

On discerning saving faith

Redeemer Church of Dubai– Ladies’ Discipleship Class – Friday, January 24th

Gloria Furman

We sing: “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness...”¹ But are you *SURE*?

1. Introduction
 - a. There is no more urgent question than this one. It is a matter of eternal life and death.
 - i. John 3:36 “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”
 - ii. Matthew 7:21 “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.”
 - b. Some of us are scared to death. Or perhaps we are talking with a woman who is scared to death. Our Adversary likes to discourage God’s children and he likes to delude lost sheep into thinking they are safe.
2. My Testimony
3. Transition
 - a. So, how can you tell if someone is truly a Christian? How can you tell if you yourself are a Christian? What does this question matter for our discipleship?
 - b. The question we are really asking is boiled down to this binary: How do we know if someone is spiritually-alive or spiritually-dead?
 - i. Illustration: *The Princess Bride* Hero – “Can you be *mostly* dead?”
 - ii. Illustration: A Positive Pregnancy Test – “Is the baby *mostly* alive?”
 - c. These are exhaustive answers. I’m going to throw these questions out for us to think about. Books have been written discussing how to answer these questions. I have about 20 more minutes.
 - i. How do we discern if someone is alive or dead? Is it something that they have to do? Is it something that they have already done? Is it something they are doing? What are the basic truths someone must believe to be a Christian? Are doubts okay? How many doubts? Doubts about what, *per se*?
 - d. I also want to give some practical ideas for how to stay focused on the gospel throughout our discipleship.
 - e. I raise all of these questions in your mind to help illustrate these two facts:
 - i. Salvation by grace through faith is so deep and complex that volumes and volumes have been written on it.
 - ii. And salvation by grace through faith is so simple that even a young child can grasp it and believe it.
4. The Answer... in case you are uncomfortable with suspense.
 - a. The biblical conception of a saving response toward Christ is “repentance” and “belief” in the gospel.
 - b. “Salvation does indeed happen in a moment, and once you are saved you are always saved. The mark, however, of someone who is saved is that they maintain their confession of faith until the end of their lives. Salvation is not a prayer you pray in a one-time ceremony and then move on from; *salvation is a posture of*

¹ Edward Mote, “My Hope Is Built” (circa 1834)

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repentance and faith that you begin in a moment and maintain for the rest of your life.”²

5. One Part of a Saving Response Toward Christ: Repentance
 - a. Faith is belief in action. We must act on the belief that God told the truth in his word concerning his Son: He is Lord and he has accomplished our salvation for us. The facts remain: Christ was crucified in our place to pay for our sins, and he was raised again for our justification. This news is true whether we believe it or not. We are rebellious sinners who are being offered amnesty by the King. When we believe the King and trust that what he says about how that amnesty was accomplished—that it was through Jesus—then salvation that Jesus offers becomes yours.
 - i. Romans 1:1-4 “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was descended from David according to the flesh and was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord”
 - b. Jesus called for repentance when he preached the gospel.
 - i. Mark 1:15 “The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel.”
 - ii. Acts 17:30 “The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent,”
 - c. What does repentance mean? Does repentance sound like this: “Ok, little sinner, say ‘Sorry to God.’ [Eyes rolling] ‘Sorr-r-y’”?
 - i. A grave thought to consider: If someone is living in unrepentant sin or continual sin they may not be a believer at all.
 - ii. 2 Cor. 7:10 “For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.”
 - iii. Luke 3:8 “Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham.”
 - d. Illustration: The woman who said she liked the good news, but she wasn’t “ready”—still had some things she wanted to enjoy before she cleaned herself up later.
 - i. *Questions:* Is this a correct understanding of the gospel? Of repentance? When we come to Jesus can anything be off-limits from his kingship? Do we negotiate with the Sovereign Lord? Or do we surrender our everything?
6. Another Part of a Saving Response Toward Jesus: Belief
 - a. Do you believe what God has testified about his Son is true?
 - i. Belief and obedience.
 1. Illustration: Running a stop sign (Will you be struck by a car? Or are you chancing for an exception?) Lying on a bed (If you need to take a nap will you rest on the bed? Or doubt the bed’s sturdiness and sleep on the floor?)
 - ii. Acts 16:30-31 “Then he brought them out and said, ‘Sirs, what must I do to be saved?’ And they said, ‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household.’”

² JD Greear, *Stop Asking Jesus Into Your Heart*, page 5.

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- iii. Rom. 10:9-10 “because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.”
- iv. Rom. 4:5 “And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,”
- v. John 3:36 “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.”
- b. Some ladies may be very dismayed by the uncertainty of not knowing when they became a Christian. Perhaps you may not know when you first believed.
 - i. Illustration: Adrian Monk from the TV show “Monk” remembers being born. The rest of us just know we are alive.
 - ii. Some ladies are being pursued by God’s Spirit and it is as though he is in labour over their souls. Have you ever been discouraged when you didn’t see or sense in someone an immediate assurance of faith?
 - iii. Do you see evidence of the Spirit’s work? Is the posture of the heart one of repentance from dead works and sin? Are they grieved that their sin offends a holy God? Do they love holiness? Be encouraged: these affections not conjured up by the flesh.
 - 1. John 3:8 “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.”
 - 2. John 10:27-28 “My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”
 - iv. For some of us this may be a moment when we did something—raised a hand, walked an aisle, etc. Scripturally-speaking, we do not have grounds to issue someone a deed of assurance based on their works. Each of us, whether we are discouraged by our sin or deluded by our self-righteousness, must always and only find assurance in the blood of Christ which purifies our conscience from dead works to serve the living God (Heb. 9:14, 22)
 - v. Being able to point to the moment you were saved, or knowing your exact spiritual birthdate pales in comparison to the importance of this one thing: Are you alive *now*? Belief is an ongoing thing, not a one-time “been there, done that.”
- c. Assurance is a real struggle and unbelief is a real threat. Out of the volcanic torrents of emotion and doubt and our sinful cravings, the cry of our heart may explode with the same cry as the father in Mark 9:24, “I believe! Help my unbelief!”
 - i. 1 John 5:10-13 “Whoever believes in the Son of God has the testimony in himself. Whoever does not believe God has made him a liar, because he has not believed in the testimony that God has borne concerning his Son. And this is the testimony, that God gave us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life. I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God that you may know that you have eternal life”
 - ii. James 1:12 “Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him.”

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1. The person who has been born again will invariably live a new life animated by the Holy Spirit. The person will be alive to God.
2. God enables his people to persevere to the end. If they don’t persevere, they never were truly his. (See 1 Corinthians 15:2, Philippians 1:6, Colossians 1:23, Jude 24-25, and Revelation 2:10-11.)
- d. Especially considering our context here among a plurality of world religions, I need to make a remark about certain beliefs that will be to your spiritual demise if you should deny them. You may be speaking with your neighbors who claim, “All religions are basically the same.” There are doctrines that are essential to the Christian faith, such as the Trinity, the full deity and humanity of Jesus Christ, justification by faith, the authority of Scripture.
 - i. There are other doctrines that we may disagree upon, but one may still be a believer in Jesus Christ. These secondary doctrines include matters such as church government, baptism (whom and how), the roles of men and women in the church, and the events in the End Times.
7. Circling the Airport – Land the Plane on the Gospel Runway
 - a. So, we acknowledge that it is impossible for you or I to know beyond the shadow of a doubt the heart of another person. Only God knows the heart.
 - b. Matthew 19:16-21 “And behold, a man came up to him, saying, “Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?” And he said to him, “Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.”¹⁸ He said to him, “Which ones?” And Jesus said, “You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness,¹⁹ Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”²⁰ The young man said to him, “All these I have kept. What do I still lack?”²¹ Jesus said to him, “If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.”²² When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.”
 - c. Perhaps this is you right now. Perhaps you are interested in spiritual things, or you even like these things that you hear discussed here at Redeemer each week. Yet there is one thing you lack—perfection. Jesus can have your Friday morning, but he may not have your life, because you think he might ask for something that you love more than him. But God never asks that we obey him perfectly in every part of our lives. He is the Sovereign Lord—he is holy and righteous and true and Creator—God doesn’t *ask* for us to pretty please just give him a try. He is the Holy One of Israel; we are his creation. He *demand*s wholehearted obedience.
 - i. Matt. 5:48 “You therefore must be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.
 - d. Very Bad News: We would be utter fools to think we could please God by following his holy Law to the letter, because we are sinners. We don’t just do sins, we are sinners.
 - e. JESUS!
 - i. Romans 5:8 “but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.
 - ii. Romans 4:25 “who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”

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1. “If you are in Christ, then there is not a single person on earth who is more justified before God than you are right now.” Matt Smethurst (tweet)
- f. Repent and believe.
 - i. We are all included among the nations who are called to the obedience of faith for the sake of Jesus’ name (Rom. 1:5). Jesus Christ is the *only* way, truth, and life. Caution others from getting caught up in the spirit of the age that says, “Don’t be a hypocrite, do what your heart tells you and be true to yourself.” Satan knows what the Bible says in Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” “Be true to yourself” is a lie from the pit of hell. Continually encourage those who doubt not to wait to repent of their sin and believe the truth about Jesus.
8. Discipleship. Basically, you rest in Christ while urging others to do the same.
 - a. The gospel is the matrix for our discipleship. The gospel is news. The gospel includes an invitation to live rightly with God forever. It is good news! News is fact. You live in light of that fact. Rest in the finished work of Christ. Share this good news with others!
 - i. We wallow in our failure when our faith is in ourselves. We soar with pride when we are doing well; but plunge into despair when we falter.
 1. Address self-righteous attitudes of the heart: “I’m paying God back for grace,” “I’ve been given a second chance at earning salvation,” (comparison) “At lease I’m more godly than her,” or downplaying God’s holiness: “God will cut me slack because I’m trying my best.”
 2. “Grace is not glorious should we add the least thing of our own to it.”³
 - ii. The assurance you continually all the time *always* draw someone’s attention to is *the sufficient, finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross two thousand years ago*.
 1. Gospel-centered discipleship is obsessed with unpacking these two truths in our daily lives:
 - a. When you receive Christ all that is yours becomes his (your sin, shame, judgment, sorrow, disease, grief, tears, life, and death).
 - b. And all that is his becomes yours (his righteousness, fellowship with the Father, holiness, love, joy, peace, patience, gentleness, his mind, life, death, and resurrection). Our hope of heaven is based upon Jesus’ finished work, plus nothing.
 2. “My hope is built on nothing less than Jesus’ blood and righteousness. ...This is all my hope and peace—nothing but the blood of Jesus! This is all my righteousness—nothing but the blood of Jesus!”
 - b. Why does assurance matter for our discipleship? One huge thing: joy.
 1. 2 Tim. 1:12 “which is why I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced

³ Richard Sibbes, *Glorious Freedom*

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that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me.”

2. Without this joyful assurance in God’s faithfulness then there are commands we will not obey, sacrifices we will never make, and peace we will never have. We will not lose our life to find it or take up our cross to follow Christ. We will not have the strength or motivation to say “no” to sin until we realize the unconditional “yes” that God has given to us in Christ.

9. Conclusion

- a. Bottom line: Are you found in Christ? Is his Spirit united to yours?
 - i. Galatians 2:20 “I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
- b. Until the Day when Christ returns, we all *press on toward the goal*.
 - i. Philippians 3:12-14 “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. ¹³ Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, ¹⁴ I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”
- c. We acknowledge that salvation is no work of man, and we humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God for our own sakes and the sakes of those we minister to.
 - i. Jonah 2:9 “...Salvation belongs to the LORD!”
 - ii. Jude 24-25 Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.”

10. Pray