I NEVER ACKNOWLEDGED YOU

"Not everyone who acknowledges me with the words, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who actually does the will of my heavenly Father. There will be many who will say to me on the day of judgment, 'Lord, Lord, in your name did we not prophesy, and in your name did we not cast out demons, and in your name did we not perform many miracles?' And then I will declare to them plainly: 'I have never acknowledged you. Depart from me you doers of iniquity (lawlessness).'"
Matthew 7:21-23

This section, following as it does the passage regarding false prophets and their being revealed by their deeds, might seem contradictory given that the people mentioned here clearly exclaim their deeds.

However, we now come to an example of a specific group of people who could be described as *one kind of false prophets* – people who make impressive claims, but whose lives did not bear *the fruit of righteousness*.

So keep seeking above all else the kingdom [of God] and the righteousness he demands, and all of these things will also be yours.
Matthew 6:33

Thus you will recognize them by their fruits (works).
Matthew 7:20

Matthew 7:21-23 then represents a striking illustration of the lesson given in Matthew 7:15-20. It provides a very serious warning at the end of the sermon, just prior to the final parable concerning the eschatological judgment.

Luke uses a parallel teaching of these words from Matthew 7:22-23 but in a different context.

When once the master of the house has risen and shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, 'Lord, open to us,' then he will answer you, 'I do not know where you come from.' Then you will begin to say, 'We ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in our streets.' But he will say, 'I tell you, I do not know where you come from. Depart from me, all you workers of evil!'
Luke 13:25-27

Luke's account concerns a master of a house and a group of people outside knocking at his door who refer to the master with a singular cry of *"Lord."* Matthew repeats the cry of the people as *"Lord, Lord."* In Luke's account the people do not refer to various charismatic deeds they had performed but rather to the fact that they had eaten and drank in the presence of the master and that he had taught in their streets.

Luke's account has the master replying, *"I do not know where you come from."* Whereas Matthew's account has Jesus citing Psalm 6:8-9.

> *Depart from me, all you workers of evil, for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping. The LORD has heard my plea; the LORD accepts my prayer.*
> *Psalm 6:8-9*

Other partial parallels can be seen in Matthew's Gospel.

> *And while they were going to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the marriage feast, and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, lord, open to us.' But he answered, 'Truly, I say to you, I do not know you.'*
> *Matthew 25:10-12*

We have pointed out that the Sermon on the Mount is constantly using parallel wording in its teaching and this pericope is no exception:

Not everyone who says / but everyone who does;
they will say to me / I will say to them.

Note that *not everyone who says / but everyone who does* are in the present tense whereas *they will say to me / I will say to them* is in the future tense.

We have pointed out Matthew's use of a three-part formula throughout this Gospel and here we find more of the same in the thrice used phrase *"In your name."*

This passage consists of the following points:

1) the general assertion of the importance of deeds and not simply words – v.21.
2) the claims made by the enthusiasts – v.22.
3) the Lord's response in the form of a judgment and his use of Psalm 6:8-9 – v.23.

This passage is cited in the following text:

> *Let us, then, not only call him Lord, for that will not save us. For he says, "Not everyone that says to me, Lord, Lord, shall be saved, but he that works righteousness."*
> *2 Clement 4:1-2 (AD. 96)*

The variations to the text replace *"enter the kingdom of heaven"* with *"that will not save us"* and *"he that does the will of my Father"* with *"righteousness."*

> *"Not everyone who acknowledges me with the words, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who actually does the will of my heavenly Father.*
> *Matthew 7:21*

The words *"will enter into the kingdom of heaven"* are in the future tense and thus point to an eschatological salvation at the last judgment. This can also be validated by the use of the words in v.22 *"the day of judgement."*

In that day of final reckoning, words alone will not suffice to gain entrance for one into the Kingdom of God: not even the important words of *"Lord, Lord."*

The use of the twice repeated *"Lord, Lord"* are used only once more in the New Testament with the exception of a parallel in Luke 6:46,

> *"Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I tell you?*
> *Luke 6:46*

And that verse is also found in Matthew:

> *Afterwards, the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us.'*
> *Matthew 25:11*

Here too, the context is that of eschatological judgment.

Matthew's community could not have failed to think here of the primary confession of the faith community that Jesus is Lord.

> *Because if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*
> *Romans 10:9*

> *and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*
> *Philippians 2:11*

> *Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says, "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say Jesus is Lord except in the holy Spirit.*
> *1 Corinthians 12:3*

Nor could they miss the futility of empty profession without the doing of what is righteous.

> *For it is not the hearers of the law who are righteous before God, but the doers of the law who will be justified.*
> *Romans 2:13*

> *But be doers of the word, not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.*
> *James 1:22*

> *But the one who looks into the perfect law, the law of liberty, and perseveres, being no hearer who forgets but a doer who acts. He will be blessed in his doing.*
> *James 1:25*

What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith, but does not have works? Can that faith save him?
James 2:14

And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.
1 John 2:17

Matthew places great importance on righteousness in the sermon which we've already noted.

In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is heaven.
Matthew 5:16

For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.
Matthew 5:20

You therefore must be perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect.
Matthew 5:48

So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do unto them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.
Matthew 7:12

Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.
Matthew 7:20

but only the one who actually does the will of my heavenly Father.

With these words we are brought back to the central point of the Sermon on the Mount.

What finally matters is obedience to God.
The focus of the Sermon is therefore, on the will of God.

For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.
Matthew 12:50

"Which of the two did the will of his father?" They said, "The first." Jesus said to them, "Truly, I say to you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes go into the kingdom of God before you."
Matthew 21:31

Mere *"lip service"* to the Lordship of Jesus is of no consequence, only doing the will of the Father.

There will be many who will say to me on the day of judgment, 'Lord, Lord, in your name did we not prophesy, and in your name did we not cast out demons, and in your name did we not perform many miracles?'
Matthew 7:22

"on that day," – is common language for the final judgment – *the day of the Lord.*

And on that day, declares the LORD God, I will make the sun go down at noon and darken the earth in broad daylight.
Amos 8:9

In that day I will raise up the booth of David that is fallen and repair its breaches, and raise up its ruins and rebuild it as in the days of old.
Amos 9:11

In that day mankind will cast away their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship,
Isaiah 2:20

On that day, declares the LORD, a cry will be heard from the Fish Gate, a wail from the Second Quarter, a loud crash from the hills.
Zephania 1:10

The great day of the Lord is near, near and hastening fast; the sound of the day of the LORD is bitter, the mighty man cries aloud there.
Zephania 1:14

The words *"Lord, Lord,"* are repeated here but now they are followed by an impressive array of accomplished deeds. And all of these deeds are preceded by the phrase *"in your name"* which stresses that those performing the deeds claimed to be doing them *in the name of power of Jesus*.

The deeds mentioned are also recognized as the same deeds performed by Jesus and the Twelve Disciples and were known in the post-resurrection Church of Matthew's day.

There will be many who will say to me on the day of judgment, 'Lord, Lord, in your name did we not prophesy, and in your name did we not cast out demons, and in your name did we not perform many miracles?'
Matthew 7:22

And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.
Matthew 24:11

Note that it will be *many* who claim to have performed *many* miracles. This seems to coincide with the eschatological false prophet deception and self-deception mentioned by Matthew later.

Prophesy – here does not simply or even primarily mean to predict the future. Rather it stands as a proclamation of truth in a broader sense and can even suggest a possession of power.

Jesus and John the Baptist were heralded as prophets.

As they went away, Jesus began to speak to the crowds concerning John: "What did you go out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken by the wind? What then did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.
Matthew 11:7, 9

But if we say, 'From man,' we are afraid of the crowd, for they all hold that John was a prophet.
Matthew 21:26

And the crowds said, "This is the prophet Jesus, from Nazareth of Galilee."
Matthew 21:11

The proclamation of the gospel which is the truth of God can also be understood as prophesying.

"And proclaim as you go, saying, "The kingdom of heaven is at hand."
Matthew 10:7

Therefore I send you prophets and wise men and scribes, some whom you will kill and crucify, and some you will flog in your synagogues and persecute from town to town.
Matthew 23:34

In the passage we are studying, the context seems to suggest that *prophecy* would appear to be understood in the more spectacular sense of prediction or mysterious utterance.

"Did we not cast out demons in your name?" – is familiar to those who study the ministries of Jesus and his twelve disciples.

And he called to him his twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every affliction.
Matthew 10:1

It was also known in the early church.

The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed.
Acts 5:16

And this she kept doing for many days. Paul, having become annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And it came out that very hour.
Acts 16:18

"Mighty deeds" – is often used as a general term. The expectation of the plaintiffs in our context, however, suggests that *miraculous* actions such as healings could be in mind. These also are common in the ministry of Jesus.

And Jesus stretched out his hand and touched him, saying, "I will; be clean." And immediately his leprosy left him.
Matthew 8:3

"But that you may know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" – he then said to the paralytic – "Rise, pick up your mat and go home." And he rose and went home.
Matthew 9:6

Healing was also part of the commissioning of the Disciples and is experienced in the early church.

"Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons. You received without paying, give without pay."
Matthew 10:8

But Peter said, "I have no gold or silver, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"
Acts 3:6

And God was doing <u>extraordinary</u> (mighty) miracles by the hands of Paul.
Acts 19:11

Since we can match the actions of these people with those of Jesus and the disciples, it presents a conundrum as to why these people are rejected on an individual and corporate level.

The answer should be that these people are not criticized for their charismatic activities but for their dependence on them as a substitute for the righteousness taught by Jesus. We could say that their activities, no matter how mighty, if conducted apart from the righteousness that comes by an ongoing relationship with the Son, have no self-contained importance. They are, in effect, not sufficient for entry into the Kingdom of Heaven.

And then I will declare to them plainly: I have never acknowledged you. Depart from me you doers of iniquity (lawlessness).'"
Matthew 7:21-23

"And then I will declare to them" – the underlined word *"then"* refers to *"that day, the day of eschatological judgment"* in verse 22.

Here Jesus gives a response to the claims made in the preceding verse. His response is an eternally haunting one: *"I have never acknowledged you."*

Their failure to do the will of the Father from verse 21 shows that they have never participated in the Kingdom of God.

"I am the good shepherd. I know my own and my own know me."
John 10:14

"But if anyone loves God, he is known by God."
1 Corinthians 8:3

Before I formed you in the womb, I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you, I appointed you a prophet unto the nations."
Jeremiah 1:5

"You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities."
Amos 3:2

Behind the free and responsible deeds of human beings always lies the sovereign will of God.

"All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him."
Matthew 11:27

And he answered them, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given."
Matthew 13:11

What these proclaimers do is reveal that they have not been chosen by Jesus.

"I am not speaking of all of you, I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, 'He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.'"
John 13:18

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you.
John 15:16

"I have never known (acknowledged) you" – finds similar wording in the parable of the ten virgins and as we have seen earlier, is a citation from Psalm 6:8-9.

Afterwards the other virgins came also, saying, "Lord, lord, open to us." But he answered, "Truly, I say to you, I do not know you."
Matthew 25:11-12

Depart from me, all you workers of evil (lawlessness), for the LORD has heard the sound of my weeping. The LORD has heard my plea; the LORD accepts my prayer.
Psalm 6:8-9

What should be noted in all of this is the eschatological, final judgment appropriation which Matthew's Kingdom-centered Gospel continually leans us toward.

Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from you, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.
Matthew 25:41

Note the added word in parenthesis from the LXX in Psalm 6: *"lawless."* It is an appropriate word for Matthew to use since he views sin as a *lawless* violation of the Father's will.

"The Son of Man will send his angels, and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and <u>lawlessness</u>."
Matthew 13:41

Perhaps no passage in the New Testament expresses more concisely and more sharply that the essence of discipleship, and hence of participation in the kingdom, is found not in words, nor in religiosity, nor even in performance of spectacular deeds in the name of Jesus, but only in the manifestation of true righteousness – i.e., the doing of the will of the Father as now interpreted through the teaching of Jesus. Relationship with Jesus is thus impossible apart from doing the will of God. For Matthew all is narrowed down to this one necessity. Neither good, important words ("Lord, Lord") nor good, random deeds of mercy (e.g., casing out demons) can substitute for the full picture of righteousness the evangelists has given in the sermon. Religion can never take the place of actual obedience to the teaching of Jesus. At the same time, the larger framework of grace should not be forgotten, nor the reality of forgiveness available to the disciples. The seriousness of the ethical demands upon the disciples does not cancel out the priority of significance of grace manifested in Jesus and the kingdom.
Hagner – Matthew, page 188-189