

Matthew 7:21, 24-29

**Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. "Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash." When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.**

They were more interested in Jesus the phenomenon than in Jesus the Savior. More interested in Jesus the science experiment than in Jesus the ticket into heaven. More interested in seeing something mind blowing than in Jesus the one who would reconcile them with the Father. So Jesus stood there in that synagogue and he hit them with truth. "I know what you're thinking. You want me to perform. You want me to amaze. You're not interested in me saving you."

That was a harsh enough critique, but Jesus wasn't done yet. He went on to sting them with this comment: "There were lots of widows in Israel in Elijah's time during that famine, but – I'm sure you noticed – God's rep didn't go to them. He exited Israel. He went to Zarephath." Do you see why that ticked off those Nazarenes so badly? Jesus was saying, "You guys remind me of Elijah's Israel and I know you know how God treated them at that time. He up and left." In a nutshell Jesus was saying to them, "Because you're treating me this way, God is outta here." In the opinion of those Nazarenes that was one step too far. They tried to push him off a cliff.

Let me tell you why that story is important to us. I'm going to borrow some language from the Apostle Paul to do it. Those ancient Nazarenes were natural branches on God's olive tree. Jesus was sent to them and for them. He was specifically for Israel. Not for us. We're not Jews. We're wild olive branches that God grafted into the spot on his tree that was left bare when he broke off the Nazarenes, the natural branches. And here's where the rubber hits the road. What if we start getting bored with Jesus? What if we start thinking Jesus is interesting, fascinating, and nice, but not essential? What if? How long will it take before God says, "Ok. If that's how you feel about the world's greatest gift, I'm outta here." I can say this. It's not a question we should ever try getting an answer to. Matthew chapter seven makes that clear to us. It reminds us to value Jesus and his teaching as our only ticket into heaven.

Look at how serious an issue this is. **"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." (v. 21)** Do you see how much value God assigns to Jesus teaching? Jesus is fast-

forwarding us to a desperate moment. It's that moment all of us will face when we are evaluated by God as to where our eternal destination will be. In the verse, people are begging Jesus, "Lord, Lord, let me into your heaven." They are desperate because the answer will determine their eternity. That let's us see the gravity of the situation. This is the biggest moment of a person's life. Think about it. There are a lot of what I'll call "awful almosts." There's almost having enough gas in your tank; almost having a winning lottery ticket; and almost getting a job; and then there's this one... almost making it into the kingdom of heaven, but getting barred.

If there's anything that mounting years teach a person it's this: the future always arrives. The moment will come when you will stand before God. The moment will come when your daughter will stand before God. The moment will arrive when your husband will stand before God. It's going to happen. And so let's be real about that. Let's be honest with ourselves too and admit that it's a possibility that in that moment your worst nightmare will be realized. Because in that moment you or your loved one will say in desperation, "Lord, Lord," and Jesus will look at you (or your loved one!) and say the four most devastating words that a person can ever hear, "I never knew you." Let me state the obvious. That future is totally unacceptable to us. I want to be an, "I made it." You want to be an, "I made it." We want each other to be an, "I made it." And, thankfully, in this section we're handed the way to make that happen.

Jesus told us who will enter the kingdom of heaven, "the one doing the will of my Father in heaven." Before we unpack what that means let's notice how this Scripture goes on. Two metaphorical houses show up in Jesus' words. One is built on a rock. One is built on the sand. The results speak for themselves. One is like New Jersey in Hurricane Sandy. The other stands firm. Which house are you constructing in your life? We can know the answer to that question. These words are really an extended simile of what Jesus just said. You're building a house on a rock when you hear Jesus' words and you put them into practice. That's the same thing as doing the will of Jesus' Father. It's just saying it in simile form.

How important is it to have a solidly constructed, well-founded spiritual building in your life? Consider this: In 1989 San Francisco was struck by an earthquake that was 7.0 on the Richter scale. That quake that happened in Haiti? That was a 7.0 too. Get this though. In San Francisco 12,000 people were left homeless and just 63 were killed. On the other hand, in Haiti 1.5 million people were made homeless and the death toll is over 200,000 people. We learned something from Haiti. Earthquakes don't kill people. Bad buildings do. There's a spiritual lesson there. It would be the understatement of the year to say that a solidly founded house is important. It is absolutely essential or we will be another tragic almost made it, but I got barred from heaven.

Hopefully we're all on board now. We want to have a solidly constructed, well-founded spiritual house. We want to put Jesus' words into practice. We actually want to do the Father's will, right? So what exactly does it mean to do the Father's will? In order to figure that out, we have a couple of options right now. We could read Jesus' entire sermon where this Scripture comes from. It's called the Sermon on the Mount. If we did that though we would have to read it and then also study it together 'cause there are some difficult parts to it that we'd have to wrestle through. We're not going to do that right now. To quote

another Scripture, there's a time and place for everything. Now is the time for a sermon not an exhaustive Bible study.

This is, however, an important enough question that I do need to give you the cliff notes version. So many people in Jesus' time and so many people today still have God all wrong on this point. Ultimately God's will is this: believe in the one he sent, Jesus. The heart and core of Christianity has absolutely nothing to do with what you do in your life. It has everything to do with what you believe. Listen to what some people say in their moment of desperation before God that Jesus depicts in the next verse: **"Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?'" (v. 22)** Do you see how confused they are? "But Jesus, we talked about you." "But Jesus, we did miracles for you." "But Jesus I worked hard." "But Jesus I was a nice person." But Jesus. But Jesus. But Jesus. They were figuring to themselves, "I talk about Jesus. I'm in." Or, "I did some really great stuff for God. I'm in." And they were devastatingly wrong. Moral performance or above average human behavior is not the ticket into God's heaven.

Let me tell you what is, but I have to take the long way. I was at a wedding last week and I found it fascinating. It's one of those rare times in life when one morning you wake up single and the next morning you wake up married. It's even more intense in a wedding service. You start the service single. You end it hitched. And what changes that status? Promises do. Think about it. One minute a person is single and free as a bird. The next a person is yoked to another person for life. And what changed? Not past behavior. Not the way you've lived, but what you've promised. That's God's way too. We don't get a ticket into heaven with our past behavior (only get a ticket in the other direction with that). We don't get a ticket for the way we've lived. We get a ticket by believing God's promises. Finally, it's his promises that hand us our ticket into heaven. Think about it. He promised to send his Son. Boom. Christmas happened. He promised that Jesus would pay off the world's debt and our individual sin with God. Boom. The cross happened. He promised to give us our tickets into the pearly gates. Boom. Jesus rose from the dead. That was God handing us all personally our tickets through heaven's gates. That's the deal. God's promises in Jesus Christ hand to us all the forgiveness we need to enter so that when the moment comes God says, "Come on in. I've been waiting for you." That's how it works.

Based on what I've just told you, make an observation with me about the people who get barred from heaven. Observe what they said and then what they didn't say. They said, "Lord, I can't believe you're not letting me. I talked about you." "Lord, I can't believe you're not letting me in. I did miracles for you." They brought the wrong tickets to heaven's gates. Now observe that not a single one of them said, "Lord, why aren't you letting me in? I trusted that your death paid my debt with God." Not a single one of them said, "Lord, why aren't you letting me in? I trusted that your resurrection proves that I've been acquitted in your court." Not a single one of them said stuff like that. Why not? Because no one ever will. People who trust in Jesus are bringing the right ticket to the entrance. They all get in.

It's still true. When people treat their heavenly entrance passes as an after thought, God has a history of picking them up and handing them out in other places to other people who actually want them. We know that from those Nazarenes. It's possible that in some future

version of Brillion or of Northeast Wisconsin God will say, "I'm outta here with my tickets." But that's not happening today. Not here. Not now. Today we were handed entrance passes through the pearly gates, God's promises to us in Jesus Christ. More than that... today we're holding on to those tickets like our lives depend on them because, honestly, they do. Amen.