

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven." These are hard words that Jesus speaks to us today. But they are words which we need to hear, because they are answering a deeper, basic question that our age struggles with. And that question is this: how do we determine what is good and what is evil? Who gets to decide? Do we? Do men? Or does God? And the reason why our age struggles with that question, Christians, is because we live in a time that is deeply divided in seeking the truth. You don't even have to look very hard to see the truth of that statement. Think about how we treat one another in this country, even on questions where you could have more than one good answer. We treat each other as enemies, as if the other side is saying nothing but evil, as if they couldn't give us anything that would help build us up, as if they didn't have any good ideas, because, frankly, we're the ones who are on this side and they are over there. And that conflict comes because we look within for the answer to that question, to try to determine what is right and what is wrong. And looking within, unfortunately, leads to pretty serious consequences.

This is something that is nothing new, after all. It's a question as old as mankind. Adam and Eve also struggled with this very question, because they weren't content to just listen to what God had to say. No, they wanted to be the ones who are going to decide what was good and what was evil. When God created Adam, after all, he placed him into the garden of Eden, and he gave him a single, simple, good law. And that law was, you can eat of any tree in the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you may not eat, for in the day that you eat of it, you will surely die. And God was being quite clear in what he was saying to Adam. He said to Adam, "Do you want to know, Adam, what good is? Then listen to my voice and do what I tell you and don't eat from this tree. Do you want to know what is evil, Adam? Then don't listen to my voice and eat from this tree, and you will know what evil is." Because that's ultimately what it boils down to. God determines what is good and what is evil. God speaks, and we are supposed to listen. But that wasn't what Adam wanted. Adam wanted to be God. He wanted to be the one that determines what's right and what's wrong. And so reaching out for that fruit, he took hold of it and brought sin into the world, because in trying to be like God, to determine what is right and what is wrong, Adam fell into evil. And we as the sons and daughters of Adam have fallen into that same sin.

You don't even have to look very hard in our culture to see how this plays out in everyday life. Because how many people have you heard say something like, "It doesn't really matter what I believe. It doesn't really matter what you believe. I have my good things, and this is what I believe is right, and you have what you believe is right, and so we'll just agree to disagree. But if you try and tell me what is right and what is wrong, then you are being a bigot. You are being someone who's just trying to push your religion on other people. You can't tell me what to do." But the problem with that, of course, is that if that were true, we couldn't call anything evil. Because ultimately what it would boil down to is that everything that had ever been done, the very worst acts of humanity, would have to be good, because you couldn't say what was right and what was wrong. And we can see pretty clearly that that is not going to be the truth. God is the one who determines what is right and what is wrong.

Let me use a concrete example for us, to help illustrate this within our own culture. We know pretty clearly from the commandments, we are not supposed to murder. That's the fifth

commandment, after all. You shall not murder. To take human life without having the authority to do so--as if we were a soldier or something or we were in the government putting down a criminal who had committed a great crime--if we don't have that authority, for us to take human life is to murder. It's something we're not allowed to do. But how often in our culture do we see that still happening, say with something like abortion? A great evil within our nation where we are killing the unborn. But how often do we try to make it sound better than it is, to come up with excuses as to why this isn't actually evil, why this is something that we can do? You see a woman who is in a difficult situation. And they do exist, Christians. We can't ignore that. But when we see that woman in that difficult situation, people will say, "For health reasons we have to abort this child, to save the life of the mother." As if papering over the murder which is happening is somehow going to brush away the fact that it's there. Or we have people who will say, "She's gonna be in poverty. She can't afford this child. She can't afford to raise a family at this time. It will put a burden on everything else or maybe her career." But again, papering over what is actually happening. Or maybe we would even say, "She just doesn't want the child, and it's better to not have a child at all than have a child that's unloved." But that doesn't paper over the fact that we are still killing the unborn. The world tries to make it sound better than what it is, and that's a problem.

Now there are things that we should do as Christians in a situation like that. If a woman is struggling, we can't just ignore it. We should help her! Help her get the help that she needs, whether that's financial or health or whatever the case might be. Or if she really doesn't want the child, we should adopt them ourselves, to raise them in the fear of the Lord, because those are godly ways of dealing with what is a real problem. We don't want to be accused of not caring at all. But are we going to determine what is right and what is wrong there by what we think or by what God has actually said? That's the issue that is before us today, Christians, the issue that Jesus is answering in our lesson before us.

But truth be told, there is a far worse sin than just trying to determine what is right and what is wrong by what I think, and that is when I try to determine what is right and what is wrong by what I think and then say God is the one who agrees with me. That God is the one who has said this, and therefore you should believe it, because I'm telling you what I think God actually says. That's what we face here in our Gospel reading, Jesus says, verse 22. "On that day, many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' We did all of these things for you, Jesus! We did all of these mighty miracles in your name, and we said that all of these things were good according to your will." But what does Jesus say? He says, "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'" To lie in the name of God is a deadly, deadly sin, one that we should not take lightly. Because Jesus says in the Gospels that it would be better for those who cause someone to stumble and fall, it would be better for them to have a great stone tied around their neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea than to suffer the judgment which God has prepared for those who lie in his name. He's not joking, and neither should we. It is a serious, deadly thing to say things that God has not said and then pretend as if he had.

It is a hard word, Christians, yes. But a word which we need to hear. Because ultimately it doesn't matter what the world says is right or wrong. What matters is what God says is right or wrong. It doesn't matter what the world has to say about us. What matters is what God has to say

about us. And the truth is, is that God has said, yes, we are in fact sinners, sinners who are deserving of judgment. And it doesn't matter what the world says. It doesn't matter what man says. That does not change the truth of what God has said. But there's also a comfort in that, Christians, because if God has said something, it is true. And God has said to you that all those who believe in his Son Jesus Christ find a free and full forgiveness, because he has said it. That's the comfort which we can find in this. It doesn't matter what the world says. It doesn't matter what we might even say about ourselves. God has said, you are forgiven. And it is true, regardless of what anyone else says. That's what ultimately matters.

And so when we are listening to God and to what God has to say to us, we should listen to his voice and his voice alone. So Christians, if we want to know what is right and what is wrong, we only have to listen to the God who has declared to us that yes, we deserve death and judgment, but also the God who declares to us that we are forgiven. And he tells us what is right and what is wrong. We only have to follow him and listen to him to answer the questions that we might have. Listen to him, Christians, and trust in him, for he has spoken. And whatever he has spoken, is true.

To him be the glory, now and forever. Amen.