

Matthew 7.21-23
By the Manner of Our Living
WRCOB 9.22.24

Today, we will look at three verses
From the epilog of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

After covering the ethics of kingdom living
The qualities and characteristics Jesus is looking for

Jesus closes his sermon with a striking warning.

Not everyone who calls Jesus Lord will be saved.

As important as that confession might be
As significant a step in faith
Jesus says, it's not enough

In fact, not only not enough
But that one will not enter the kingdom of heaven
Based on confession alone.

Faith requires more than just a verbal profession of faith.

Faith in Jesus is not just a head affirmation
It is a heart affirmation

For Paul says

1

Romans 10:9 CEB

**^{9a} . . . if you confess with your mouth "Jesus is Lord"
and in your heart you have faith that God raised him
from the dead, you will be saved**

Not only, faith requires aligning our will with the will of God.

I don't think there is a more concise statement
In the whole of the Bible

That so clearly states
That the essence of faith is not in our words
Nor in our religiosity

Not even performing spectacular deeds
In the name of Jesus.

Rather, the essence of faith
Will be known by the fruit it bears.

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In 1958, AC celebrated the church's 250-year anniversary

The Moderator, Desmond Bittinger, my great-uncle
In his opening sermon
Quoted Brethren founder, Alexander Mack Sr.

Mack was asked by his contemporaries
How the Brethren would be known
And he responded as quotes by Bittinger

2

We wish to be known by the manner of our living

Meaning, of course, that a Christian's true identity
Is most clearly witnessed in actions
Rather than religious pronouncements.

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Jesus' warning, I admit, is a bit disturbing.

But Jesus was concerned with the hypocrisy
He saw in the religion of the day.

The earlier passage we read, verses 15-20
Jesus condemns right practice with wrong attitude

Beware, he preached, of those leaders
Who are wolves dressed in sheep's clothing
You will know them by their fruits.

He says, if you want to know what kind of tree it is
Look at the fruit it produces.

What we do reveals who we are.

Jesus saw through the Pharisees' hypocrisy.

He warns his followers, don't be like them.

Not everyone who says to Jesus, "Lord, Lord"
Will enter the kingdom of heaven.

He will declare, "I never knew you!"

He won't know you
Because you've not had
A heart to heart relationship with him

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It all comes down to this.

Neither the good, important words we say
Nor even the good, important deeds we do
Can ever substitute for properly motivated right living.

We've seen too many ministers fall from grace
Because their personal life
Did not match their public life.

Jesus wants authenticity.

In today's atmosphere of cynicism toward the church
There is nothing more damaging
To the cause of Christ

Than claiming to be Christian
Claiming to have the corner on truth
Claiming to be transformed by the Holy Spirit
And living a life that proves otherwise.

William Barclay, in his commentary, writes

3

More people have been brought into the church by the kindness of real Christian love than by all the theological arguments in the world

4

And more people have been driven away from the church by the hardness and ugliness of so-called Christianity than by all the doubts in the world.

Jesus sees through fake, imitation, Christians.

We must not proclaim Jesus as Lord
And live a life counter to his ways.

I am very troubled when I saw people carrying posters
With the words, "Jesus Saves"
Forcing their way into the nation's capital building
On January 6, 2021

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The rise of Christian Nationalism concerns me greatly.

I believe it is not authentic Christianity

Drew Strait, professor of New Testament
At the Anabaptist Mennonite Biblical Seminary
Defines Christian Nationalism

6

*As a worldview where one's theological imagination is
coopted by state power.*

7

*It exchanges the church's loyalty to the Lord of Peace for a
false god fashioned by the myth of American exceptionalism.*

8

*In fact, Christian nationalism is a form of political idolatry that
distorts our knowledge of God and neighbor through a
xenophobic, racialized and militarized gospel that is at odds
with the life and teachings of Jesus.*

Russell Moore, editor of Christianity Today
Said that when he saw a "Jesus Saves" sign
Displayed near gallows built by rioters,

9

*"I was enraged to a degree that I haven't been enraged in
memory. This is not only dangerous and unpatriotic but also
blasphemous, presenting a picture of the gospel of Jesus
Christ that isn't the gospel and is instead its exact reverse."*

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If we are to take the Sermon on the Mount seriously
And consider it our treatise on Christian ethics

And if our character is to be an imitation of Jesus

Rather than storming the capital
We should express our faith
Through the qualities of the beatitudes
Found in the beginning of the sermon

We are to exhibit meekness and mercy
We are to hunger and thirst for right relationships

We are to be pure in heart
And above all, to be peacemakers.

Our ultimate allegiance is to a higher power
Than the governing body we live under.

While we must reject the toxic blend
Of faith and nationalism
That seeks to impose its will on others.

We can still be patriotic and engage in public life.

Our faith calls us to be salt and light in the world
Advocating for justice and compassion.

We can participate in political discourse.

But always guided by the teachings of Christ
Seeking common ground
And promoting dialogue rather than division.

Let our actions reflect our love for God and neighbor.
Not our allegiance to a political party.

We should not get patriotism and faith mixed up.

And that is what Christian Nationalism does.

It blends patriotism with piety
It associates allegiance to a nation with loyalty to God.

According to Andrew L. Whitehead
Professor of Sociology at Indiana University

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The Christianity of Christian Nationalism is very narrow and specific. It is typically white supremacist, nativist, and authoritarian.

Christian Nationalism uses the language of faith
But its heart is driven by fear and anger
And a desire for worldly power.

This is not the faith Jesus teaches!

Jesus never preached hate, exclusion, or violence.

Jesus preached love, compassion, and radical inclusivity.

He maintained a clear separation between politics and faith

11

Mark 12:17 NIV

^{17b} **“Give to Caesar what is Caesar’s and to God what is God’s.”**

Rather than God’s will

Christian Nationalism seeks to impose its will on others.

It seeks to use the power of the state

To enforce a narrow and distorted interpretation of faith.

It demonizes those who disagree, fostering division and fear.

True faith in Jesus is not about worldly power.

It is about worldly service.

12

Mark 10:45 NRSV

^{45a} **For the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve”**

13

John 13:15 CEB

15 I have given you an example: Just as I have done, you also must do.

The kingdom living Jesus teaches in the sermon
Is not about creating a Christian nation
But about building a kingdom of love and justice.

Because at the heart of Jesus' sermon
Is a message of love, compassion, and selflessness.

Jesus tells us to forgive others
And to care for the poor and marginalized.

He speaks of the importance of covenant relationships
Of humility in everything we do

He assures us not to worry about material possessions
Or outward appearances
But to focus on living a life of integrity.

We are to love our neighbor.

We are to seek justice
Speak out against oppression
Stand with the vulnerable
Advocate for a more just and equitable society

And we are to live in peace
Peace with ourselves and peace with others.

We must not participate in hate speech
Or any kind of violence

We are to seek peaceful solutions to conflicts
And build bridges toward understanding.

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So, let me ask.

Do we live out our faith as taught by Jesus in the SOM?

Or do we use faith as a tool to justify our own prejudices?

Jesus warns us.

Our salvation does not rest solely on our profession of faith

Our salvation rests on the grace of God

AND living out our faith in seeking the will of God.

Faith manifested in action is the faith Jesus teaches.

Faith that bears no fruit is dead.

James addresses it this way.

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James 2:26 NIV

²⁶ As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.

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May God grant us the grace

To live our faith in truth and love

And not by words alone

But by the manner of our living

That reflects the heart of Christ.