

## Don't Be Surprised

Zack Lee

Life is filled with surprises, some good, some bad. There is one surprise that I hope we will never experience. I am referring to the surprise of standing before God in judgment, having been a Christian for many years, only to be rejected by Him. Many would be surprised to find out that such a surprise is even possible, yet Jesus says that it is. As Jesus finishes up His Sermon on the Mount, he says, *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 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?’ And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness”* (Matt. 7:21-23).

This warning should concern everyone who is a Christian. Jesus is not speaking of atheists or agnostics. Neither is He speaking of those in religions who deny His authority and deity. He is speaking of us, those who call him “Lord”. Yet to the surprise of many, they are shocked to hear Jesus say, *“I never knew you, depart from me; you workers of lawlessness.”*

These are very religious people. Not only do they call Him, “Lord, Lord,” but they also recognize the power of His name. They claim to prophesy, cast out demons, and do many mighty works in the name of Jesus. These are people who openly profess Christ. Yet Jesus says their profession is not proof that they are on their way to heaven. Why? Their profession did not match up with their practice.

The people Jesus refer to have deceived themselves into thinking that they are on the right path, but their true condition before God is a disaster. Their profession of Christ is empty because they do not live by the demands of His Lordship. According to Jesus, these people do not “do the will of my Father” and are “workers of lawlessness.” In Luke 6:46, Jesus asked, *“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?”* This is the same problem with the people in Matthew 7. They act and sound religious. They may attend worship service and be involved in the church, but when it comes right down to it they refuse to do the will of God. There are many people who claim to be Christians yet there is a huge gap between their profession and their practice.

While this should be clear to us, according to Jesus it isn't. Let's look at a few examples of how this might play out:

- If you expect to go to heaven, you cannot claim to be a Christian and engage in adultery and fornication.
- If you expect to go to heaven, you cannot claim to be a Christian and hate your brother or sister in Christ (or anyone else for that matter).
- If you expect to go to heaven, you cannot claim to be a Christian and not forgive those who wrong you.
- If you expect to go to heaven, you cannot claim to be a Christian and serve two masters.
- If you expect to go to heaven, you cannot claim to be a Christian and lie, cheat, and steal.
- If you expect to go to heaven, you cannot claim to be a Christian and engage in continued, willful sin.

If you think you can, you are in for a big surprise come judgment day. Many people will try to argue with Christ on the Day of Judgment, listing all of their religious involvement, only to be shocked that they were not doing the will of God.

Can you imagine how terrible it would be to hear Jesus say, *“I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness?”* The worst thing that could ever happen is to be banished from the presence of God for all eternity. There will be no more opportunities for repentance or redemption.

So what can we do to avoid such a surprise? Let me suggest two things.

**Examine yourself regularly.** Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the danger of deceiving ourselves. *“Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves”* (2 Cor. 13:5). We should examine ourselves daily as we go through life. This is one reason for observing the Lord’s Supper. When observed, according to the teaching of the New Testament, the Lord’s Supper includes a time of self-examination. *“Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup”* (1 Cor. 11:28). Paul went on to say that a number of Christians in Corinth were “weak and ill, and some have died” because they did not examine themselves (1 Cor. 11:30).

**Allow the word of God to expose your sin.** Hebrews 4:12 says, *“For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and of marrow, and discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”* Self deception can be buried deep within our minds. God’s word is able to penetrate those deep, dark places and dig out the fraud that is found there if we allow it. When you read or listen to the word of God and something hits close to home, do you pay attention to the words or do you ignore them?

Do not be surprised on the Day of Judgment. Let’s be sure that our profession matches up with our practice.