

DEEP IN SCRIPTURE

Verses & Notes November 29, 2006

Matthew 7:21-23

- 21: "Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,'
shall enter the kingdom of heaven,
but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.
- 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?'
- 23: And then will I declare to them,
'I never knew you;
depart from me, you evildoers.'

Discussion Notes:

Introduction:

- A common opening line used by door-to-door evangelists is: "If you were to die tonight and found yourself standing before God, and He asked you why should I let you into my heaven, what would you say?"
- Aside from the likelihood that this scenario may have no semblance whatsoever to what we will experience when we die, how would you answer this question: Why should God let you into His kingdom? What must you do to inherit eternal life? What must you do to be saved? And if at one time in your life you accepted Jesus as your Lord & Savior, can you be turned away at the door of heaven?
- This is what we will discuss today on Deep In Scripture.

- Today's passage is very pertinent to our condition today:
 - The world is under siege by people with contradictory views of what God expects us to do to enter His Kingdom ...
 - Radically different religions & philosophies...
 - The full range from radical left to radical right.
 - Limiting our discussion to Christianity, the same applies:
 - Even amongst conservatives, the answer is different.
 - We will examine this passage in historical stages:
 - 1) What did Jesus mean when He gave this to the crowd, and how did they understand it?
 - 2) How would it have been understood as Matthew wrote his Gospel to his mostly Jewish audience, 10-20 years after Jesus' resurrection?
 - 3) How was this understood by the Early Church Fathers?
 - 4) How has the Church understood this throughout the ages?
 - 5) How does it apply to us today?

1) What did Jesus mean in this passage and how did His audience understand it?

- 21: *"Not every one who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*
- 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?'*
- 23: *And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you evildoers.'*

• Scriptural context:

- Sermon on the Mount: Central instructions on discipleship
- Jesus is calling his disciples to radical conversion.
- Conversion = metanoia = turning radically back towards God
- All of what Jesus taught in the Sermon demands this radical turning back to God...
- Today's passage addresses this turning, especially against those who want to compromise, diminish, or even belittle the necessity of this turning.
- This is # 3 of three warnings against false gospels:
 - 1) (Mt 7:13-14) False roads: True road? = narrow, hard, followed by few;
 - 2) (Mt 7:15-20) False teachers; True teachers? = know by their fruit.
 - 3) Today's passage, 7:21-23, False professions.
- **What does Jesus mean to "enter the kingdom of heaven"?**
 - Both "now and then"
 - *"The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of [or within] you." (Lk 17:20-21)*
 - *"I tell you I shall not drink again of this fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." (Mt 26:29)*
 - Common question, asked in different terms:
 - "Teacher, what good must I do to have eternal life?" (Mt 19:16f)
 - "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" (Jn 6:28f)
- **What kind of people is He referring to ... ?**
 - Those who hear his words but don't do them! (Lk 6:46-47)
"Why do you call me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do what I tell you? Every one who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like..." (man who builds house on rock).
- **What does it mean to "do the will of our Father in heaven?"**
 - Explained in the context: the Sermon on the Mount!
 - Jesus' answers to the other inquirers were shaped to their needs:
 - [to the rich young ruler] "If you would enter life, keep the commandments ... if you would be perfect go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come follow me" (Mt 19:16-22)
 - [the Jews who were seeking after him who wanted signs] "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent." (Jn 6:29)
- **How could Jesus not "know" them? Doesn't he know everyone?**
 - "Know" = union; communion; fellowship (1 Jn 1);
 - This lack of knowing: the parable of the sheep & the goats (Mt 25:31-46)

2: How would the early Christians to whom Matthew wrote his Gospel understood this?

- There were already alternative "gospels" pulling people away from the truth.
 - "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and turning to a different gospel" (Gal 1:6)
 - Extremes: libertines & legalists.
- In Romans, St. Paul emphasizing both side of conversion, internal & external:
"...if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved" (Rom 10:8)
- St. Paul was primarily fighting against Jewish legalists:
"...a man is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified" (Gal 2:16)
- St. James was dealing with a different form of false gospel: those who professed faith in Jesus but denied the necessity of obedience (James 2:14-24)

What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit?

So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead.

But some one will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith. You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe -- and shudder. Do you want to be shown, you shallow man, that faith apart from works is barren? Was not Abraham our father justified by works, when he offered his son Isaac upon the altar? You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by works, and the scripture was fulfilled which says, "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness"; and he was called the friend of God.

You see that a man is justified by works and not by faith alone.

- So how do we bring these two views together?
 - Recognize that St. Paul and St. James, besides responding to the specific needs of their communities, were converts & may have been emphasizing that which was most significant in their own conversions: (common for converts!)
 - St. Paul was a Pharisee of Pharisees: he had been a legalist!
 - St. James may have been a nominal Jew: his actions didn't match his internal belief in God.
 - The point: Believing in Jesus was never mere mental assent; it has always included changed lives; faith means obedience to the will of God.
 - "Faith, hope, and love" were constantly emphasized together (i.e., 1 Cor 13)
"We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ when we pray for you, because we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love which you have for all the saints, because of the hope laid up for you in heaven" (Col 1:3-5)
 - Faith itself is a gift of grace, which we must freely accept, for which we must ask His assistance

3: How was this understood by the Early Church Fathers?

St. Hippolytus of Rome (died AD 236)

Then shall they also give an answer to the dread Judge . . . Lord, when did we see you hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister to you? Lord, do you not know us? You formed us, you fashioned us, you made us of four elements, you gave us spirit and soul. We believed in you; We received you seal, we obtained your baptism; we acknowledged you to be God, we knew you to be Creator; in you we restored sight, through you we cast out demons, for you we mortified the flesh, for you we preserved virginity, for you we practiced chastity, for you we became strangers on the earth; and you say, I do not know you, depart from me! Then he shall answer them, and say, you acknowledged me as Lord, but you did not keep my words. You were marked with the seal of my cross, but you deleted it by your hardness of heart. You obtained my baptism, but you did not observe my commandments. You subdued your body to virginity, but you did not practice mercy, but you did not cast the hatred of your brother out of your souls. For not every, one that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall be saved, but he that does my will. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life eternal. (On the End of the World 48)

4: How has the Church understood this throughout the ages?

- Contrary to anti-Catholic polemicists, the Catholic Church has never taught "works righteousness"; this has always been declared a heresy!
- CCC, 1814-1816

Faith is the theological virtue by which we believe in God and believe all that he has said and revealed to us, and that Holy Church proposes for our belief, because he is truth itself. By faith "man freely commits his entire self to God." For this reason the believer seeks to know and do God's will. "The righteous shall live by faith" (Rom 1:17). Living faith "work[s] through charity" (Gal 5:6).

The gift of faith remains in one who has not sinned against it. But "faith apart from works is dead": when it is deprived of hope and love, faith does not fully unite the believer to Christ and does not make him a living member of his Body.

The disciple of Christ must not only keep the faith and live on it, but also profess it, confidently bear witness to it, and spread it: "All however must be prepared to confess Christ before men and to follow him along the way of the Cross, amidst the persecutions which the Church never lacks." Service of and witness to the faith are necessary for salvation: "So every one who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven; but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven" (Mt 10:32-33).

5: How does it apply to us today?

- What must we do to make sure Jesus knows us when we meet Him one day?
 - Believe in Him, which means to obey His word as we have received it through his Church: External practice & internal conversion are BOTH important:
- Three dangers:
 - Those who depend on doing all the proscribed religious duties without an internal conversion of heart—without understanding or sincerity;
 - Those who put themselves above the Church, denying the validity of the present Church hierarchy, and defining for themselves what it means to be a true Christian or Catholic.
 - Those who limit their relationship to Jesus on faith alone without recognizing the necessity of external obedience, holiness, and especially obedience to the Church Jesus established as the means throughout with grace and salvation were to be received.