

Matthew 7:21-23

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Jesus asserts He will refuse many people entrance into His kingdom on the Day of Judgment because they did not know Him or follow His Father's will. Despite their claims of performing mighty works in His name, their deeds and hearts violated God's law.

The parallel account of this teaching is found in Luke 6:46 and Luke 13:25-27.

As Jesus begins to conclude His kingdom platform message, He makes a sobering remark. *Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven.* It is not enough to believe in Jesus as *Lord* to *enter the kingdom of heaven*. It is not enough to call or *say* to Him *'Lord.'* The fact that Jesus uses the phrase *Not everyone*, implies that sadly there will be some *who say to Him 'Lord, Lord' who will not enter the kingdom of heaven.*

Jesus clarifies *who* does get in. *But he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter.* As we have seen throughout this entire sermon about *the kingdom*, the phrase *kingdom of heaven* is not a term for *heaven* in the sense of "living forever with God." *Kingdom of heaven* is a term describing the Messiah's rule and administration. Jesus's sermon is a description and an invitation to serve in Jesus's present and coming administration—His *kingdom*.

The Jewish disciples listening to Jesus' sermon likely would have understood Jesus to be speaking of restoring Israel to a kingdom under the rule of the throne of David (2 Samuel 7:13). After Jesus' resurrection, the remaining 11 disciples asked Him, "Lord, is it at this time You are restoring the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). They were asking Jesus if He was going to ascend the throne of Israel, displace Rome, and restore Israel as a kingdom. This was a reasonable question given that 1) this is prophesied as being an eventuality throughout the Bible and 2) Jesus had told them after He rose from the dead that, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth" (Matthew 28:18).

Jesus affirmed He was the King of the Jews, but told the Roman governor Pilate that His kingdom was "not of this world" (John 18:36). However, when His disciples later asked if it was "now" that He was going to restore the "kingdom to Israel" Jesus answered that it was not theirs to know when. This affirmed that Jesus will, indeed, restore His kingdom in physical form. It is likely that many of these rewards will be manifested at that time. In the meanwhile, it seems apparent that "entering His kingdom" applies to walking in spiritual obedience to Jesus.

The Bible teaches that we are born into everlasting life on the basis of simple faith and pure grace. The gift of eternal life is offered on the basis of what Jesus did for us on the cross (1 John 4:10)—given freely by God's grace. Believing in Jesus only takes enough faith to look, expecting healing, as the Israelites were told they would be healed if they would look at the bronze serpent on the pole (Numbers 21:9; John 3:14-16). That could be what Jesus is referring to as the person who says *Lord, Lord*. Saying *Lord, Lord* might be sufficient to receive the free

gift of eternal life, but it is not sufficient to gain the reward that comes from living in obedience to kingdom principles.

We *enter* the Messiah's *kingdom*, assume our role within His administration, obtain our divine inheritance, and receive our reward on the basis of our external and internal faithfulness. *But he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter (the kingdom of heaven)*. Simple faith in Jesus is enough to have eternal life and 'get to heaven,' but obedient faith, what James might describe as 'living faith' (James 2:17), is required to reign alongside God in His *kingdom*.

Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' *Many* is a reference to the *many* who walk the broad way and enter the wide gate which leads to destruction (Matthew 7:13).

The phrase *on that day* is a reference to Judgment *day*, when Christ judges the works of believers at the Bema, the judgment seat (2 Corinthians 5:10, 1 Corinthians 3:11-15). Because of what the *many say*, it appears that they are believers who have externally performed good and mighty deeds in His name, but who performed them in their own strength and before men to be seen (and rewarded) by men. Sadly, they have already received their reward in full (Matthew 6:1, 2, 5, 16). There is no further reward remaining for their empty righteousness.

After being told that they will not be able to *enter the kingdom* on the *day* of judgment, these people will beg their case to Jesus: *Did we not prophesy in Your name? Did we not cast out demons in Your name? Did we not perform many miracles in Your name?* Jesus has just made it clear that *false prophets* routinely do these things. These are not men who had no knowledge of God or His law. Pagans or Atheists would not make these kinds of appeals. The kinds of people who would appeal in this manner would be highly religious. On the surface, their religious works are impressive. It is likely they were respected and followed by many while living on earth. They were likely followed as "holy men." But in God's *kingdom* their deeds are worthless. Jesus made this clear earlier in the sermon: "For I say to you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will not *enter the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5:20).

Jesus will later expound at length on the hypocrisy of the scribes and Pharisees in Matthew 23. He makes clear that their motivation is oriented toward gaining the praise of men. God will judge the "thoughts and intents of the heart" in the Day of Judgement (Hebrews 4:12). There is no intimate fellowship created with God when we choose to manipulate others to feel personally fulfilled. Intimate fellowship with God comes from walking in faith, through the trials of life (James 1:2, James 1:12).

It is significant that in this passage, Jesus does not dispute with them whether or not they actually did these works. They likely did some amazing things. *And then I will declare* (literally "confess") to them, *I never knew you*. He admits that He is unfamiliar with them. Matthew uses the term "ginosko" (G1097) for "knew." This type of knowledge describes an understanding that is grounded in experience and familiarity. When applied to personal relationships it describes a closeness or intimacy shared between all parties. Ginosko is used to refer to the ultimate physical

intimacy, sexual intercourse, in Matthew 1:25, which states that Joseph did not “know” (ginosko) Mary until after Jesus was born.

Ginosko comes from living and doing life together, serving together, facing trials and overcoming them as part of the same team. These people to whom Jesus says, *I never knew you*, had not lived in harmony with Jesus. They were not part of Jesus’s team. They did not seek His *kingdom* and righteousness on earth. They sought harmony with the world in an attempt to acquire power or recognition within its kingdoms. Consequently, Jesus did not have intimacy with them. They were not walking in faith and obedience. They were not part of His *kingdom* before *that day* of judgment, and they are denied entrance into His *kingdom* afterward.

There are other aspects of exclusion for those who decide not to walk in faith. In the next chapter, we will see believing Jews who will be excluded from the banquet honoring the faithful when Jesus sets up His kingdom on earth. In Revelation, believers who are not “overcomers” will miss many rewards, and potentially experience negative rewards.

Jesus’s response to these faithless fakers is very similar to what He describes in Mark 8:38.

“For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will also be ashamed of him when He comes in the glory of His Father with the holy angels.”

The phrase *enter the kingdom* means to choose to walk according to Jesus’ kingdom platform. Jesus uses the same Greek word translated *enter* in Matthew 19:17. Jesus answers the question “What good thing must I do to obtain eternal life (zoe)?” Jesus answers:

“...if you wish to *enter* into life, keep the commandments.”

Jesus tells a young man who is clearly alive how to “enter life.” Life here is “zoe” which focuses on quality of life. A great quality of life is something that must be entered through obedience. In a similar manner, Jesus’ kingdom that is not of this world can only be entered into through obedience by faith.

Christ’s denial of these men into *the kingdom* on *that day* speaks of the Day of Judgment, when Christ will pass out rewards for deeds. This will apply to both believers as well as unbelievers. Believers will be rewarded for deeds, but that will have no bearing on whether or not they are children, or servants, of God. Becoming a child, or servant, is a matter of faith alone (John 3:14-16). However, faithfulness is required before children can receive the inheritance of adoption as sons (which was a bestowal of family stewardship during this era) or the reward of being a faithful servant rather than a wicked and lazy servant.

Any believer can practice *lawlessness*, and not keep God’s law through actions and heart attitudes. These unfaithful folks have not *done the will of the Father who is in heaven*. Their works of righteousness were a hypocritical attempt to get ahead in the kingdoms of this world. Because they chose to pursue temporary power in this world and reject the ways of Christ, they and their works are rejected by Him. This is clearly intended as a warning to His disciples, so it

applies to the judgement of believers. These warnings are consistent with other passages concerning the day of judgement (2 Corinthians 5:10; 1 Corinthians 3:11-15; Romans 2:6-8).

The world's kingdoms are based on selfishness and pride. Worldly positions of honor are attained by those most effective at taking what they want either by force or by fraud. The foundations of Christ's *kingdom* are based on serving others and humility. Its positions of honor are awarded to those who faithfully follow God's commands to love people and show mercy. Those seeking power in worldly kingdoms rage against one another over who has the most power. Those seeking righteousness in His *kingdom* believe that all authority will be granted as a reward unto those who serve others in this life. Those who serve in obedience to Christ in this life will be God's servant kings in eternity.

Throughout this sobering passage about *the kingdom* Jesus makes a bold claim. He asserts that He is God. Jesus claims that He is the One to whom all will appeal '*Lord, Lord*' on that day. He twice emphasizes that people *will say to Me*. Jesus claims to be the ultimate and final Judge, a role that Jews would have understood belonged to God alone (Psalm 58:11, Isaiah 2:4, 33:22, Micah 4:3, Zephaniah 3:8). When He states *then I will declare to them*, Jesus makes a clear claim that His authority will equal God's authority. To make such a statement before a Jewish audience would be to unmistakably claim to be God.

Biblical Text

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