

“Putting Your Faith In Jesus Christ”

Series on "Four Fundamentals For Lifelong Followers"

"The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks. About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved—you and your household." Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God—he and his whole household." (Acts 16:22 – 34)

The simplest answer ever given to the question "What must I do to be saved?" was given by Paul and Silas around midnight in a prison in the town of Philippi. The answer was given to a prison officer who was about to kill himself because he thought all his prisoners had escaped after an earthquake. Roman law said that if a prisoner escaped, the life of the prison guard was to be taken in his place. So even though the earthquake had stopped, we can be pretty sure that this fellow was still shaking. When he asked "What must I do to be saved?" He really needed to know, and quickly. The answer Paul and Silas gave him was, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

Faith, or belief, is essential if a person is going to become a lifelong follower of Jesus Christ. But what kind of faith do we need? There are five characteristics of faith that saves us.

1. Faith that is based on the facts of history.

Faith in faith alone is not enough. Most of us understand that. If I told you I sincerely believe that I am a brain surgeon, and I wore a white coat, and put a stethoscope in my ears, would you allow me to operate on you? Or if I put on the uniform of an airline pilot and told you I sincerely believed I can fly an Airbus A380, would you be one of my passengers? I doubt it. You would want to see some evidence that I was who I claimed to be and that I knew what I was doing as a brain surgeon or as a pilot.

It's not good enough to say "I believe". Everyone believes in something, and if you want to see some of the wacky things people believe, spend an hour surfing the internet. You can't even take the statement "I believe in God" at face value these days. Which God? The Muslim God? The Hindu gods? The god you have made in your own image?

The Christian faith is based on objective reality, not subjective sincerity. It's based on the Biblical record of God revealing himself first to the Jewish nation, then to individuals through one Jew called Jesus. And the heart of this revelation is the claim by Jesus that there is only one way to be saved, and that is through him. I realise that what I have just said is deeply offensive in an age where everyone is assumed to have some truth and no one is considered to have all truth, but I'm trying to accurately portray which the Bible actually says, not what we would like it to say. The message of the New Testament is that Jesus of Nazareth claimed to be the Son of God, died on a Cross for the sins of all people, and came back to life again after being dead for three days.

Saving faith accepts these things as being historically true. So let me ask you. Do you believe that Jesus is the Son of God? Do you believe that his death on the Cross was as an offering for sin? Do you believe that he bodily rose from the dead after three days in the tomb? Saving faith is based on these historical events.

2. Faith must be personal.

Becoming a Christian means trusting Christ as Saviour personally. Believing that I need him to save me. It's not enough to agree that Jesus is the Saviour of the world, or that all the statements about Christianity are true. Faith in Christ is not about believing a set of propositions. Faith needs to move from my mind, to my will. From believing about Jesus, to trusting in Jesus. You can miss out on heaven by just 18 inches. That's the difference between your heart and your head. If it's all your head, you're not going to make it.

If we trust in someone, we will do what they tell us to do. When Mary, the mother of Jesus was at a wedding with her son, she said to the servants at the wedding **"Do whatever he tells you to do".(John 2:5 NIV)** On another occasion Jesus was speaking to his disciples and he said **"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?" (Luke 6:46 NIV)**

Some weeks ago Jeanette Magura told the story of Charles Blondin, the French high wire walker and acrobat. On June 30, 1859 he walked a rope across the gorge of the Niagara falls, 50 metres above the water. He repeated the feat a number of times. Once he did it blindfolded. Another time in a sack. Once trundling a wheelbarrow. He did it on stilts. He did it standing on a chair with one leg balanced on the rope. One time he sat down on the rope midway while he cooked and ate an omelet. His crowning glory came when he carried his manager on his back as he walked on the rope above the water. Now if Blondin had said to you "Do you believe I can walk across without falling off?" Having seen his performances, you would say, "Yes I believe." But then if he were to say to you, "Alright, you believe in me, climb on my back!" Would you believe?

That's the difference between believing in your head, and really trusting in faith. You only show you believe in someone when you do what they say. Faith means committing yourself to action. When we call Jesus Lord, we say we believe in Him, which means we must do what he tells us to do. Faith has to be personal. We have to be involved.

3. Faith has to be practical.

The letter of James in the New Testament says that faith without actions is dead. If you read Hebrews Chapter 11, you will read a whole list of great men and women of God who were men and women of faith. They were saved through their faith, and their faith wasn't just what they believed, it was also what they did. Faith that is just words doesn't save you. It's faith in action that saves you. What were the practical things that they did?

Noah built an ark a long way from the beach while the sun was shining. He had no crane and transporter to get it to the water because cranes and transporters hadn't been invented yet. Why did he do it? Because he trusted God. Abraham shifted out of home at 80 years of age and went camping in a tent. Why did he do it? Because he trusted God. Joseph made arrangements for his own funeral in a land he hadn't seen for years. Mrs. Moses hid her baby in a basket in a river because she believed God. Joshua marched around the walls of Jericho looking stupid, because he trusted God. Rahab, the prostitute, risked her life to welcome the spies. Why did she do it? Because she believed God could save her. There is not one word in Hebrews 11 about how they felt about it. They just did it. Faith is just accepting the truth, and acting on it.

4. Faith has to be spoken.

The New Testament teaches us that faith has to be put into words. **"If you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved". (Rom 10:9 & 10 NIV)** When you look into the face of Jesus Christ and confess to Him that you believe he is the Lord, then it's only a short step to looking into the face of others and saying the same thing. Saving faith is expressed by telling other people that we belong to Jesus Christ.

5. Faith is continual.

Real faith in Christ goes on trusting, even when the going gets tough. It's not how you start in the Christian life, it's how you finish. It's not how high you jump, but how straight you walk afterwards. John Chapter 3:16 is probably the most well known verse in the New Testament. **"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life". (John 3:16 NIV)** In the original language, it's in a continuous tense. It's talking about the person who **keeps on** believing who will not perish but have eternal life.

All through this talk today I have stressed the importance of faith that works out in practice. I have talked about faith that believes in the Jesus of history. I've talked about faith that is more than just intellectual assent. I've talked about faith that requires action. I talked about a faith that needs to be spoken out and to be declared before other people and before God. I've talked about a faith that keeps on believing in Jesus right to the end.

Having said these things it would be remiss of me to leave this talk as an intellectual idea. This sort of faith demands response. There maybe people here today who have never publicly acted on their belief before. You believe the truth about Jesus Christ, but you have never publicly declared that before. For some of you this will mean following the New Testament pattern and being baptised as a believer. For others of you it will mean confessing with your mouth to those that you work with and live with that you are a follower of Jesus Christ. For others it will mean taking some action that God is calling you to, which demonstrates that you are trusting Him in faith. For some it may be that your faith has been wavering a bit, and today you want to declare that you are going to keep on trusting Christ. If you want to take a new step of faith today, there will be an opportunity for you to come to the front as we conclude the service, and make that decision of faith real.

Prayer

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