

Last Year, Americans spent 12.2 Billion dollars on Halloween, the highest amount ever. That includes candy and costumes to attend parties, but more than anything else, it includes decoration. More and more Americans are going all out to decorate for Halloween. Tombstones, Witches gathered around a cauldron, Skeletons riding bikes and mowing lawns, spider webs.

A couple weeks ago, I went on a group bike ride around Battlefield and we went by one house that had multiple skeletons that, and I'm not kidding had three skeletons in the yard that were as tall as the peak of the roof of the house, and this wasn't a small house. And they weren't inflatables. All I could think of was where do they store those things the rest of the year?

Since it's October and scary is in, I want to take a couple of weeks to talk about some of the scariest verses in the Bible. But I don't mean fun scary. This isn't the kind of scary where you say, "Isn't that cute and creepy." I'm talking about the kind of scary that keeps you awake at night, the kind of scary that causes you to question your life and do some deep soul searching.

Don't sweat too much, because we're only going to do this a couple of weeks. But remember, as a pastor I'm called to teach the whole counsel of God. I don't get to skip certain verses because they're uncomfortable.

There are certain passages of Scripture that make us gulp. That make us pause, or speed up and skip on ahead, because we don't want to think about the implications of what they mean. One of the scariest passages in Scripture is found toward the end of the Sermon on the Mount. Three verses whose implications should make you tremble, at least a few times in your life.

Picture this. It's Judgment Day. Jesus has returned in all His glory, and the nations are gathered before the great white throne. It's time to separate the sheep from the goats. The sheep are invited into eternal life, but the goats are sent to eternal punishment. That's a scariest enough scene all by itself. No imagine stepping before the Father on the throne and the Son seated at his right hand, fully expecting to hear, "Well done, my good and faithful servant. Come and share your master's happiness." Instead, this happens. Matthew 7:21-23:

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 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 in your name perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

I can't think of anything more terrifying than that.

Throughout the Sermon on the Mount Jesus emphasizes that there are only two choices. There is the narrow way and the easy way. There is good fruit or bad fruit. There are wise and foolish builders. There are true prophets and false prophets. In these verses, we see there are two

types of followers of Jesus, true disciples and false. Jesus wants us to know for sure which side we are on.

We are not comfortable with things being so black and white. We don't want things to be so cut and dried. We love to work in the grey areas. We don't like either/or, we like both / and. We want our cake and to eat it too. But Jesus says there is a clear difference between those that truly follow him, and those that only seem to. He says these things so that we will do some honest self-examination in light of the all-knowing, all-seeing sight of God and know whether we call on Jesus as our Lord in true salvation, or we claim him as Lord entirely in vain.

Here's my struggle as a pastor. There are some of us here, most of us, I pray, that genuinely know Jesus as our Savior. We are true followers, and I don't want to take anyone who should only know the assurance of their salvation, and make them doubt and wonder.

On the other hand, there are probably some here this morning who are confident in an assumed faith that they believe to be real, that they profess to be real, but it isn't. There is something terribly wrong at their spiritual core. What is needed is sorrow, confession, and repentance. How terribly tragic it would be if I, or any other preacher, made them comfortable in their false faith.

The scary warning here is that it is possible to be self-deceived. We can convince ourselves that we are true followers of Jesus when we are not, that we are bound for glory, when in fact, we are destined for damnation, that we know Jesus, but when in reality He doesn't know us.

As a preacher of the Word, I can only proclaim the truth of the Word, and pray that the Holy Spirit will speak through my words, that he will convict those that need convicting, and assure those who need reassuring. It's been said that the job of the preacher is to comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable.

So don't just hear me this morning. Hear the voice of the Spirit of God and what He is saying to you through this message. Know, without a doubt whether you are a true follower of Jesus, or a false disciple. So what's the difference? To answer that question we first need to see what it isn't.

I. It's Not Just Saying the Right Thing

First, it's not just saying the right thing. Vs. 21 draws our attention to what people say. "*Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord.'*" Both the true and false followers of Jesus call Jesus Lord. These are people who say all the right things. Jesus emphasizes here what these people say. They make the right claims. They profess the right doctrine. They have correct theology.

These are people who profess Jesus as Lord. It's emphasized here. They call Him "Lord, Lord." The double Lord is important. If they addressed him as Lord only once, it could be merely a matter of politeness, little more than calling him, "Sir."

But to call him “Lord, Lord” shows us that they understand who Jesus is. There is nothing better to call Jesus than Lord. These aren’t evil people who are calling Jesus something bad. They’re not proclaiming Mohammed or Buddha or some fruit loop Jim Jones or David Koresh kind of false messiah. They aren’t even minimizing Jesus by just calling him “Good teacher” or a “wise man.” They’re standing before the throne with Jesus seated at the right hand of the Father, and they recognize who He is. They acknowledge His Lordship. They readily admit His divinity. They understand He is the one in all authority here.

This is not to say what we say about Jesus is unimportant. What we profess about Jesus is crucial. Who we claim he is absolutely indispensable. Paul writes in romans 10:9-10, “If you declare with your mouth, *“Jesus is Lord,”* and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved.” And then down in verse 13, he says, “*Everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.*” Calling on Jesus as Lord is absolutely essential.

The problem isn’t in their profession. They’re saying the right thing. Notice Jesus doesn’t say that No one who calls him “Lord, Lord,” will enter the kingdom of heaven, just not everyone who does will enter. All who enter heaven will call Jesus “Lord,” but not all who call Him “Lord” will enter heaven. Saying the right thing isn’t enough.

Our final destiny will not be determined by who we say Jesus is, either now or on the day of judgment. It will not be determined by what we call him.

II. It’s not just Believing the Right Things

The second point follows right on the first. If the difference between true followers and false isn’t just that they say the right things, it also is not just believing the right things. These people aren’t just saying the right things about Jesus, by all appearances they seem to believe the right things about Jesus. They recognize that He is Lord, and in this context they acknowledge God the Father and understand that Jesus is the final judge.

The earliest Christians knew what they were doing when they called Jesus “Lord.” It was a divine title that recognized Jesus as the Son of God. It was a Greek translation of the Old Testament Hebrew for Yahweh. This was the divine name of God. So by any definition, this is an established and accepted confession of the divinity of Jesus Christ.

The fact they said the right things shows that they knew the right things. Their right profession shows that they know the truth about Jesus. They could answer all the Sunday School questions correctly. The fact that they did things in Jesus’ name shows that they recognized his power and authority in those areas. It is only in Jesus’ name that one can cast out demons and perform miracles.

They have orthodox theology. They have correct doctrine. If you asked them what they believed, you wouldn't immediately label them as a heretic. They pass that test. Correct belief, by itself is not enough. James warns us in James 2:19 *"You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that—and shudder."* Even Satan's minions know the truth. They have correct doctrine, but it doesn't save them. Just believing the right things won't save you.

III. It's not Just the Right Feeling

Thirdly, what separates the true believer from the false follower is not just feeling the right way. It's not an emotional component. I want to be careful here and not press this point too far, reading into the text more than is there.

But when these false disciples stand before the throne pleading their case, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name? Did we not do many amazing things?" there is emotional fervor behind their words. You wouldn't call someone Lord twice over unless you really meant it. Jesus doesn't turn them away because they didn't profess him with enough feeling.

The passion is there. The sincerity is real. But it's not enough.

Many today confuse the emotional for the spiritual. Having a deep, emotional response is thought to be a spiritual experience. However, our feelings aren't inherently any more spiritual than any other aspect of our nature. The whole of our human nature is fallen and corrupted by sin. Our intellect can deceive us. Our feelings lead us astray. Our will drives toward the wrong goals, and when we follow Jesus, the Spirit can work through heart, our mind and our will.

So, don't just assume that because something was very emotional, you cried a lot, so it must be real. It must be true. It's possible to have a very emotional experience involving Jesus. Maybe there was a tear-filled decision at church, at a rally, at a women's event, at youth gathering, but that doesn't automatically mean that you're a genuine follower of Jesus.

I'll also add this note. By nature some of us are more emotional than others. Some of us get emotional about everything, and there's few of us for whom, even the end of the world would barely register on our heart rate monitor. Some of us watch the game and shout and holler at the TV the whole time, and others can watch our favorite team lose the championship game in the final minute with only a passing comment.

The same thing happens in church. I've known some people who are moved to tears almost every single worship service. There are those that can't sing in church without almost dancing. I've also known others that a moving worship service means they took their hands out of their pockets once. One isn't automatically more spiritual than the other. The other isn't less spiritual.

Yes, we need spiritual fervor and we should follow Jesus passionately, but that looks different in different people. You can't measure someone's spiritual temperature by measuring their emotional response.

IV. It's Not Just Doing the Right Religious Stuff

Fourthly, it's not just doing the right religious stuff. These false disciples that are confronted with their own lostness on judgement day aren't just those who made a one-time decision for Jesus when they were younger then walked away from it. These are people who did things for Jesus. These were religious people. They were involved in church. They were active in ministry.

And they did this in Jesus' name. They prophesied in his name. They were in a position of speaking for God. They were teachers, maybe even preachers. They proclaimed the Word and they taught about Jesus.

They even claim to have cast out demons and performed miracles in Jesus' name. Some commentators speculate that these are false prophets performing fake miracles to deceive the masses, but I don't think that's the case. These people seem sincere. They seem to think these religious things they've done on behalf of Jesus are the real deal. They offer them up as real evidence of their genuine faith.

Notice that Jesus doesn't argue this point with them. He doesn't say, "No you didn't do those things. It was all a charade." He doesn't accuse them of pretending, or faking it. His beef with them isn't that their teaching was false, or that their miracles were fake. Jesus takes their claims at face value.

Again, just like we saw with having the right profession, or the right belief or the right feeling, it's not that religious activity doesn't matter, it's that it's insufficient. We need people to teach that class, volunteer for that ministry, chaperone that youth trip, do that work project, lead worship, do communion meditations, those are all great things, but they don't save you.

There's too many people in church who think all their religious activity is what makes the difference. It doesn't. And here is where the rubber really begins to meet the road this morning. Religious activity isn't a replacement for a real relationship with Jesus.

Religious activity isn't a substitute for real obedience. Amos was a farmer in the days of the divided kingdom. He lived in the southern kingdom of Judah, but God called him to cross the border into the northern kingdom of Israel to confront the spiritual hypocrisy of the people there.

A part of the problem God had with the people of Israel was that they were doing all the right religious things. They celebrated the right religious festivals. They made the sacrifices. They brought the right offerings. They went to church and worshiped and sang songs of praise.

But none of that had any impact on how they lived the rest of their life. Throughout Amos 5, God takes them to task for abusing the innocent, trampling on the rights of the poor, making a mockery of justice in the courts. They were greedy and materialistic. They lied. They cheated, and they stole.

And yet every Sabbath day there they were worshipping and praying and singing. Every holy day there they were with their sacrifices and offerings. Here's what says what He thinks about all of their religious activity. Here's what He says through the prophet Amos. Amos 5:21-23:

21 "I hate, I despise your religious festivals; your assemblies are a stench to me.
22 Even though you bring me burnt offerings and grain offerings, I will not accept them. Though you bring choice fellowship offerings, I will have no regard for them.
23 Away with the noise of your songs! I will not listen to the music of your harps.
24 But let justice roll on like a river, righteousness like a never-failing stream!

Religious activity that doesn't come from true life change is just a performance. It's just a charade. It doesn't mean anything. These people acted out one thing on Saturday, but Sunday through Friday, they lived something else.

It's no different than people who come to Church on Sunday, they sing the songs. They pray their prayers. They put some money in the plate. They've made a decision for Jesus. They even call Jesus, Lord, but when it comes to the rest of their life, Jesus isn't really Lord at all. They are. You can't come to church on Sunday and call Jesus Lord, but Monday through Saturday do whatever it is that you want to do anyway. That's not salvation; that's a sham.

V. It's a Heart Change that Leads to Life Change

Herein lies the problem with the confession of those that Jesus turns away. They know with their minds. They confess with their lips. They even act it out. But they don't really believe with their heart. They say the right things, but they've never submitted their hearts. That's why their lives remain unchanged. They call Jesus "Lord," but they are still Master of their own lives.

This is the child that tells his mom, "Yes, I will clean my room, but then plays video games all afternoon." This is the attention hogging player who tells her coach "I will" when the coach says pass the ball more, but in the game she still takes all the shots herself.

Your profession must go beyond your lips to your life. You must do more than say the right thing, you must live it out. It does no good if you know the truth, and you speak the truth, but don't let the truth change your life.

I remember a funny realization I had back in the early 2000's the laws against public smoking were really picking up steam. And for the first time there could be no smoking inside of a hospital. There were no designated smoking areas. So doctors couldn't smoke in the doctor's lounge. Nurses couldn't smoke in the break room. The hospital set up these little outside

smoking pavilions for their employees that smoked. It was in the middle of the winter. It was 10 degrees outside. The wind was howling. I would drive by the hospital and there would be these clusters of 10 to 20 people in their white lab coats and blue scrubs all puffing away.

These were all people who knew the truth about smoking. They had treated the lung cancer, the emphysema, the COPD. They'd seen the scans. They read the charts. They knew the research. They understood the science. They could tell you all about. But it didn't change what they did.

In the same way, it's possible to go to church every Sunday. You know who Jesus is. You know what He's done. You know the truth about sin and forgiveness. You know the reality of heaven and hell. You understand that judgment day is coming, but it doesn't change your heart. It doesn't change your life. The difference is a heart change that leads to a life change.

English is a funny language. There is no butter in buttermilk and no egg in eggplant. There is no ham in a hamburger and no apple in a pineapple. Quicksand works very slowly and boxing rings are square. We drive on parkways and park in driveways. Inconsistencies of language are not a big deal, but when your life doesn't match what you claim, that is a huge deal. When there is no Christ in Christians that matters eternally.

We are not saved by what we do, but being saved absolutely will change what we do. How can I say that? How can I be so sure? Because of how Jesus concludes the Sermon on the Mount. The very next words out of Jesus' mouth, he applies what he's just been saying. Why did Jesus turn these people away, because they did not put Jesus' words into practice. Listen, Church.

24 "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. 25 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. 26 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. 27 The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash."

They seem genuinely surprised that they're not on heaven's guest list. They fully expected their names to be written in the Lamb's book of life. And when Jesus says, "I never knew you. Away from me." They are shocked.

Even the right words coupled with the right beliefs and even imbued with fervent passion when not accompanied with life change empty of their power.

This is not salvation by works. This isn't about what you deserve or what God gives you freely in His grace. It is the difference between profession and your way of life. It's about the difference God's grace makes in the way you live. If Jesus is truly the Lord of your life, your life will bear good fruit.

Of course, October is also the month for scary movies. I read last week that 17 horror movies were releasing this October. That would be 17 sleepless nights for my wife. She hates horror movies. I can sometimes talk her into a creature feature or zombies, but possessed dolls and serial killers are a no. How many of you love scary movies? How many of you are definitely out?

Sometimes a little scary can be fun. We know we're not going to get hurt in a movie theater. Some of us love the feeling we get in the pit of our stomach as the klick klack of the roller coaster silences at top of the first drop and we rush headlong into free fall.

But there's a limit to how real we want our scary to be. For instance, I'll do the roller coaster, and you can talk me onto a zip line. But if you want to bungee jump off a bridge, that's a definite no go. And an airplane would have to be on fire to get me to jump out of it. Even then I might still take my chances.