

## A Few Degrees Off

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**Scripture: Matthew 7:21-23**

Good morning Church. Let me start with an illustration, as I always do. It's happened couple of years, maybe almost over a decade back.

A fully laden super tanker, fully laden super tanker was on a long oceanic voyage and she was now finally coming into port. Everything was normal. All systems were working fine, navigation equipment were good, experienced officers were on the bridge and the master in command was one who had done years and years of such difficult navigation and he had experience that was absolutely without flaw.

The voyage so far had gone smoothly. It was night time, the coastline was clear, radar, the land was visible, the lights were visible, the chart, everything looked normal, the track seemed correct. From the bridge, nothing seemed wrong, but there was a very small problem, a very slight error in position fixing, a minor deviation, just a few minutes off course, nothing dramatic, nothing significant, but still that small error placed the vessel not in the safe channel, but directly towards shallow waters.

The crew were confident in their ability; the crew were confident in the command that they had and they believed they were aligned until the moment that there was a big jerk and the ship came to a halt because she had hit the seabed. She had run aground. And what makes this story powerful, significant, is that it was nothing to do with reckless navigation. It was nothing to do with system failures. Everything was almost right. A few degrees off doesn't look dangerous, not until you see where it leads you.

The Bible has a verse in Proverbs 14, 12, There is a way that seems right to man, but its end is the way to death. There is a way that seems right to man, but its end is the way to death. The passage for today that we're going to be meditating on, Jesus says something very similar.

Because there is one area in life where almost is not just risky, it is eternal. One area in yours and my life where almost is not just risky, it is eternal. The focus for meditation today is Matthew 7, verses 21-23.

Jesus is talking about the true and false disciples.

<sup>21</sup> "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. <sup>22</sup> 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?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'

This passage I think we have all read many a times, and I'm sure that each one of us has just brushed past this passage thinking, I'm good, this doesn't apply to me. But here's the part, it's not being addressed to outsiders, this is being addressed to people like us, who look like they are on course.

This is addressed to you and me in more ways than one. This passage comes to us at the end of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus had spoken about the narrow and wide roads. He had talked about the true and false prophets.

He had talked about the good and bad trees and their fruits. Now suddenly he brings this final searching, very profound question, not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven. This is a point where we would need to pause and think, am I in that position? There are four points that I would like to bring out of this verse, and you may like to note it down.

Point one, words do not equal lordship. Words do not equal lordship. What does it mean? It means saying the right words is not enough. Saying the right words is not enough. Not everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord. So when we look at this at first stance, we would be a little confused, because these are not the people who are rejecting Jesus. These are not people who are opposing him. These are not people who are denying him. They are in fact calling him Lord.

And when you look at the way they called Jesus Lord, it's not casual, it's emphatic. Lord, Lord. Go back to that culture when somebody repeated a word, and in some cases even today, when we want to emphasize something, we stress on that word, we emphasize it by repeating it. It means sincerity, it means urgency, it means that people are convinced. And these people sounded passionate, they sounded real. Yet, from Jesus's point of view, they were outside. They didn't make the cut. Sincerity is not the same as submission. You may want to note this down.

Sincerity is not the same as submission. One can be sincere and still be wrong. One can feel strongly and still be misaligned.

This is where many get deceived. But Jesus cuts through all that and says, words are not the measure, lordship is. Words are not the measure, lordship is.

If you go to Luke 6, verse 46, Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say? Why do you call me Lord, Lord, and do not do what I say? Go back to that illustration that I mentioned earlier. Instruments were fully functional. They were working, they were on. Systems were all working. Everything looked right. But she was still off course.

So what does it mean to call Jesus Lord? It's not a title. It's not a title that you are using to address Jesus. You are making a declaration when you call him your Lord.

And what does it mean when you address Jesus as Lord? It means authority. It means ownership. It means surrender.

In more words, it says, Lord, I'm not in charge of my life. You are. My life does not belong to me.

It belongs to you. I don't have a will. I follow your will.

That's the declaration that you and I make when we call Jesus our Lord. But where is the tension? What's going wrong? The tension is that we are not, or rather, we are just saying the right word, but not living the right reality. We are just saying the right word, but not living the right reality.

That's where this declaration of Lordship kind of falls short in God's eyes. Titus 1:16 They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him.

And then there comes out an application from this. Do I follow Jesus or just speak about him? Do I follow Jesus or just speak about him? Is my faith lived or just expressed? Is my faith lived or just expressed? And if words are not enough, then actions must count, right? There should be some credit to actions, but Jesus comes out heavily against that in the next part of the verse, and it's even more confronting.

Point 2 Activity does not equal relationship.

Activity does not equal relationship. What does that mean? It means doing impressive things is just not enough. What did the people say? Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy? Did we not cast out demons? Did we not do many things, many mighty works? This is where the passage becomes confronting and more uncomfortable because Jesus is now not addressing casual believers.

He's addressing serious, active, spiritually engaged people. These are people who have probably served, who have lived a life of leadership, who have lived a life of sacrifice, who have operated in visible spiritual power. Whatever they did, it was visible, and yet Jesus says, you missed it.

Spiritual activity can mask spiritual emptiness. Spiritual activity can mask spiritual emptiness. If you go back to what they said, they started off, did we not? The focus was not on the one who made them able. The focus was not on a relationship that they were supposed to have with Jesus, but it was more focused on the confidence that they built on what they did, what they had achieved, what they experienced.

There was nothing to do with the relationship that Christ was talking about. 1 Corinthians 13, verse 1-3.

**13** If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup> If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup> If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

What is the emphasis here? Where is that love coming from? That love is coming from a relationship. It's very clear, it talks about if I have faith that can move mountains, yet not have love, I am nothing. The seed or the core of it all is a relationship which gives birth to love.

In maritime terms, if you go back to that same ship, a vessel can be fully powered, fully staffed, in fact she had the best that they could have, fully functional with no systems going wrong, yet she was heading to danger.

And what are those dangers if you look at it? Danger one, substituting activity for intimacy. Substituting activity for intimacy. How do you explain that? It is possible to build a life around God, yet without building a life with God.

It is very easily possible to build a life around God, but not building a life with God. What does it more openly imply? It means living a life where there is no prayer, living a life and serving without surrender, living a life and leading without listening, and so much more. One can become spiritually productive, but relationally distant.

1 Samuel 15 verse 22 says, “Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the Lord?  
To obey is better than sacrifice,  
and to heed is better than the fat of rams.”

The problem is many of us are caught in just the sacrifices. To obey and heed comes out of an act of relationship, an act of response to love.

I have made this example in our own families. If you look at our children, they might do things because you tell them to do. But if there is no relationship, that doing is not out of love, it is not out of respect. It is just doing because it has been asked to be done.

What is danger number two? Danger number two is mistaking gifting for godliness. This is so rampant around us.

So easily we get fooled into seeing gifts and interpreting it as godliness. Here is the point. God can use a person's gift without endorsing their life.

God can use a person's gift without endorsing their life. How is that? Because gifting is not the same as character. What we show out is our talent, which is public, but our character is private. It is what we are inside. And God is not looking just as usefulness. He is looking at alignment. He is looking at a character that is aligned with God. Now this might be difficult to comprehend for some as to how is it possible. How can somebody have the gift, but yet not be aligned in character with God? We look no further than the Bible itself.

Matthew 10 verse 1

**10** Jesus called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness.

All twelve were given the authority to drive out impure spirits and to heal every disease and sickness. This was part of God's gifting. Who was amongst these twelve? Judas was also there. He operated in real spiritual power, but his heart was never aligned. He looked and functioned like the remaining disciples, but he had not truly surrendered. And what did he do at the end of it? He betrayed Jesus.

God doesn't need you and I to get his job done. It's a false understanding that we become so useful to God the day we accept him as our Lord and Savior. He is using you and I for sure, but he also can use those who even don't know him. He can bring about changes in lives of those who don't know who Jesus is until the point that they come to know who he is.

I had given an example of my dad. When he looks back at his life, he sees God's doing in his life in so clear ways when he didn't know who Jesus was. He came from a staunch Hindu Brahmin family, but he saw God's provision in ways that was not explainable any other way. How God protected him, kept him from going the wrong way and eventually bringing him to the understanding of who this Jesus is.

And that's a very significant part of his testimony because he knows that God watched out for him even when he didn't know who Jesus was.

What's danger number three? Measuring impact instead of obedience.

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And just as many of us get carried away by what we see, we tend to measure spirituality by results, influence, visibility. What we see as numbers, what we see as statistics, what we see as influence, and what we see as being visible to us. But God could care less for that.

Because God measures by faithfulness, obedience, and surrender. For him, that's important. That's significant. That's the only thing that matters. A person can have impact and still be internally misaligned.

That can be true of any one of us. We could believe that we have an impact, but internally whether we are aligned or not is something that we can decipher. What's the application here? Are we doing things for God but not walking with him? Is our spiritual life outwardly strong but inwardly empty? Both of this can be possibly evidenced if we look deep inside. Are we doing things for God but not walking with him? Because God is not impressed by movement. He's concerned with direction. We could be moving in any odd direction thinking that we are moving for God, but that doesn't concern him. What concerns him is the direction that we are moving in.

Point number three, relationship. I had spoken about relationship in the earlier points also. The real issue is always about relationship.

What does Jesus say? I never knew you. He didn't say that I once knew you but now I don't. I thought I knew you but now I don't. He says I never knew you. This is the core of that passage. It's not about losing a relationship. It's about never having a relationship. And that's scary. So what does it mean to know or be known by Christ? What does it mean?

We don't need to look anywhere. We just look at the Bible and we see wherever scripture has used the word know or known, it had a relational language associated with it. It either indicated recognition, it indicated intimacy or an ongoing connection. Every example in the word where know or knowing has been used has somehow or the other surrounded itself in these three areas, recognition, intimacy or ongoing connection.

John 10 verse 14 says, <sup>14</sup> "I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me."

I think it can't get any clearer than that. I know my sheep and my sheep know me. This implies access, familiarity, belonging. Again in John 17 verse 3, <sup>3</sup> "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."

This is eternal life that we know the only true God. So it implies that Christianity is not because we choose Christianity. It's not because we believe in Jesus Christ. It's not validated by knowledge, activity and identity which we kind of get caught in. It is validated by a relationship. It's not like the other religions which have do this and do that and that's how you obey this deity, but it's about a relationship.

Because he gives us the authority to call him Abba, Father. That's relational. And that changes everything.

When you look at 2 Timothy 2.19, <sup>19</sup> "Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his." The Lord knows those who are his. It's so clear. There is a relation that he's talking about. And when we latch on to that relationship, this is what God says, The Lord knows us. It is a relationship with Christ where you engage with God personally. You respond when you are convicted because that's what the Holy Spirit does in us. You desire him not just for the benefits and you return to him when you drift, when you falter.

You go back to that ship. It wasn't enough that land appeared on land. It wasn't enough that the radar showed the approach. It wasn't enough that everything was visible. It needed to be correctly positioned safely within the middle of the channel. In the same way, relationship shows up in direction, not just declaration. There has to be a direction to a relationship.

So what's the application here? Do I know him or just know about him? Do I walk with him or just associate with him? Because, Church, the real question is not whether you know Jesus. The real question is whether Jesus knows you. And if that is something that we are unable to answer, then we need to rethink.

The last point on this, obedience. Obedience reveals authentic faith. What does that mean? Jesus says, the one who does the will of my Father. It does not mean that he is preaching legalism or he is asking it to be that we just be mindless and do whatever is being told, but it is talking about responding to God the Father. It's responding in a manner of doing God's will. Because we have our own will that can take us away from what God intends.

Ephesians 2, 8-10 <sup>8</sup> "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— <sup>9</sup> not by works, so that no one can boast. <sup>10</sup> For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

There is good works that God has planned in each of our lives, but it says it was prepared in advance. Advance of what? Advance of before you came to know. We are created in Jesus Christ to do good works which God prepared in advance for us to do.

And how do we do that good work? How do we respond? It's because we have obedience. How does obedience come up? Obedience comes up because of relationship. Relationship seeds love. Love seeds obedience. Obedience seeds following of God's will.

Real faith produces real direction. I use this example that if you set out to go to the market, pick up a compass and say, let me head to the north. You are not going to head or arrive at north. Because the compass is going to show you what's magnetically relevant. It's going to take you to the magnetic north and you will find yourself away from the true north. You need correction to that. You need a gyro-stabilized direction which will take you to the true north.

A vessel is truly on course when it is making corrections, when it is responding to guidance, when it is adjusting when it's needed. Because there is influence, there is set and drift. So you could be headed in this direction, but your ship could move like this.

And that's what signifies our life. We could be looking at the right direction, but we are not in the real direction.

A follower of Christ, just like you and me, will respond to conviction. We will respond and we will move to its obedience. We will change direction whenever we are drifting. Because this is what it is. It's not about being flawless. It is about being responsive.

So what's the application here? Is our life adjusting when God speaks? Are we moving towards obedience or just simply resisting it? Is our life adjusting when God speaks? Are we moving towards obedience or resisting it? Because obedience is not how you earn salvation. It's how you reveal it. Obedience is not how you earn salvation. It's how you reveal it.

What does it mean? It means when you respond to that relationship, that love, you do things in obedience, you do what is God's will. And that is visible to everybody around you. That is how you reveal your faith in action.

It's not a means of doing a check-off list. When I say this check-off list, it keeps coming back to me when we look at many of us who choose to be in church only for Thanksgiving or Good Friday or Easter or Christmas or New Year and we say, that's it, I made my attendance and that's good enough for me. That's not obedience.

That's a tick-off list. When we choose to come into church at our own time, knowing very well that God's probably here five, ten, fifteen minutes before the service starts, we choose to take it casually because that's not obedience. That's being casual about it. It's not being revealed to the world because you are not enacting that obedience in response to love, a relationship.

That vessel did not run aground because it was wily, of course. It ran aground because it was slightly off. But no one corrected it.

And that brings us to a very real question. Are we truly aligned with him? Does he know us? Because if our faith has been words without surrender, activity without intimacy, and being confident without being aligned, then we need to seriously and honestly ask ourselves, are we truly following Jesus or just fluent in speaking about him? Are we really working for God and quietly walking without him? Are we daily walking with him or are we just saying staying loosely associated? And when God speaks, do we respond? Do we adjust or we continue to remain unchanged?

Because if any of this convicts us, then it's not a moment to panic. It's not it's not the end point. It's a moment that we disengage from being on autopilot. It's a moment that we manually take over control and we make an intentional deliberate correction because at sea and in life it's far better to adjust early than to be late.

Hebrews 2:1 says, "We must pay the most careful attention therefore to what we have heard so that we do not drift away." I had mentioned this in the first service that it always amazes me to see how the Bible has so many references to the sea. I think Jesus was in love with ships and seas. And that's why I enjoy bringing up maritime illustrations because I am easily able to connect that in my life and it makes it easy for understanding. And he uses the word so that we do not drift away. That's something that happens very real and if we are seeing that in our life then there is a time that we need to course correct.

So at this point I don't want to rush into closing this this message. I don't want it to come to an end just on these points because what we have heard today is not information. It's a call to examine. It's a call to respond. It's a call to realign because in 2 Corinthians chapter 13:5 it says, "Examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith." Examine yourself to see whether you are in the faith.

So I'm going to ask again and you need to be honest with yourself. Have we been saying the right things but not truly following him? Have we been doing the right things but not walking with him? Have we drifted ever so slightly and never corrected course? And most importantly, are we confident that not only do you know Jesus, he knows you, too?

Be clear in your minds about this. This is not about shame. It's not about getting exposed. It's simply about realignment. Because the most dangerous place to be is not far from God. It's almost close but not truly ever aligned. And if you realize today that my faith has become a routine and not been a relationship and I have been outwardly strong but inwardly distant, I need to come back. I need to realign that this moment is for you. I strongly feel that many of us tend or have drifted or have been set though yet maintaining the same direction not knowing that we have been going off course.

So this is a time that I would want to invite you step out forward come forward because stepping ahead is not going to change or save you. That's not the act of it. It's simply saying, "Lord, I'm not staying where I am anymore. God, I need to realign. This is me, Father, responding to your call." Because that is something that we can do. That's all it is. Cuz we in our own hearts know where we have drifted. We in our hearts know where we have been affected by the set. And it's not possible that none of us haven't.

James 4:8 says, "Draw near to God and he will draw near to you." That's it. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. The best part is that we are not trying to reach a distant God. We are not trying to reach somebody who's up there in the mountains and you need to make so much of an effort. You're responding to a God who's already calling you back. So if that is you and if you feel that there is a course correction, there is an alignment required now is the time come forward.

Examine yourself and see whether you're strong in the faith. I'm going to give you a couple of moments to think about this. And if you are feeling the call and if you feel that there is conviction in some areas then don't shy away. All you are doing is course correction.

Don't be burdened with what's visible. It's between you and God. There is nothing dangerous than being where you want to remain because being off course is not temporary. It's eternal. I feel there are many others if you are, I'll give you a few more minutes, you can step out forward. It's just between you and God.

Let's pray.

Father Lord, we've heard your words. Father, we've heard your voice. We have heard your conviction in our hearts, Father. Father, we have far too long continued in routine and forgotten about that relationship. We have far too long continued to set adrift in confidence in our own directions, Father. Today we come before you in true honesty. Lord, we just want to come here and do the right thing. Father. Father, Lord, we pray, Lord, wherever we have drifted that you would bring us back. Wherever we have tended to take control, Lord, you will take charge, Father. Our response to this word is just to align ourselves with you, Lord, to course correct and set you in charge of our life. Father, we choose to surrender completely.

We choose relationship over being routine. Lord, we want to be in alignment with you, Lord. And that is our heart's desire and that is what we want to do. Lord. Father, Lord, we don't want to live a life that is only in a direction that seems to be almost right. We want to be dead right center in the safe channel, Father. We want to make it home. We want to make it to you, Lord. So father we commit each one of us here Lord who have taken this step. You know their hearts. You know the situations. You know where they are wanting Father. And so Lord, you would do what needs to be done and whatever needs to be corrected Lord and you'll bring us home. In Jesus' most precious name we pray. Amen.