

SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 07, 2010

## Sunday, February 7, 2010: Mistaken Identity

Mistaken Identity  
Matthew 7: 13 – 23.

### I. Introduction.

One Sunday afternoon, when we were living in a different town, we came home from church to find a note from the Police. The note read, “Andrew Pittman, Please call Detective John Smith at Police Department, phone number 123-4567.”

I wouldn't say that we were freaking out, but it can be a little unsettling to find a note from the Police on your front door.

When we checked our answering machine, there was a message from the Police. The message said, “Mr. Pittman, This is Detective John Smith with the Police. Please give me a call when you get home. My number is 123-4567.”

At this point, we were a little closer to freaking out. I had a note and a phone message to call the Police.

I quickly called the phone number and got a switchboard operator. I introduced myself and made a point to say, “My name is Andrew Pittman. I just got home from **church** and got a message to call Detective John Smith.”

The operator put me on hold while I waited on the Detective to answer. When the Detective answered, I told him that I got his messages when I got home from church. The first words out of his mouth were... “Mr. Pittman, Is there anything you want to tell me?” I said, “No Sir. There is **NOTHING** that I want to tell **YOU**.”

At this point he started laughing and said... “I found the Andrew Pittman I was looking for, but I wanted to give you an opportunity to confess ...Just in case.”

My story was a case of mistaken identity. I didn't do anything intentionally to resemble the person the detective was looking for, but we had the same name.

Have you ever been confused for someone you are not? Sometimes it is good to be mistaken for a famous person. But it's not so good to be mistaken for someone who is wanted by the Police.

What about your spiritual life? Do people look at your life and automatically think you are a follower of Jesus? Do your actions reveal that you love God and love your neighbors? Or, perhaps you have learned how to pretend to be Christian. Perhaps, your heart is far from God, but your actions have everyone around you fooled. Not everyone is fooled. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us that in the final day of judgment there will be no more mistaken identity. Jesus will know you for who you really are!

## **Read Matthew 7: 13 – 23.**

We have come to the end of the Sermon on the Mount. There are no new teachings in the rest of the sermon. Jesus has arrived at his conclusion. I'm sure the First Century listeners closed their Bibles and gathered up their purses, because they recognized that the sermon was coming to an end.

Instead of introducing new material, Jesus is here making an emotional appeal to his listeners. He gives them a series of illustrations that demonstrate how they are forced to choose what to do with Jesus' words.

**II. Verses 13 – 14... "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.**

The first illustration describes a choice between two roads. It's possible to read this illustration as a warning that only a few people will ever be saved and that the majority of the world is going to Hell. And I suppose that is a valid interpretation. However, the Book of Revelation contains a vision of what Heaven will look like. In that vision, John tells us there are so many people in Heaven that no one person could ever count them. For this reason, I think we must think of this as a secondary understanding of Jesus' words. The primary meaning must have something to do with discipleship, since that is what the Sermon on the Mount has been about thus far.

Jesus' words are reminiscent of words that were spoken by Moses to the Hebrew people as they were wandering in the desert for 40 years. In **Deuteronomy 30: 15 – 20**, Moses said:

**See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess.**

**But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.**

**This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the LORD your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the LORD is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.**

There are two roads in life. One road leads to life. The other road leads to death and destruction. It seems obvious that both Moses and Jesus are referring to Eternal Life and eternal death. These are the roads that lead to Heaven and Hell.

The road to Heaven is a very difficult road that requires us to be obedient to all of God's commands. The road to Hell does not require anything. The difficulty of the road to Heaven is offset by the great reward at the end. The comfort and ease of the road to Hell is offset by the destruction that comes at the end.

The road to Heaven is a difficult road, because it is a narrow road. This road is defined by clear boundaries on all sides. The boundaries on the road to Heaven are God's expectations. Since God's expectations are contained in the Word of God, we might even say that the road to Heaven is defined by the Bible itself. If you are following the Bible, then you are traveling on the narrow road. This is not the most popular road. This is not the road with the most travelers. It is not an easy road. In fact, it is a narrow and difficult road with very few travelers.

The road to Hell is a very wide and broad road. It is an easy road. It is a very popular road. It is popular, because it is an easy road. It doesn't matter which side of the road you drive on: you can drive however you want to drive in whatever direction you want to travel. There are no laws, no requirements, no expectations. People who drive on the road toward death make their own rules. No one follows the same rules, because no one has a right to tell another person how to live on the road to Hell.

Does that sound familiar? The road to Hell is the road most of our culture is traveling. There are no absolutes on the road to death and destruction. Each man or woman decides for himself or herself what is right and wrong. Morality is subjective. No one has the right to make absolute claims on the lives of others. Lifestyle choices do not matter. The only rule that is absolute is the rule of toleration. Everyone is accepted and tolerated on the road to Hell.

**III. Verses 15 – 20... "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thorn bushes, or figs from thistles? Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.**

Then Jesus turned his attention to the church. These are the people who are traveling on the narrow road defined by the character, morality and ethical teachings of the Bible. Jesus refers to the people who travel on the narrow road as the sheep.

In fact, it is Jesus' use of sheep in these verses that leads me to believe he is describing the church. "Sheep" was a common image in both the Old Testament and the New Testament to refer to the People of God.

Most families in Ancient Israel kept their own sheep. Sheep provided the family with wool, milk, meat and sacrificial offerings. Jesus' audience knew about sheep. And, they knew that wolves are the sheep's natural enemy.

So, Jesus' illustration of a wolf in sheep's clothing would have been easily recognizable to his audience. If a wolf could disguise himself as a sheep, then he could easily sneak into the flock undetected. Once the flock accepted him, he could destroy the entire flock. He wouldn't have to settle for just one sheep.

Wolves can't disguise themselves as sheep. But, people can disguise themselves as anything they want to be. If sheep is a common description for the people of God, then a wolf in sheep's clothing is a description of a person who disguises himself or herself as a member of the community of faith in order to destroy the entire flock. So, Jesus gave us a test to determine the difference between

true sheep and wolves pretending to be sheep.

The test is in the fruit. I know it's a mixed metaphor. Wolves don't grow fruit. Plants and trees grow fruit. But the fruit of a plant reveals two things about the plant: the character and the condition.

Grapes can only come from one kind of plant: a grape vine. Figs can only come from one kind of plant: a fig tree. Don't look for figs on a grape vine, and don't look for grapes on a fig tree. The same thing can be said about people.

Only Christian people produce Christian fruit. Non-Christian people cannot and will not produce Christian fruit. We don't need to complicate the definition of fruit in this illustration. Jesus is using this illustration as a conclusion to his Sermon of the Mount. Therefore, fruit is not a new concept. It is the prevailing concept throughout the entire Sermon. Christian fruit is the kind of righteousness and Christian morality Jesus has been describing all along. Just as the fruit of a plant reveals what kind of plant is growing, the fruit of a person reveals what kind of person is growing.

Fruit also reveals the condition of the plant. If the plant is good, it will produce good fruit. If the plant is bad, it will produce rotten fruit. If the plant is dead, it cannot produce any fruit at all.

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

In this final illustration, Jesus turned his attention to the future, final judgment. One day all people will stand before Jesus in judgment. This final day of judgment will determine your eternity. Some will be granted eternal life in Heaven. Others will face an eternity of death and destruction in Hell.

Jesus used a consistent theme in all three illustrations. The narrow road is the road that leads to Heaven. The narrow road will not be easy, because it is defined by obedience. Sheep are the true People of God. They are not like the wolves. Sheep are more like a good tree that produces good fruit. This fruit is obedience. On the final day of judgment, the only ones who will be welcomed into eternal life in Heaven are the ones who have been obedient.

V. Conclusion.

Obedience is an important part of being a Christian. The most important part of being a Christian is faith in Jesus. But, obedience is a very close second place. Christian faith is not supposed to be a private thing or something that is reserved for Sunday mornings. True faith is an obedient faith.

The Christian life is not a cafeteria plan. When I was a kid, I used to love eating Sunday lunch at the Morrison's Cafeteria. I knew that I could choose everything I wanted and nothing that I didn't want. This is not the Christian faith. Yet, there are people who try to live this way.

"I want Chicken Fried Steak, Mashed Potatoes, French Fries and a Baked Potato. Don't give me anything green."

"I want Jesus to be my Savior and extra Grace and Forgiveness. But, don't give me any judgment."

... “I want all the Blessings and none of the discipline.”

“I want Jesus to be my Savior, but I want to hang on to my Anger (**Matthew 5: 21 – 22**)...I want Jesus to forgive me of my sins, but I want to commit Adultery, look at Pornography and hang on to my Lust (**Matthew 5: 27 – 28**)...I want to call myself a Christian and still get an easy Divorce (**Matthew 5: 31 – 32**)...I want to go to Heaven, but I don’t want to tell the truth (**Matthew 5: 33 – 34**)...I want to be a Christian, but I’m still going to get revenge on my enemies (**Matthew 5: 38 – 39**)...I am going to call myself a Christian, but don’t expect me to love people who are not like me (**Matthew 5: 43 – 44**)... I want to go to Heaven, but I don’t want to give away my money (**Matthew 6: 2**)...I want Jesus to be my Savior, but I’m not going to Pray and Fast (**Matthew 6: 5, 16**)...I want to go to Heaven, but I’m going to store up money and possessions on earth (**Matthew 6: 19**)...I want to be a Christian and continue to worry about temporary things (**Matthew 6: 25**)...I want Jesus to save me while I criticize and judge others (**Matthew 7: 1**)...”

This is not a salvation based on works! This is salvation by Grace through Faith in Jesus. The truth is, none of us can accomplish these things for ourselves. This is fruit! Obedience like this can only come as a result of Jesus working in our lives. Salvation is not accepting Jesus as your Savior. Salvation is allowing Jesus to be your Lord. Giving him absolute control over every area of life.

The faith that saves you will also change you.