

## **“The Crash of the Nominal Christian”**

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Scriptural Foundation: Matthew 7:21-27, NIV

<sup>21</sup> “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. <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 perform many miracles?’ <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

### **The Wise and Foolish Builders**

<sup>24</sup> “Therefore, everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. <sup>25</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock. <sup>26</sup> But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

<sup>28</sup> When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, <sup>29</sup> because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law.

The 1920’s were a great time of peace and prosperity in the United States. The economy was booming as the new technologies of radio and the automobile were emerging. From 1921 to 1929 the stock market found a surge of over 600% in value. Investors began doing every thing to invest more and more, and to leverage it, at greater and greater risk. Many investors mortgaged their own homes and took out their life savings in order to make, what they considered to be, a “sure deal” and a “quick killing” in the stock market. But, then “Black Tuesday” occurred on October 29<sup>th</sup>. The over-inflated stock bubble burst. In two days the Dow Jones Average fell twenty-three percent. Over the next month the stocks would lose forty percent of their original value and over the next three years the market would lose eighty-nine percent of its original value. Can you imagine?

Due to the stock market crash of 1929, ten thousand banks would fail in the United States. Many wealthy investors lost all that they owned and then some. Some committed suicide by jumping out of buildings in utter despair. Very few anticipated such a day of disaster and many were caught completely unaware.

In Matthew 7, Jesus teaches us about another crash that is far more devastating than the stock market crash of 1929. This crash will also take many by utter surprise for it will happen in an instant. One moment a person will be confident of their life, their future, their well-being, and the next moment disaster will strike with a terrible force and swiftness. Jesus describes this day, in Verses 22 and following:

<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 perform many miracles?’ <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, ‘I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!’

Jesus wants us to understand the great terror of that day so He tells us, not just once, but He tells us twice, in Verses 26 and 27:

<sup>26</sup> “But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. <sup>27</sup> The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.”

I believe these words to be the most solemn words ever uttered. If any mere man would speak such words we would feel compelled to censor him as being “overly harsh” and “overly negative”, but these words are spoken by our Loving Savior, by the Son of God Himself. Because Jesus spoke these words they demand our earnest attention and focus. Here Jesus warns us of professing Christ as Lord without possessing Christ as Lord. Jesus warns us to be aware of a “nominal Christianity”. He teaches us about the absolute uselessness of a mere outward profession of Jesus as

Savior, for, friends, nothing avails in the presence of God but true righteousness. No church membership, no confession of faith, no external surface works, and no human goodness, none of that will be of any value in the court of Heaven. Rather, if we are to be accepted by God there must have been a genuine, inward transformation, a transformation that produces God's righteousness inside of us. If our doctrine of God's free gift of eternal life does not include the fruit of such inward transformation then we are living a disastrous delusion and that is the grave warning that Jesus gives us here.

As a pastor there is nothing that concerns me more than the concern that some would come to this church, week-after-week, and participate in ministries, listen to sermons, pray prayers, and talk with other believers, and yet, on that day find that their house, their life, would fall with a great crash. There is no greater concern I have for this flock, so I pray that God will help us to understand Jesus' teaching and to take His teaching to heart. This is message that Jesus gives to pierce our very soul with application.

We will look at three applications of the nominal Christian. The first application is the crisis of nominal Christianity. Second are the causes of nominal Christianity. Finally, we will look at the cure or the correction for nominal Christianity.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in his book, The Cost of Discipleship, would write, "Cheap grace is the preaching of forgiveness without requiring repentance; baptism without church discipline; communion without confession; absolution without personal confession. Cheap grace is grace without discipleship; grace without the cross; grace without Jesus Christ living incarnate."

I believe there is crisis of nominal Christianity. What do I mean when I talk of nominal Christianity? A nominal Christian is one who is a Christian in name only. That is to say, one who would say, "I am a Christian," but without any real internal affect upon their life from the working of God's Spirit; no real transformation. In 2 Peter 1:4, Peter would describe the life of the believer as being one who is a partaker in the Divine Nature, and as a result of partaking in the Divine Nature we escape the corruption of this world. That is who we are – we are participants in the very nature of God Himself. The crisis of nominal Christianity is no where better described than it is described by Jesus in Verse 21. In Verse 21, Jesus names the principle,

*<sup>21</sup> "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."*

Then He demonstrates this principle in the following verses:

*<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 perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'*

They are cast out from the presence of God, of His goodness, of His mercy, and of His grace forever and ever.

The idea here, in Jesus' teaching, is that many will die thinking they will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but who, when they die, discover they are not to enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but rather they would be separated from God and from His grace. Friends, this is the worst possible illusion that can ever overtake a man or a woman, for in this illusion a person is mistaken about their own eternal destiny.

There are three observations concerning this crisis of nominal Christianity. The first observation is that this crisis afflicts many people. Jesus first says, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' and we think to ourselves that there a maybe just a few, but Jesus clears that up in Verse 22, when He says, "Many will say to me..." There are not just a few who are caught up in the membership of nominal Christianity, but there are many. We would be fools to think that there are only a few around us who we know who are a part of this membership of nominal Christianity.

The second observation is that this condition afflicts many who are not aware that they are afflicted with this condition; they are self-deceived. The condition of their own soul is hidden to themselves; it is largely unseen. These will be surprised on the Day of Judgment that they are not welcomed into God's presence. They cry out, "Lord, Lord,

did we not...”, and they seek to give a defense of the acceptability of their own soul to God, but God’s final judgment is, none-the-less, unmoved. “Away from me, you evil doers...”, He would say.

The third observation concerning this crisis of nominal Christianity is that this condition will be revealed on the Day of Judgment. “Then,” He says in Verse 27, “it fell with a great crash.” “Then,” in Verse 23, “I will tell them plainly; on that day everything that is hidden will be made known and be made public.” Friends, if we wait for that day to understand the condition of our own heart and of our own soul it will be far too late. There is no opportunity to affect the outcome on that day. Up until the Day of Judgment there is great opportunity; today is the day of salvation, but nominal Christians, by their very nature, don’t even ask the question. They, rather, have no doubts about themselves. It never crosses their mind that they not be numbered with the elect of God’s people. They are quite assured that they have a home in Heaven. They are quite certain of this.

The question comes to us on the basis of these three observations: why are there so many who are self-deceived? Why are there so many who assumed they are safe when, indeed, they are in grave danger? The answer is that the nominal Christian looks so similar to the authentic Christian. To look at them from the outside we would notice no difference. From Jesus’ words we pick up at least three similarities between the authentic Christian and the nominal Christian.

The first similarity is that both the authentic Christian and the nominal Christian give a doctrinally sound confession: they both confess Jesus as Savior and Jesus as Lord. Notice the nominal Christian’s confession in Verse 22:

<sup>22</sup> *“Lord, Lord...”*

This is a confession of faith. In the Old and New Testament, this term “Lord” denotes divinity; the one being spoken to is God Himself. In the New Testament this word “lord” was used by the Romans in the Roman Empire to speak about Caesar. They would call Caesar “lord”, thus including him in their pantheon of gods to be worshipped. The Christian, in that Roman context, refused to say, “Caesar is lord” and they were put to death for it. They were considered traitors to the Roman Empire because they absolutely would not acknowledge Caesar as lord, but rather they called Jesus as “Lord”, as “God who is the One who is worthy to be worshipped. Yet, here we find the nominal Christian calls up to Heaven and considers Jesus as Lord and as God.

Someone may ask the question: “How is it possible for someone to make an orthodox confession of faith, for a person to go to a Bible college and seminary, for a person to go to a Bible-teaching church, and yet not be born again and yet not be transformed?” Friends, a man or a woman may study the Bible and sit in the pew and listen to many great Bible teachers, and then upon the basis of what they have come to learn confess that Jesus is God; that He died upon the cross; that He rose the third day; that He is coming back one day to judge the world and yet never commit themselves to Him in faith.

James Boyce in his commentary of the Sermon on the Mount reminds us that Martin Luther was one such a man. Martin Luther, as he was pursuing the secular occupation of being a lawyer, became very concerned for his soul and decided to go to seminary. At seminary he was an outstanding student. He became, then, a professor of Bible. He taught the Psalms, Romans, Galatians, Hebrews, and Titus to students with great expertise and with great skill. If you would have asked Martin Luther at times, “Do you believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah, and the Son of the Living God”, he would have said, “Absolutely, I do.” If you would have asked him, “Do you believe that Jesus died upon the cross for your sin”, he would not have clearly understood the meaning of Jesus’ death, but none-the-less he would have said, “I believe that Jesus died upon the cross and rose again the third day and that He did for my sins.” If you would have asked him, “Do you believe that Jesus is returning one day to rule and to reign, and to judge this world”, he would have said, “Absolutely, and I tremble because of it.” But yet, at this point in Martin Luther’s life he did not know the Lord personally. He professed Christ but he did not possess Christ as Savior and as Lord.

Jesus was Lord, but not his Lord. Jesus was God, but not his God. Jesus was Savior, but not his Savior.

Boyce would go on to say, “Because a man can believe certain Christian doctrines with his head, and yet not be converted, there will always be counterfeit or nominal Christians in church circles. Some of them will be dangerous because they will be planted there by the Devil to deceive the unwary like tares in the field of wheat. Others will only be self-deluded. Whatever the case, the world will be able to point to them and say, “Ah, look at those hypocrites. That is why I am not a Christian.” Boyce will say, “Do not be discouraged by that. Just be sure that you are not one of

them. Ask the Lord to reveal the state of your own heart before Him and allow Him to lead you to the fullness of belief in Christ and commitment to Him.”

The first similarity we see between the authentic Christian and the nominal Christian is that both make an orthodox confession of faith. The second similarity is that both also possess a zeal and a passion for God. We remember that this nominal Christian Jesus paints the picture of does not just say, “Lord”, but he says, “Lord, Lord!” In other words, he is passionate about his calling upon Jesus. He goes on to say,

“...did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?”

The nominal Christian is not just applying an intellectual ascent that is cold and distant. Often times the nominal Christian is full of feeling concerning God; the emotion is fully engaged. The nominal Christian comes to church and can be passionate about singing praises, zealous in praying, enthusiastic in teaching as they teach the word, yet some who zealously say the right things about God are “eternally lost”, Jesus says, and they remain in their sins.

How can this be explained? How can one be zealous and passionate for God and yet not have the life of God? The answer is that true spiritual emotions and carnal, fleshly emotion look very much the same. There is such a thing as fleshly emotion that is often engaged in a religious environment. A person may, in their own flesh, respond when the music begins to play and begin to feel happy and joyful and excited about what is going on because of the environment of worship and even be able to participate in that with great energy, a smile on the face, and a feeling of joy.

Jonathon Edwards was a great instrument used of God in the 1700’s. In the middle of the 1700’s God used Jonathon Edwards, and others like him, to bring about first “The Great Awakening” in this country in which thousands became converted. Many of these revival meetings, when people came to commit themselves to Christ in a dramatic way often times there were these very emotional affections that would spring out among the people who were responding. Some, of course, who were very staid church folk looked at that and said, “That must not be of God because if this were of God they wouldn’t be so emotional in their display.” They would cry and wail and thrash about a bit as they responded to God. Others, though, pointed to that and said, “It must be of God because how could they have such zeal and passion were they not from God and were this experience not genuine?”

I imagine that if we had such a display here today that some of us would be on one side or the other of that opinion as well. Jonathan Edwards, a brilliant man, wrote a book titled, Religious Affections, in which he addressed that. He said to those who believed that this must not be of God because of the display of affection that indeed the Scripture shows much zeal and passion when there is a genuine response to God’s grace, but on the other hand, he wanted to communicate to those who would think that this must be of God because of all the zeal that the Scripture also teaches that that is not a criterion by which we can measure whether something is genuinely from God or not. Rather, he wanted us to know that a self-centered, nominal Christianity often makes a great emotional commotion, but the difference between those two is not in the emotion, or the passion, or the zeal which we see on the outside, but rather the difference between authentic Christianity and nominal Christianity is what happens on the inside when the heart of a man and the heart of a woman turns towards God in faith and repentance and commitment to righteousness; that the natural heart which does not long for righteousness begins to long for righteousness and pursues it with a passion as a result of God’s working of grace.

Nominal Christianity and authentic Christianity are very similar in that both make a orthodox confession, both reveal a very passionate, zealous emotion towards God, and the third similarity is that both also perform great acts of service towards God and some displaying great power, as we see at the end of Verse 22,

”... did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?”

Here we think of Balaam in the Old Testament and how God uses him as a prophet, but whom none-the-less was a wicked man. We also think of the Twelve Disciples who did the exact same thing and remember that Judas was among those who performed miracles and cast out demons in the name of Christ. Someone may say, “That person must of God. Look at the results. Look at demons being cast out of individuals. Look at the healings that are taking place.” Again, that is not a means by which we can measure genuine Christianity because it is found in both.

Remember the story in Luke 10 where Jesus sends out seventy-two disciples to preach the Gospel and to perform miracles. They came back all excited and they said to Jesus, “Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name!” If I set out seventy-two people to preach and perform miracles and they came back with this glowing report about their preaching and about their ministry and how even the demons are commanded out of people if they minister in His name, I would tend to say, “Let’s have a praise for that. Let’s hold hands, stand around the fire, and sing ‘Kum bay ya!’, and that will be it.”

But, that is not what Jesus does. It is interesting what Jesus does when they come back with this glowing report. In Luke 10:20, Jesus says,

<sup>20</sup> *“...do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven.”*

Friends, it is possible that demons would submit to us as we are talking in Jesus name, but that is not something to get all giddy about. What we need to be focused upon is our names written in Heaven. Jesus will say in Matthew 24:24:

<sup>24</sup> *“For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible.”*

Again, the nominal Christian and the authentic Christian both give an orthodox confession. You cannot be an authentic Christian without an orthodox confession. Both have a zeal and a passion and an emotion towards God. Both commit themselves to acts of service and have great effects as a result of their acts of service. What is the difference? Jesus tells us the difference in Verses 21 and then in Verse 24.

<sup>21</sup> *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.*

There is a very dramatic change inside so that the one’s very life is changed. Jesus goes on to say in Verse 24:

<sup>24</sup> *“... everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice...”*

The only difference between the wise man and the foolish man is not what they listen to or not what they do; they are both building houses and the exterior of the houses are great, but the only difference is the foundation upon which they are building and the result of the foundation upon which they are building expresses itself in that one listens and obeys Jesus Christ and the other listens and does not obey.

The second point we want to look at is the causes of nominal Christianity. Why are so many found in this condition of nominal Christianity? There are three reasons for this. First, often a nominal Christian possesses a misplaced confidence in a partial Gospel. They are able to parrot some of the words and phrases of the Gospel, but they are unable to really grab hold of the depth of their meaning and a real understanding. Much of this is due to the fact that, as Jesus says in Verse 15, “Watch out for false prophets.”

A nominal Christian is not careful of whom he or she listens to and often is very enamored with false prophets – those who would proclaim a partial Gospel; a Gospel that is right on many points, but a Gospel that is either wrong on some or neglectful of many aspects of the Gospel. As such their understanding of the Gospel is very limited; it is partial, it is not full, and it is not complete. They think that they are Christians because they are responding to that which they have heard as the Gospel and understand as the Gospel, but what they have heard and what they understand is not the Gospel itself in its fullness so they can’t respond to that which they don’t know.

That is the reason why Jesus connects this “watch out for false prophets” with “not everyone who says to me on that day, ‘Lord, Lord’ will enter the kingdom of Heaven.” A person who listens to a false teacher, one who doesn’t proclaim the fullness of the Gospel and the fullness of the Scripture, is one who is susceptible to being a false follower; a professor without being a possessor of Jesus Christ, because perhaps they have only responded to what I would call the “pleasant Truths” of the Gospel and they have not responded to the “offensive Truths” of the Gospel because they haven’t fully understood them yet.

What are the offensive aspects of the Gospel? They are those aspects that have to do with the condition of our own heart; that we are depraved, that we are fallen, and that our heart is deceitful above all else and is desperately wicked.

The offensive part of the Gospel has to do with the issue of the Doctrine of Repentance; that there is something that we need to turn from in our lives in order to turn to serve the living God. The offensive part of the Gospel has to do with the cross and its meaning; that Jesus died, not as an example of His love towards us, but He died as a sacrificial and substitutionary atonement for our sin, that He received from God the full measure of God's judgment of our sin upon Himself and that is why He suffered so. The offensive aspect of the Gospel which leads us to the fact that there is a final judgment where God will judge the wicked in their sins and separates them from Him forever and ever in a place called Hell.

A partial Gospel does not bring about an internal transformation and there is one principle that the Bible teaches us, that if we are to be accepted by God we must have true righteousness, and the only way we can obtain this true righteousness is through the Gospel, offered freely to us, in Jesus. There are many who are found in nominal Christianity because they have placed their confidence in a superficial and partial Gospel.

The second reason why are so many found in this condition of nominal Christianity is because there is often a false understanding of the Doctrine of Assurance. There are many today, particularly among nominal Christianity, who would suggest that if you prayed a prayer at some point in your life that you are safe and you don't have to worry about your soul any more because you prayed a prayer. Whether it was when you were in AWANA as a seven or eight-year old, or whether when you were a young adult, or even in mid-life, if you have a good feeling about God and Jesus, if you affirm Jesus, if you say you believe in Jesus, and if you say you love Jesus then you don't have to be concerned about your soul, says this false understanding of assurance.

But, the Bible teaches us something different about assurance. The Bible teaches us that our assurance of our salvation is always connected to the real transformation that God produces in the soul of a man and in the soul of a woman who comes to Him. Their assurance is based upon the effect of what we see God having done inside of us to liberate us from our rebellion and that liberates us from our sin. It is always connected in that way.

Tragically, many in the church give fuel to this wrong idea of assurance in their evangelism and in their approach toward their witnessing. It is not uncommon when a person presents the Gospel, and upon presenting it, to ask for a decision. That is an appropriate thing to do; present the Gospel and ask for a decision and say, "Will you pray with me?" That is very appropriate for us to do, and they when the person prays with us to trust in Jesus Christ as their Savior, immediately the one who is witnessing will say something to the effect, "I want you to know that you are safe forever, absolutely safe, and that you never need to be concerned about your soul."

I would ask that person, "Why do you say that? Upon what basis can you assure that one that they never need to be concerned about their soul ever again?" "Well, I heard them confess Christ and I heard them pray the prayer." I would ask, "Upon what biblical basis would you say that is a confidence for which they would never ever need to be concerned about their soul again? I don't find it in the Scripture?"

God always connects assurance, not only with right confession that is connected, but that is not the only aspect of assurance. He always also connects it with the fruit of the life that is changed as a result of God's working in our heart and of a regenerate soul. James would say, in James 2:26, NKJV,

<sup>26</sup> ...faith without works is dead...

But, the one who comes to Jesus Christ in faith is the one who is also changed by Jesus Christ through faith.

When I pray with a person to receive Jesus Christ, rather than assuring them that they never need to be concerned about the condition of their soul again, I take them to Matthew 13 and talk about the parable of the sowers and I say that there are four kinds of people who hear the Word of God, Jesus says. Jesus says that there is one kind of person who hears the Word of God and doesn't want anything to do with it and they reject it right away, and I tell them, "Thankfully, you are not that person because you have trusted in Jesus Christ as your Savior. You have prayed and you have made a decision that I trust is genuine and authentic."

But, Jesus also talks about a person who hears the Word of God and hears the Gospel and receives it immediately with joy, but then the sun comes out and because there is no real depth of commitment the fruit of that faith withers up and dies and produces no fruit.

Then Jesus talks about a third kind of soil that springs up but it springs up against thorns and those thorns represent the concerns of this life, the desire to become rich and wealthy in this world and that desire and that pursuit to have all of the stuff of this life chokes out the seed of the Gospel and in that person, too, their faith dies and is of no value.

Then there is the fourth kind of person and that is the good soil. The person hears the Word, believes it, and the rest of their life is one of bounty and fruitfulness.

I say to them, “I can’t tell you what kind of person you are. You have to decide upon the basis of your faith and upon your commitment to the Lord Jesus Christ what kind of soil you are going to be. I would warn you against being these other kinds of soil because there won’t be any use of what we have talked about if that is true, but you will need to persevere in your faith and as you do, know that God, in His mighty miracle-working power will work in you to free you and to bring fruitfulness in your life.”

I have talked to some parents who say, “My grown child never goes to church. They are not giving any evidence of having anything to do with Jesus Christ, but I am so glad to know that they are going to Heaven.” I ask, “How do you know that?” They say, “I know that because when they were eight years old they went to AWANA and they prayed to receive Jesus. I know that because I listened to them when they were nine and they knelt down by the bed with me.”

I would say to that parent, and I would say not unsympathetically, “Of course, everyone of us as parents desire for our children to be received by God into Heaven and to avoid the condemnation of sin, but I will tell you it is of no value if, in order to bring emotional comfort, we tell ourselves that when it is not true. We need to search the Scriptures and understand what the true Doctrine of Assurance reveals to us. Rather than taking emotional comfort about some past decision, we need to press our sons and daughters with the Gospel and say, ‘Son, or daughter, I am concerned about your soul and you should be too!’ I don’t want to give you false comfort. Here is the Gospel and here is the call of God upon your life, and as I see you life right now there is no evidence of you following Jesus and as a result there is no comfort that the Scripture would afford you.”

The last reason why there are so many nominal Christians is because there is often a neglect of a self-examination. We often think that we don’t need to examine ourselves to see whether we are in the faith or not because “we just know that we are!” That is not what the Scriptures say. 2 Corinthians 13:5 says,

<sup>5</sup> Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you <sup>5</sup>Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith...

Paul is saying that this ought to be a normal course of our lives; to examine our own soul so that we don’t base our assurance upon something we have done in the past, but that we base our assurance upon something that God is continuing to do – that He is continuing to bring us along in the faith.

Caterpillar has a place called “The Proving Grounds” where they take tractors out to prove what they say about that tractor really is true in a work environment. It is not the “testing grounds”, it is the “proving grounds”.

When we examine ourselves it is not because we are full of doubts and fears about whether we are truly born again, but it is because we want to gain more and more confidence of God’s working in our life. There is a “proving grounds” of our faith.

Let’s look at the last issue which is the cure, or the correction for nominal Christianity. It is perhaps the most important aspect. What is the difference between the nominal Christian and the authentic Christian? We have discussed it: the nominal Christian, Jesus says in Verse 22, does not do the will of the Father who is in Heaven. The authentic Christian is one who does the will of the Father in Heaven. In Verse 24, in that great word-picture of the wise man and the foolish man, the wise man is the one who hears the words of Jesus and puts them into practice. The foolish man is the one who hears the words of Jesus and does not put them into practice.

The bottom line for the self-examination of our lives, in regards to God, is that we would look to observe a personal commitment to Christ that translates by Christ’s grace and by Christ’s power into a life that is more Christ-like in character and in our behavior.

Someone may protest, "This sounds like works-oriented salvation; that we are saved on the basis of our good works." No, not at all! We have misunderstood. The foundation that Jesus speaks of in this parable is not a person's good works, the foundation, the rock, is Jesus Christ. Scripture makes that abundantly clear. Paul will say that Jesus Christ, Himself, is the chief cornerstone and that He is the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2:20). If a life is built upon Jesus Christ, the foundation, then that life gives evidence through its practice, through its character, and through its behavior.

It is no different from what James says, that faith without works is dead (James 2:26). It is no different from what John says, that if we claim to have fellowship with God and yet walk in darkness, we lie and we don't live by the truth. The man who says, "I know God," but does not do what He commands is a liar and the truth is not in him. (1 John 1:6).

The relationship with God comes through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone, all as a result of God's grace, His free gift, but the grace of God always bears the fruit of real obedience in a life. Our hope is built upon Jesus Christ and upon Him alone. We don't put our hope because of our obedience, because of our works, and because of our actions, but as we place the foundation of our life upon Jesus Christ and as we commit ourselves to Him, we ask: how do we really know that we have planted our feet in Jesus and not in some self-resource? How do we know that we are trusting in Christ and not in ourselves? When we place our feet in Jesus Christ, He brings about a real working that changes our character, our actions, our thoughts, and our behaviors. That is what Jesus does. So how do I look for the handiwork of Christ in my life?

I have a concern for many who come to church and they come and agree with all that is said and all that is sung. When praise begins they praise God with energy and with zeal. They serve God in Sunday school and in the nursery and in the various mission ministries throughout our community. When they pray they pray with passion and biblical insight and they even evangelize and witness, and yet they are Christian in name only and it is evidenced by this: when they walk outside of the sphere of nominal Christianity and they walk outside of the church and they walk outside of their place of ministry, their life is just the same as everyone else's in this world. They leave the church and they go back to committing sexually immoral acts in their thoughts or in their relationships. They leave the church and they go back to cheating in school or cheating in the marketplace. They leave the church or their ministry and they go back to remaining angry and bitter toward those who have hurt them or wronged them. They leave the church and they go back to longing and a desire to be wealthy and powerful in this present world. They leave the church and they go back to using a vocabulary that they know would not be acceptable among their Christian friends and in a house of worship. They leave the church and they go back to continuing to gossip and slander and a host of other sins, not to all of the sins but whatever they go back to, they go back to that and it is almost as if it is a seamless slide back into it and there is no soul-concern for the difference and the dichotomy between those two worlds.

Friends, I ask you to listen to Jesus' words. The answer to our problem is not to prove ourselves to become more moral and more righteous. No, the answer is to root ourselves in Christ; Christ alone can save us. He alone can rescue us, but the answer is not found in a nominal Christianity where everybody else thinks we are a Christian. Our commitment is not there and we know that because we do not experience the power of God in our life to make us more like Jesus.

Jesus tells us a story and He does it out of grace and loving kindness so that we might avoid the great crash of Judgment Day. May God be merciful to us to reveal that which we could not discover on our own and then to turn to God in real, genuine faith and repentance, that we might receive from Him the gift of eternal life.