

Spurgeon on Matthew

SERMONS ON MATTHEW

C H Spurgeon

Matthew 7:21-23 The Disowned

[\(See also Spurgeon's Sermon Notes\)](#)

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“Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.”- Matthew 7:21-23.

ONE of the best tests by which we may try many things is to ask, “How will they appear at the day of judgment?”

Our Lord here says,

“Many will say to me in that day.”

He used no other word to describe that memorable period because that terse, brief expression suggests so much, -**in that day**, - that terrible day, - that last great day, - that day for which all other days were made, - that day by which all other days must be measured and judged. I pray, dear friends, that we may, each one of us, begin to set in the light of “that day” the things that we most prize. The riches upon which you have set your heart, how will their value be reckoned “in that day,” and how much of comfort will they afford you then? As for the way in which you have been spending your wealth, will that be such as you will remember “in that day” with satisfaction and comfort? Value your broad acres and your noble mansions, or your more moderate possessions, according to this gauge’ of their real worth, - how will they be valued “in that day”? And as to the pursuits which you so eagerly follow, and which now appear so important to you that they engross the whole of your thoughts, and arouse all your faculties and energies, are they worthy of all this effort? Will they seem to be so “in that day”?

What is the chief object of your life? Will you think as much of it “in that day” as you do now? Will you then count yourself wise to have so earnestly pursued it? You fancy that you can defend it now, but will you be able to defend it then, when all things of earth and time will have melted into nothingness? You value the esteem in which you are held among men, and you do rightly, for “a good name is better than precious ointment;” but are you really worthy of the good name that has been given to you? Is that favorable judgment of your fellow-creatures the verdict of infallible truth? Will you be as highly honored “in that day” as you are now? Will as much credit be given to you for honesty and virtue then as is given to you now? Is there no tinsel, no veneer, no deception, no counterfeit coin about you? O my brethren, who among us can submit his position amid his fellowmen to such a test as this without the most solemn questioning and searching of heart!

You young men are, perhaps, rejoicing in your youth, and letting your heart take full liberty in the enjoyment of earthly pleasure. God forbid that I should deprive you of any real pleasure; but let me ask, concerning those enjoyments, how will they appear “in that day”? Will they bear serious reflection even now? Then, how are they likely to endure the more sober judgment that will be exercised then? “In that day,” when the glare of this world’s lamps shall have died out, and the glitter of its pomp shall forever have passed into the eternal darkness, how will your pleasures look then? Especially, if you have sold yourself for those pleasures, - if you have bartered your peace of mind for them, - if you have disobeyed your God in order that you might enjoy them, how will they then appear when, at the end of the feast, the cost of it has to be met, and you have to give in your last account? It is truly wise for a man to be familiar with his last hours; it is well for him often to rehearse that grand act when he must gather up his feet in the bed, and die, his father’s God to meet; and it is wiser still for him to overleap the chasm which divides us from the realities of eternity, and, by the force of faith rather than by imagination, picture himself standing in that mighty throng of the risen dead, from every part of land and sea, - the innumerable population of this great globe, - every eye turned in one direction, all looking to him who shall sit upon the great white throne, that Christ who was once crucified in weakness, but who shall come in power and great glory,

appointed Judge of all mankind. I know that I am inviting you to think of something that you do not wish to have brought to your mind. The world plucks you by the sleeve, and says, "Come away;" but I would fain detain you, for a little while, as the ancient mariner held the wedding guest, yet not to tell you a quaint story of far-off seas and strange adventures there, but solemnly to talk to you about your immortal soul, and to stir you up to see to its future de tiny, lest Christ should come, and you should be as unprepared for his coming as the men in the days of Noah were for the flood which swept them all away.

Well, then, as everything is to be regarded as it will appear "in that day," we will try to judge our profession of religion by that test, for it will mainly be to those who think themselves Christ's people that I shall speak, and I pray that a strong North wind may blow through us; and if there be any chaff in this great heap, may it be speedily discovered, and be driven out from amidst the wheat!

We shall, first of all, notice that the persons mentioned in our text, whom Christ "never knew" in a saving sense, went a long way in religion; secondly, they kept it up a long while; thirdly, they were fatally mistaken; and, fourthly, they found it out in a very terrible way.

I. First, then, there are some, to whom Christ will say, at the last, "I never knew you," yet who Went A Long Way In Religion. Who were they, and what did they do?

Well, first, they were persons who made an open profession. Jesus said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven." They called Christ "Lord"; so they virtually declared that they were his disciples. They said this plainly, as though they were not at all ashamed of it, and were, indeed, even proud of it. They said it twice over, zealously, frequently, "Lord, Lord." They said it as if the saying of it were so sweet to them that they could not say it often enough. They said it in all sorts of company; they sometimes said it when wiser men would not have said it. We know many persons who have never made any profession of being Christ's followers. They that are without, God judgeth; but let those who are within, those who have come into the fellowship of the church, and have said, "Lord, Lord," judge themselves, lest they should be deceived into a false security. It is not every one who has been called by the name of Christ whom he will own "in that day." There has been many a loud profession that will count for nothing in that heart-searching time. O my brethren, I am speaking to myself as I speak to every member of this church, and every member of any other Christian church, and I beseech you to see to it that you have something more than a mere profession, for these condemned ones had made an open profession of religion, yet Christ will say to them, "I never knew you."

Note, next, that they had undertaken religious service, and that of a high class, for Christ says of them, "Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name?" They had not served in any mean capacity, for they had prophesied or preached in the name of Christ. This is one of the things to which false professors are very prone; they love to take the chief place's in the synagogue. There is many a true servant of Christ who prefers to be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord, while many a hypocrite, who would not keep the door on any account, would very cheerfully occupy the prophet's chair, and prophesy in Christ's name. Ah, my brethren! this thought comes home to those of us who hold any office in the church, and especially to those of us who are preachers of the gospel. If preaching could save a man, Judas would not have been damned. If prophesying could save a man, Balaam would not have been a castaway. We may preach with the tongues of men and of angels; yet, if we have not love, it profiteth us nothing. We may be even leaders of the church in the noblest and, highest enterprises; and yet, for all that, Christ may say to us, at the last, "I never knew you." "But, Lord, the world blazed with my fame!" "I never knew you." "I gathered thousands round about me." "I never knew you." "Wherever I went, they flocked to listen to my words." "I never knew you." Some of you may say, "Lord, I was a deacon of the church," or, "I was an elder. I was accustomed to visit the sick, and to speak to enquirers. Everybody in the church knew me, and I was held in high repute;" yet he may say, "I never knew you. I am an utter stranger to you. Your name was never familiar to me. I never knew you; depart from me." This truth comes close home, and it ought to come close home, to every one of us who has ever professed to be engaged in Christ's service.

These people, too, had obtained remarkable success, for they went on to say, "Have we not, in thy name, cast out devils?" It is grand success to cast out devils, and they might well rejoice in it. But, dear friends, if you and I should be able to cast devils out of others, yet the devil should not be cast out of ourselves, we shall be in a woeful plight at the last. If you knew a man who had the power to cast out a devil, you would probably say to yourself, "I wish I were as sure of salvation as he is. Did I not see Satan, as lightning, fall from heaven while he spake in the name of the Lord?" Suppose that did happen, it would not prove that his name was written in the Lamb's Book of life. Rejoice in your success, my dear friend, as I may rejoice in mine; but let us both rejoice with trembling; for, although we may have brought ten thousand souls to Christ, yet, after all, we may never have come to him ourselves; and if so, he will say to us, at the last, "I never knew you."

And, once more, these people were not merely professors, and doers of great works, and very successful, but they were exceedingly zealous, and were noted for their practical energy, for they said, "Have we not, in thy name, done many wonderful works?" They had done many works in Christ's name. They were busy night and day; they had a great many irons in the fire. They seemed as if they could never do too much, and what they did was really very wonderful; in fact, they did not like to do anything

unless it was wonderful. A great part of the charm of it to them was that people wondered at them, and it kept them diligently at their work because they were so much wondered at. Yet is it possible that a wonderful life should, after all, be a lost life, -that a doer of many wonderful works should, at the last, be found wanting? Can it be? Yes, for so the Lord Jesus puts it in our text; and, therefore, I invite each professed believer here, however highly favored he may have been in his Master's service, to put away from him everything that might tend to false security, and to ask himself, "Shall I, in that last great day of account, be proved to be right?"

I can imagine what some of you have been saying to yourselves while I have been speaking; you have said, "Well, I am not a professor of religion; I am not a prophet; I never thought of attempting to cast out devils; I never did any wonderful works;" and you have comforted yourselves with the thought that my message did not concern you. But immediately after my text there is something that relates to you: "Whosoever heareth these sayings of mine." Now, you are, at least, all hearers; and if the gospel that you hear shall be so perfectly pure that it may be truly called the sayings of Christ, yet remember that there are multitudes of hearers who, through not being doers of the Word, will find at last that Christ never knew them. "But, Lord, I always sat in my seat; I was never absent from the services, I used to be there whenever the doors were opened. I was there as regularly as the minister himself." Yes, that may all be true; yet the Lord Jesus will not know you unless your heart has truly known him. If you remain without repentance, and without faith, you may go to the house of prayer till you totter on your staff, and you may never once have been an inattentive hearer; but, unless faith comes to you by the hearing of the Word, and that faith makes you a doer of it, verily, verily, I say unto you, when the winds shall blow, and the floods shall rise, and the rain shall descend, your house shall be proved to have been founded on the sand, and shall be swept away forever. So take our text with that which goes before it, and that which follows after it, and you will find that there is something here for every one of you. These people went a long way in religion, but they did not go far enough.

II. Now, secondly, They Kept It Up A Long While.

Have you never noticed how long some people will manage to keep a business going even after the capital has been spent for years? The whole concern is thoroughly rotten; but, somehow or other, in divers ways they succeed in keeping up the appearance of prosperity. There gets to be, at last, a little suspicion abroad that things are not quite as they seem; yet the clever people avoid the crash that appears to be inevitable. I expect there is many a firm in the city that is just like tinder; yet, for all that, it does not catch alight for a time. There are certain artful ways by which men can prop up a thing which, otherwise, would soon tumble down. It is so with religion. You can very easily patch up a profession; when a nasty, ugly hole comes in it, you can daub it over; and if a sudden temptation comes, like the blast of a tempest, and takes off a piece of the roof, there are plenty of slaters to be had, and they will soon put on a few new slates, and make the broken place look neat and sound. And even when the old hovel is only fit to be taken down, and burnt, you can still get some ivy and a few flowers to grow over it, and you can make quite a picturesque thing of it; and there are people who do just that with their old rickety religion. It never was worth having, yet they managed to keep it up for a very long while.

It was so with the people mentioned in our text; for, first, they were not silenced by men. They prophesied in Christ's name, yet nobody said to them, "You shall not prophesy again, for you are living such inconsistent lives that we will not listen to you." This does not appear to have happened with any one of these people. The man who went about casting out devils was not stopped, but he kept on doing so, and he declared even to Christ that he had done it, and done it continually. Ah, my brethren! some of us have seen ministers whose characters have been ruined so that they will never be likely to preach again. We have known some church-members whose hypocrisy has been found out, so that they will never come to the communion table again unless the Lord shall, in his grace, grant them repentance. Yet, what may be the difference between them and some of us except that they have been found out, and we have not been? Or it may be that, had we been exposed to the temptations to which they yielded, or had we been tested as they were, we should have fallen with as great a crash as they did, for it is quite possible that we are no more sound at heart than they were. May the Lord give us the grace to lay this matter to heart; for, if a man be conscious of being right, it will not hurt him to search himself; and there is not one among us to whom it will be an injury to have it suggested that we should try and test ourselves in the sight of God.

Further, it does not appear that Christ himself openly disowned these people during their lifetime. He held his tongue concerning them until "that day." There they were, preaching, teaching a Sunday-school class, distributing the bread and wine at the communion, going about among their fellow-members, actively engaged in Christian service, and everybody saying of them, "What good people they are!" Yet the Lord Jesus Christ knew that they were not; why, then, did he not, in his righteous wrath, at once expose them? He did not, for such is his gentleness that he will bear long-even with a Judas; so he let these hypocrites alone throughout their whole lives, and they died "in the odor of sanctity," and somebody preached a funeral sermon upon them, and wrote their memoir, and it was only at the last great day that the imposture was discovered, and then, for the first time, Christ said publicly to them, "I never knew you. I had nothing to do with you. How came you to be professedly in my Church? What right had you to preach in my name? What authority had you to speak to devils in my name? I never knew you. You were always an impostor

from the first day until now." He knew all about them all the while, yet he did not expose them until the last.

And note, once more, that they clung to their false hopes right to the end. They did not really know of the deception themselves. "What!" you say, "did they never think that they were deceived?" Perhaps they did, now and then; but they always said to themselves. "We must not get into a doubting frame of mind. This looking within, and searching our hearts, will not do it will disturb and distress us." So they went on daubing themselves with untempered mortar. They were as wrong as wrong could be, yet everybody treated them as though they were right, so they thought at last that they were right. For a man may, in time, make himself believe what he knows to be a lie. I have heard persons tell stories about themselves which had not any foundation in fact; but they have told them so often that I am sure they believe at last that they are really speaking the truth; though, if they would only think seriously, they would perceive that their tale is all invention. A man may go in and out among Christians, join in their prayers, and praises, and communions, and preach their gospel or hear it, till, at last, without any reason for his belief, he may persuade himself that it is all right. He may even pass through the portals of death undeceived. The righteous are often troubled when they come to die; but it is with these self-deceived people as the psalmist says, "There are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men." Take heed, I beseech you, of self-deception. I say it first to myself, and next to you, lest, not until "that day" should we hear the Lord Jesus say to us, "I never knew you," and lest, even "in that day," we should say to him, "Lord, Lord," and begin to argue that we were all right, and Christ should put an end to it all by saying, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity."

III. I must be brief upon my third division. These people went a long way in religion, and they kept it up a long while, but They Were Fatally Mistaken.

They were mistaken, first, because their tongues belied their hands. They said, "Lord, Lord," but they did not do the will of the Lord. They were very glib of tongue when they took to prophesying, but the message never came out of their hearts. They never did the things they told others to do; they were earnest to exhort, but not diligent to set a good example to their hearers. They cast out devils; but, at the same time, they did not themselves escape from the power of the devil by giving up sin, and following after righteousness. They failed in the matter of practical holiness. They had not the grace of God in their souls, displaying itself in their ordinary, everyday actions. They could talk; they could sing; they could prophesy; but they were not obedient to the divine commands, and they did not walk in the ways of God.

Then, next, they used the name, which is dear to the disciples of Christ, but they did not possess the nature of disciples. They used Christ's name, for they said to him, "Have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?" They knew Christ's name, but they had not his nature. They quoted his name, but they never copied his example. They had never come to him, and trusted and loved him. They knew his name, but they did not know him; and he knew their names, but he did not know them. There was no communion-no intimate intercourse between them.

Next, they prophesied, but they did not pray. Prayer is a vital evidence of Christianity, but prophecy is not. A thousand sermons would not prove a man to be a Christian, but one genuine prayer would. It is easy enough to speak to men, but quite another thing, from our inmost soul, to speak into the ear of God. They failed in that point; and, therefore, their failure was fatal.

Further, they attended to marvels, but not to essentials. They neglected the important things, which should have been done in secret; they did much that could be seen in public, but they failed in the plainer, simpler things that nobody saw. Let me just say to you, brothers and sisters, that herein lies a great part of our danger

<> the risk of getting a religious character without having a renewed heart,

<> doing religious actions without really being born again,

<> learning the brogue of the New Jerusalem without having been born as a citizen of the heavenly city,

<> becoming fluent talkers, and earnest workers, but not having confessed sin, or repented of it, or laid hold on Jesus Christ by living faith.

I do beseech you, young professors, to covet most of all secret holiness (see Holiness Quotes),

<> the holiness that does not wish to be seen,

<> plain, honest dealing with God in private,

<> much secret prayer and meditation upon the Word,

<> in brief, a life of true consecration to God.

You may prophesy if God calls you to do so. Perhaps you will cast out devils, I hope you may; and in Christ's name you may do many wonderful works; but, first of all, "ye must be born again." You must become as little children to sit at the feet of Jesus, and to learn of him. You must be obedient to His commands, and yield yourselves up to Him, or else you will be fatally mistaken, whatever profession you may make.

IV. Now, last of all, I want to remind you that These People Found Out Their Mistake In A Most Terrible Way.

Oh, if they could only have found it out before! Possibly, they attended a ministry that was very soothing. Or, if they heard a sermon that seemed to plough them up, they said, "The preacher is very rough, he has not enough love,"-as if it were not the truest love to bid men search, and test, and try themselves, lest they should be mistaken, and so be lost. There are some whose preaching is all sweetness; it would do very well for catching flies, but it is no use in winning souls. It would be more than my soul is worth for me to come here, and cajole you into a lying confidence; and, so long as these lips can speak, there shall be no man self-deceived here for want of warning, and earnest exhortation to lay himself before God, and ask God to search him, and try him, and see if there be any wicked way in him, and head him in the way everlasting. It is not sufficient to feel quite sure of heaven, and to begin singing,-

"Happy day! happy day!"

Suppose that, after all, you are not saved. "Ah!" says one, "I cannot endure that supposition." No, dear friend, but perhaps it may be true; and if it be true, what a mercy it would be for you to find it out now, when, in a moment, you may look away to Jesus, and find eternal life; whereas, if you do not find it out till the time when the unhappy men and women, mentioned in our text, found it out, that is to say, "in that day," you will then find it out too late! Once become a bankrupt in the great business of life, and you are bankrupts for ever. Once lose the battle of life, and your defeat is eternal. Imagine not-dream not-conjure not up to yourselves any false notion of a larger hope lest you sink at last into a still deeper disappointment. "The Holy Ghost saith, Today if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts;" but he tells none of us to hold out to you any hope but that which hangs upon the winged moment in which you are now existing. "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shall be saved;" "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." This is part of the great commission that Christ gave to all his disciples, and he that dares to fall short of it, or to go beyond it, is a traitor to his Lord, and a murderer of the souls of men, and this we pray that we may never be.

Notice how these people found out their fatal mistake. They found it out from what Christ said. He said to them, "I never knew you. Not passionately, or angrily, but in stern, sad, solemn tones he said, "I never knew you." "But we used thy name, good Lord." "I know you did, but I never knew you, and you never truly knew me." I can almost imagine someone turning round, "in that day," and saying to some Christians, who used to sit in the same pew, "You knew me." "Yes," they will reply, "we knew you, but that is of no avail, for the Master did not know you." I can picture some of you crying out to your minister, "Pastor, did not you know us? Surely you recollect what we used to do." What can he reply? "Ah, yes! sorrowfully do I own that I know you, but I cannot help you. It is only Christ's knowing you that can be of any avail to you."

Note, also, the terror that is implied in what Christ did not say. He says, "Depart from me, ye that work iniquity;" but who can tell all that those words mean? What happened to these people after that sentence was pronounced upon them by Christ? It was that "nameless woe" of which we sang a little while ago. There is no name that can ever fully describe your state of woe if Christ does not know you, and says that he never did know you. If you have no acquaintance with the Redeemer-if in his loving heart there is no recognition of you,-if he says, "I never knew you," ah, then! woe! woe! Woe thousand times, woe without hope for you; for, to be unknown of him is to be devoid of hope for ever and forever.

Perhaps the worst thing of all was, the solemn truth of what Christ said. He never tells a lie; so, if he ever says to a man, "I never knew you," his words are true. Just think a minute about that short sentence; I wonder whether it is true concerning any of you now. Christ knows all who have ever sought his face with repentance' and faith; but these people, though they had prophesied in his name, and cast out devils, and done many wonderful works, had never repented, or believed in Jesus. You remember those verses by John Newton,-

"Dost thou ask me who I am?"

Ah, my Lord, thou know'st my name!

Yet the question gives a plea

To support my suit with thee.

**Once a sinner near despair
Sought thy mercy-seat by prayer;**

**Mercy heard and set him free;
Lord, that mercy came to me."**

If that is true of any one of you, you can say to the Lord, "Thou knowest me, Lord, for I came to thee, and said, God be merciful to me a sinner." But, "in that day," these pretenders will have to recollect that they never did that. David said to the Lord, "Thou hast known my soul in adversities." Beloved, some of you know what it is to go to God with every trouble that ever comes upon you, but these pretenders did not; and they had to remember, "in that day," that they had never resorted to God,-never had fellowship with Christ,-never, indeed, became acquainted with him. "No," says Christ, "I never saw you come as a beggar to my door. I never saw you sit as a disciple at my feet. I never saw you as a humble follower treading in my footsteps. I never saw you as a sheep that knew my voice, and followed me. 'I never knew you. You were a stranger to me; you and I never exchanged a word with one another. We were not friends. You never leaned your head on my bosom. You had nothing to do with me, and now I have nothing to do with you." If Christ ever thus shakes you off, and says to you, "I never knew you," you will be indeed shaken off. It may be that my words upon this solemn theme distress you, but how much more will his words distress you when his own dear lips shall say, "I never knew you"! O Christ of God, never say those words to any one of us! O blessed Lamb of God, thou who art all our salvation, and all our desire, we know that thou never canst say such words as those to some of us, for thou hast known us even from eternity, and we have long known thee! Thou knowest whom thou hast chosen; thou knowest whom thou hast redeemed with thy precious blood; thou knowest whom thou hast called by thy grace; thou knowest whom thou hast quickened, and preserved, and kept even to this day; but, oh, never let us be among the self-deceived who shall, "in that day," hear thee say, "I never knew you"! There is more thunder in those four words than you ever heard in the most terrible tempest that has rolled over your heads. There is no stamp of the foot or fire-glimpse of the eye to accompany them; they are spoken calmly and deliberately, yet they are terrible and overwhelming: "I never knew you.

Judge ye, dear friends, whether ye know Christ or not, and whether Christ knows you; and, as you judge yourselves, whatever your verdict may be, take this last word of advice; whether he knows you or not, come to him; trust in him; rest in him. I felt, as I was thinking over this subject, "Well, perhaps my Lord does not know me;" so I made sure that he should, for I sought him there and then; and I exhort you to do the same. If you fear whether you do know him, trust him this very moment. Then, if you have made a mistake hitherto, and have not really known him, you will begin to know him now; and if you have known him, you will blessedly renew your acquaintance with him, and the question that has troubled you will disappear, and you will say, "Yes, Lord, blessed be thy name, I do know thee, and thou knowest me, and thou wilt know me for ever and ever." May the Lord give each one of us this blessing, for Jesus sake! Amen