

Principles for Changing the World #6: Beware of the Deceived.
From the Series, “The King and I – Matthew Tells Us About the King of the Universe”
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Introduction

In our last article, I told the story of how I was tricked out of some money many years ago. A salesperson on the phone told me that if I purchased the product she was selling, I would be entered into a drawing with big prizes. It’s entirely possible, and I think likely, that she was lying about the drawing. I fell for it and wound up buying the product she was selling. I likely paid a lot more for it than I should have. From there we learned about “Principle for Changing the World Number 5: Beware of Deceivers.”

Let me start in this article by telling another story about I time when someone told me something that likely was not true. It was way back in third grade. During a discussion on the playground, someone brought up the subject of card tricks. One of my associates on the playground responded by making the following claim: He said, “I can take a deck of cards and make any card I want come to the top.” He repeated that claim several times. I recall being very impressed.



About a week later, I attended a family gathering. Coincidentally, the subject of card tricks came up again. I happily chimed in, “I have a friend who can take a deck of cards and make any card he wants come to the top!” One of my uncles was there at the gathering. He got a suspicious look on his face. He looked at me and asked, “Did you ever see him do it?”

I was a little embarrassed, because I knew right away what he was getting at. He was suggesting the kid lied, and I got tricked. I sheepishly said, “Well, he said so.” I was thinking to myself, “Hey uncle, you don’t know who you’re dealing with here. I’m 9 years old. “I’m too sophisticated to be tricked.”

My uncle repeated, louder, “Did you SEE him do it?” At this point, all I could say was, “Well, no.” That ended the conversation.

OK. What are the possibilities here? One: My friend was a genius who could do amazing card tricks at the age of 9. Sadly, this was not likely.

Two: My friend was telling a fib – a big fib. Sadly, sometimes children do this. Fortunately, most of the time, they grow out of that habit. Sometimes, they don't, but that's a message for another day.

There is a third possibility. Many of you have been to magic shows. If you have, what I'm about to describe may be familiar. Let's say my friend's family went to one of these shows - Those shows are thought to be "family friendly". Magicians often ask for volunteers from the audience. I could see the magician announcing, "I need some assistance. Who wants to help?" Young children are very quick to raise their hands at times like this. Perhaps the magician called on my friend. He might have said, "You look like a talented young man. You may have special abilities. Do this: Think about a card - any card." The young boy says, "Ace of spades." "A good choice" says the magician. He then reaches into a special case on the stage and pulls out a deck of cards.

Now, little known to the young boy, the case has 52 decks of cards. Each deck has 52 of the same card. The magician pulls out the box marked "Ace of Spades". He then says, "I'm going to shuffle the deck – you tell me when to stop." He shuffles for a bit and the boy says, "Stop!" The magician smiles and holds out the deck. "Now, you pull off the top card." To his amazement, the little boy pulls off an Ace of Spades. This gets repeated several times with small variations. Then the magician smiles and says, "This is one very talented young man - He can make any card come to the top of the deck. Let's all give him a big hand."

Anyone who's watching knows that the "magic" is in the hands of the magician, not the little boy - But, maybe the little boy doesn't know that. So, option number 3 for our story: This little boy may **actually believe** he can do what he says.

We're in our series, "The King and I – Matthew Tells us About the King of the Universe." We're in chapter 7 where Jesus gives us "Principles for Changing the World." Last week, we learned principle number 5: "Beware of Deceivers." This week, we'll learn principle number 6: "Beware of the Deceived."

Let's read about it:

21 "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. 22 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?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (Matthew 7:21-23)

In our last session, we learned that some deceivers are crooks. If such a deceiver only takes our money and possessions, we may be getting off easy. But, some deceive in such a way as to endanger our souls. In the same way, some people become deceived by the deceivers or by circumstances. When they are deceived in this way, on the best days, they only lose a few things. But sometimes when people are deceived, their souls are in danger - And worse, they endanger the souls of people around them.

Jesus gives us three things here:

- A warning.
- A promise.
- An explanation.

I. The Warning

Let's take a look first at the warning.

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven...”
(Matthew 7:21)

Earlier, Jesus told us about the narrow gate and the narrow road. If you enter by the narrow gate, you are on the road to heaven. Heaven is the wonderful, eternal home of God. If you don't enter by the narrow gate, you are on the road to destruction. Destruction is the eternal and terrible place called hell. It's one or the other. There is no middle.

Some believe that everyone live on after they die - And everyone is in some way progressing towards something better. The Hindus and the Buddhists believe in reincarnation. After you die, if you're not in the right place, you get to try again. Others say that God is a wonderful benevolent being who just lets everyone into heaven.

To those, Jesus says: "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (John 14:6)"

Jesus stands at the narrow gate. In fact, Jesus *is* the gate:

“I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. (John 10:9)”

So, you have either entered through the narrow gate, which is Jesus, or you have not. This is very straightforward. You can disagree if you want, but it's not hard to understand.

But here, Jesus says something scary. There are going to be people on the day of judgement who believe they are calling on him. They will say, "Lord, Lord". They will call upon the Lord with confidence. They will think that they are ready for the Kingdom - But they will not enter. They will be turned away.

This is a terrifying warning. Jesus will explain why this will happen in a moment, but before he does that, he reminds his followers of the promise.

II. The Promise

"... but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Matthew 7:21)"

So, here's a promise: Those who do the will of the father in heaven will see the kingdom of Heaven. When we consider that in relation to the warning, it becomes: "...**only** the one who does the will of my Father in heaven."

Here we have to ask an important question:

"What is the will of the Father who is in heaven?"

Let's find out. One way to find out God's will is to look around in the Scripture and find the times that someone says, "God wants something", or "This is the will of God." We can't hit all those places today, but let's look at a few.

A. God wants everyone to be saved.

First, God wants everyone to be saved. The apostle Paul told his young friend Timothy to pray for people. Here's why:

3 This is good, and pleases God our Savior, 4 who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. (I Timothy 2:3-4)

The Apostle Peter said it in a slightly different way:

9 The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. (II Peter 3:9)

The King James says, "God is not willing that any should perish..."

The first part of doing God's will is to be saved. To be saved, you only need to do a few things.

- 1 Realize the God loves you.
2. Realize that you have a problem: Sin. Sadly, we all have a problem of sin. We disobey God.
This places a barrier between you and God. This also creates debt.
3. Realize that Jesus died for your sins. Through his death on the Cross, Jesus has paid the debt that our sins create. And he has removed the barrier between us and God.
4. Realize that heaven is a free gift that you receive only by faith.

Most of the folks who attend our church regularly have heard the statements in the Bible that describe and support what I've just said. I want to remind everyone of just one statement for now:

8 For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God— 9 not by works, so that no one can boast.
(Ephesians 2:8-9)

This is important. Jesus did all the work. He did all the work so we don't have to. This is important: **Good works do not earn salvation.** God is so loving and generous that he gives salvation to any who will have faith in Jesus Christ.

This will be important later in our talk.

So, the first thing you need to do if you want to do the will of God is be saved. If you've never done that, talk to us. We want you to be able to say with assurance that you are in the will of God. There will be some important links at the end of this article.

Now that we understand that, let's see something else that's in the will of the Father.

B. Good Works

AFTER they're saved, the Father wants everyone to produce good works. Let's read about that.

For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

Our works do not earn or produce salvation. But, after God has done the work of salvation, and after he has given it to us as a free gift through faith, we become new creatures – AT this point, it's very much the will of God that we do good things.

This also implies that we avoid bad things.

15 Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, 16 making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. 17 Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is. 18 Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit, 19 speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord, 20 always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Ephesians 5:15-17)

So, once we are saved, it’s God’s will that we do good things and not bad things. Bad things are things like getting drunk and getting involved in what Paul calls debauchery. Good things involve inviting God’s Holy Spirit to fill us. We worship: We sing, we glorify our Father by giving thanks in all things in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. There are plenty of places in the Scriptures that describe other good works.

With that, we have just begun to investigate the will of the Father.

What is his will? Be saved. After you are saved, ask God to fill you with his Spirit so you can perform good works that glorify God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. If you do those things, God promises us that we will be on the road to the eternal Kingdom of Heaven.

As a final note before we move on to the next point, this salvation is solid. However, it does not produce immediate perfection. Sometimes, you will try to do the right thing, and you will fail. Here’s where we need to be reminded of God’s grace.

13 As a father has compassion on his children,
so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him;
14 for he knows how we are formed,
he remembers that we are dust.
(Psalm 103:13-14)

We’re told here that our God is a God of great compassion. He knows we are limited.

Isaiah tells us what the Messiah will be like when he comes:

3 A bruised reed he will not break,
and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out.
(Isaiah 42:3)

We'll run into this one down the road, so I'll give more explanation then. For now, God isn't sitting around waiting to crush us and throw us away because we fail.

And finally:

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. (I John 1:9)

If we fail; if we sin, we only need to confess our sins. Part of the great promise of Jesus Christ is that he will forgive. When we fall, he helps us to get up and get back on track.

So, when Jesus warns us that some will not enter the Kingdom, he's not referring to truly saved people who sometimes fall.

Let's move on to the next point. So far, we've seen the warning. We just looked at the promise. Now, let's learn about the explanation.

III. The Explanation

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?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!' (Matthew 7:21-23)

So, why did Jesus need to give his followers a stern warning? Because there will be many who are deceived. They will be deceived by two things. First, they will be deceived by a false understanding of the miraculous.

Jesus presents three types of miraculous events. The first is prophecy. We learned in our last session that a prophet is someone who speaks the words of God. In order to speak the words of God, someone has to have the words of God. That can only happen when God supernaturally gives those words to someone. If someone is truly receiving words from God, certain things will be true. We discussed those things in our last session. We'll just be reminded of one: People who are true prophets can tell what will happen in the future. They will be able to do so with 100% accuracy. Anything less, and you don't have a true prophet. Recall that in the Law of Moses, false prophets received a very harsh treatment: The death penalty. So, God takes this very seriously.

I have heard people who think of themselves as prophets who have tried to predict things like the winner of an election. Seeing as you usually have a 50% chance of getting it right, that's not a hard thing to do. But some of these people have missed on even that.

Why would somebody do this? Why would someone claim to be speaking the words of God when they have no solid reason to believe so? There are two main reasons:

First, some people want desperately to feel important. There is something about imagining that they're speaking for God that makes them feel that way. It gets even worse when these people get others to believe them. The sense of power grows as more and more people fall for the lies.

The second reason is something that will come to play in other places of deception: Some people are mentally ill. Some forms of mental illness involve hearing voices and seeing things that others don't see. Sometimes, these experiences can feel very real. And once again, if you can get others to believe that what you're seeing or hearing is real, it gets worse.

Jesus warns us that some people will think they're prophesying in his name and that this wins them a place in heaven. But those people will be horribly surprised.

Then there is the business of casting out demons and performing other types of miracles. Is it possible to drive out demons or perform miracles without God? Apparently, it's possible to look like it. Once again, let's look at some possibilities.

Again, mental illness sometimes comes into play. People who are mentally ill sometimes lose the ability to discern between reality and the products of their imaginations. In extreme cases you can imagine that demons are running around and worse. To the mentally ill person, this all seems very, very real.

Another possibility is hypnosis. Sometimes, people who are otherwise normal and healthy are capable of entering a state where they are very vulnerable to the suggestions of others. A skilled hypnotist, when working with the right people, can do amazing things.

Some years ago, I watched a documentary on hypnosis. The reporter who investigated this topic volunteered at one point to be put into a hypnotic state himself. After entering this state, the hypnotist handed him a lemon. He told the reporter that the lemon was a fresh orange. He then asked the reporter to take a bite and describe what he was tasting. The reporter, who was biting into a sour lemon, said that he had never had a tastier orange. To him it was very sweet and delicious. Before bringing the reporter out of his hypnotic state, the hypnotist suggested that he would feel great - refreshed and awake. Sure enough, when the reporter woke up, that's exactly how he felt.

Later in the documentary, viewers learned about group hypnosis. They followed a Las Vegas hypnotist during one of his performances. The hypnotist got a whole group of volunteers and got them to believe all kinds of crazy things.

Two of those things stood out: One – the hypnotist could put any of the participants to sleep at will. He would just tap their foreheads, and they would fall into the arms of some helpers. And then, like the hypnotist in the scene I mentioned a minute ago, this one also said that all participants would wake up refreshed and feeling like they had the best night's sleep they'd ever experienced. And sure enough, that's what everyone reported.

So, there are lots of reasons why people might be deceived into thinking that they're prophesying, casting out demons, and performing miracles.

This is a very real warning for some Christian groups today. In particular, groups who would call themselves "Charismatic" or "Pentecostal". These folks believe the Christian life should be full of supernatural activities. People should prophesy and participate in an activity called "speaking in tongues." People who speak in tongues claim to speak in foreign languages and special angelic languages. Also, they believe you should see miracles like healings and demon exorcisms on a regular basis.

One activity that stands out at this time is called "Being slain in the Spirit." This is an activity that is mentioned nowhere in the Bible. To be slain in the Spirit, you come to the front of the church, and someone touches you on the forehead. You immediately fall back into a deep sleep.

If this is sounding familiar, it should. It's exactly what happens in group hypnosis. I spoke to a friend once who participated in this activity. He said, "I don't know how it works, but after I do it, I feel like I've had the best night sleep in years." "If it feels so good", many would say, "It must be right".

Can the supernatural take place for Christians today? Could there be miracles like healings, or could a true prophet arise? Yes. But be warned, these types of activities can be very deceptive. And it's entirely possible that people who spend a lot of time in churches who focus on these activities will be tragically surprised someday when they meet Jesus. They will be surprised because being saved doesn't necessarily mean a long line of miracles.

Jesus said something very interesting to the Apostle Thomas. Thomas said he wouldn't believe that Jesus had risen from the dead until he could put his fingers into the wounds. Jesus allowed him to do just that:

27 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." 28 Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"

29 Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." (John 20:27-29)

Jesus tells us that the greatest faith is found in people who have not seen miracles and believe anyway.

There's a second reason that these people will be deceived: They will be deceived by a false understanding of what it means to be saved. You see, we are saved so that we can know God. Jesus will tell these people that he never knew them.

Let's read what Jesus said in another place:

3 Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. (John 17:3)

This is very important. Eternal life is not just a place. It's not just a state. It's a **relationship**. The will of the Father is that everyone be saved so that they can know him, and know Jesus Christ.

This is why it's so important to understand how we are saved. As we said, we are not saved by works. Let's look at an interesting story from the life of Jesus.

46 While Jesus was still talking to the crowd, his mother and brothers stood outside, wanting to speak to him. 47 Someone told him, "Your mother and brothers are standing outside, wanting to speak to you." 48 He replied to him, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" 49 Pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. 50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:46-50)

At another time, this happened:

27 As Jesus was saying these things, a woman in the crowd called out, "Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you." 28 He replied, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it." (Luke 11:27-28)

Tragically, people get it into their heads that all kinds of things around Jesus and things around the Christian life are really what matters. Jesus says that doing his will is what matters. And we've talked about that.

This is where all kinds of people who believe themselves to be Christians will be very surprised. Some believe in the Rosary. With the Rosary, you push a bead along a string. You recite a "Hail Mary". When you do that, you complement Mary, the mother of Jesus. You push another bead and repeat until you're done the whole string. There will be people who reach the gates of heaven one day and say, "I pushed those little beads until my fingers were sore." Jesus will say, "I'm sorry - Complementing my Mother is not my will."

Some think baptism saves them. They will say, "I was sprinkled with water as a child." Jesus will say, "Yes, but what did you do when you grew up?"

Others will announce all kinds of activities that they believe will purchase their way into heaven. But Jesus will say, "Your works do not purchase salvation - I save you so that you can produce good works."

Someday, as you approach the gates of heaven, the question will be, "Are you saved, and do you know God?" If not, Jesus will have to say, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers."

Let's pull this all together.

Conclusion

So, today we've learned another Principle for changing the world - Number 6: Beware of the deceived. Some people are deceivers because they're crooks. Some people are deceivers because they themselves are deceived. They think they're going to be admitted to the Kingdom of Heaven. Some will believe those people and follow them. They will all be in for a horrible surprise.

Do not be deceived by them. You: Be saved. Be saved by faith alone in the work of God on your behalf. Understand that you are saved so that you can know God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ. Seek God's help to grow in your relationship with him. Seek the help of his Holy Spirit so that you can produce works that glorify him. Then, not only will you receive the promise of salvation. But you will be well on the way to changing the world so that others can follow.

Thanks for reading! Here are some helpful links:

Trinity Church
www.TrinityTeaneck.org

Phil's Site
PhilBrainerd.com

To learn how to begin a new life with Jesus Christ, visit Billy Graham's site:

PeaceWithGod.net
