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A few years ago, an article in Money magazine reported a study that was done with a group of people, who were asked the question: “Which is longer, the Panama Canal or the Suez Canal?” And after they answered, they were then asked how certain they were that their answer was correct. Among those who were 60% certain, 50% of them got the answer right—meaning that this group was 10% too sure. But among those who were 90% certain, only 65% got the answer right, meaning that this group was 25% too sure. This study supported other research, which revealed that *the more convinced we are of our knowledge, the bigger the gap between what we actually know and what we think we know*. Such overconfidence leads to an illusion of control. As we overestimate the value of our own skills and knowledge, it leads us to make tragic mistakes. One of the hardest challenges we face in life is accepting just how little we really do know. We see this when a Spanish national lottery winner was asked how he selected the ticket number. He answered that he was positive his lucky number ended in 48—because, he said, “I dreamed of the number seven for seven straight nights. And seven times seven is 48.”

Hopefully most of us know that seven times seven is 49. We can say that with a high degree of certainty because most of us learned that mathematical reality when we were young. But studies and research show us that the more certain we are about being right, the more we just might be wrong. Robert Burton, in his book, *On Being Certain: Believing You Are Right Even When You're Not*, writes that, “Despite how certainty feels, it is neither a conscious choice nor even a thought process. Certainty and similar states of ‘knowing what we know’ are sensations that feel like thoughts, but arise out of involuntary brain mechanisms that function independently of reason.” If that’s true, there are few things we can really be certain about, especially in the fallen world we live in. Nothing we experience in life is ultimately permanent. We are all pretty certain the sun will come up in the morning, but we also know that someday, far in the future or maybe tomorrow, it will not. But are also pretty certain that if the sun does come up in the morning, we will wake up because our hearts will still be beating and our lungs will still be breathing. But we also know that someday, one or both of those will stop – either in the future or maybe tomorrow. The truth is, while life is precious, it is also quite fragile. What we know for certain is *today* the Suez Canal is longer at 101 miles in length than the Panama Canal is at 48 miles.

While there is much in life that we can be uncertain about, there is one thing that we need to be really certain about – and that’s what each one of us will face at the end of life. Someday everyone in this room and everyone who is living on earth, will die. The death rate for humanity still stands at 100%. While there has always been a great degree of controversy in the world about what happens after death, we who claim Jesus as Lord and Savior are certain about what will happen when we die. The God who created us and gave us life has told us that someday our physical bodies will die and our souls will leave our bodies and go to either to the glory heaven with God or to the fire hell without God. We know this for certain because Jesus died on a cross in our place for our sins so we might be forgiven and redeemed and restored back to God through the power of Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. In Romans 6:5-8 the apostle Paul writes: *“For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his. We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin. For one who has died has been set free from sin. Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.”* In John 11:25-26 Jesus declared: *“I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?”*

But in the joyful, glory of that certainty, today Jesus tells us: *“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 will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’”* (Matthew 7:21-23). These words cause fear to invade the hearts of all those who claim to follow Jesus. He spoke these words toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount. They are the most dreadful and terrifying statements to come from the lips of Jesus in that they are a pronouncement of a curse, not upon wicked pagans but upon those who profess to be followers of Jesus Christ.

Jesus began his Sermon on the Mount, by pronouncing blessings on the citizens of the kingdom of God: *“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven”* (Matthew 5:3-10). But in our text for today our Lord Jesus pronounces a sentence of final doom upon a people who were deceived that their faith in Christ would allow them to enter the kingdom of heaven. This passage serves as a warning to all of us who call ourselves Christians. In these words Jesus forces us to examine ourselves and our faith in Christ to determine whether we are genuine Christians whose character and conduct are characterized by the blessings of the beatitudes.

Last week, in Matthew 7:15-20, Jesus warned us and told us how we could recognize and identify false prophets/teachers. In today's text Jesus warns us and tells us how we can recognize and identify false disciples/followers. These are individuals who have confessed Jesus as Lord and Savior but whom Jesus knows have not truly repented and truly surrendered their hearts and lives to him as a condition for entering the kingdom of heaven. There are false prophets at the gate that leads to the broad way, making it easy for people to enter. But at the end of that way, there is destruction. For those of us who claim to be disciples of Jesus, the final test as to whether we are true disciples for false disciples is not what we or others think or say of ourselves, but rather the final test is: *“What does God think or say?”* These words are universally uncomfortable because we who claim the label of Christian assume we will go to heaven based upon our faith in Jesus as Lord and Savior - and those who don't claim the label of Christian assume they are going to heaven based upon the good things they do here on earth. But Jesus already pushed back on both of those assumptions in Matthew 7:14 - saying *“those who find it are few.”*

*“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.”* The *“kingdom of heaven”* Jesus speaks of here is synonymous with the *“Kingdom of God”* he speaks of elsewhere in the gospel of Matthew. The Kingdom of heaven/God refers to God's kingship or rule or reign from heaven that is focused on the Person of Jesus Christ, manifested where He rules and reigns in the hearts of humanity. In Luke 17:21 Jesus proclaimed: *“For behold, the kingdom of God is in the midst of you.”* The Kingdom of heaven/God is spiritual in nature and it gives all authority to Jesus to rule and reign as God. In our day, the church, as the body of Christ, is given his spiritual authority and also in the future, as it will involve the *“new heavens and new earth,”* where we will be with Jesus for eternity! The Kingdom of heaven/God was *“inaugurated”* on the Day of Pentecost, and will be *“culminated”* when Jesus returns to deliver it all back to God. The Kingdom of heaven/God in our text for today looks toward the future to the day when Jesus will judge everyone. This passage speaks about the reality of the final judgment. Jesus spoke of this judgment in John 5:22: *“For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, that all may honor the Son, just as they honor the Father.”* And in John 5:27 he said, *“And he has given him authority to execute judgment, because he is the Son of Man. Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.”* There is a day coming when judgment will be carried out by our Lord Jesus.

*“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven.”* Jesus is telling us the truth that not everyone who claims to be a Christian will *“enter the kingdom of heaven.”* Here Jesus was giving a clear warning to all professing Christians that the confession of, “Jesus is Lord,” is not enough. Jesus was saying that our confession must be matched by the practice of our righteousness. In other words, a Christian confession must be matched by Christian conduct. Or in “Kingdom” terms – Kingdom character should lead to Kingdom conduct. It is true that without the confession “Jesus is Lord” no one will enter into the kingdom of heaven/God. But here Jesus says that not all who do confess will enter.

It is also true that we who claim to follow Jesus Christ must believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We must confess that Jesus is Lord, that he is God, that he is King of kings and Lord of lords, that he alone is the Savior, and that he alone is the Judge of the world. But Jesus also tells us in verse 14 that just a “few” will enter the kingdom of heaven, and in verse 22 he says “many” of those who confess that “Jesus is Lord” will not enter into the kingdom of God. Who are these false disciples? In the context of Matthew 7:14 they are people who are confident that the *easy entry on the broad path will lead them into the kingdom of heaven.* They seem to have pronounced certainty of their salvation and possess no doubt at all that someday the Judge of all will welcome them into everlasting joy with God.

But Jesus tells us that: *“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?’”* There will be a day of judgement when many who profess to be Christians will stand before Jesus and will boldly declare: “Lord, Lord, we know you will bring us into heaven. We put our faith in you. We believed in the Bible and we went to Bible studies. We were baptized. We worshiped regularly and attended prayer meetings and gave our money and our time to the church. We served and volunteered in the church and did good things in our community. Some of us even shared our faith with the lost and preached in your name and cast out demons by your name and even performed miracles in your name.” And Jesus will say to them: “I have no idea who you are. Go back to the easy entry on the broad path that leads to destruction.”

These are the words that either strike fear in our hearts or cause us to brush them off as not being relevant to those of us who believe in God through Jesus Christ. But Jesus’s brother James kicks that can down the street in James 2:19 when he wrote: *“You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder!”* Here the Word of God exposes the delusion of how presumptuous we can be about our faith in Jesus Christ. Even demons acknowledge that Jesus is Lord, the Holy One of God and the true God. But there is one thing demons will not do. They will not repent or surrender to the Lord Jesus Christ. They will not submit to him or obey him. And they will not do the work of God. This is what James speaks about in the next verse: *“Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?”* (James 2:20). This reflects one of the main themes of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount in the true Kingdom character (faith) will produce Kingdom conduct (works).

We know this is one of the issues Jesus is talking about in our text for today - in that Jesus tells us those who are deluded regarding their faith in Jesus Christ arrogantly argue that *they* are producing the works of Kingdom conduct: *“Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?”* In the attempt to build a case that would cause Jesus to accept them into the kingdom of heaven, they reveal the reason they are false disciples in that their faith in Jesus and the things they have done for Jesus have all been accomplished for *the sake of self.* “Lord, Lord, did WE not prophesy in your name, did not WE cast out demons in your name, did not WE do many mighty works in your name?” In an attempt to gain prestige and favor and affirmation and recognition from God, from people and even from themselves – the words of the false disciples expose that there has been no real, true, new born-again spiritual birth in Jesus Christ. While they may be perfectly sincere, deeply earnest, even completely dedicated, it is all directed at the deadly magnifying of self which is of a faith that, while done in Jesus name, ultimately sets God completely set aside.

Jesus speaks of this also in Revelation 3:15-17 regarding the false disciples in the church at Laodicea. *"I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot. Would that you were either cold or hot! So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of my mouth. For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."* Here we read of a church full of people who think they are Christians and call themselves Christians but who suffer from a false self-deluded sense of superior spiritual power. They even saw themselves as an especially powerful church and they reckoned their power from three apparent sources.

The first of these is that they were *financially healthy*. They say, *"I am rich"* but money cannot save souls or change hearts or break sinful habits or open deluded eyes. The church is not a business, it is the body of Jesus Christ. Their second source of power was their *prosperity*. They say, *"I have prospered,"* that is, they have increased in numbers. Is this not the standard for measuring power and status so many churches today? The size of a church has nothing to do with the spiritual power of a church; Jesus changed the world with twelve disciples. Their third source of power was their unrestrained sense of confidence. They said, *"I need nothing,"* which stands in prideful opposition to the reality of our desperate need for God and runs aggressively across the grain of the heart of Jesus' Beatitudes which begins with, *"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:3). Jesus tells us here that this kind of "sake of self" faith in him makes him want to vomit (*"I will spit you out of my mouth"*) because it pridefully blinds us to the reality that, while we might think we are rich, prosperous, and confident – we are in fact false-disciples who are *"wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked."*

We see what this looks like on a personal level in the apostle John's words in 1 John. 1 John 1:6 we read, *"If we say we have fellowship with him while we walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth."* And so, we may "say" that we are in "fellowship" with Jesus (a Christian), but our "practice" (conduct) must go along with it. In verse 8 we read, *"If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us,"* and in verse 10 we read, *"If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."* In 1 John 2:4 we also read, *"Whoever says 'I know him' – in other words, someone who will stand up and confidently affirm their faith in Jesus Christ and relationship with Jesus Christ – 'but does not keep his commandments is a liar, and the truth is not in him.'" And then we look at verse 6 of chapter 2: "Whoever says he abides in him (Jesus) ought to walk in the same way in which he (Jesus) walked."*

In 1 John 3:1-3 we begin to get a picture of those who are true disciples of Jesus Christ. *"See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God! And so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure."* Who will enter the Kingdom of Heaven/God? Those who have a relationship with God the Father, who have been born again by surrendering their hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, by the miracle of regeneration through the mighty power and presence of the Holy Spirit. Amen! *But* there is still one thing missing.

*"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."* Who can "enter the kingdom of heaven"? Those who do "the will" of God our "Father who is in heaven." In the context of our text for today, we would say: "Those who are true disciples of Jesus Christ are those who will do the will of God our Father who is in heaven, *which means* those who are false disciples of Jesus Christ are those who will not do the will of God our Father who is in heaven. And so the question before us is: What does it mean *to do the will of God?* Well, if we are true disciples, our conduct must match our confession. If we truly have relationship with God our Father, that relationship will produce God's righteousness and obedience to God's will in our lives. And while righteousness is required for entrance into the kingdom, obedience to God's will is not – *but* no one ever enters the kingdom without obedience, because obedience to God's will is a product of righteousness.

Obedience to the will of God is outcome of a Spirit-wrought, Spirit-produced righteousness of God in the true disciple of Jesus Christ. In Matthew 5:6 Jesus said, *“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.”* And in Matthew 5:20 Jesus declared: *“For I tell you, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.”* If Jesus is truly Lord, his true disciples will submit to him and will obey His will. In 1 Corinthians 10:31 the apostle Paul wrote: *“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.”* In Ephesians 5:8-9 he also wrote *“For at one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light, for the fruit of light is found in all that is good and right and true.”* Those who are saved by God will seek and do God’s will. True disciples practice righteousness by doing the Father’s will.

And so, how can we prepare for the day of judgment? By truly and completely surrendering our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior – and obey the will of God. Obedience to the will of God is the test of true faith in Jesus Christ. But the test is not words, not saying “Lord, Lord,” not doing good and miraculous things in the name of Jesus. When we are truly born again, we will have the Spirit of God living within us (Romans. 8:9: *“You are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if in fact the Spirit of God dwells in you.”*) and the Spirit will enable us to know and do the Father’s will. God’s love within our hearts motivates us to humbly obey God’s will and serve God and others. In Romans 5:5 we read that : *“God’s love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us”*).

What then is the will of God? Well, there is no better place to look than the Word of God. In Romans 12:1-2 the apostle Paul writes: *“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”* The aim of Romans 12:1–2 is that all of life would become *“spiritual worship.”* Which means that the aim of all human life in God’s eyes is that Christ would be made to look as supremely valuable as he is. Worship means using our minds and hearts and bodies to express the worth of God and all he is for us in Jesus. Paul tells us here that there is a way to live — a way to love — that does that. But he tells us that before that can happen, we must be transformed. But this transformation is not first and foremost about our external behavior, but about the way that we think with our minds. *“Be transformed by the renewal of your mind”* he says. This is a transformation that begins to happen to true disciples of Jesus Christ because when they come to faith in Jesus they become blood-bought new creatures in Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 5:17-18 speaks of this truth: *“If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”*

What is significant for us today is Paul’s stated purpose that we *‘be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.’* There are two clear and very different meanings for the term “will of God” in the Bible. We need to know them in order to understand which one is being used in our text for today. The first is God’s Will of Decree (or God’s Sovereign Will). The apostle Paul speaks of God’s sovereign will in Ephesians 1:11: *“In him (Christ) we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will.”* This is the will of God in God’s sovereign governance over all that comes to pass - and there are numerous passages in the Bible that teach that God’s providence over the universe extends to the smallest details of nature and human decisions. Now the other meaning for “God’s will” in the Bible is what is called “God’s will of command.” This is God’s will in *commanding* us what to do. These are God’s commands from the Ten Commandments to Jesus’ commands throughout the New Testament. This is the will of God we can obey or disobey. This is the “will of God” in our text for today. Jesus said: *“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will (God’s will of command) of my Father who is in heaven.”* Jesus says, *“Not everyone . . . will enter the kingdom of heaven.”* Why? Because not all will obey the will of God’s command. This is the same “God’s will of command” we see in Romans 12:1-2.

But even then, we will not always obey God's will - and when we do, we will not always do it perfectly. Even those who of us who are true disciples of Jesus still carry within us, to varying degrees, remnants of sin, which seeks to distract and destroy the continuing work of obedience to God's will, by the power and presence of the Holy Spirit within us. The default of our remaining sinful nature is to either slowly drift away from the path of Kingdom obedience or to proudly take credit for staying on the path of Kingdom obedience. But Jesus calls us to a different kind of obedience. He defined the character of Kingdom obedience in the Beatitudes. At the beginning of his Sermon on the Mount Jesus called us to a spiritually-poor, sin-grieving, humbly-dependent, God-pursuing, merciful, pure-hearted, joyful peacemaking endurance-in-the-face-of- persecution obedience. This is an obedience without pretense or presumption; an obedience where we are desperately aware of our great need for God, and at the same time deeply overwhelmed by the mountains of mercy and the oceans of grace and the skies full of love that God is constantly pouring into our hearts, souls and lives – despite our idolatry of the self.

The badge of the true disciple of Jesus Christ is an obedient faith to the will of God. In John 14:15 we read that on the night just before he was arrested and crucified on the cross, Jesus told His disciples, *“If you love me, you will keep my commandments.”* In that context of that night, Jesus was telling us that He was giving himself up for us - and in the giving of Himself, He gives us all that we need to obey Him: *“If you love me, you will keep (obey) my commandments.”* *The power we need to obey God's will can be ours!* As we yield ourselves to Jesus, he will empower us to do the will of God's commands. God never asks us to do anything that He will not enable us to do. True disciples of Jesus know the power of obedience. It is the freedom to serve God in the fullness of His righteousness according to His will. Jesus gives us the freedom to love Him with all our heart. We get that freedom through our surrender to Christ. The Holy Spirit indwells us, giving us the desire and ability and power to do the will of God. If we love Him, we will obey Him. Love solves our obedience problem. That's Kingdom obedience.

By his sovereign will, God has providentially given us a personal and a congregational application to today's message in Article II, Section 3 of the By-laws of Arrowsmith that were unanimously approved in January of this year, regarding the definition of a Member in Good Standing, which reads as follows: “Church membership does not involve an expectation to live a perfect life, but rather a commitment to worship and minister in a body of believers, where the members covenant together to hold each other accountable to pursue *obedience* to what God teaches us in Scripture. This pursuit of *obedience* is not the same as perfection, but the mark of a church “member in good standing” is regular attendance in worship and continuous involvement in the ministries of the church; with a commitment to love one another and forgive each other; and a persistence to humbly recognize sin as sin, confessing it and turning away from it, towards a new resolve of holiness in their lives again and again, in a manner that would build up the church and glorify Jesus Christ.” May we be a people of that Kingdom obedience.

The vast majority of our lives are lived spontaneously. More than 99 percent of our daily decisions about this or that happen without any immediate reflection. We just act, with the certainty we are doing what is right. Our lives flow from the kind of person we are—the kind of person we have become in Jesus Christ - rather than a progression of times for consideration. And this is precisely what Jesus is calling us to do in obeying the will of God, which leads us into the Kingdom of God/Heaven. God does not give us simple obedience to a clear to-do list of His commands, but rather by His Spirit, He lovingly give us wisdom to discern and obey His will as we encounter life's many choices coming at us without pause. The apostle Paul wrote of this in Colossians 1:9-14: *“And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him: bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; being strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with joy; giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”* 2017-11-12 Pastor Leland Botzet Arrowsmith Baptist Church