose greatest delight is that Jesus, the Son of God, can say, I know you. Do you have a Christian like that in your life?

They're probably not on your Instagram feed. but look around. There are saints in this church for you to follow as they follow Christ.

Are you getting into a small group? Are you coming to the monthly prayer meetings? Are you doing what you can to connect with them? To walk with the wise so that you can be wise?

If not, by all means, do so. Third and last point of application here.

[29 : 42] Do you see in this passage what matters most in ministry? You know, every believer is called to use their gifts in service of Christ.

If you're here and you're in a relationship with God in Christ, He has given you His Spirit and He has given you gifts to use to build up the body.

He's given you gifts to serve Christ. He's given you a mind to use. He's given you talents to use. The Holy Spirit indwells each one of us so that we might build up the church and advance His kingdom in the world.

But at the end of the day, what really matters? You know, what really matters? Is it when the book proposal that you've drafted is accepted?

Is it when your prayers are answered? Is it when the pews are full? Those are fine and good things, but what really matters?

[30 : 51] What about when the book proposal you've spent so long on is rejected? What about when the prayers go unanswered? What about when it seems like there are no mighty works?

What then? What really matters as we step out and engage in this ministry God has given us?

There's a passage in Luke's gospel that connects with what Jesus teaches here in the Sermon on the Mount.

In Luke chapter 10, Jesus has sent out the 72 of His disciples and He sent them out to minister with power. And then in verse 17 of chapter 10, Luke writes, the 72 returned with joy, saying, Lord, even the demons are subject to us in Your name.

And Jesus said to them, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. And then He says, Behold, I have given you authority to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy and nothing shall hurt you.

Nevertheless, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

[32 : 06] when your ministry is going great and your gifts are blessing others or when your ministry is not so great and you're not sure if your gifts are making a difference.

Rejoice in this, Jesus says, not the highs and the lows, but that your name is written in heaven. In other words, that you are known by God forever.

forever. That's what really matters. I know you. Can you say that?

Can you say that your deepest joy is that He knows you? If not, then friend, look again.

Look again at what it means to have your name written there. Look again at what it means for the Lord Jesus to say, I know you. What does it mean?

[33 : 16] It means that He has set His eternal love upon you before you were born. and that though you were fallen and sinful, an enemy of God, it means that He left heaven to take your place in judgment and that He died on the cross and rose again for your forgiveness and now ascended to the Father's right hand.

He intercedes for you continually so that now when the kingdom comes in fullness, when the doors of heaven open and the presence of God comes flooding in, and when His holiness banishes sin and evil once and for all, like a child running through a field sends the birds flying in every direction, then that same Jesus will say to you, not depart, I never knew you, but He'll say, enter into your rest.

I've known you before the foundation of the world. Rejoice that your names are written in heaven.

Friend, take no pride in intellect, put no trust in works of power, throw yourself wholly on Him and let simple obedience to His will be your daily bread and let His love for you be your joy.

Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank You for these sobering words from our Lord Jesus.

[35 : 03] God, it's so easy to get caught up in the flashy things of this world. Even inside Your church, God, we put the emphasis on the wrong things.

Lord, help us. Help us to be a church that rejoices in Your truth and that stands firm in sound doctrine. Lord, help us to be a church that expects You to do mighty things in Your goodness and sovereignty.

But God, help us to be a church that does not rest our hope in those things but rests our hope in You and that our deepest delight is to be surrendered to You and Your will because in Your paths there is freedom in life, forgiveness, and grace.

Help us to live into these things we pray. Amen.