

Sermon Title: Jesus' Scariest Words

Speaker: Jim Harris

Scripture Text: Matt. 7:21-29 (Sermon on the Mount #31)

Date: 4-11-21

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Come with me to Matthew Chapter 7. Today is the final visit we will make to the Sermon on the Mount. We are going to look at the last nine verses here.

Every time that I have studied the Sermon on the Mount—which is *many* times—I always have flashbacks, and I've mentioned them to you along the way, that when I was new to the faith and I read through Matthew for the first time—and *especially* when I got into the Sermon on the Mount—I would hear things that I realized I had been told in sort of a caricature format; some of the things that Jesus said, especially things like: "Love your neighbor"—they would leave off "as yourself" and just say, "Love your neighbor;" there was the "Golden Rule" in a watered-down version that I had learned.

So I *did* have that reaction several places in the Sermon on the Mount when I first read it; but when I came to our text for today, my reaction was different: I had *never* heard anything like this! And the only sense in which I had heard anything resembling *even a part* of this passage was in the form of the story of the Three Little Pigs and the Big Bad Wolf; and, needless to say, that hadn't driven me toward great theology.

But when I read this passage for the first time—especially the first three verses that we're going to look at this morning—my reaction was visceral. And I was thinking back to all the times that I have read this, and I came up with this title; I think you could make an argument that these are "Jesus's Scariest Words."

These nine verses are the conclusion of the conclusion of the Sermon on the Mount. The conclusion started back at Chapter 7, Verse 13. That's where there are the two commands that form, basically, the backbone of the "altar call" to this sermon. The first one is Chapter 7, Verse 13; it's the command: "Enter"—"Enter through the narrow gate." And then, Verse 15; the second command: "Beware"—"Beware of the false prophets"—because there are people who will try to woo you into the *wrong* gate, onto the *wrong* path to the *wrong* destination, and trick you into thinking you're on the right way (Matt. 24:11, 24; 2 Pet. 2:1; 1 Jn. 4:1).

These scary words from Jesus leave no room whatsoever for thinking that you can respond to this any way you want to. Jesus *demand*s of every person who was there that day when He preached this sermon, and every person who reads Matthew's inspired summary of it, to come to a decision about Him (Jn. 5:23; 1 Jn. 2:23). And it is a *binary* decision. It is: Accept or reject (2 Thess. 2:10); believe or ignore (Jn. 3:18); Heaven or Hell (Matt. 25:46); one way or the other (Jn. 14:6; 1 Tim. 2:5); right, wrong (Acts 4:12). *There is no middle ground* (Matt. 12:30). *There is no option* for picking and choosing the moralistic applications of the Sermon on the Mount that you like, and trimming off the rest of them (Matt. 5:17-18; 24:35; cf. Ps. 119:128, 160; 2 Tim. 3:16-17).

There are many voices that proclaim *false* messages about the way to Heaven, and so Jesus says, "Enter by that one narrow gate." And today, we're going to see the final descriptions of the *importance* of entering through "the narrow gate," and learning to "Beware of the false prophets."

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Here's how we're going to do this: Verses 21-23 is about True And False Professors—and we don't mean people who teach math at local colleges; we're talking about people who "profess" to follow Christ (Titus 1:16). Then we'll see, in Verses 24 through 27, True And False Hearers. And then, there is a Postscript to this great sermon (Verses 28 and 29).

Let's start with the True And False Professors, Verses 21-23; these are the scariest words I think Jesus ever spoke: "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven will enter. 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?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' " (NASB-1995; and throughout, unless otherwise noted)

This is a bone-chilling passage. You don't end the Sermon on the Mount with a feel-good, go-home-and-have-your-picnic kind of a message. Jesus tells us that there are people who will be deceived into thinking that they are going to Heaven, and they will be so *committed* to their deception that they will lead *others* into thinking that they are going to Heaven; and some of them will get *all the way* to final judgment before they discover: they chose the wrong gate! They took the wrong way! (Lk. 13:24) And by the way: He's talking to *very religious* people when He says this.

"On that day" refers to the Day of Judgment (Acts 17:31). The people that Jesus condemns are branded as false by Him, because they proclaimed, "This is the way to Heaven," but they didn't live up to what He told them to do. Their profession and their actions didn't match (Titus 1:16). They "say, 'Lord, Lord,' " but they have not truly submitted themselves to Him.

That word "Lord" is very significant. If you call Jesus "Lord," you are declaring that He is the "Master" who "bought" you (2 Pet. 2:1), and you are His "slave" (1 Cor. 7:22-23). He *owns* you! You belong to Him. So do not ever say, "Jesus is Lord" if you are unwilling to do what He says (cf. Matt. 28:20; 1 Jn. 2:4). There's another statement of this in Luke 6:46, where Jesus said: "Why do you call Me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"

The unspeakable tragedy of this passage is meant to teach us an obvious lesson: You're supposed to come to the end of this sermon, and you're supposed to examine yourself—you're supposed to make a *choice*. There are *only* two choices! Now, one of them has a whole lot of different brand names on it, but there's the "narrow way" and there's the "broad way," the "narrow gate" and the "wide gate."

Paul would later write this very same thing to the Corinthians: Second Corinthians Chapter 13, Verse 5—"Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?" I found that verse long ago and referred to it several times later; and it always kind of troubled me: "Paul—*what is the test?*" He didn't even tell us if it's True/False or Multiple choice! By the way: it *is* True/False—in or out, believe or don't believe. But he didn't put the test exactly in words right there.

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But I think you can summarize it if you pore over the 28 chapters of inscripturated revelation that he wrote to that church. And as I've said many times: I think you can boil it down to two related questions.

Examine yourself, and ask: What do you think about your sin? and, What do you think about Jesus Christ? Because at any moment—and as the pattern of your life—you will love and cling to one of those two, or you will hate and be ashamed of it (Ezek. 6:9; Mk. 8:38). And again, it's *binary*—you're always going to be in that bifurcated choice.

So He was pretty serious: "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?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.' "

Now, what's the problem with those people who say that? I mean, after all, they're saying "Lord"! They're *announcing* that they believe that "Jesus is Lord" (1 Cor. 12:3; cf. Rom. 10:9), but what's the problem with it?

Well, one thing is: notice that they emphasize, not who the Lord is, not anything about sacrifice, not anything about sin, not anything about turning to Him—they emphasize: "Look what *we did* for You!" There's a subtle problem with that. Of course, we want to serve the Lord, right? Of course, we want to *do* great things by His grace and by His power. But they say, "*Did we not* do these things?" They're calling attention to *themselves*. "Lord! Let me into Heaven! Just look at all the favors that I did for You! Weren't you blessed to have *me* on *Your* side?" That's the attitude.

I get shivers down my back when I hear people—sometimes pastors being the worst of the lot—speaking so glowingly of all they've done for the Lord and for His Church. I knew one pastor who had the habit of using the pronoun "I" interchangeably with the church board and himself. "This is *my* church! Look what *I've* done!" That's *frightening*! I *hope* he doesn't mean what it sounds like. I was once in a group of Elders—*not* at Heritage Bible Church, I'm happy to say—where some people were praying, and I heard an Elder say: "Thank You, Lord, for this church we have built for You." Wow! *Who* is building the Church? It is a humbling thing to be *any* part of that process, but *we're* not building a church for the Lord—*we are the Church*! He is building it (Matt. 16:18; Jn. 6:37, 45; Acts 2:47; Col. 2:19)—stone by stone, person by person (Eph. 2:21-22; 1 Pet. 2:5).

Second problem with this profession: They appeal to the name of Jesus, but more like a *magic formula* than a reference to the true character and His person (e.g., Acts 19:13). The phrase "Lord, Lord," and then the thrice-repeated "in Your name"—which in the Greek is given the position of maximum emphasis in the phrase; it's like they're using it as a sentimental or mystical or magical incantation: "We did this 'in *Your* name!'" In reality, to pray or to act "in the name of" Jesus means: to act based upon who He is and what He has done—and you're standing with Him (1 Jn. 5:14). You can't just say, "In the name of the Lord Jesus," and that's like Popeye taking his spiritual spinach—and then he can do great things.

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There is no special power in reciting that name. It's a matter of *living* in light of who He is, and standing with Him on what He has accomplished. And by the way: there's a lot of that going on in this century, if you haven't noticed.

And that leads to the third problem with this. Do you notice: He says there are going to be "many" who are going to be majoring on these self-glorifying, attention-getting, flashy, crowd-gathering events—rather than humble service for God's glory.

"Prophesying"—proclaiming, preaching—that's the most public of all ministries. It can affect the greatest number of people—but *if not in the proper perspective*, it can be an ego trip! (1 Tim. 3:6; 3 Jn. 9)

Then there's "casting out demons." Hey—if you have a demon, I want you *not* to have that demon. It's not a *bad thing* to have someone be delivered from demon possession. But, do you know what? Jesus did not give that ministry to the Church! He *had* that special ability, and He gave it to the Apostles, and that was a sign of their Apostolic office (Lk. 9:1; 2 Cor. 12:12)—and it *ended* with the Apostles! Victory over a demon *now* comes *not* at the hands of a third party, ordering the demon to go away—it comes with conversion (Col. 1:13; 1 Jn. 2:14; 5:4), repentance (2 Tim. 2:25-26)—*not* the ministry of somebody laying on hands, or repeating formulaic prayers or whatever.

Same with "performing miracles." That's likewise *not* the ministry of the Church. No one today has the power to perform miracles, as did Jesus and the Apostles! I can't do miracles! God *does* miracles. He does miracles *any time* He wants to, *any place* He wants to—but He has not granted that power to someone to choose to do it or not. People today who make these claims that they are speaking for the Lord—*they are frauds!* And by the way: In the last six months, we have had dozens and dozens and *dozens* of people who have *proven* themselves to be false prophets by saying that the Lord told them what was going to happen in this election—except they were *one hundred percent absolutely wrong!* How many of them? *All of them!*

When someone claims to be speaking *verbally* for the Lord today—*they are a fraud!* Do I sound like I'm not leaving any room for any alternatives? *I am*, and I am on purpose, because "God...*has* spoken to us in His Son" (Heb. 1:1-2), and "everything" we need for "life and godliness" (2 Pet. 1:3) is made known to us through His Son (Lk. 10:16; Jn. 13:20; 1 Thess. 4:2), through His Word (2 Tim. 3:15-17; 2 Pet. 1:21), taught to us by the Holy Spirit (Lk. 24:45; 1 Cor. 2:12; 1 Jn. 2:20, 27).

Jesus's words are as strong as they could possibly be: "I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness.'" *Can you imagine how awful*, to be thinking that you are coming to the moment when you're going to hear: "Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21-23)—and instead, you hear: "Get out of here! Depart from Me! I never knew you!" And by the way: you can't even word-study yourself into softening that. The word "never" means "*never*"—not for a *single moment!* (1 Jn. 2:19)

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He doesn't mean He doesn't know anything about them—He knows *everything* about them in perfect detail (Heb. 4:13; cf. Ps. 147:5). But He means *there is no relationship here* (e.g., Jn. 13:18; Gal. 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:19)—there is no friendship, there is no fellowship, there is no salvation, there is no forgiveness, there is no reconciliation, there is no hope— "Depart from Me! I never knew you!" And "depart" implies going away to *judgment* (Matt. 25:41)—that's where the "broad way" leads.

And it's interesting how He describes them. Remember: *very religious people*, claiming to do all of these spiritual things! And He says: "You are practicing lawlessness." That's a really interesting way to describe people who hammer away on what God says—they *think*. They're so proud of their religious activities, but He's saying they have all been done apart from *real* submission to the Law of God—because if you *did* submit to the Law of God, it would lead you to the Savior (Deut. 18:15; Is. 9:6; Mic. 5:2; Acts 3:21-24), and you would act solely upon His Word (Deut. 18:18-19).

These people who Jesus condemns in this passage are not fire-breathing ogres who terrify people around them. They come to you in "sheep's clothing." They pretend to belong to the Great Shepherd! They pretend to be part of the flock. They themselves would declare themselves "under-shepherds." They look good; they sound good, by normal appearances. They even speak *true words*, sometimes (e.g., Deut. 13:2)—maybe even more times than not. But if they don't know the Lord, it doesn't do any good.

Remember in the Old Testament: Balaam—he was the prophet-for-sale to the highest bidder (Num. 22:5-7). He spoke the truth sometimes (Num. 22:38), but so did his donkey (2 Pet. 2:15-16). You can't just get "sometimes." There's that man Demas—he's the one Paul calls out by name, and he condemns him in Second Timothy Chapter 4, Verse 10. He may have preached many fine sermons (Col. 4:14; Philem. 24)—but he was a false prophet. There's Judas Iscariot—*he was among the original Twelve!* He was one of the ones who Jesus sent out to heal the sick, cast out demons and preach the Gospel of the Kingdom (Matt. 10:7-8)—but he wasn't for real; he was "the son of perdition" (Jn. 17:12; cf. Jn. 6:70-71; Acts 1:25).

Learn to be discerning and wary (Matt. 7:6). "Enter through the narrow gate" (Matt. 7:13). "Beware of the false prophets" (Matt. 7:15). Now, that's talking mainly about the false *teachers*—the ones who *call* people onto the "broad way" and say, "Follow me! Here's the way to Heaven"—and they're misrepresenting it.

But He also talks about true and false *hearers* (Ezek. 13:19). There's a beautiful collection of word pictures here, in Verses 24 through 27. He's not talking about the preachers now; He's talking about everybody. He says: "Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall."

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Now again, there's the contrast: There are *two* kinds of builders; they're contrasted on three different things. Both of them are descriptions of people who know what Jesus said—they hear His words; they are "hearers...of the word" (Jas. 1:22). But notice again, as through this passage: there are only *two* categories, two kinds of builders. There's the character of the builders: one is called "wise," and one is called "foolish." There's the manner of construction: some build on the good foundation; some build on the bad foundation. And there is the outcome: permanence, or total destruction.

Would you notice that nothing is said of different building materials. If you will, the "house" would seem to be a description of the life: What have you based your life upon? How are you living it? But He doesn't say anything about different materials. He doesn't talk about different *styles* of houses. He doesn't talk about different *sizes* of houses.

Now again: Where is He? He's on a mountain—we would call it a molehill, because we live in Idaho—overlooking part of the Sea of Galilee; you can see a lot of the land of Israel from there. In that part of the world, rain is not very plentiful; but when it comes, it can come in heavy doses. Israel gets most of its rainfall in a very short period of time each year. During the long dry season, a house could be built pretty much anywhere; the ground is hard and dry—but many of those areas are subject to flash flooding when the dry season ends and that hard ground is suddenly inundated with water. A nice valley could be a delightful place to build, maybe a little bit cooler than where there is more open access to direct sunlight. Maybe it would be fine in most years, but one day ever several years, it could be inundated with a flash flood; and at that time, *everything* depends upon the *foundation*—not the *size* of the house, the foundation.

The day of testing arrives for both houses. Jesus is not saying it's different for different people; He's saying *everyone* will be tested in the fire of judgment. Read about that for believers in First Corinthians Chapter 3; read about that for unbelievers in the Great White Throne Judgment in Revelation Chapter 20.

In the metaphor here, down pours the rain. Cloudburst after cloudburst rolls in, buffeted by the winds coming off the Mediterranean Sea. And that beautiful valley would suddenly be home to a brook, and then a stream, and then a torrent—swift and furious. And suddenly, it isn't just the *roof* that you worked so hard on to spare you from the rain and repel the rain—now, the *walls* are being assaulted, and the entire house is washed away, unless it stands firmly anchored to an unmoving foundation. The *only reason* a house stands in that kind of a situation is because it is anchored on the rock (Prov. 10:25).

And you see the application: That's how it is with *every person* who hears Jesus's words, with *every person* who hears the Gospel. Some respond with an emotional response, a sentimental response. You've seen the Parable of the Four Kinds of Soils; and in two of them, it looks like an immediate response, but they—to switch over to the metaphor of the gates—they refused to strip off their baggage and enter through the turnstile of that "narrow gate"; and so, they choose that easier, more convenient way; they don't want to take an unpopular stand. And eventually they turn and they don't follow anymore, and it becomes evident that they *never knew Him* (Jn. 8:31; Heb. 3:14; 1 Jn. 2:19).

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Many wash away from that phony faith when a severe trial comes. They might proclaim that "Christianity doesn't work!" Well, the fact is, *they never tried the real thing*—they tried a caricature.

But *this passage* is about those who take the manifestation of their apostasy *all the way to the end*. They *continue* to say, "Lord, Lord." They *continue* to do those flashy things to get people to follow them. Some of them actually survive clear to the end; but then, when the refining fires of judgment—or, the "flood" of judgment, to use this metaphor—comes to their lives, it will be evident that they refused to build upon the "rock"! And what does it say? "And great was its fall." Great *disastrous* destruction, for eternity. Don't be one of them!

Jesus had several half-brothers who did not believe in Him during His life (Matt. 13:55; Jn. 7:5)—actually wanted to make Him go away. But they came to the Lord. You know, if you resented your older brother, who was always right; and then He rose from the dead, that would get your attention. It did; they came to faith. One of those half-brothers is James, who became the leader of the church at Jerusalem (Gal. 1:19; cf. Acts 12:17; 15:13; 21:18).

He wrote his little epistle, and he said *the same thing* that Jesus said: "Therefore, putting aside all filthiness and all that remains of wickedness, in humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves" (Jas. 1:21-22). He's saying exactly what Jesus did. "If you hear these words of Mine, and you build upon the rock that they are, you'll stand. Otherwise, you won't."

Receiving God's Word in such a manner that it becomes "implanted" is analogous to just building your spiritual house on the rock. Let it "take you over," if you will. Or, the way the Apostle Paul put it in Colossians Chapter 3: "Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you" (Col. 3:16)—not just lip service; let it change you (1 Pet. 2:2).

And by the way: Neither James nor Jesus was teaching "salvation by works" in this passage. If anything, this passage teaches us that your works will do *nothing* for you, because *it's not the building itself* that determines whether you stand or fall—*it's the foundation*—what you built *upon*. The basis for our survival of judgment is about whether or not the spiritual "house" is "built" on "the rock."

And remember, He said: "Depart from Me, you who practice *lawlessness*." How could these *preachers*, how could these people who talk about the Bible all the time—how could they be "*lawless*"?

Well, if they truly believed the Law, the Law would tell them about their sin (Rom. 3:20) and drive them to the Savior, and they would build their house "on the rock"—which is "Christ" (Gal. 3:24)—and the foundation of the rock, which is His Word. The *whole determining factor* is whether or not it's built upon the "rock."

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Now, there is a Postscript to this great sermon: Verses 28 and 29. Look at this; this is no longer Jesus talking now, this is part of Matthew's inspired recollection and record of this: "When Jesus had finished these words, the crowds were amazed at His teaching; for He was teaching them as one having authority, and not as their scribes."

What does that tell you? It tells you that all those people who were teaching—*they were false teachers!* People had *never heard* anything like what Jesus said! They taught works-righteousness: you become righteous by doing your works, and therefore God accepts you. And Jesus had said *countless times*: "No, that's not the case!" (see Gen. 15:6; Is. 53:11; Rom. 9:31-32; 10:3-4; Gal. 2:21; 3:21)

All that we've heard through this sermon—I know you've heard *my* words; I don't mean just *this* sermon today, I mean this Sermon on the Mount—you've heard my comments; I've tried to help you understand it, but *this is not an opinion!* This is what *God says* to all of us (Matt. 10:40b).

And notice, it says they were "amazed at His teaching." The word "amazed" literally means something like "stricken out of themselves." Various translations in English have struggled to try to find the best way to put that into English. Among them are: "they were filled with amazement," "stunned," "astonished," "astounded," "awed," or "dumbfounded." The Amplified New Testament says they were "astonished and overwhelmed with bewildered wonder" (AMPC). Why? Because Jesus was *so different* from their religious leaders (cf. Matt. 22:46; Jn. 7:46).

For one thing, *He spoke the truth*—and the *whole truth*, and *nothing but* the truth! He didn't evade *anything!* He didn't hem and haw about it and say, "Well, there are seven opinions of this, and I go with Rabbi Number 4." No. No politicking. No mincing words.

He presented matters of great significance. He didn't skirt anything. He talked about life and death. He didn't get hung up on trivialities.

His teaching was systematic. There was no rambling; He just pointed to the truth, and He gave evocative presentations of the truth, perfectly illustrated.

His teaching was interesting and compelling; people came from *all around* just to hear Him! Just on a *human level*, He was *that* compelling—never mind that He was God, and He was speaking matters of eternal life and death! He was *masterful* in His use of words.

He spoke as a lover of men. This wasn't just academic; this wasn't theoretical, this wasn't philosophical. He knew that He was going to go to a lonely cross, and He was going to die for those to whom He was preaching (Gal. 2:20; Rev. 1:5); this was *real*.

And He spoke with "authority." This is *direct* revelation from God (cf. Matt. 24:35)—not philosophizing about different ideas and different theories. He poured out streams of "living water" (Jn. 7:38), to use one of His own metaphors.

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So, when you come to the end of the Sermon on the Mount, the obvious question is: What will *you* do with the words of Jesus? The advertisements say you don't want to leave home without your American Express card; but for the sake of your soul for all of eternity, I beg you: Don't leave here this morning without putting your life *squarely* on the foundation of Jesus Christ, the "rock" of salvation, committed *fully* to His completed, inscripturated Word! *That* is what He calls you to (Acts 13:48a). Leave your baggage at the turnstile, like we said back in Verse 13.

And by the way: Once you let it go, you're going to be happier without it (Phil. 3:7-8). Don't rebel at the difficulty of the way (Matt. 11:30; 1 Jn. 5:3b). Trust Jesus to be with you; He *will* enable you every step of the way (Phil. 4:13).

And if you hear anybody preach that you should come to Jesus so that *you* can get *your* uncomfortable things made comfortable, that you can get *your* health, that you can have *your* wealth—if you hear anybody say, "Come to Jesus so you can have 'your best life now,' " *you are listening to a fraud!* *Everybody* who preaches a gospel of comfort is preaching a *gospel from Satan!* *It's not about us being comfortable!* I can tell you that God promises that if you come to Him—if you "desire to live godly in Christ Jesus"—which means, building your house on the foundation—you "will be persecuted" (2 Tim. 3:12), because everybody who hates Jesus will hate you (Jn. 15:18-19), and "the whole world lies in the power of the evil one" (1 Jn. 5:19). It's the "narrow" gate, it's the *constricted* way! There *are* difficulties along the way (Acts 14:22; cf. Ps. 34:19; Jn. 16:33). If you want to read a fantastic, massive exposition based upon this text, go read "Pilgrim's Progress" again! That's what he was talking about!

Look forward to your destination (1 Pet. 1:13; cf. Rom. 8:18; 2 Thess. 1:7; 2 Tim. 4:18). You don't become a Christian in order to have a cool life now, the way you want it to be. You come to be a Christian in order to *honor Christ*, in order to follow Him. And trust me: If you keep your eye on that destination, like the writer of Hebrews says: "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith" (Heb. 12:2)—or, to use the trivial metaphor: If you "keep your eyes on the prize," *it's worth it!* When you hear His voice say: "Well done, good and faithful slave" (Matt. 25:21, 23), you won't care about any of the difficulties that you have faced in this life (Is. 65:17). It will be rewarded in the presence of God forever, beyond *anything* you could dream.

Along the way, there will be many attacks (Ps. 119:157; 1 Cor. 16:9). There will be many seductive voices trying to woo you from the path (Matt. 24:24). But remember: You have "everything" you need for "life and godliness" through "the true knowledge" of His Son (2 Pet. 1:3), and it is all revealed in His Word (2 Tim. 3:15-17).

My friends, these are indeed Jesus's Scariest Words. And remember: He *especially* focused on the ones who were the most religious people the world ever knew at that time; He singled out *their* scribes as false teachers. He told them that their version of righteousness would *never get anybody* there! You must have something *completely surpassing* that form of works-righteousness (Matt. 5:20; cf. Jas. 2:10; Phil. 3:9).

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But unless you're building your life anchored on His words and what He accomplished for you on the Cross, you are in danger of someday hearing from Him those bone-chilling words: "I never knew you; depart from Me."

When someone left a church where I was pastor, they told me it was, in part, because a relative of theirs, who also came to the church, was disturbed when I challenged people to examine themselves and make sure they are in the faith; and that relative, when hearing that message, would go into a tailspin of depression and anxiety, hearing about a passage like this (cf. Acts 24:25).

I don't like driving people away from church! Trust me, *it's no fun* being the number one reason that people leave a church—and that's what the pastor almost always is! I don't want to drive anybody away, but *I can't get around the responsibility that we shepherds have!* You remember it: Hebrews 13:17—"Obey your leaders and submit to them, for"—listen to this—"they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you." (see Ezek. 3:18-19; Acts 20:26-27)

And I'll tell you, nothing sobers me more—or anybody else who proclaims God's Word—than to think that someone who has heard me preach and teach for years would come to see the Lord face-to-face, and He would say, "I never knew you."

I look around the room, and everybody here that I know personally, well enough to have had a conversation about it with you—I don't see anybody here that I don't think has a testimony of faith in Christ. But He stuck in that word "many"—"*Many* will say to Me on that day..." *Who?* I don't know! I don't know.

But which do you love—your sin, or Jesus? Which do you cringe from—you sin, or Jesus? My friends, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test?" (2 Cor. 13:5).

I showed you this a few weeks ago, back in the "gates" and "ways" passage: Luke 9:23—Jesus "was saying to them all, 'If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.' " The cross is the symbol of death: "Be willing to die, rather than to desert Me." (see Acts 21:23; Heb. 11:36-38; Rev. 12:11)

Or, there's that other kind of invitation; He gave this also to those same Pharisee-infested people: Matthew 11:28-30—"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden"—those are the ones who are "weary and heavy-laden" from trying to be good enough, trying to master all the do's and don'ts—"Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light." Yes, you'll have "rest for your souls," but *you have to get into the yoke!* You have to be willing, in that metaphor, to walk side-by-side *with Jesus*. Different metaphor: Build your house upon "the rock"—which is His "words."

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Understand: The Bible is not ambiguous. Romans 3:23—"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." "All" means every single one of us (Is. 53:6; Rom. 5:12). Romans 6:23—"For the wages of sin is death"—wages are what you *earn*, that's what you deserve (Rom. 4:4)—"but the free gift"—that which you *can't earn*—"the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

I was sitting in the early part of the service, and I decided what I'm going to preach on next week. I aint saying, *but* I want to talk to you about what you *have* in Christ, *so that you know* the flood of judgment *will not destroy* what you've done.

Now, I'm not Jesus, but I'm speaking to you on His behalf; and I've never found any words better than those that He gave through the pen of the Apostle Paul in Second Corinthians 5:20 and 21: "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him."

Let's pray:

*Father, thank You for Your Word—even this scary collection of words from Your Son. Father, my prayer couldn't be more simple: Please, do not let anyone go from this place, not building their house on "the rock," not standing on Christ alone—by faith alone, through Your grace alone, based upon Your Word alone, and for Your glory alone. You know what needs to be done in each of our hearts; so, do it, we pray.*

*And Father, there are those, who we also want to lift up to You, in special situations—for Madeleine Howell, still recovering from her heart valve replacement; for Candy Smith, and her broken leg; for Roger Wright, and his surgery scheduled tomorrow—we pray that it will have the effect of granting him relief from this awful back pain.*

*Father, we pray for our President and all those in positions of leadership over us. And we pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ who are truly experiencing the persecution that You have said would come. We pray for Grace Life Church in Edmonton; give them wisdom, boldness, steadfastness, grace. Please turn around this awful decision to fence that church and block the way—that people would see that they are powerless against Your will to build Your Church. And Lord, there are others like them in other states—maybe not to that level, but other places around here; and then around the world, people whose houses are being burned, whose churches are being burned, whose villages are being ruined because people have come to faith in Christ.*

*Father, we don't ask for persecution, but we ask that we would be building our house upon "the rock," so that if it should come—when it should come—we will stand firm in our Savior, in whose name we pray. Amen.*