The Constitution of the Kingdom

A 33-Session Journey through the Sermon on the Mount & the Sermon on the Plain

SESSION THIRTY — "Lord, Lord"

Part Six: The Two Ways · Texts: Matthew 7:21–23; Luke 6:46

The Texts

> **Matthew 7:21–23** *Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven… Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.'*
>
> **Luke 6:46** *Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you?*

The Hardest Saying

We come now to one of the most sobering things Jesus ever said — a saying that has troubled sensitive hearts for two thousand years, and rightly commands our full attention. Having warned us to know a tree by its fruit, Jesus now presses that test all the way to its most unnerving conclusion, and — this is the part that stops us cold — he turns it not on the obvious sinners, but on the deeply religious and the spectacularly impressive.

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father." And then the words that give us chills: "Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?' Then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you.'" We must read this one slowly, and carefully, and without flinching — because rightly understood, it is not meant to terrify us. It is meant to clarify, once and for all, what following Jesus actually is.[1]

Let's search the Scriptures together.

Saying It Is Not Doing It

Start with the first line: "not everyone who says to me 'Lord, Lord.'" To call Jesus "Lord" is to say the right thing — the true thing, even; he is Lord. But Jesus says the words alone are not enough. And notice the doubling — "Lord, Lord" — the fervent, repeated, emphatic profession, the person who says it loudest and most often. Even that, Jesus says, is not the point. What is? "The one who does the will of my Father." There it is again, the drumbeat that has sounded through the entire Sermon: hearing must become doing; saying must become

[1] Unless noted, Scripture is quoted from the New Revised Standard Version, Updated Edition (NRSVue), the base translation for this course. Matthew 7:21–23, with a related saying at Luke 6:46 ("why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you?") and a fuller parallel at Luke 13:26–27. This is the third of the Sermon's closing two-ways warnings.

living. Luke puts it as bluntly as it can be put: "why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I tell you?"[2]

This is the great danger of religion, and it is a danger unique to the religious — the sinner in the street is not tempted by it, but every one of us in this room is. It is entirely possible to have all the right words — to profess the faith, to say the creed, to sing the songs, to call Jesus "Lord" with real feeling — and for none of it to have touched the way we actually live. Words about Jesus are not the same as a life shaped by Jesus. You can talk a beautiful game and walk a different road entirely. And Jesus, who has spent this whole Sermon driving everything down past the surface to the heart, will not be fooled by the profession when the life tells another story.

Even the Spectacular Is Not Enough

And then he raises the stakes almost past bearing. It is not just the ones who said the words; it is the ones who did the wonders. "Did we not prophesy in your name, cast out demons in your name, do many deeds of power in your name?" These are not lukewarm churchgoers. These are the religious superstars — the ones with the anointed sermons, the miraculous ministries, the crowds and the results and the visible power. And notice: Jesus does not say they were lying. He does not deny they prophesied, or cast out demons, or worked wonders. He lets the claim stand — and still says, "I never knew you."[3]

Sit with how bracing that is. You can preach powerfully, and be a stranger to God. You can do impressive things in Jesus' name — build the ministry, draw the crowd, even see real results — and be, at the core, unknown to him. The spectacular is not the test. It never was. This is the same lesson as the false prophets, turned now on ourselves: it is not the dazzle that reveals a true follower of Jesus. A wolf can prophesy. A stranger to God can work wonders. What God is looking for is not on the stage at all.

"I Never Knew You"

So what is he looking for? Everything hangs on the strange, sad phrase Jesus uses for the verdict. Not "you did not work hard enough," not "you fell short of the quota," not "your record was insufficient." He says: "I never knew you." Hear that carefully, because it changes everything. The tragedy Jesus names is not that these people failed to earn their way in. It is that, for all their words and all their wonders, there was never any actual relationship. The word he uses for "know" is the word for deep, personal, intimate acquaintance — the knowing of two people who truly belong to each other. And he says: we never had that. You called me

[2]"The one who does the will of my Father" (7:21) is the consistent Sermon standard: hearing that becomes doing (7:24), the greater righteousness (5:20), the good fruit (7:16–20). "Doing the will" is not works-righteousness earning entry, but the lived reality of a genuine relationship with God—faith that has become love, as the whole Sermon assumes (compare James 2:14–17).

[3]The rejected in 7:22 point to prophecy, exorcisms, and "many deeds of power"—the spectacular and the religiously impressive. Jesus does not deny they did these things; he denies that such deeds, apart from relationship and obedience, are the measure. Charisma and power are not the same as knowing and being known by God (compare 1 Corinthians 13:1–3; Matthew 7:15–20 on fruit over dazzle).

"Lord," you used my name, you performed in my name — but you and I were never, actually, close. It was all performance, and no acquaintance.[4]

And that is the key that unlocks this whole hard saying — and, mercifully, takes the terror out of it. This is not a passage about being good enough; it is a passage about being known. "Doing the will of the Father" is not a merit badge you earn to buy your way past the gate; it is simply what a real relationship with God looks like from the outside. When you actually know and love someone, you do what they ask — not to keep their love, which you already have, but because you love them back. The obedience Jesus wants is not the anxious performance of a stranger trying to impress a distant judge. It is the natural fruit of a child who knows the Father, and loves him, and therefore lives his way. Faith that has become love. That is the difference between saying "Lord" and being known by him: not more effort, but a living bond — that then, inevitably, shows up in a changed life.

Not Fear, but Clarity

Now, this saying has been used to torment people — to make tender believers lie awake wondering, in dread, whether they have done enough, whether they are secretly among the "many" Jesus turns away. So hear this clearly. If you are anxiously asking, "does Jesus really know me?" — that very ache is not the mark of the stranger; the strangers in this passage were not worried at all. They were serene, confident, sure of their record, right up to the moment of the verdict. The person who longs to be known by God, who wants to love and follow him, who is troubled by their own shortcomings and keeps turning back toward him — that is precisely the person Jesus is not describing. Grace has been the ground under this whole Sermon from its very first word, which blessed the poor in spirit, the empty-handed. This warning does not overturn that grace; it simply refuses to let grace be counterfeited by mere words and wonders. It is not asking, "have you done enough?" It is asking, tenderly and searchingly, "do you actually know him — and does your life show it?"

Freedom for Others

Put it to our thread, and notice what "doing the will of the Father" has meant all through this Sermon. It has never been private religious performance; it has been mercy, and justice, and peacemaking, and love — especially love of the least. So the very thing that distinguishes the truly-known from the merely-impressive is, once again, freedom-for-others. The religious superstars in this passage were all about the visible, the powerful, the applauded — the stage. But the will of the Father is done mostly off-stage, in the quiet, costly love of a neighbor no one is watching you help. So ask with me, gently: is my faith mostly words and impressive moments — or has it become a life quietly bent toward the good of others? And where might Jesus be inviting me, not to do something more spectacular, but to know him more truly —

[4] "I never knew you" (7:23) turns on relationship, not merit. The verb "know" (ginōskō) carries the sense of intimate, personal knowing. The tragedy named is not that some worked too little to earn heaven, but that some were never truly in relationship with the One they called "Lord"—all performance, no acquaintance. "Lawlessness" (anomia) names a life that never actually followed his way of love. Grace remains the ground (the Beatitudes bless the empty-handed); the warning is against a faith that is words and wonders only, with no living bond and no obedience of love.

and to let that knowing show up as love? *Freedom for others may cost us the applause of the impressive religious life — what can we lay down?*

Around the Table — For Discussion

- Jesus says the right words — even "Lord, Lord" — are not enough. Where are you tempted to mistake saying the faith for living it?
- He turns the warning on the spectacular — prophecy, miracles, deeds of power. Why is impressive religion such a subtle danger?
- The verdict is "I never knew you" — relationship, not merit. How does that reframe what "doing the will of the Father" actually means?
- This saying has frightened tender believers. Why is the very anxiety "does Jesus know me?" a sign you are not who this passage describes?
- Freedom for others may cost us something. Where is the will of the Father asking you to love off-stage, where no one is watching?

This Week — A Practice

Two movements, and both toward knowing rather than performing. First, seek the relationship, not the record. This week, set aside any anxious tallying of whether you have done enough, and instead simply be with God — pray honestly, sit with him, tell him you want to know him and be known. Let the goal be nearness, not a higher score. Second, do one hidden thing. Choose a single act of the Father's will — a mercy, a justice, a quiet love for someone in need — and do it entirely off-stage, where no one will ever applaud it. Let your faith become, this week, one small deed of love that no one sees but the One who knows you. Then bring back what you found. This Kingdom, like all the rest, is learned in the doing.

Looking Ahead

Next session, the Sermon reaches its own ending — the last of the two ways, and the great closing image Jesus chose to leave ringing in our ears: the two builders and the two houses. "Everyone who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock… and everyone who hears and does not act will be like a foolish man who built on sand." Hearing, and doing; rock, and sand; and the storm that will one day test them both. The Sermon's final word — and it is a call to build.

Benediction

So go this week not to impress God, but to know him. Do not lie awake counting whether you have done enough; that is the fear of a stranger, and you are not a stranger — you are a child who is loved, and who longs, however falteringly, to love back. Let go of the performance, the words without weight, the wonders that would leave you unknown. And let your knowing of the Father show, quietly, in a life bent toward mercy and justice and love — especially where

no one is watching. Blessed are those whom Jesus truly knows, for their faith has become love, and their words have become a life.

Love, practiced — not just professed — reveals the Kingdom among us.

Blessings,
Pastor Mick Finch

SESSION THIRTY

Introduction Video Script

Single presenter, to camera · target 5–6 minutes · warm, steady, unhurried

[Begin still.]

Welcome back to the table. We come now to one of the most sobering things Jesus ever said — a saying that has troubled sensitive hearts for two thousand years. Having warned us to know a tree by its fruit, Jesus presses that test all the way to its most unnerving conclusion — and here's the part that stops us cold — he turns it not on the obvious sinners, but on the deeply religious and the spectacularly impressive.

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[Saying isn't doing.]

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[Even the spectacular.]

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[I never knew you.]

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[The thread and practice.]

So here's our question this week — freedom for others: "doing the will of the Father" has never been private religious performance. All through this Sermon it's been mercy, justice, peacemaking, love — especially of the least. The superstars here were all about the visible, the powerful, the applauded — the stage. But the will of the Father gets done mostly off-stage, in the quiet, costly love of a neighbor no one's watching you help. So: is my faith mostly words and impressive moments — or has it become a life quietly bent toward the good of others? And where might Jesus be inviting me, not to do something more spectacular, but to know him more truly, and let that knowing show up as love?

Two things to practice, both toward knowing rather than performing. First, seek the relationship, not the record — set aside the anxious tallying of whether you've done enough, and just be with God: pray honestly, tell him you want to know him and be known. Let the goal

be nearness, not a higher score. Second, do one hidden thing — one act of the Father's will, a mercy or a justice or a quiet love, done entirely off-stage, where no one will ever applaud it. Let your faith become, this week, one small deed of love that only the One who knows you sees.

Next time, the Sermon reaches its own ending — the two builders and the two houses. Hearing and doing, rock and sand, and the storm that will one day test them both. The Sermon's final word — and it's a call to build.

[Slow. Land it.]

For now, go not to impress God, but to know him. Don't lie awake counting whether you've done enough — that's the fear of a stranger, and you are not a stranger. You're a child who is loved, and who longs, however falteringly, to love back. Let go of the performance, the words without weight, the wonders that would leave you unknown. And let your knowing of the Father show, quietly, in a life bent toward mercy and justice and love — especially where no one is watching.

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