

“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? And in thy name have cast out devils? And in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity,” (Matthew 7:21 – 23.)

To say that the people Jesus described in the above passage were surprised, or disappointed, would be to put it mildly. It would probably be impossible to accurately describe their feelings. When they heard Jesus say, “I never knew you, depart from me.” These words meant that they had missed heaven, and would be eternally lost with the wicked of all ages. These words meant that all hope was gone. There would never be another chance to make amends for their errors. Perhaps the saddest thing about their judgment is that they had lived in hope and anticipation of going to heaven. It’s important that we ask, Why these were lost; because these words could fall upon our ears if we make the same mistake that they made.

Why were these people lost? Let’s first consider some things that were not the reason.

1) They were not lost because of a failure to believe in Jesus. It was in Jesus’ name that they said they had preached, cast out devils, and done many wonderful works. Their disappointment at the judgment scene indicates their faith in Christ. We could easily understand their being lost if they had been unbelievers. The unbeliever has no hope of heaven. In John 8:24 Jesus said, “I said therefore unto you, that ye shall die in your sins: for if ye believe not that I am he, ye shall die in your sins.” And in verse 21 he said, “I go away, and ye shall seek me, and shall die in your sins: whither I go, ye cannot come.” The unbeliever will die in his sins, and by doing this he cannot be with Jesus in eternity. In Matthew 7:21 – 23 Jesus is sounding out a warning for all generations. A warning that just believing on him is not enough. It is possible for one to believe in vain (1 Cor. 15:2). James also emphasized the fact that belief is not enough. He asked, “What does it profit, my brethren, though a man say he has faith, and has not works? Can faith save him?” James answered this question by saying, “Faith, if it hath not works is dead, being alone”(James 2:14, 17). The people Jesus described were not unbelievers, nor were they people who believed they could be saved by faith alone; they were actively expressing their faith by doing many wonderful works.

2) They were not lost because of being wicked and immoral. They obviously hated sin and Satan, for they said “In thy name we have cast out devils.” This would indicate that they were fighting against the works of the devil. We could understand their being lost had Jesus indicated that they were immoral people. The immoral have no hope of eternal life. In Revelation 21:8 Jesus said, “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolators, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone.” Jesus did not leave the impression that the people of Matthew 7:22 were immoral people.

3) They were not lost because they refused to tell others about Jesus. They said that they had been preaching in his name. This would indicate that they were not ashamed of Christ, or to tell others about him. If they had been ashamed to tell others of Christ, we could better understand

their being lost. In Luke 9:26 Jesus said, "For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come In his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels." Those who are ashamed to share Christ and the gospel with others will miss heaven.

4) They were not lost because of being insensitive or indifferent toward the needs of others. They said, "Have we not in thy name done many wonderful works?" Jesus did not deny any statement that they made. As followers of Christ we must be involved in doing-good to others. In Galatians 6:10, Paul wrote, "As ye have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." Some will be lost because of being insensitive to the needs of others. In Matthew 25:41 – 46 Jesus pictures some being lost for not helping those that they had an opportunity to help. He said, "Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: For I was a hungered, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked and ye clothed me not: sick and in prison, and ye visited me not." These people then asked Jesus when they had failed to do this, and he said, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into life, eternal." Those in Matthew 7:22 were not lost because of a failure to care for the needs of others.

Why were these apparently sincere, morally good, working religious people lost? The answer is in the words of Jesus, "I never knew you." They had never become a child of God. Though they believed on Christ, hated sin, told others about him, and did many wonderful works, they were not Christians. Those who believe that we are saved by faith only need to ponder, these words of Jesus. Those who believe that all we have to do is be sincere about our belief should listen carefully to these words of Jesus. Those who believe that we can be saved by doing many good works need to listen to these words. While our salvation does depend on our belief in Christ, our rejection of sin, our sincerity in our belief, and our doing good works, there is more involved than these. As indicated in the text, we may be sincerely religious and still be lost.

Why had Jesus never known these people? They believed on him, which is essential to salvation (John 8:24). They obviously had the right attitude toward sin, which is required for salvation (Acts 17:30). They had confessed Christ to others, which is essential to salvation (Romans 10:10). Though they had done these things, they still lacked something, for Jesus had never known them. This was not an oversight on his part. In John 10:14 Jesus said, "I am the good Shepherd and know my sheep, and am known of mine." And in 2 Timothy 2:19 Paul said, "The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his." There is one thing for sure, the Lord doesn't forget who his children are, he knows each of them.

Why had Jesus never known these people in Matthew 7:22? There is one command of the Lord that most religious people reject as a prerequisite to salvation. It is listed in most church manuals as a "Church ordinance." It is listed in the Bible as a command of the Lord. This command is baptism. In Mark 16:15 – 16 Jesus said, "Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature, He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." To whom is the promise of salvation made? Is salvation promised to the one who believes and is not baptized? In 1 Peter 3:21, the Bible states, "Baptism doth also now save us."

Yet, multitudes are taught that baptism does not save us. In Acts 2:37 – 38, when the people heard the gospel and thereby came to realize they were lost, they asked, “Men and brethren, what shall we do? Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.” Ananias, who was sent by Jesus to tell Saul what he must do, said, “And now why tarriest thou? Arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord” (Acts 22:16). Saul had been fasting and praying for three days before Ananias came with this message from Jesus. Saul was certainly a penitent believer in Christ, but his sins were not washed away until he obeyed the Lord’s command to be baptized. Since Jesus had never known those of Matthew 7:22, it seems evident that they had never been baptized for the right reason.

Baptism is the act of obedience in God’s will that puts the believer into Christ. In Galatians 3:26 Paul shows that we are children of God in Christ. In verse 27 he said, “For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Paul also taught this in Romans 6:3, “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized Into his death?” Since we are children of God IN Christ and since we are baptized INTO Christ, until we are baptized into Christ we are not the children of God, and thereby Christ does not know us as such. If the people of Matthew 7:22 had been baptized into Christ, Jesus would not have said, “I never knew you.”

Jesus made it clear that only those who do the will of God will enter into the kingdom of heaven. It doesn’t make any difference how sincerely one may believe in Christ, or how penitent of his sins he may be, or how dedicated one is to doing good works, unless he does the will of God, he will be lost eternally. It isn’t enough to be religious, we must be religiously right. The people in Matthew 7:22 were religious, but Jesus said they were workers of iniquity. Iniquity involves acting without law. We must use care not to go beyond that which Christ has authorized for us. In both Old and New Testaments God has forbidden people, to add to or take from his laws (Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18 – 19). Jesus said, “in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men” (Matthew 15:9). Men have no right to enact church laws and rules for people who want to serve God. To do so is iniquitous. We can be sure of our salvation only when our life is in harmony with God’s will. We are encouraged to “Study to show thyself approved unto God” (2 Timothy 2:15). In 2 Peter 1:10 we are encouraged to “Give diligence to make your calling and election sure.” We can do this only when we diligently study and obey God’s word. The judgment will be a poor place to find out that we were following the laws of men, rather than the will of God. Don’t be among those who were never known by the Lord.