

The Characteristics of False and True Faith

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

Code: 80-20

May we share together in a word of prayer. Our gracious Father, as we come to a time of communion with You, fellowship with You, as well as with each other, we ask that Your Spirit would cleanse our hearts...that we might partake worthily of this, Thy table. We would pray for any in our midst who do not really know the Lord Jesus Christ...that they might come to true faith in Him...and share this table with us. For those of us who do know the Lord...that we might examine ourselves...and know that all is right between us and Thee. Be with us as we look to the Word. May it speak to our hearts...as the very voice that comes from Thee. For the glory of the Savior, we ask. Amen.

One of the very important aspects of coming to the Lord's table, as you well know, is the matter of self-examination. That is an issue for the Apostle Paul in two separate passages of Scripture. The familiar one to us is in 1 Corinthians chapter 11, where he calls upon believers to examine themselves...to be sure that, as they come to the Lord's table to celebrate His death, they do not harbor sin in their life, which is to mock that table. The other passage of Scripture which calls for self-examination is in his second letter to the Corinthians chapter 13 and verse 5. In that, he says, "Examine yourselves whether you be in the faith." So on the one hand, we who are Christians, who know we are in the faith, are to examine ourselves to see that our lives are right before God, that all sin is confessed...And, also, there may be some among us who need, as well, to examine themselves to see, in fact, if they are even in the faith.

I want you to open your Bible with me, because I want to call us to that second kind of self-examination in preparation for the Lord's table tonight...by looking at James chapter 2 as just a beginning Scripture reading. James chapter 2 verses 14 through 20. The writer of Scripture under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit says, "What doth...doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he has faith, and has not works? Can faith save him? If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, 'Depart in peace; be ye warmed and filled,' notwithstanding, you give them not those things which are needful to the body, what doth it profit? Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone. Yea, a man may say, 'Thou has faith, and I have works.' Show me thy faith without thy works, and I will show thee my faith by my works. Thou believest that there is one God; thou doest well. The demons also believe - and tremble. But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead?"

If that passage teaches anything...if it teaches anything at all...it surely teaches that there is such a thing as non-saving faith. Faith that does not save. And I believe that it is not the only passage that points this to us. It is obvious from many portions of Scripture that there is a faith that saves and a faith that does not save. Scripture is filled with that fact. We learn about it in our Lord's parable of the wheat and the tares. That in some cases are so much alike that only God in judgment can distinguish them. One has a faith that saves, and one a faith that does not save. That same dichotomy is indicated by our Lord in the parable of the soils. There are three bad soils, which do not produce fruit. Two of the three look as if they should and will, but do not. And then there are three types of good soil that bring forth fruit thirty-fold, sixty-fold, and one-hundred-fold. There is a faith that has appearance, but does not save. We learn from the disciples who followed Jesus for a little while, who remained with Him for a little while, who listened for a little while, and then defected, leaving Him, that there is a discipleship that is not genuine.

We remember the teaching of our Lord in the 15th chapter of John's Gospel about branches that abide and bear fruit, and branches that do not bear fruit, and are cut off and cast into the fire and burned...James talks about the sayers and the doers, those who make claims and those who know reality. In Hebrews chapter 10, two verses come to mind. Verses 38 and 39, "Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draw back...that is from true faith...My soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition, but of them that believe to the saving of the soul." There is a believing that draws back and is damned. There is a believing that moves ahead and is saved.

Now this matter of saving and non-saving faith is very aptly illustrated in a very special chapter in the book of Acts, and I'd like you to turn to that, and I'd like our attention to be drawn to that chapter. It is the 8th chapter of Acts. And here I believe we have in bold relief the distinction between non-saving faith and saving faith. We're going to meet in this chapter two people who believed. One named Simon, another who is nameless to us, though he is identified. Each of them, it is said, believe. One of them has a faith that does not save. One of them a faith that does. Now, the main character in the 8th chapter of Acts is really the evangelist by the name of Philip. We first met him in chapter 6 where, because of the godliness of his life, the strength of his character, the integrity of his devotion to God, he was chosen to be a deacon in the church to carry out a very specific task. He has since been given an even wider responsibility than that of distributing food to the widows, which was his portion in Acts 6. He is now called upon to preach the Gospel. And we meet this man in verse 5, and the text says, "Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spoke, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did."

His message was confirmed by miraculous signs and wonders...namely, that, "unclean spirits...verse 7...crying with a loud voice came out of many that were possessed with them; and many taken with palsies and that were lame, were healed. And there was great joy in that city." Samaria had a revival

under the evangelism of Philip. The persecuted church we meet in verses 1 to 3 is scattered out of Jerusalem. That's not bad. That's good. It sends them with the Gospel into Samaria, just as the pattern of the book was established in Acts 1:8, Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and then the uttermost part of the earth.

And so the persecuted church moves out. Philip is the key in the 8th chapter, as he preaches the Gospel. Now, into the life of Philip, in this adventure of evangelism, come two people. One is a man by the name of Simon. The other is an Ethiopian eunuch who is attached to the court of Candace, who is the queen of the Ethiopians. He is nameless to us, but identified in that way. First, we wanna meet Simon, and then we wanna meet the eunuch, and we wanna see the distinction between saving faith and non-saving faith.

Now, let me say at the very outset that, simply stated, up to this point in the Gospel narrative, and even in the flow of the book of Acts. It seems that we could identify three necessary ingredients to saving faith...three necessary ingredients to genuine belief...believing, obeying, and continuing. In John 8, for example, the Lord said, "If you hear My Word, and if you continue in My Word, then are you My true disciple." Believing, obeying, and continuing mark out true faith. We saw that also in the 2nd chapter, where those people who heard, believed, were baptized, and continued in the Apostle's doctrine, prayers, fellowship, and, of course, the ministry of that early church.

So those are the elements. But as we look at Simon, and we look at the eunuch, it seems as though we see those elements, and so we must look even more closely to discern the nature of true saving faith. Now, to begin with, let me say that Simon is an illustration of the faith that does not save...and I'll show you as we look at the text. I wanna give you characteristics of non-saving faith. Let's begin at verse 9. "There was a certain man called Simon, who previously, in the same city...that is in the city of Samaria...used sorcery and bewitched the people of Samaria giving out that himself was some great one, to whom they all gave heed from the least to the greatest saying, 'This man is the great power of God.' And to him they had regard, because that for a long time he had bewitched them with sorceries."

Now, here I find the first ingredient of non-saving faith. The first element, a wrong view of self...a wrong view of self. Simon was very egotistical. There are some people who think they are good, who have a very high opinion of themselves. Simon was such a person. He thought himself to be some great one, it says at the end of verse 9. He was involved, it says, in sorcery. The word is maguown. We get the word magic from it. He was a magician. A magician in the black sense, not somebody who goes down to the local trick store and comes off with a few slight of hand tricks. This man was a man who was neck deep in the occult, involved in things like astrology and soothsaying and sorcery, who dealt with incantations and charms, who dealt with divinations, astrologies, horoscopes...who plied his trade with demon beings, mediums, and spirits from the supernatural world of Satan. He was a demonic sorcerer, attached to the kingdom of darkness. And the kingdom

of darkness is, after all, a supernatural kingdom, and, therefore, there were some rather astounding sorceries that he was able to perpetrate to the degree that the people were bewitched. If you want another word for that, they were duped. They were deceived.

And he announced himself to be a great miracle worker from God. He was an egotist. The very opposite of the right heart preparation for true reception of the Gospel. And he made his point very well. People all believed him. He had, it tells us, power. In fact, in verse 10, "This man is the great power of God." Now what did they mean by that word, the great power? It's very likely that what they had in mind, if we'd set a cultural context for that word was that he is some kind of an aon, some kind of an angelic creature. Some kind of an emanation descending from God. He is a sort of deity...and his basic personality trait was that of pride.

Someone once said pride is a weed that grows in every man's garden, but in the garden of Simon, it was a tree. He was a man who was devoted to his own aggrandizement. And we are reminded, aren't we, of James 4:6, which says, "God resists the proud and gives His Grace to...what?...to the humble." He is very unlike the publican of Luke 18, who beats upon his breast and cries out, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner who will not so much as lift his eyes toward Heaven," because he is so filled with shame over his sin. And I think it's fair to say that the man who comes to true faith in the Lord Jesus Christ has a prepared heart, which is the heart that sees itself as sinful...and worthy only of judgment. Again, I'm reminded of James 4:10, "Humble yourselves in the sight of God, and He will lift you up." And I'm reminded of the Lord's Words in John 5:44, "How can you believe who receive honor, one from another, and seek not the honor that comes from God alone? How can you believe when you live for the honor that you can receive?"

So the first thing that marks this man as one whose faith is not legitimate is he had a wrong view of self. Secondly, he had a wrong view of supernatural power. He had a wrong view of supernatural power. Verse 12, "And to him they had regard, because that for a long time he has bewitched them with sorceries. He was convincing to the people. But when they believed Philip, preaching the things concerning the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." Now, Simon just lost all his converts. Everybody had fallen in to the message of Philip, and God had moved with great power, and the people believed and were baptized when they heard the full word of the Kingdom.

By the way, it tells us in verse 12, "He preached the things concerning the Kingdom of God, that is all the truths related to salvation and entrance into that Kingdom. He preached the central message of the name of Jesus Christ." And back in Acts 4:12, we were reminded that there is no other name given among men under Heaven whereby we must be saved but the name of Jesus Christ. So he preached entrance into the Kingdom through the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. And when they heard the full word of the Kingdom and how to come in, and they understood fully the work of Jesus Christ, they believed, were baptized, both men and women. They were delivered from the bondage

of Satan and also delivered from the bondage of Simon.

Now, when Simon saw this, I suppose his attitude was, "If you can't lick 'em, join 'em." He was impressed by Philip's preaching, and he wanted that power so that he could hold the people. If Philip had a power that surpassed his, he wanted that power. And so we see he had a wrong view of supernatural power. He saw supernatural power as a way to fulfill his own ambition, rather than as a way to transform his sinful life. And he sought Christ for his own gain and his own good and his own purposes. So many like that. So many want Jesus for what He can do for them. Wrong motive. A wrong motive. But it looked awfully good, though, at verse 13. Simon himself believed. There it is. It says he believed. Now what kind of faith is this? He believed, and "When he was baptized, he believed to the point of obedience."

So we said three things. Believe, obey, and continue. He believed. He was obediently baptized, and he continued with Philip. Boy, looks good. It's like all the parts are there, and he was amazed, "beholding the miracles and signs which were done." But the problem was he wanted miracle power. He wanted all the goodies that could possibly be gained to him personally. There was no sense of self-sacrifice, no sense of giving up his sin. There was no legitimate perception of spiritual power, supernatural power. True salvation does not come to those who grab at the things that God offers, who grab at the power of God with a self-indulgent sentiment, with the goal of self-fulfillment.

The third thing is, he not only had a wrong view of self and a wrong view of supernatural power, but he had a wrong view of the Spirit. Notice this...he thought he could buy the Holy Spirit, verse 14. "Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent to them Peter and John, who, when they were come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit." The giving of the Holy Spirit throughout the book of Acts was done, first of all to the Jews, then the Samaritans, and then the Gentiles. And, in each case, when the Spirit of God came, apostles were present so that everyone would know that the Gentiles and the half-breed Samaritans had received the same Spirit and the same power as the Jews had on the day of Pentecost.

And so it was for the apostles to be present. Thus, when this faith came to the Samaritans, Peter and John came in order to be there for the receiving of the Spirit. "For, as yet, He was fallen on none of them, only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus." They had to wait for the Spirit in that early time in order that it might be confirmed to them and to the whole world through the apostles that they had received the same thing that the Jews had received, so there would be no dichotomy in the church. "They laid their hands on them. They received the Holy Spirit." Now, there must have been some attendant miracles. We don't know what they were. Perhaps there was even a display as the cloven tongues of fire that appeared in Acts 2. perhaps there was the speaking in...languages unknown to them. The display was obvious enough, it says in verse 18 that Simon saw it. When he saw that through laying on of the apostle's hands, the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money.

Now, he must have seen some supernatural display. And he said, "That's what I want. How much is it? How much do I pay for that?"

"Saying, 'Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Spirit. I want that magic. I want that ability.'" He just flipped out when he saw the power that was demonstrated through Peter and John. And Simon wanted that miracle power, and so he treats Peter like he's some kind of a...of a snake oil salesman, dispensing supernatural goodies, and he wanted to know what the price was. He didn't want the sanctifying grace of the Spirit. He only wanted the power of the Spirit. And he thought he could buy it.

I'll never forget a man that I met who was very wealthy, and I was talking to him, I think it was in about October or November of the year, and he told me that he was convinced Jesus was coming on December 31st at midnight. And that was the Rapture of the church, and he was dead serious. He was a realtor in the south Orange County area, and he said, "In order for me to be ready to meet God and be sure I'm going in the Rapture, between now and then, I'm going to liquidate all of my assets." Which came to a little over \$500,000. And so, literally, within the next six weeks, this man liquidated half a million dollars. He bought Bibles and shipped them...the...the Vietnam War was going on...he shipped them over to Vietnam. I think something like 20 or 40,000 Bibles. He bought thousands upon thousands of praying hands, plastic praying hands that glow in the dark, and sent boxes of 'em to churches all over the country and all around the world. He bought plaques. He had holy hardware. He bought everything in sight and shipped it all over everywhere and got himself ready for the Rapture, feeling he could buy his way in by doing these kind of good deeds. He wanted to be sure he paid the price. To buy into grace in time for the Rapture. That man had to be disappointed a lot of ways. One, the Rapture didn't happen. Two, in his heart, he knew he didn't purchase salvation. Three, he didn't have any more assets...

Well, Simon had such a skewed view of grace, and thought he could buy into the power of the Holy Spirit. And Peter exposed him. Peter said to him, "Thy money perish with thee, because thou has thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money!" Holy indignation. "Thy money perish with thee. Thou has neither part nor lot in this matter, for thy heart is not right in the sight of God. Whatever kind of faith you have that led you to baptism, whatever kind of faith you had that led you from baptism to continuing following Philip is not saving faith. You will perish." He speaks of destruction and eternal hell. He's no Christian. God saw his defiled heart and Peter could see it, too. His faith could not save. He had a wrong view of self. He had a wrong view of salvation. He had a wrong view of the Spirit. And then, fourthly, he had a wrong view of sin. He had a wrong view of sin. Watch his response. Peter says, "Repent therefore of this thy wickedness." It is so wicked to think that any work can earn salvation. So wicked to think of God only as the dispenser of supernatural goodies.

"Repent of it, and pray God if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee." Now, Peter had a right view of sin. He said, "Repent of this wickedness, and pray that God might forgive." You know, it's an interesting little perspective here, but men are not to repent just to get forgiveness. "Boy, I want forgiveness. I better...I better repent." No, men are...are to repent, not to get forgiveness as if it's mechanical. But men are to repent...mark this...because their heart is so burdened with their sin and so overwrought with their wickedness and evil, that they cry out to be delivered whether God forgives them or not. See the difference. That's the penitent heart. It's not mechanical. "Oh, if I wanna get conversion, I better...I better repent." It's the crying out of repentance and pleading for God to please forgive and, bless His name, He will forgive.

But Peter puts true repentance in perspective here in the way that he phrases his statement. In verse 23, he says, "I perceive that you are in the bile...the word is bile here...you are in the bile of bitterness, and you are in the chains of iniquity." This is no Christian. Now what's gonna be his view of sin? Notice verse 24. "Then answered Simon and said, 'Pray to the Lord for me that none of these things which you have spoken come upon me.'" What was his response? He was scared. He was fearful. He was afraid. He was terror-stricken. Some Western texts even say he was sobbing. He shook. He trembled. But he did not, what? Repent. No confession, no repentance, no self-condemnation, no acknowledgement of sin, no seeking forgiveness. Only fear of the consequence of his evil. He was scared, but never saved. Scared but never saved. Because he never faced the reality of his own sin. Wrong view of self. Wrong view of supernatural power. Wrong view of the work of the Spirit. Wrong view of sin. He had a faith that doesn't save.

And I would ask you tonight to examine your heart...to see if you have that kind of faith. That kind of shallow faith that seeks the goodies...and the signs and the wonders and the miracles and the power, and seeks to be preserved from judgment, but there's no repentance, and there's no confession, and there's no crying out acknowledging sin, and no seeking forgiveness...

Now let's turn the table, and let's meet a second man. An Ethiopian eunuch who is a marvelous illustration of the faith that does save. And if I may, I'd like to point to the characteristics of saving faith, elements that accompany true faith. First of all, notice verse 26. Verse 25 just tells about the fact that they went on preaching the Word and returned to Jerusalem, preached the Gospel in many villages of the Samaritans. "And an angel of the Lord spoke to Philip, saying...the Lord sent him a divine messenger...'Arise, Philip, and go to the south to the way that goes down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.'" Now, an angelic minister comes along, finds Philip, and, believe me, Philip knows something important is up. He hasn't had an angelic messenger to this point that we know of. And he is sent to Gaza. Gaza was one of the ancient cities of the Philistines. It is on the road from Jerusalem to Egypt, if you go to Egypt via Bethlehem and Hebron, you would go through Gaza. We know it today as the Gaza Strip, that same region.

Now it is God, through an angel, who commands him to go. Verse 29, "Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go near, join thyself to this chariot.'" Now lemme give you the first characteristic of genuine saving faith. One, it is the sovereign work of the Spirit. The preparation is so different...so different. The work of the Spirit begins in the heart and begins, not only in the one who is to receive the message, but the one who is to give it, as well. The faith that saves begins with a divine preparation. It begins with a divine preparation. The sovereign work of the Spirit.

Secondly, it involves the submissive will of the servant. Verse 27, after the angel gave him the message, look at verse 27. it says, "And he arose and went." No wasted time. He knew he was on a divine mission. "And behold, a man of Ethiopia," and, by the way, the Ethiopia of that day was a much larger territory than we know Ethiopia to be in this time, covering a great expanse of the northern part of Africa. And so here was this "man of Ethiopia, a eunuch of great authority under Candace, queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure." He was the chamberlain or the treasurer of the queen. "And had come to Jerusalem to worship."

The point I want you to note is that Philip arose and went. He went. It seemed illogical. He was having great, great results where he was. He was preaching and people were listening and believing, being baptized. Why should he pack all this aside and take off to Gaza to talk to one person? He didn't even know what was going to happen when he was there. But the Lord had prepared everything. I love the fact that in verse 30, it says that when the Spirit said go to the guy in the chariot, verse 30 says, "And Philip"...did what? Moseyed over? What did he do? He ran. He knew he was on a divine mission.

So we see then that where there is saving faith, it begins with the sovereign work of the Spirit and then the submissive will of the servant. The third thing I noted in this is the searching heart of the sinner...the searching heart of the sinner. Look at verse 27. This man of Ethiopia...Ethiopia, as I said, covered all the way from the Red Sea clear across to the deserts of Libya in the west. This man was attached to the king of Ethiopia. You might be interested to know that the king of Ethiopia was worshipped. In fact, they believed that the king was so sacred that he couldn't do any normal duties. In other words, he just sat. And so the queen mother came alongside the king, and she had to do all the royal duties. So Candace, which, by the way, is not a proper name, but a title like pharaoh, or like Caesar, or like czar, or something like that, an emperor, king. Was the queen mother who cared for all of the issues related to the royalty of Ethiopia. This eunuch...a eunuch because, traditionally, they were castrated in order to serve in the palace and in the harem, was her trusted, honored treasurer.

Now, it says that he had been to Jerusalem. He had come to Jerusalem. You know, we've got to estimate that that's probably somewhere between a thousand and 1300 mile walk. That is a long trip. This is a searching sinner, friends. He's weary of the gods of his own culture. He has come to seek out the true God. And when he went to Jerusalem to seek the true God, there's little doubt in my mind that he found only ceremony, ritual, cold formality, and nothing for his heart. He hungered

for...for salvation, if we can put it in those terms. He hungered for God, and he was returning and sitting in his chariot reading the Isaiah, the prophet. Still hungry. Still trying to figure it out. But here you have the searching sinner, and saving faith comes to the searching sinner.

The fourth thing that I would point out where you have genuine saving faith is the Scriptural Word. The Scriptural Word comes by revelation. He's reading Isaiah. The Spirit says, "Philip, go and get into the chariot." Philip ran, verse 30, heard him read the Prophet Isaiah and said, "Do you understand what you're reading?" He was reading the right book, wasn't he? He was reading Isaiah, and he was even reading Isaiah 53. Now do you know the Holy Spirit's prepared everything? Here is a guy in the desert leaving Jerusalem, dissatisfied, hasn't found the God he sought. He's got the Old Testament in his hand, in some scroll form, and he's reading the 53rd chapter of Isaiah, and all of a sudden, an angel drops the evangelist Philip alongside the chariot. He runs over. Everything is prepared. Look at his response. "Do you understand what you read?" Verse 31, he said, "How can I except some man should guide me?" Don't you love that? "I need some help." Here is a meek, teachable, humble spirit open to the truth.

And I remember Psalm 25, I think it's verse 9, "The meek shall He teach His way." The place in the Scripture which he read was this. "He was led as a sheep to the slaughter, and like a lamb, dumb before his shearer, so opening not His mouth in His humiliation, His judgment was taken away. And who shall declare His generation, for his life is taken from the earth." In other words, he was reading Isaiah 53 verses 7 and 8. Wow, what ready heart. But he didn't have the way to unlock it. He...he didn't understand of whom the prophet spoke. So in verse 34, the eunuch answered Philip and said, "I pray you, of whom speaks the prophet this? Of himself, or of some other man? Who is this person? Who is this person who is the Savior? Who is this who will bear sin. Who will die? All our iniquities are laid on Him." He read all of that. Who is this who will take away our sin? Here is truly a seeking sinner who wants a deliverer, and the issue with him is not where do I get spiritual power. The issue with him is where do I get salvation?

And the faith that saves, fifthly, also involves a presentation of Jesus, verse 35, "And Philip opened his mouth and began at the same Scripture, and preached unto him...what?...Jesus." Jesus. And anyone who comes to true saving faith must hear the message of Jesus Christ. That's why Trumbull, who used to write books...I love the things that he wrote...used to write books on evangelism, said that he made a vow one time. I've shared it with you past years. He said this. "Every time I have the opportunity to introduce the topic of conversation, it will always be of Jesus." Well, Philip spoke of Jesus. All that encompasses the doctrine of salvation is bound up in Jesus. Philip gave it all to him, including teaching him about baptism. His response was the right response. And as they went on their way, he was just so thrilled and so excited. All that he had sought had come to pass. "And as they're going along, they came to a certain water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here's water! What hinders me to be baptized?'" I mean, he believed, and he knew no reason not to be baptized.

Verse 37 probably was added by a scribe, and so we would go to verse 38 in the original text. "And Philip commanded the chariot to stand still, and they both went down into the water, Philip and the eunuch, and he baptized him." I love that. "Look, water," he says, "why can't I be baptized right now?" You know he's already put his faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Philip takes him down into the water, immerses him in the water. Verse 39 says, "And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip." He was gone as fast as he had arrived. "And the eunuch saw him no more, and he went on his way confused...is that what it says?...no...he went on his way....what?...rejoicing."

The ordeal of Simon ended with fear. The wonderful story of the Ethiopian ended with joy. Simon had a faith that wanted to take from God. The eunuch had a faith that wanted forgiveness of sins. What kind of faith do you have? What kind of faith is your faith as you come to the Lord's table?

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