

MATTHEW 7:21-23

*Entrance into, Exclusion from the Kingdom
NOT Entrance into, Exclusion from Eternal Life*

By Arlen L. Chitwood

Not everyone that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of the heavens; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven.

Many will say unto me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils [‘demons’]? 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 [‘lawlessness’]” (Matt. 7:21-23).

“Many” among those to whom the offer is presently being extended to occupy positions of power and authority with Christ in His kingdom (Christians today, Israel in past time) will, in that coming day, find themselves *rejected for one of these proffered positions*. Matthew 7:21-23 is one of seven similarly-worded sections of Scripture, *teaching exclusion from the kingdom in this respect*.

The other six can be found in Matt. 5:20; 18:3; 19:23, 24; Luke 18:17; John 3:3, 5; I Cor. 6:9, 10. And these sections of Scripture — having to do with *saved individuals*, not the unsaved — *must be understood and interpreted relative to the Christian’s calling, his present responsibility, and his future accountability*.

A travesty in Scriptural interpretation today is the use of Matt. 7:21-23 (or, for that matter, also vv. 13, 14, 24-27) as a message directed to the unsaved, for *this serves not only to destroy the true message but open the door for other types of error as well*.

These verses have to do, not with the message of salvation by grace, but with the message concern-

ing *a future entrance into or exclusion from the kingdom of the heavens*. Such could only be quite clear to *anyone who is willing to accept not only a plain reading of the text but also that clearly taught by the text*.

Calling Jesus “Lord”

The words “Lord, Lord” (vv. 21, 22), uttered by individuals in the passage who are denied entrance into the kingdom, *constitute an expression peculiarly related to saved individuals*.

According to I Cor. 12:3, “no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Spirit.” An unsaved person, separated from the Holy Spirit, has *NO understanding of the things of the Spirit*. *These things are alien to the natural man* (the only type nature which he possesses). *Jesus is not his Lord; and, apart from the Spirit of God, he does not, HE CANNOT, so acknowledge Christ*.

(An unsaved person can, in a meaningless way, utter these words [Jesus is Lord]; but he CANNOT acknowledge Jesus as His Lord, as seen in Matt. 7:21, 22.

A person CANNOT *do this apart from his actions emanating from above, apart from being brought forth from above*. And actions of this nature *would, accordingly, be possible ONLY for the saved* [cf. Matt. 16:15-17].)

Prophecy in Jesus Name

A three-part question is asked by those who acknowledge Jesus as Lord in verse twenty-two, and the construction of this question in the Greek text (using the negative “ou,” governing all three parts) designates that *these individuals expected a positive rather than a negative response from the Lord*. That is, the manner in which the question was asked reveals that *these individuals expected to hear the Lord say*:

“Yes, you have prophesied in my name; yes, you have cast out demons in my name; and yes, you have performed many wonderful works in my name.”

These individuals had been proclaiming a message and performing works — even miracu-

lous works — believing that these things were being done in the name of the Lord. However, the Lord’s response revealed that such was not the case at all.

These individuals had, *unknowingly*, been deceived by false teachers, with miraculous works emanating from the only source possible — *the demonic world*. As a result, Christ’s answer to their question (v. 23) was not at all in keeping with the response which they expected.

Prophecy in the name of the Lord in this passage is simply proclaiming things *supposedly* in accord with the Word of God. The meaning of the word for “prophecy” in the Greek text (*propheteuo*) is “to speak forth.” The meaning could go beyond this and refer to prophetic (futuristic) utterance itself, but that is not what the text and context are dealing with.

This is the same word (in its noun form [*prophetes*]) translated “prophets” in verse fifteen, as well as in II Peter 2:1. Note that in II Peter 2:1 the “false prophets” are identified as “false teachers,” synonymous with the false teachers in Jude.

This entire thought surrounds a servant of the Lord (who himself is an apostate, or has been misled by the apostates) teaching things which are contrary to the Word of God.

Casting Out Demons, Wonderful Works

Casting out demons and doing many wonderful works, *supposedly* in the name of the Lord, is perhaps best exemplified during the present time by the actions of Christians involved in the Charismatic Movement, for this is exactly what these individuals are doing.

The Charismatic Movement can be properly understood only in the light of Scripture. *Seemingly* it is a movement which exists because of the simple failure of Christians to understand the proper place which signs, wonders, and miracles occupy in the Word of God.

However, the crux of the matter goes far beyond this. Matthew 7:15-23 reveals an apostate

element resulting from the ministry of false teachers associated with a movement of this nature.

Signs, wonders, and miracles, such as were in evidence during the earthly ministry of Christ and for the first three decades of the existence of the Church, *are inseparably related to two things:*

- a) *Israel*
- b) *The Kingdom*

That would be to say, God *MUST* be dealing with *Israel* in relation to *the kingdom* for signs, wonders, and miracles, of a true nature, to exist.

Israel was dealt with in relation to the kingdom in the past (relative to the O.T. theocracy; then relative to the offer of the kingdom of the heavens at Christ's first coming, continued during the Acts period), *is not being dealt with in this manner today* (during the present dispensation while God is calling out a bride for His Son, with Israel set aside), *but will be dealt with after this fashion in the future* (during the Tribulation and the Messianic Era).

Accordingly, signs, wonders, and miracles (*inseparably associated with Israel and the kingdom in Scripture*) were in evidence in *the past*, cannot be in evidence *today*, but will be in evidence once again in *the future*. Thus, *there can be NO present manifestation of signs, wonders, and miracles, as seen in the gospel accounts and the Book of Acts.*

Those in the Charismatic Movement, claiming to be manifesting these signs during the present time, *CANNOT POSSIBLY be doing so*. That being seen in the movement today *can neither be a continuation of nor a restoration of the signs, wonders, and miracles evident during Apostolic days.*

The Charismatic Movement has been singled out because of the movement's widespread influence on what is viewed as Christendom in the world today (crossing all denominational lines, Protestant and Catholic alike).

But, again, suffice it to say, *any manifestation of supernatural powers in the world today — in any movement, Christian or non-Christian — can have no association whatsoever with supernatural powers*

exhibited during Apostolic times. Such powers, from a Biblical standpoint, simply CANNOT exist today.

These powers were for *a time past*, and are reserved for *a time future* (during the Tribulation and Millennium, *when God once again deals with Israel relative to the kingdom* [Isa. 35:1-6; Rev. 11:1ff; 13:1ff]).

Consequently, any movement in the world today purporting to exercise these powers is *NOT AT ALL what it claims to be.*

Manifestations of supernatural powers in the world today are NO INDICATION that these powers emanate from God. One thing which is almost completely overlooked is the fact that *Satan possesses supernatural powers which can be exhibited through man.* Scripture associates the *working of Satan* with "all power and signs and lying wonders" (II Thess. 2:9, 10).

Satan's efforts through the manifestations of his powers are always directed toward *one goal — to deceive.* He is introduced into the affairs of the human race in this fashion, comprising *a first-mention principle* which remains constant throughout Scripture (Gen. 3:1-7; Ex. 7:11, 12, 22; 8:7; Matt. 24:24; Eph. 4:14; I Tim. 2:14; Rev. 13:13, 14). And the deception of individuals in Matthew chapter seven (vv. 21-23), by the false teachers (vv. 15-20), *constitutes a warning to everyone involved in comparable activity today.*

During the present day and time, because of Israel's past rejection of the proffered kingdom, the nation was set aside for a dispensation. God then called into existence an entirely new entity — *the one new man* "in Christ" (Gal. 3:26-29; Eph. 2:11-15; 3:1-6; II Cor. 5:17) — and the kingdom of the heavens is being offered to this new man, *COMPLETELY APART* from "signs" (I Cor. 1:22).

But note something about all of this. *Though true Biblical signs as seen in the gospel accounts and the Book of Acts CANNOT EXIST TODAY, "signs" of some type DO EXIST.* And since "signs" have a peculiar relationship to *Israel and the kingdom*, any *pseudo-manifestation of them today could only be so related.*

And, with Israel set aside, *THE KINGDOM ALONE remains in this respect, with ONLY ONE KINGDOM presently existing* (the kingdom under

Satan, which will one day become "the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ" (Rev. 12:15, ASV).

Thus — if the associated relationship is correct, which it evidently could only be — individuals involved in any movement associated with signs, wonders, and miracles today are, in reality, *producing works relating to a kingdom which is presently DIAMETRICALLY OPPOSED to the kingdom of Christ; and any manifestation of supernatural powers would have to emanate from and relate to THIS KINGDOM.*

Thus, it is little wonder that those referred to in Matt. 7:21-23 are called *workers of iniquity* and will, in the coming day of reckoning, be denied entrance into the kingdom, after it has become "the kingdom of our Lord, and of his Christ."

(For additional information concerning *signs, wonders, and miracles*, refer to the author's book, "From Acts to the Epistles," Chapter I; or refer to the author's article titled, "Signs, Wonders, Miracles.")

The words, "I never knew you" (v. 23), referring to the supernatural works previously performed, have been misunderstood by many individuals over the years. In reality, God in His omniscience *knows everyone and everything.* Thus, all expressions of this nature in Scripture must be understood as *relative expressions*, pertaining to the subject matter at hand.

An expression of this nature used relative to eternal life, for example, would limit those whom God *knows* to the ones in possession of eternal life. God *knows* all the others (the unsaved), but not relative to eternal life.

However, the subject under discussion in Matt. 7:21-23 *is not eternal life at all.* This subject has to do with "doing the will of the Lord" — resulting in *fruit-bearing* — with a view to *entrance into the kingdom.*

In that coming day, *Christ will KNOW ALL Christians*, but *He will NOT KNOW MANY Christians relative to the matter at hand* (cf. Matt. 25:9-13).

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