The story is told of an itinerant preacher / evangelist who found himself the house guest of a man who had once lived on skid row in downtown Los Angeles, but had come to saving faith in Christ and become a sold out servant of God. The once homeless man brought the preacher into a very simple room, and he told him that he could spend as much time there as he needed to prepare his messages for the week’s worth of services that lay ahead. The preacher settled in and began to pray about what the Lord would have him preach about in the coming week. Suddenly, as he was praying, he heard a voice from the corner of the room say, “You must be born again”. The preacher quickly sat up wondering where the voice had come from. As he scanned his surroundings, he noticed a small caged parakeet in the corner of the room. Looking at the bird it again said, “You must be born again. You must be born again”. Confused at first, it dawned on the preacher that the gentleman in whose house he was staying had been so captivated by the gospel that he would walk through the house reciting verses. One of those verses was John 3:7, “You must be born again”. The parakeet had heard the homeowner recite this verse so often that it started repeating it. It was in this moment that the traveling preacher knew what he would preach about the coming week. He decided to preach about “parakeet Christianity”. Those are the individuals who, like the parakeet, say all the right things, but whose lives aren’t marked by growing obedience to Christ. These are the individuals that Paul warned Timothy of who exhibit the external appearance of godliness, but deny its power (cf. 2 Timothy 3:5).

The world is full of individuals who verbally identify with Christ, but don’t have lives that validate their profession. But sadly, the church is also occupied by individuals who have a robust knowledge of the Bible, an ability to articulate the truths of gospel, a well-spoken theological vocabulary, actively serve in a variety of ministries, and give of their time and resources, but who have never been changed by the very message they know in theory and profess to believe. It is one thing to profess Christ, but it is another thing altogether to possess Christ by faith. In 2016 the Barna research group indicated that 73%, almost 2/3, of Americans would self-identify as being Christian. Interestingly, of that 73%, 31% would consider themselves to be practicing Christians while 41% would consider themselves to be non-practicing Christians. 55% of those attending church regularly and 45% attending irregularly or not attending at all.¹ From a cultural perspective, to be a Christian doesn’t say much or require much. But is that what Jesus says?

¹ https://www.barna.com/research/state-church-2016/
Let’s turn our attention to our text for this morning. Let me encourage you to stand, if you have the ability. Matthew, recording Jesus’ teaching, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, pens the following words:

> 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?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’ Matthew 7:21–23

Brothers and sisters, the grass withers and the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever (Isaiah 40:8).

Three points on your outline this morning: The **Indictment** (v.21), The **Plea** (v.22), and the **Verdict** (v.23).

I. THE INDICTMENT (v.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.

Jesus is, without a doubt, bringing the Sermon on the Mount to a conclusion. At this point, He isn’t concerned with further instruction, but rather ensuring a proper response to the instruction He has already given. In our text for this morning, verses 21-23, Jesus warns of the danger of banking our eternal security on a mere verbal profession of faith. Next week, as we study verses 24-27, Jesus will warn us of the danger of banking our eternal security on mere intellectual knowledge. Both are important and encouraged in Scripture, but neither can be a substitute for genuine obedience that is a result of genuine conversion and a changed heart.

We have looked at broad and narrow roads, true and false teachers, healthy and diseased trees, and good and bad fruit. 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**.

The mere claim to be a follower of Jesus, and the mere possession of the outward trappings of a commitment to Him, don’t indicate whether a person’s relationship with Him is real. Christian discipleship is genuine when it arises from a heart and mind transformed by God’s grace, and this inner transformation, which Matthew calls repentance, will inevitably bear good fruit (cf. 3:8).²

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THE REALITY: TARES AND WHEAT ARE FOUND IN THE SAME FIELD

He put another parable before them, saying, “The kingdom of heaven may be compared to a man who sowed good seed in his field, but while his men were sleeping, his enemy came and sowed weeds among the wheat and went away. So when the plants came up and bore grain, then the weeds appeared also. And the servants of the master of the house came and said to him, ‘Master, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have weeds?’ He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ So the servants said to him, ‘Then do you want us to go and gather them?’ But he said, ‘No, lest in gathering the weeds you root up the wheat along with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.’” Matthew 13:24–30

A PROFESSION OF FAITH IS ESSENTIAL, BUT A PROFESSION OF FAITH ALONE IS INADEQUATE

Paul writes, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame” Romans 10:9–11. To make a profession of faith is good and right, but a profession of faith part from obedience is a sham.

JESUS ISN’T TEACHING A WORKS-BASED SALVATION, BUT NEITHER IS JESUS TEACHING THAT WORKS (PRACTICAL RIGHTEOUSNESS) DON’T MATTER

It is true that men are saved by God’s grace through faith in Christ; but it is equally true that God’s grace in a man’s life inevitably results in obedience. Any other view of grace cheapens grace and turns it into something unrecognizable. Cheap grace preaches forgiveness without repentance, discipleship without obedience, blessings without persecution, joy without righteousness, and [change] without obedience. In the entire history of the church, there has never been another generation with so many nominal Christians and so few real ones. And where nominal Christianity is compounded by spectacular profession, it is especially likely to manufacture its own false assurance.³

PROFESSION VS. POSSESSION

Do know what it means to profess Christ? It doesn’t mean anything if your life doesn’t back it up. That’s why Peter said, “For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with

steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they keep you from being ineffective or unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ” 2 Peter 1:5-8. This is what James means when he says, “What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead” James 2:14,17.

**WHAT IS THE ESSENTIAL CHARACTERISTIC OF A TRUE BELIEVER**

The Father’s will is not only to be admired, discussed, praised, or debated; it is to be done. That’s why Jesus taught us to pray, “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. Your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven” Matthew 6:9-10. Words, though they are important, are not a substitute for obedience.

**WHAT IS THE WILL OF GOD?**

One word: righteousness (cf. Matthew 5:48)

A false profession will only last until judgment comes. Though Jesus is most likely speaking about the final judgment in our text, sometimes judgment comes in the form of the trials of life. Like the person who received the seed of God’s Word into a shallow heart (cf. Matthew 13:4-9), the commitment fails when the testing comes. Many people have professed faith in Christ, only to deny their faith when life becomes spiritually costly and difficult.⁴

**II. THE PLEA (v.22)**

*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?’*

There is coming a day when the curtain will be pulled back and everything will be exposed for what it is. Paul writes, “[The Lord] will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God” 1 Corinthians 4:5.

**JUDGMENT WILL SURPRISE MANY**

J.C. Ryle, with pastoral wisdom, says, “The day of judgment will reveal strange things. The hopes of many, who were thought great Christians while they lived, will be utterly confounded. The rottenness of their religion will be exposed and put to shame before the whole world. It will then

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be proved, that to be saved means something more than “making a profession.” We must make a “practice” of our Christianity as well as a “profession.” Let us often think of that great day. Let us often “judge ourselves, that we be not judged,” and condemned by the Lord. Whatever else we are, let us aim at being real, true, and sincere."⁵

Jesus isn’t saying that it’s wrong to say, “Lord, Lord,” to Him, but rather that it’s insufficient. When individuals stand before Jesus, the Righteous Judge on judgment day, it will not be people’s profession that counts, but their profession as shown in the way they live. It’s easy for anyone to profess loyalty, but to practice it is quite another thing.

IMPRESSIONS SPIRITUAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work. Titus 1:16

A. IT’S NOT YOUR SPIRITUAL EXPERIENCES

The story is told of a man who enjoyed what he took to be a special outpouring of God’s blessing on his life. So momentous was the event that he wrote it all up in a paper to which he gave the title, “My Experience.” The months slipped past, and he became indifferent to spiritual things. A first he preserved the form, and hauled out his manuscript to show various visitors. But as months turned into years, even the form of godliness was abandoned, and his experience lay forgotten in a dusty drawer. Many years later, a minister came calling. The man thinking to impress his visitor called upstairs to his wife, asking her to bring down “My Experience”. She rummaged around until she found the tattered document, and replied, “I’m sorry, dear, but your experience is rather moth-eaten.” Just so: the man had lulled himself into irresponsible spiritual apathy by coasting along on the memory of some past experience.”⁶

B. IT’S NOT YOUR SPIRITUAL RECORD

God isn’t going to weigh your life on a scale. You’re either in Christ, clothed in His righteousness, or you’re in Adam, clothed in your sin. The prophet Isaiah reminds us, “We have all become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy rags” Isaiah 64:6

⁵ J.C. Ryle, 57.
C. IT’S NOT YOUR POSITION OR SPIRITUAL INVOLVEMENT

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.

D. IT’S NOT YOUR SPIRITUAL KNOWLEDGE

There are many who would say, “We accept the deity of Christ, His virgin birth, miraculous life, substitutionary death, powerful resurrection, intercession, and second coming.” They are respectful, orthodox, use the right terms, and appear to have the right attitudes. They even appeal to Jesus with the title, “Lord, Lord”. The fact that they repeat it twice indicates their zeal, passion, fervency, commitment, and strength of devotion. But for some, their knowledge hasn’t led them to genuine repentance. Friends, your spiritual knowledge won’t save you. In fact, knowledge without repentance will condemn you.

OBSERVATION: JESUS DIDN’T DENY THEIR WORKS

How were unconverted individuals able to cast out demons and do mighty works in Jesus’ name?


B. Perhaps they did these deeds through the power of Satan.
   For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders. (cf. Matthew 24:24, Acts 8:11, 19:13-16)

C. Perhaps their claims are spurious: their miracles were false, faked, contrived.
   Both A and B seem likely.

WHY SHOULD I LET YOU INTO HEAVEN?

Our only hope of Heaven is trusting in the sinless life and shed blood of Jesus alone. We have no other hope. Jesus is saying that it’s possible to be baptized, take communion, serve in the church, be a missionary, preach in a pulpit and still never have been born again. Please don’t mistake spiritual activity for genuine conversion. A person can be spiritually bright and incredibly busy for Jesus and still be as lost as last years’ Easter egg. Jesus moves from what the self-deceived will say to Him on the day of Judgment to what He will say to them. Look at the verdict Jesus renders in verse 23.
III. THE VERDICT (v.23)

And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’

Just as the self-deceived have made a profession about Jesus, calling Him “Lord, Lord,” so Jesus will also make a solemn profession. It’s interesting to note the word Jesus uses, translated “declare” in the ESV, and “profess” in other translations, is the Greek word ὁμολογέω (homologeo). It’s a compound word ὁμο – “same” and λογέω – to “say” or “speak”. This is the word that was used of a person’s profession of Christ before men (cf. Matthew 10:32). Jesus is saying, “Just as you made a open and public profession about me, so I will make an open and public profession about you.”

FOUR CHILLING WORDS

What profession will Jesus make to those who were very active in His name, but never demonstrated true obedience from a changed heart? To those people Jesus will say, “I never knew you; depart from me…” We need to be clear about the fact that God is omniscient and knows everything. Jesus isn’t saying that He literally didn’t know the individual. As a matter of fact, the Psalmist says, “You formed my inward parts; you knitted me together in my mother’s womb” Psalm 139:13. To “know” in the Bible is often times used of intimate knowledge. Jesus is saying that He never knew the lost person in the sense of a personal relationship. Jesus says, “I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me” John 10:14.

WHAT WILL YOU HEAR?

Friends, do you know Jesus Christ? Better question, does He know you? What will He say when you stand before Him? There are two responses Jesus gives in Matthew 25. Some will hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant...Enter into the joy of your master” Matthew 25:22–23. Others will hear, ‘Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels” Matthew 25:41. Which will you hear?

While I’m a firm believer in the doctrine of eternal security, sometimes preachers overemphasize to the degree that they give a false assurance of salvation. While I don’t think it’s healthy to be morbidly introspective, Paul clearly calls us to examine our lives. He says, “Examine yourselves to see if you are in the faith. Test yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you - unless indeed you fail the test” 2 Corinthians 13:5.

Where is your faith? Is your faith in Christ’s atoning work alone for your sin? If your faith is in your faith, it’s misplaced. Examine your life. Are there evidences of God’s grace in your life? Are the fruits of the Spirit present and growing (cf. Galatians 5:22-23)? Is there a love for God (cf. Mark 12:30). Is there a hunger for His Word (cf. Jeremiah 15:16)? Are you growing in an increasing hatred for sin and love of holiness, purity, and righteousness (cf. Romans 12:9)?
Friends, I would much rather have you unsure of your salvation and striving to work it out in fear and trembling (cf. Philippians 3:12) than blindly traveling down the wide road only to hear the Lord say, “Depart from me, I never knew you.” Hear me loud and clear, hear me with grace and truth, but hear me with the broken heart of a shepherd - countless faithful church attenders will miss Heaven by 18 inches. That’s the approximate distance from your head to your heart. They will miss Heaven not because they don’t know enough about the Bible, or because they haven’t been present and even served the needs of the church, or because they haven’t prayed a prayer. They will miss heaven because what they know has never traveled from their head to their heart. Their knowledge of Christ has only been theoretical instead of experiential. They have not been clothed in the of Christ that produces righteous and obedient living from the heart. Jesus said, “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” John 14:21-22.

The reason Jesus will reject “many” is because their profession was merely verbal and not moral. It concerned their lips only, and not their life. They called Jesus “Lord, Lord,” but never submitted to His lordship or submitted to His will. In Luke’s account Jesus says, “Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” Luke 6:46 This is the vital and eternal difference between saying and doing. If you want to know if you are going to Heaven, obedience, springing forth from a changed heart, is the litmus test. Will you pass the test, or have you simply been practicing parakeet Christianity?

CLOSING BENEDICTION

Hear this benediction from Romans 10:9-11 as we bring our corporate worship to a close. Paul writes, “If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. For the Scripture says, “Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame.” And all God’s people said, “Amen!” Go in peace.