

Do You Have Saving Faith?

Introduction

There is a show on television that I enjoy. You may have watched it. It is Antiques Roadshow. People bring their antiques and artifacts to experts who carefully examine the items and determine if they are a rare, expensive valuable antique, or something far less. I particularly enjoy watching people's anticipation as they wait to find out the dollar value of their "treasure". Some bring their Tiffany lamp or colonial piece of furniture with great anticipation, convinced that they have something of immense value. If you've seen the show, you have observed the reaction when the expert checks out the piece and then looks up and says "you have a counterfeit". The person's expression shows the disappointment. They had come, believing they had some original rare antique worth thousands of dollars, only to find that it is indeed a trinket worth far less.

This morning I'm not talking about Tiffany lamps and ancient pottery. I'm speaking to you about the condition of your soul. Many are convinced that they are spiritually rich and prosperous and will be shocked when their life is examined and found to be a counterfeit.

Today we are going to take a close look at your faith, and find out if it is genuine. True faith in Christ is a priceless gift that is the means of our forgiveness, justification, and acceptance by God. The shocking truth is that, according to Jesus, there are many people in the world that believe they are right with God, but are not. There are many that profess a saving relationship with Christ, but Jesus says that only a relatively few of those professors possess a genuine saving relationship with Him. In a letter that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church, he admonished professing believers to examine themselves to see if they had the real thing, or a counterfeit.

II Corinthians 13:5-6

⁵ Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you? unless indeed you fail to meet the test! ⁶ I hope you will find out that we have not failed the test.

Some of the people in the Corinthian church were questioning whether or not Paul was a true apostle. This letter is Paul's defense of his apostleship, authority, and relationship with Christ. At this point in the letter, he issues this challenge to those who were questioning his authenticity. He admonished them to look at themselves, and determine if they were truly in the faith, or just merely religious. We need to do the same.

Friends, I am not talking this morning to atheists or those who are following false gods and professing other beliefs. I am talking about people sitting in churches like ours, and the thousands of other churches that profess Jesus Christ as Lord. There are many that think they know God and are eternally secure, but are in fact deceived. All of us must take this warning seriously. The Scriptures admonish us to examine ourselves to be sure. Today I am asking you to compare your life to the standard of Scripture to see if you have a true, genuine saving relationship with God through Christ, or if you have a counterfeit.

It is not my aim to create a sense of eternal insecurity. The same Scripture that tells us to examine our faith also teaches that those the Lord saves, he assures and He keeps safe to the end. My prayer is that if you are truly saved but having some doubts, that this message will push you to deal with the source of your doubt and place your full faith and trust in your Lord and Savior. I have also prayed that the Spirit of God may use this message to speak to that person who thinks they are saved but are in fact deceived. That is why the Paul pleaded with the Corinthians to closely examine themselves to see if there was any evidence they had the real thing.

I want to take a moment now and pray again and ask the Lord to use His Word to enlighten all of us on our true spiritual condition this morning...

Here's where we're headed. First, we are going to consider three reasons why it is important to periodically

examine ourselves to see if our Christianity is genuine or counterfeit. Second, we are going to consider three evidences of genuine saving faith to examine our spiritual condition. Finally, I will provide three appropriate responses to the results of the examination.

I. Why should we examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith?

Reason #1: I need to examine myself because Jesus said there are two roads, and only one leads to eternal life, and most miss it.

Matthew 7:13-14

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

How many roads lead to heaven? Only one. It is the narrow road of holy and righteous living. Most people believe that there are many roads that lead to heaven. I had an Uncle that told me that faith and religion were like a wagon wheel. God was the hub, and there are many spokes that lead to Him. As far as I know, my well-meaning Uncle died with that common, popular belief. How frightening is that thought based on what we just read? Jesus plainly tells us that there is only road and narrow gate that leads to life, and few find it. You have to really seek this gate out, because it’s off the main path and hard to find. And when you find it, you have to agonize and squeeze to get through it. In fact, to get through this gate, you have to be poor in spirit, and mournful about your poverty, and be starving for righteousness, a righteousness that you can’t attain and don’t deserve. This gate is so narrow that you have to leave everything behind to get through it – all of your good works, and your religious standing, your pride and ego, maybe even your family. Only a few are on this narrow path that leads to life. The crowds are on the broad path that leads to destruction. We need to think about the road we’re on, and the gate that we passed through.

Reason #2: I need to examine myself because Jesus said there are false preachers with false messages that deceive people.

Matthew 7:15-20

¹⁵ *“Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. ¹⁶ By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? ¹⁷ Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. ¹⁹ Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. ²⁰ Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.*

These false preachers sound good. They tickle your ears, and make you feel good. Many of their words appeal to the flesh. They proclaim a message that soothes and pacifies – it brings a comfort and solace to respectable religious people. Just believe in God, go to church, and try to live a good life, and you will be ok. You’re a good person. All God expects is for us to try. Spirituality is on the rise. It is popular to pray, believe in God, and to be a spiritual person. The false teachers proclaim a popular message, but are they from God? Jesus says take a closer look. Look at the character and lifestyle of these preachers. Then you will discover that the goodness is only superficial. It is a religious veneer. Inwardly there are major problems. False gospels have no power to deliver the heart from sin. The bad root will eventually produce a bad fruit. Who are you listening to, and what message are you following?

Reason #3: I need to examine myself because Jesus said there are many people that say they know Him and call Him Lord, but He doesn’t know them at all.

Matthew 7:21-23

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

There are going to be many on judgment day that are going to profess the name of Jesus on their lips, and appeal to the life they lived in His service, the works that they did in His name, and He is going to say He does not know them. He calls them evildoers. Merely professing Jesus as Lord does not save a person. These people prayed and said the right words. They even did miracles and great works in His name! Being a missionary, a pastor, a deacon, a youth worker, does not prove that a person is saved. Religious activity is not evidence of salvation. Just because you believe you are ok and say you are ok does not mean you are ok.

There are three reasons it is important for you to examine yourself to see if you are in the faith.

1. Because few find the narrow gate that leads to eternal life.
2. Because there are many false preachers whose message will lead many down the wrong road that ends in destruction.
3. Because there are many people call on Jesus as their Lord, but He does not know them.

II. What is the evidence of having genuine saving faith?

Evidence 1: You are a new creation and have had a change of desires.

In the second letter to the Corinthian church, Paul declares in chapter 5, verse 17 that *“if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come.”* I will ask you, has the old gone, and has the new come in your life? Or is the old really still prevalent, and there really isn’t much new around at all? When a person possesses saving faith in Christ, his life is transformed from the inside out. Jesus says whom the Son sets free is free indeed! We’re not talking about sinless perfection. We’re talking about a radical change of direction. You were going one way, away from God, doing your own thing, living for yourself, and now you have a new life. You hate sin. You love Jesus. You are pursuing righteousness and holiness. You have godly desires that are increasing. You have sinful desires are fading. The things you used to love, you now hate, and the things you used to hate, you now love. You love things like the Word of God; you crave it like a newborn baby craves his mother’s milk. You have new friends, people that love Jesus, new affections, a new life.

Do you have a new nature? Do you run from sin and pursue holiness? Do you have an inner longing to please God? Does it cause you agony and sadness when you fail to please Him and fall short of His standard? Do you know the voice of Jesus, your shepherd? Does He speak to you as you read the Word of God, or hear it preached? Do you savor the Word of God? Does the Holy Spirit speak to your heart, and convict you of sin, and comfort you in your difficulties? Jesus said that His sheep hear His voice, and they obey it. Does this describe your life? Do you abide in Christ?

If you said yes to these questions, then this is evidence that you are a new creation in Christ and have genuine saving faith. If not, you are in trouble.

Evidence 2: You have the power of the Holy Spirit and overcome sin, flesh, and the devil.

Notice, that I did not ask you if you are a strong person. The Bible says that God chooses the weak and despised things of the world to show His greatness and strength. This is a power that comes from God and not within from us. It manifests in times of trial and testing. In fact, James tells us that we can count it all joy when we encounter trials, because if you are a true believer, trials strengthen your faith and help you grow stronger.

So here’s the test. When you face life’s problems, do you find that you grow stronger and more dependent on God through the difficulty, or do you slip and fall away from God and lose confidence in God? If you have a genuine faith, trials mature and strengthen your faith and make you more like His Son. If you lack saving faith, trials pull you away from God and discourage you and end in bitterness and hopelessness. Think about difficult situations you face. Do you experience the power of God in your struggle? Does God teach you and perfect

you, and do you come out on the other side of problem closer to God? If so, that evidence that you truly know Him and He knows you, and that your faith is genuine.

How about when you face temptation? God has not only saved true believers from the penalty of sin, but He also protects them from the power of sin. Do you experience the power of God to overcome the evil one? The apostle John states it this way in I John 5:4-5 *for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.* Do you overcome the world, or does it overcome you? Do you experience victory in your battle with temptation and sin, or are you continually defeated? Again, it's not that we don't fall or struggle. It is that we walk in the light, confessing and turning away from sin, and not living in it. If you experience the power to overcome sin, that is an evidence of true salvation.

Evidence 3 – You have an affection and deep love for Christ and His church.

What do I mean by love? Many people have a degree of natural love. I know some unbelieving couples that put some professing believer's marriages to shame. Because of common grace, many people express amazing degrees of love and affection toward other people. The supernatural love that comes from God, however, is a completely selfless love. It is the love that the Father expressed when He gave us His Son. It is a love that gives with no expected in return. It is a love that goes beyond natural ability and is motivated by a deep desire to see God glorified. It is first toward God Himself and then expressed toward other believers. I John chapter 4:7-8 *“Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.”* John makes it clear that he is not talking about just mere affection for others. He is talking about the kind of love that takes action. John says that if we see a brother with a material need and can help him, but don't, that indicates that we don't have this selfless love in our hearts. James said it this way, that pure and undefiled religion is helping the helpless, like widows and orphans.

This supernatural love of God is the fruit of the Spirit which produces a forgiving spirit within true believers. This matter of forgiveness is quite serious. If we have truly experienced the mercy and forgiveness of God, then it is an utter contradiction for us to be unforgiving toward anyone. If you have the capacity to forgive others as God has forgiven you, that is a true evidence of genuine faith.

Do you have a love in your heart for those in need? When you see needs in your brother's and sister's lives, are you moved with compassion and a desire to help them? If not, there is another red flag that your faith is deficient. If you have a genuine saving faith, your life will be characterized by giving, because that's the nature of your Father. Jesus even takes it further. He says that if you have the nature of God the Father, that you will love even those who hate you. Now that is an evidence of supernatural love. Its one thing to do good to those how are kind and considerate to you and appreciate your service and help. God grants His children the capacity to love people who despise and hate them. If it is not within you to love unconditionally, you don't have true salvation according to the Word of God. Its not that it is easy to love like this. As a human being, Jesus agonized in the garden of Gethsemane as He faced the cross. It was for the joy set before Him that He willingly accepted and embraced the suffering and took the wrath and judgment of God in behalf of sinners.

So listen carefully to these questions, and answer carefully and honestly:

Question 1: Have you had a change of desires?

Do you hear the Savior's voice in His word and follow Him? Are the old things passing away, and are you living a changed, holy, righteous, new life?

Question 2 - Do you overcome sin, the flesh, and the devil?

Do you experience supernatural strength to overcome temptation and do you grow stronger in times of suffering and hardship? Do trials make you bitter or better?

Question 3 – Do you have an affection and deep love Christ and His church?

Do you possess supernatural love, mercy and forgiveness – especially for other believers, but even for your enemies?

If you can honestly say yes to these three questions, then fall on your knees and thank God for His grace in your life. He has granted you the gift of faith and repentance, and you know Him.

If you can't say yes to these three questions, how should you respond? You thought that you were ok, but now you aren't sure. Perhaps these questions have raised questions in your mind about your true condition. Though this is disturbing, it is a good thing. What a tragedy to believe that you are something that you are not. How sad it will be for the multitudes that will face their ultimate judgment, believing that they are ok, but shocked to find out that it wasn't real. It is painful and humiliating to get real and honest about ourselves. The promise is that God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

III. The appropriate response for those who need help

A. Forsake your own good works and efforts as the way to be accepted by God. Then ask the Lord to help you trust in Christ alone to save you.

Displaying a changed life, supernatural strength, and supernatural love is not what saves someone. This is the fruit of true salvation. Apples and apple tree. If the evidence is absent, you need to ask the Lord to grant you salvation. Once you are truly an apple tree, there will start to be apples. Stop looking to your past religious decisions as a basis for your assurance. Look to Jesus alone as the author and finisher of your faith. Count everything that you would offer God as worthless. Salvation is a gift that God freely gives to those who put their full reliance on Jesus Christ and His work, not theirs.

B. Ask God to show you your true condition

Ephesians 2:1-3 states that without Christ, we are dead in our sins, that we live for ourselves, and that we follow our own way and desires. You must admit that you are totally helpless, that you have no ability to save yourself, and that there is nothing you can do but ask God to have mercy on your wretched soul. You must be like that publican in Luke 18 that would not even raise his head, but said God be merciful to me a sinner! Jesus said that man was justified that very day.

C. Repent and turn away from your sin and self-righteousness, call on God for mercy and place your full trust in Christ alone for your salvation.

If anyone had reason to trust in his own righteousness, it was the Apostle Paul. Listen to Philippians 3:4-11

If anyone else thinks he has reasons to put confidence in the flesh, I have more: ⁵ circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee; ⁶ as for zeal, persecuting the church; as for legalistic righteousness, faultless. ⁷ But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ ⁹ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. ¹⁰ I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, ¹¹ and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.

It is possible to live in an assurance and security of your salvation. It is in forsaking the trusting in your own strength, goodness, decisions, and righteousness, because what you have to offer God is deficient and corrupt. Whoever is willing to forsake all of their self-effort and piety, and come as a spiritually poor, mourning, hungry, needy, desperate person to Jesus for mercy and compassion, will be accepted by Him and granted eternal life. O ye sinners, poor and needy, come to Christ today.