

# Meeting With Christ

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Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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## I NEVER KNEW YOU

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### Matthew 7:21-23

The words of the Lord Jesus are not always comfortable. They are always true, but not always comfortable. At the end of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that not everybody who claims to be a Christian will enter the kingdom of heaven. Let us read Matthew 7:21-23.

*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.*

*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!'*

In this passage, the Lord Jesus warns us about the danger of a merely verbal profession. Notice the emphasis on 'saying,' on verbalizing a profession of faith. In v. 21, we read, *Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord.'* Again, in v. 22, we have, *Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord.'* Jesus tells us that our entrance into the kingdom of heaven is not determined by what we are saying to Him now nor by what we will say to Him on the last day. The only kind of person who enters the kingdom of heaven is the person who does what he says. It is the person who does the will of God.

### A verbal confession of Jesus as Lord

And yet, the Christian profession that Jesus talks about here seems to be quite remarkable in many ways. Let's take a closer look. First of all, this verbal profession is very polite. It addresses Jesus as Lord. When we call Him 'our Lord,' we express courtesy and respect.

Not only is it polite, but also it is an orthodox confession. It is an accurate style of address because it acknowledges Jesus for what He is. He is the *kurios*; He is the Lord. *Kurios* is a divine title, which is used in the Septuagint for 'Jehovah,' for God. In the context of Matthew 7:21, to call Him *kurios* implies that Jesus is Jehovah. God the Father has exalted Him and given Him all authority over the universe. *Every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord* (Philippians 2:11). Therefore the title 'Lord' corresponds to the reality that all powers have been subjected to Him.

Notice the enthusiasm of the speaker. 'Lord, Lord.' It is not a formal 'Lord,' but a fervent 'Lord, Lord.' We can feel the zeal of the person's devotion to Jesus.

This 'Lord, Lord' is not just said privately, but also publicly. The people that Jesus is talking about openly and publicly confessed that they prophesied, cast out demons and performed miracles in the name of Jesus. On the day of judgment, these people will emphasize the fact that they did all these

things in the name which they professed. *Have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?* Surely, Jesus should know them. But Jesus will say to them, 'I never knew you.'

## **Wrong arguments**

Now think about this for a moment. Suppose you begin to prophesy one day. Wouldn't that be an exciting experience? You might even be prophesying in tongues. You feel that you have joined the rank of the prophets like Isaiah or Jeremiah. It is quite possible that God is using you at that particular moment to fulfill a specific task. But the Lord Jesus makes it clear that the ability to prophesy is not a guarantee that you will enter the kingdom of heaven.

Or you might say, 'If prophecy is not a guarantee, then casting out demon must be a guarantee because Jesus Himself said that Satan never casts out Satan (Matthew 12:26). Therefore if I can cast out a demon, then surely the Spirit of God is working through me.' You are probably right. God's power is working through you. But again, that does not mean that you will enter His kingdom.

Or you might say, 'I can do mighty works. I can perform miracles. Surely, the power of God is working through me. I must have a seat in heaven.' But Jesus says this surprising thing, 'Not necessarily. Doing mighty works does not automatically prove that you are a spiritual man.'

You see, having these spiritual experiences is wonderful. But they never guarantee that you are on the narrow road. Doing these amazing things does not show evidence of your spirituality. None of these spiritual experiences prove that you will enter the kingdom of God.

So what is wrong with this Christian profession? There is nothing wrong in itself. The problem is that these people never did what they said. They confessed Jesus as Lord with their lips, but they never put into practice His teaching. They said, 'Lord, Lord,' but they never submitted to His lordship. Jesus says, 'If your desire is to enter the kingdom of heaven, don't just call Me 'Lord.' You have to do the will of My Father.'

## **Saved by faith**

Is the Lord Jesus teaching us that we will be saved by our own effort? Certainly not. No one will enter the kingdom of heaven because of his obedience. And obviously, no one will enter the kingdom who is not obedient. We are saved by God's grace through faith in Christ. It is a faith that is not limited to a verbal profession but it is accompanied by moral obedience. If God's grace is active in a man's life, this man will seek to perform the will of God.

So Jesus' teaching is about faith. We are saved by faith. And faith, everywhere in the Bible, means obedience to God. It means to do His will.

It should be obvious to us that unless we have faith, we will not obey God. It is faith that motives us to listen to Him. It is faith that enables us to realize that Jesus is the judge who is to come and who shall reign over the earth. It is faith that enables us to see the wonder of His person. It is faith that enables us to see our sinfulness. It is faith that enables us to see that nobody in this world can save us from sin and from the judgment except Jesus. If you don't have faith, you won't believe in the judgment to come. If you don't believe in the judgment to come, then there is no point following God's commands. If there is no judgment, it doesn't matter how you live your life.

Faith, then, is what the Lord Jesus is talking about. Here it is important to define exactly what faith means. When Jesus talks about faith, He is not talking about some mental perception. He is speaking about a spiritual discernment which once it perceives the truth, it acts upon it.

## **True faith: obedience**

Now these people who prophesied, who cast out demons and who performed miracles, do they not have some kind of faith? Could it be that they could prophesy in the name of Jesus without faith? Could it be that they could do miracles in the name of Jesus without faith? I think that they did have faith, or at least some sort of faith. Could it be that they could cast out demons without faith? The disciples tried once to cast out a demon but they couldn't. They asked Jesus why they couldn't do it. Jesus said, 'Because your faith is too small' (Matthew 17:20). This answer shows that faith is needed in order to cast out demons. But according to Jesus' words, none of these people will find entrance into the kingdom of God.

When we say, 'Believe in Jesus and you will be saved,' we have to make sure that we also explain what we mean by 'believing in Jesus.' Because it is possible to believe in Jesus (in that sense, to have faith) without being saved.

This is the point that the apostle James addresses in his letter (James 2:19). He says, 'You say you have faith. You do well. But the devil also has faith. You say you believe in God. The devil believes also that there is one God, maybe more than you do because he trembles.' If the devil has faith, why is he not saved? Because he does not do the will of God. That is why James says, *For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also* (James 2:26). There is a kind of faith that does not save you. It is a faith that does not bear good works. It is a faith that does not express itself in good works of obedience to the will of the Father.

We like to quote Paul to talk about salvation by faith. For example, he writes in Ephesians 2:8, *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God. We are saved by faith. What a precious truth! But that is not all that Paul said. Immediately after that declaration, Paul goes on to say, 'You were created to do good works. God prepared them in advance, that you should walk in them.'* Here is the element of obedience to the will of God. We walk on the path that God has already prepared for us, i.e., we do the good that God wants us to do. Here Paul and James say the same thing: good works attest the reality of salvation in our lives. If there is no good works, our faith is dead and we are not saved.

There is a faith that saves and a faith that does not save. It is possible to believe in Jesus, to be baptized, to go to church every Sunday and sing Christian hymns, even to exercise certain ministries in the name of Jesus and yet, to have a dead faith. When Jesus says, 'He who does the will of God shall enter My kingdom,' He is looking for evidence of our commitment to Him in good works of obedience.

## ***You evildoers***

So there is a faith that saves and a faith that does not save. What is the faith that saves? It is the faith that does God's will. Here is another important observation. You can do things in the name of Jesus, but they may not be according to His will. The fact that you do something in the name of God does not mean that it automatically becomes the will of God.

This is easy to understand. When we say that we do something in Jesus' name, we mean that we act as His representatives, His agents. We act on behalf of Jesus, much like an ambassador who acts on behalf of the country that he represents. But the fact that he acts on the authority of his country does not necessarily mean that what he does meet the approval of his country. It will be according to the will of the country if this ambassador is in constant communication with the government of his country and if he follows the instructions that are given to him. It is the same for the Christian.

Obedience to the will of God requires that we are in constant communion with God. We communicate regularly with God and we ask Him, 'Is this your will? What do you want me to do?'

These people used Jesus' name. They called Him 'Lord' and they said that they did many things in His name. Jesus rejected them and called them 'evildoers.' *Depart from Me, you evildoers.* In the gospel of Luke, in the parallel passage, (Luke 6:46), Jesus said, *Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?* An evildoer is a lawless person who just does what he likes. He does not do the things that Jesus teaches. You are an evildoer if you live in your own way, doing whatever you want to do, without considering the will of God.

Notice that in Jesus' teaching, an evildoer is not necessarily somebody who is guilty of murder, or adultery, or robbery. You may not have committed any of these sins but in God's eyes, you can still be an evildoer. God looks into your heart because sin originates in the heart. He looks at the root of all sins. And in the heart of any sinner, there is always this inclination to go his own way, to do things the way he wants, without any regard for the will of God. You may claim to do spectacular works in your ministry, yet your works are works of evil if they are not done in obedience to the will of God.

### **Faith in God's love and in His power**

You have a saving faith when you come to see that God is a loving Father. You realize that His will for you is always for your good. It may not always look very nice at this present moment. But you know that in His eternal plan, God always works for your good. This is what these people did not see. They failed to see God's love. They had the faith that could prophesy, cast out demons, and do mighty works, but they did not have the faith that embraces the reality of God's love for them. In other words, they had faith in God's power but not in His love. The person who has faith in God's love knows that no matter how the storm blows, God will never let him down. I know that God loves me. And because God loves me, I want to do His will with joy.

When you have faith in God's love, you also have faith in His power. The reason is simple. If you believe that God will not let you down, you are also convinced that He has the power not to let you down. Now we can see what Paul means when He says in 1Corinthians 13:13, *The greatest of these is love.* He compares faith, hope and love. And he says that love is the greatest. Many of those who appeared to be close to God with their successful ministries may in fact end up quite far off. Many who are least in the kingdom of heaven will turn out to be the greatest because they have faith in God's love, and not just in His power. They know God as a loving Father and therefore they delight to do His will.

### ***There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth***

We will conclude this lesson with a few comments about Luke 13:24-28, a section that is related to our passage.

*Luke 13:24. "Strive to enter by the narrow door; for many, I tell you, will seek to enter and will not be able.*

*25 "Once the head of the house gets up and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock on the door, saying, 'Lord, open up to us!' then He will answer and say to you, 'I do not know where you are from. '*

*26 "Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets';*

*27 and He will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you are from; depart from Me, all you evildoers.'*

*28 "There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being cast out.*

Here the master of the house is Jesus. Notice the words in v. 26. Notice the shock and the protest of those who were knocking at the door, trying in vain to enter. They will say to Jesus, *We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets*. I can almost hear the painful cry of people who are in despair. It is enough to make us weep. 'We ate and drank in your presence. Surely, you can't say you don't know us. You have seen me before, haven't you? I was eating and drinking in front of you. We sat at the same table. You remember me?'

Their appeal was that they were present with Jesus during His ministry. They heard Him teach before. They even sat with Him at other tables in the past. Table fellowship was a sign of relationship. They claimed familiarity with Jesus' ministry and expected that Jesus would recognize them. In the gospel of Matthew, the connection to Jesus' ministry is expressed in the ability to prophesy, to cast out demons and to do mighty works. But familiarity with Jesus is not enough. These people may have seen Jesus. They may have been physically close to Him. But the problem is that they never responded to Him with an obedient heart to His teaching. Therefore He could not recognize them as His own.

And the Lord answered in the same way as He did the first time. 'I tell you. I don't know who you are. I never knew you.' These are tragic words, aren't they? This is a banishment formula. It doesn't mean that Jesus never saw you before. As our Creator, He has seen us before. It simply means that He doesn't recognize you as His own. You don't belong to Him. He has nothing to do with you.

What a tragedy! I fear that this is what is going to happen to some people who are now doing all the Christian things. Some people, who sit regularly at the communion table in their church, will say to Jesus on the day of judgment, 'Lord, we sat at your table. We ate and drank in front of you. Do you remember us?' And the Lord Jesus will say, 'I don't know who you are.' 'But Lord, I was in church every Sunday. I was baptized. I was running this ministry for you. Surely, you know me!' And the Lord will say, 'I don't know who you are. Depart from Me, you evildoer.'

Notice the basis on which a person is excluded from the presence of Jesus. When the Lord Jesus says, 'I never knew you,' it implies that the eternal destiny of a man depends on his relationship to Christ, whether Christ knows them and whether they know Christ.

For some people, this will come as the shock of their lives. They had expected to be in the kingdom but they will be forced to walk away into the judgment. On that day, there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Today is the day to do God's will. We do His will because we love Him. And we love Him because He loves us.