

The Sermon on the Mount

"Who Will Enter The Kingdom of Heaven?" (Matthew 7:21-23)

INTRODUCTION:

- I. If you were to conduct an interview with the average person on the street who considers themselves to be a believer in Jesus Christ, and asked them the question, "Do you believe you will go to heaven when you die," what do you suppose the answer will be?
 - A. The vast majority will tell you they DO believe they will go to heaven when they come to the end of their life.
 1. Their hopes have been fostered by several things:
 - a. Many have a false understanding of what salvation is really all about – assuming that simply being a believer in Jesus Christ is going to ensure them a home in heaven.
 - b. Many have the false assumption that eternal salvation is simply based on their moral or ethical behavior.
 - (1). They believe that by practicing the "Golden Rule" of treating others the way they would want to be treated –

with dignity and respect – they will reap the reward of heaven.

- c. Still others are confident of their reward in heaven because their GOOD WORKS outweigh the BAD they've done in life – in other words, their lives over all are characterized by being a good, moral, ethical, responsible, loving, caring person.

B. However, in each of these examples their hope of eternal life is founded on beliefs that are completely erroneous and foreign to what the Bible teaches, or are based entirely on their own goodness.

1. However, upon a closer examination of the Scriptures it's easy to see serious problems with the beliefs of many regarding their salvation.

- a. Obviously, salvation that is based on Biblical error is no salvation at all.

- b. And salvation that depends on our own goodness to guarantee us a home in heaven will fall short every time simply because NONE of us are GOOD ENOUGH.

C. In The Sermon on the Mount Jesus gave some ominous warnings regarding salvation.

1. One of the most ominous warnings is one we just studied.

- a. **Matthew 7:13-14** – *"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. 14 Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it."*
 - b. From this we learned that even the majority of those who seem so confident of their reward in heaven will be surprised to discover their ultimate destiny is eternal destruction.
 - c. The way to life is not only difficult, but only a FEW will find it and be able to enter in – and then only with great difficulty.
2. But perhaps the most ominous warning of all is the one we want to look at in this lesson.
- a. **Matthew 7:21-23** – *"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. 22 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?' 23 And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"*
 - b. Once again, Jesus plainly said NOT EVERYONE will enter the kingdom of heaven.

- c. In fact, He said that even among those who are CONFIDENT they are in God's favor – including those who claim to be doing wonderful things in the name of God – that even among THEM, not EVERYONE will enter the kingdom of heaven.
- d. This is just another way of saying that EVEN AMONG BELIEVERS there will be many who are denied entrance into heaven.

II. In this lesson there are a couple of things I want us to understand about this statement of Jesus.

A. Since we're talking about our eternal salvation it's vitally important that we understand exactly what Jesus meant.

1. First, we want to understand what Jesus meant by the term *"kingdom of heaven."*
 - a. There are differing opinions as to what Jesus actually meant by the use of this term.
2. Second, we want to understand just who will NOT be able to enter the *"kingdom of heaven."*
3. Finally, we want to see what Jesus said regarding those who WILL be able to enter the "kingdom of heaven."

BODY:

- I. So, let's begin by attempting to explain what is meant by the term "*kingdom of heaven*" – just what does this mean?
 - A. Anyone familiar with the teachings of Jesus – especially those recorded in the gospel of Matthew – is familiar with the term "*kingdom of heaven.*"
 1. Jesus told His disciples that His parables deal with "*the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven.*" (**Matthew 13:11**)
 - a. This is why Jesus would often begin His parables by saying, "*The kingdom of heaven is like...*" (**cf. Matthew 13:24, 31, 33, 44, 45, 47**)
 2. In fact, "*the kingdom of heaven*" was the theme of Jesus' preaching from the beginning of his ministry to the end.
 - a. **Matthew 4:17, 23** – *At the beginning of the ministry of Jesus we're told: From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"... 23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all kinds of sickness and all kinds of disease among the people.*

- b. Through out our series of studies on The Sermon on the Mount we've seen Jesus make repeated references to "*the kingdom of heaven.*" (**Matthew 5:3 - 7:21**)
 - c. Just days before his crucifixion, Jesus was still teaching about "*the kingdom of heaven*": **Matthew 25:1, 14** – "*Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom*"...
14 "*For the kingdom of heaven is like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them.*"
3. And yet, in MARK'S account of the gospel the phrase "*the kingdom of heaven*" doesn't appear – MARK repeatedly uses the term "*the kingdom of God*" in the same places where MATTHEW uses the phrase "*the kingdom of heaven.*"
- a. For example, in **Matthew 4:17**, where MATTHEW records, "*From that time Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"*", MARK'S account, in **Mark 1:14-15**, reads, "*Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, 15 and saying, "The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand."*"

- b. Some try to argue that the terms "*kingdom of heaven*" and "*kingdom of God*" are two separate things, but the reality is they are the SAME. There is NO difference.
 - c. Matthew, who wrote to a Jewish audience, may have chosen to use the term "*kingdom of heaven*" exclusively since the Jews revered the name of God so highly that they rarely spoke the name.
 - d. Others suggest Matthew used the term "*kingdom of heaven*" in writing to his Jewish audience to help correct the misunderstandings most had regarding the nature of the coming kingdom – meaning it was SPIRITUAL in nature, and not the EARTHLY kingdom most of the Jews of that day were expecting.
- B. Regardless of the reasons for the terms "*kingdom of heaven*" and "*kingdom of God*" being used INTERCHANGEABLY, the terms are certainly related.
- 1. For example, we understand that the kingdom of which Jesus spoke refers to the REIGN OF GOD.
 - a. Therefore, the phrase "*kingdom of heaven*" (or "*kingdom of God*") speaks of the REIGN or DOMINION of God who is in heaven.

2. But in addition to speaking about the reign or dominion of God, the phrase "*kingdom of heaven*" (or "*kingdom of God*") also speaks about the SPIRITUAL NATURE of the kingdom.
 - a. **Luke 17:20-21** – *Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, "The kingdom of God does not come with observation; 21 nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you."*
 - b. Jesus was emphasizing the fact that the kingdom is the reign or dominion of God within the hearts of men and women.
 - c. This is why the Lord's church is described repeatedly in the New Testament as the KINGDOM – in fact the terms "church" and "kingdom" are used interchangeably.
 - d. The church is simply a body of believers who have obeyed the gospel of Christ, and therefore are a body of believers IN WHOM Christ reigns as Lord of lords and King of kings, and THROUGH WHOM Christ works to spread the message of the gospel to others.
3. However, there is one more aspect regarding the nature of the "*kingdom of heaven*" (or "*kingdom of God*"). The terms are both PRESENT and FUTURE.

- a. The kingdom is PRESENT in the sense that all who have believed and who have been baptized into Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins have been added by the Lord to the body of believers known as the church – we have been translated into the kingdom.
 - b. However, the kingdom is FUTURE in the sense that there is coming a time when the body of believers who have remained faithful to the Lord will be taken into heaven to dwell in the presence of God forever.
- C. In the passage we're discussing TODAY from The Sermon on the Mount, Jesus is speaking about this FUTURE aspect of the *"kingdom of heaven"* (or *"kingdom of God"*).
1. We know Jesus is speaking about the FUTURE aspect of the kingdom of heaven because He says, *"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."* **(Matthew 7:21)**
 - a. And further adds: *"Many will say to Me IN THAT DAY..."* **(Matthew 7:22a)**
 2. It will be a day of JUDGMENT – a day of SEPARATION – the same day of judgment and separation that Jesus warned His disciples about shortly before His crucifixion.

- a. **Matthew 25:31-41** – *"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats. 33 And He will set the sheep on His right hand, but the goats on the left. 34 Then the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world... 41 Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels..."*

3. In other words, according to Jesus, entering heaven – being able to dwell forever in the presence of God – is **CONDITIONAL**.
4. This would have naturally shocked the Jewish audience listening to Jesus during The Sermon on the Mount because it was commonly believed that simply **BEING** a Jew – being a descendent of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob – automatically **GUARANTEED** them a home in heaven.

D. So, according to Jesus, who **WILL** be able to enter into heaven?

1. What, if any, are the requirements for those who will be able to dwell forever in the presence of God in heaven?
2. Merely ASKING the question "who will be able to enter heaven" stirs up a lot of emotions because it sounds JUDGMENTAL.
 - a. It sounds as if I'M somehow determining who WILL and who WON'T be able to enter heaven.
 - b. I don't want to give that impression AT ALL.
3. Therefore, allow me to remove MYSELF from the equation and let's allow JESUS the opportunity to answer the question FOR us.
4. However, since Jesus speaks of both those who WILL NOT be able to enter heaven as well as those who WILL, let's start by seeing who Jesus said will NOT be able to enter.

II. So, according to Jesus, who will NOT be able to enter the "*kingdom of heaven?*"

A. First, Jesus said not everyone who PROFESSES Him will enter the kingdom of heaven.

1. Jesus said: **Matthew 7:21** – "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven...*"
2. In other words, not everyone who acknowledges Jesus as LORD and CHRIST will enter heaven.

- a. Some say this means that a person must truly BELIEVE Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God, and not just SAY they believe.
 - b. I would agree. But is that ALL Jesus is saying here?
 - c. Granted, there is a HUGE difference between those who SAYS they are believers in Jesus Christ and those who ARE believers. But what is the difference?
3. James, the Lord's brother, spoke about this difference in his letter to first-century Christians.
- a. James made a clear distinction between those who SAY they are believers from those who SHOW they are believers by the things they DO.
 - b. **James 2:14-26** – *What does it profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him? 15 If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, 16 and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what does it profit? 17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead. 18 But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith*

by my works. 19 You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe — and tremble! 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? 21 Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? 22 Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? 23 And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." And he was called the friend of God. 24 You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. 25 Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent them out another way? 26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

4. So, from what both Jesus says, merely SAYING you acknowledge Jesus as your Lord isn't going to get you into heaven.
5. And from what James, the Lord's brother says, merely BELIEVING Jesus is Lord isn't going to get you into heaven either.
 - a. In fact, James is rather clear that salvation is based on our FAITH coupled with a DEMONSTRATION of our faith through WORKS of obedience.

- b. That fact disturbs a LOT of people who believe that salvation is based entirely on the basis of their FAITH – of what they say is simply "accepting Jesus into your heart as your personal Savior."
 - c. A lot of preachers in the religious world say you can be saved by "faith only."
 - d. But James says: "*You see then that a man is justified by works, and NOT by faith only.*" (**James 2:24**)
 - e. So our salvation – our being able to enter heaven – is not based on merely SAYING Jesus is Lord, nor is it based on merely BELIEVING Jesus is Lord.
 - f. There is something we must ALSO DO!
6. But let's go back to the statement of Jesus and see what ELSE He had to say about those who will NOT enter into "*the kingdom of heaven.*"
- B. Jesus said not everyone who DOES MANY WONDERFUL WORKS will enter into the "*kingdom of heaven.*"
- 1. **Matthew 7:22-23** – "*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?' 23 And then I will*

declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"

2. Take a look at the kinds of WORKS these people were DOING, or were CLAIMING to do.
 - a. Some said they PROPHESED in His name – meaning they declared the WORD OF GOD, the GOSPEL OF CHRIST by the power and inspiration of the Holy Spirit.
 - b. Others said they CAST OUT DEMONS in His name – meaning they were empowered by the Holy Spirit to have power over the Devil and his angels.
 - c. And still others said they did MANY WONDERFUL WORKS in His name – meaning they performed other miracles, signs and wonders by the power of God.
3. Whether they actually DID these things, or merely THOUGHT they did them is beside the point – THEY believed they did them through the power of God, and therefore believed they were accepted by God.
 - a. But JESUS will tell these SAME PEOPLE: *"I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"* **(Matthew 7:23)**

- b. Regardless of what they HAD DONE, or THOUGHT they had done, Jesus said they were guilty of "LAWLESSNESS"
("INIQUITY" – KJV)

C. Therefore, in the final analysis Jesus said those who practice "LAWLESSNESS" ("INIQUITY" – KJV) will NOT be able to enter into heaven. What does that mean?

1. The word lawlessness or iniquity is from the Greek word anomia (ah-no-mee'-ah) meaning: illegality, i.e. violation of law or wickedness. In the Scriptures, the word is often used to speak of a transgression of the law, or simply of unrighteousness.

- a. Thayer, in his Greek-English Lexicon says the word means:
"the condition of one without law — either because ignorant of it, or because violating it... contempt and violation of law..."

- b. Vine's Expository Dictionary of NT Words defines the word as: *"...the rejection of the law, or will, of God and the substitution of the will of self."*

2. So, taken together, the word LAWLESSNESS or INIQUITY suggests those who are violating the Law of God either because they are IGNORANT OF IT, or because they have CONTEMPT FOR IT and REJECT the will of God to substitute their OWN WILL.

- a. It describes those who haven't taken the time to truly KNOW what the will of God is, as well as those who really DON'T CARE and chose to DO THEIR OWN THING INSTEAD.
3. So, what GOOD these people may have done in the PAST doesn't have any bearing on their IGNORANCE of God's will, or of their choosing to do THEIR OWN will in the NOW.
4. Jesus seems to be saying He will be looking at where we ARE in relationship to Him when He comes again – and NOT where we've been in the PAST.
 - a. Think of it this way. It's not going to do you one bit of good to attach a letter to your tax returns on April 15th, 2009 stating that in the PAST you've always paid your taxes, but NOW have decided to do your OWN thing and KEEP the money for yourself from here on out.
 - b. The same is true on the day of judgment. It's not going to do you one bit of good on that day to tell the Lord that in the PAST you've always believed in Him and sought to obey Him, but never took the time to really KNOW if you were obeying the Lord, OR that you have NOW decided to do your OWN THING and live the way YOU want.

5. Jesus said: **Matthew 7:21** – *"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."*
 - a. It's a matter of DOING the will of the Father in heaven!
 - b. It's a matter of OBEDIENCE, and not just SAYING or BELIEVING – but of DOING!

III. So, according to Jesus, who WILL be able to enter the *"kingdom of heaven?"*

A. Jesus said, *"...he who DOES the will of My Father in heaven."*

(Matthew 7:21)

1. This is EXACTLY what James, the Lord's brother said earlier.
 - a. **James 2:17, 20, 26** – *"17 Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead... 20 But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead?... 26 For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also."*

B. Unfortunately, when people hear that Jesus and the other writers of the New Testament demanded OBEDIENCE, a lot of people cry
LEGALISM!!

1. However, OBEDIENCE is NOT legalism.

- a. There is a VAST difference between trying to be saved on the basis of our OWN PERFORMANCE verses being saved on the bases of God's GRACE and MERCY.
 - b. You and I will NEVER be able to do ENOUGH good to UNDO all the sins we've committed in our lives – that's why it was necessary for JESUS to offer HIS SINLESS LIFE as a sacrifice on our BEHALF.
2. Therefore, we are saved by God's grace and mercy – BUT, from what Jesus tells us in The Sermon on the Mount, we can't become RECIPIENTS of God's saving grace and mercy until we DO the will of our Father in heaven.
- a. That's not LEGALISM. That's OBEDIENCE.
 - b. That's not being saved by PERFECT LAW-KEEPING, where we somehow EARN or MERIT salvation.
 - c. That's DOING what God COMMANDS US to do to the very best of our ability out of a LOVING, OBEDIENT HEART – seeking to KNOW and to DO the will of the Father in heaven.

CONCLUSION:

- I. Are you ready for the day when we all stand before the judgment seat of Christ?

- A. That day inescapable. It will come.
1. **2 Peter 3:9-14** – *The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. 10 But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. 11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, 12 looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? 13 Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 14 Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless...*
 2. If that day were today, would you be able to enter the kingdom of heaven?
 3. The answer to that question depends on two things:
 - a. Whether you KNOW the will of the Father in heaven, and...
 - b. Whether you're willing to DO the will of the Father in heaven.

B. What is the Father's will?

1. It begins with...
 - a. Repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ.
 - b. Confessing your faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior.
 - c. Then being baptized into Jesus Christ for the remission of sins.
2. The will of the Father continues with...
 - a. A life of faithful service to Christ, confessing our sins along the way, so that we can continue to walk in the light as He is in the light.
3. Are you doing the will of the Father in heaven?