

“Saving Faith”
John 4:43-54
November 9, 2008
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I believe it was the late Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse, as the long-time pastor of the Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, who first phrased the following question:

“If you were to die today and stand before God, what would you say if he asked, ‘Why should I let you into my heaven?’”

Even in a post-modern world, I think it is still a relevant question.

The Bible teaches there is a God who is holy and just.

It also teaches that we all are sinners who stand under God’s judgment.

Romans 1:18 “The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men...”

It seems to me that all religions of the world, including what some people call just their spirituality, are people’s attempts at remedying a sense of alienation from whatever they consider to be God.

Whether it is the prayers of Islam, the sacrifices of Hinduism, or the meditations of a New Age spirituality, they are trying to reconcile with the divine.

And those who choose Christianity seem to be seeking the same.

Hundreds of thousands will gather in churches across this country today.

And most people know that this is different than belonging to a Rotary Club, the YMCA or a support group.

At root is the desire to be in harmony with the God that common sense alone tells us is there.

So while you may not think of it this way every Sunday, most of us are here because we want be in a positive relationship with the God we know exists.

The Bible is clear that such a relationship with God is by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

We have already seen this in the Gospel of John 1:12 “To all who received **him (Jesus)**, to those who **believed** in his name, he **gave** the right to become children of God.”

To be a **child** of God instead of an **enemy** of God is certainly what we want.

Being an unconditionally and eternally loved, protected, and cared for child of God is infinitely superior to being an eternally condemned enemy of God.

Now the operative issue in every religion or spirituality is the same as what the Philippian jailor asked the Apostle Paul: “What must I do to be saved?”

And the Bible’s answer through Paul is same as it is in John 1:12, “believe in the Lord Jesus Christ.”

That is the essential matter before us today.

What does it mean to “believe”?

I believe today’s text will demonstrate that the so-called “faith” of many is a truncated and insufficient or imitation “faith.”

AND it will demonstrate a true saving faith that God provides and to which he calls us to respond.

In our on-going study of the Gospel of John, we have seen Jesus most recently in the part of Israel called Samaria.

Samaria lies between Judea in the south and Galilee in the north.

To the Jews, the Samaritans were a mongrel race with an adulterated religion.

And yet there Jesus, a Jew, revealed himself and many believed him.

John 4:42 The Samaritans said, "We know this man really is the Savior of the world."

In our text for today, Jesus has left Samaria and is returning to a part of the country where the people think the "true" religion prevails.

But in the very place where he ought to be most received and believed, he is only used and abused; except for one man who responds to God's marvelous work of grace and truly trusts in Jesus.

Listen to John tell us what happened. (READ or WATCH John 4:43-54)

John 4:43-54 "After the two days he left for Galilee.⁴⁴ (Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.)⁴⁵ When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there.⁴⁶ Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum.⁴⁷ When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death.⁴⁸ "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus told him, "you will never believe."⁴⁹ The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies."⁵⁰ Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live." The man took Jesus at his word and departed.⁵¹ While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living.⁵² When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, "The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour."⁵³ Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, "Your son will live." So he and all his household believed.⁵⁴ This was the second miraculous sign that Jesus performed, having come from Judea to Galilee.

It is verse 44, a parenthetical comment by the author, which helps us understand that **what we will see in this story is how God changes one man's focus from his own needs to genuine faith in Jesus Christ.**

First of all I want you to see how John sets a context for the story.

John 4:44 "(Now Jesus himself had pointed out that a prophet has no honor in his own country.)"

We all know you are not an expert unless you come from at least 500 miles away.

Galilee is the area of the country where Jesus grew up.

And so it is not the Samaritans but the Jewish people of Galilee and Judea who are his own people.

John, writing later than the other gospel writers, reminds his readers of what Jesus had said a little later when he went to Nazareth, his hometown.

Luke 4:24 "Truly I say to you, no prophet is welcome in his hometown."

Now at first, that would seem to contradict what John writes in the next verse: John 4:45 "When he arrived in Galilee, the Galileans welcomed him. They had seen all that he had done in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, for they also had been there."

By way of showing you how the "welcome" in verse 45 is not a contradiction to the "no honor" of verse 44, look next at verse 48 "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders...you will never believe."

Clearly, there, Jesus is making a negative assessment.

And it suggests that there is counterfeit faith that is based solely on miracles or based only on God producing what we want.

That kind of "belief" is not the real thing.

So the "welcome" in verse 44 is obviously shallow at best.

Some of them had been in Jerusalem and had seen him clear the Temple area of commerce and they had seen him do many miraculous signs – miracles (2:23)

Now the local-boy-made-good returns home.

It's like the welcome the hometown fans give a Bronco's quarterback after his latest victory.

And wise is the quarterback who knows that to the fans he's only as welcome as his last game.

Likewise, the Galileans were glad to have Jesus in their midst as long as he produced miracles.

And that is the shallow "welcome" or even the counterfeit "faith" of many even today.

What is your connection to God today; are you in relationship with him or just bartering with him?

Now with that context in mind we turn to the story:

John 4:46-47 "Once more he visited Cana in Galilee, where he had turned the water into wine. And there was a certain royal official whose son lay sick at Capernaum. When this man heard that Jesus had arrived in Galilee from Judea, he went to him and begged him to come and heal his son, who was close to death"

Capernaum was between 12 and 20 miles from Cana, depending on the exact location of Cana, which we don't know with certainty.

And an official serving in Herod Antipas' government, headquartered in Capernaum, had a son whom he feared would soon die from a fever that was consuming him.

Don't confuse this incident with Jesus healing the servant of the Centurion in Capernaum sometime later.

That man's faith was quite different than what we will see here and that man was a Gentile; we don't know whether the official here is a Gentile or a Jew – apparently that detail wasn't important to John.

In this story I want you to see how God always takes the initiative and how the man responds.

First, we are going to see God's "general call" to this man and the man's response.

Based on Scriptural evidence, theologians differentiate between the general call of God and the effective call of God.

Regarding the "general call" of God we read in Matthew 24:14 Jesus says, "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

In Mark 16:15 we hear Jesus issuing the command to his disciples to declare the gospel of Jesus everywhere: "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation.

Now clearly not everyone responds positively to this general call of God but the call is given.

John 6:64-66 Jesus said, "There are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him...From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.

But in our story, God issued this "general call" in two ways:

First of all, Jesus had been proclaiming the gospel and authenticating it with miraculous signs.

Jesus was apparently quite a sensation by this time.

Even the civil authorities, like this man, were hearing about the miraculous things Jesus was doing.

The word about Jesus had come to his ears.

Secondly, the general call of God came to this man through the sickness of his son.

A.W. Pink wrote, “He has heard that Jesus does miracles and he wants his son to benefit. This domestic trial was a blessing in disguise, for it caused the anxious father to seek out Christ... God uses many different agents in predisposing men to receive and believe His Word...Affliction is one of God’s medicines...” (Exposition of the Gospel of John CHAPTER 16, CHRIST IN GALILEE, John 4:43-54)

God used the sickness of the man’s son to drive him to Jesus.

God initiated but how will the man respond?

Many people refuse to turn to God no matter how desperate they are. But God apparently worked in this man’s heart and drew him to Jesus.

I suggest, though, that the man is coming out of desperation not out of true faith in Jesus but he does come!

Jesus was perceived as a miracle-worker.

I think the man believed in Jesus in the way that a terminal cancer patient believes a Laetrile clinic in Mexico might bring a cure.

This man wants what Jesus might have to offer, but he doesn’t yet want Jesus or trust him.

This is where the story gets somewhat strange to our ears.

Instead of encouraging the man, Jesus appears to discourage him.

John 4:48 “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders, you will never believe.”

Jesus clearly knew what God was doing in this man’s heart and how this man would respond.

But Jesus challenges him so that those standing around would understand **and so that we would understand.**

I think the underlying question is, “What **kind** of faith do you have?”

One man wrote, “If it weren't for a dying son, (the official) would never have bothered with Jesus. He didn't have any great spiritual longings to know

the Messiah. He wasn't all excited about spiritual truth. He wasn't all blessed about getting his sins forgiven and his guilt released. He had no thoughts of that. He had a dying child and he wanted Jesus to take care of that child if He could. John MacArthur on John 4:34-43

If that is the extent of your belief, it is not saving faith!

Jesus knows full well that, if that is the case, when he stops healing your kids and providing you jobs or whatever it is you expect him to do, you will walk away.

- How many people attend church because they think thereby they will earn God's favor and he will give them what they want in life?
- Or they call themselves Christians because they are afraid if they don't God will take something away from them?

They aren't trusting Jesus, they are bartering with God.

And as long as God produces, they will hang around.

But if the miracles stop, they are gone.

They want the "goodies" of life that God might provide, but they don't want him!

I remember too well the experience of one very prosperous man in our church who attended regularly, participated in a mid-week small group Bible study and gave generously to the church.

When his daughter became ill, oh how he prayed; and he called for groups to come and pray for his daughter.

When she died, he walked away from God, the church and even the rest of his family.

He had an imitation faith that lasted only as long as God did what he wanted God to do.

In the gospel of Luke, Jesus tells the parable of the farmer who sowed seed. Luke 8:11-15 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have

no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life's worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

In our story we see that, by God's grace, this man is the last of the four – one who hears and responds in faith as evidenced by his works.

But we are not there yet.

Look at the man's response to Jesus' charge of only seeking miracles: 4:49 "The royal official said, "Sir, come down before my child dies."

I call this the determination of desperation.

His son is nearing death and this man needs Jesus' help.

The man obviously doesn't realize at this point that Jesus is going to do for him far more than he could ask or even dream.

Strictly as an aside, one man wrote, "In the action of this father who came to Christ on behalf of his child there is an example which you will do well to emulate." (A.W. Pink in sermon on this text)

I have placed on the website a very short but excellent article from a sermon by Charles Spurgeon on the subject of "Praying for the Salvation of our Children." I commend it to you.

But back to the story; **I spoke earlier of the "general call" of God in the gospel; now we are going to see God's "effective call" on this man's life and, again, the man's response.**

John 4:50 "Jesus replied, "You may go. Your son will live."

I am convinced that verse 50 is the apex, the pinnacle, of the story:

Here God gives his promise and, I believe, gives the ability to respond in saving faith.

Imagine if you had been that man!

You came asking this miracle-worker to come home with you and heal your son.

But instead Jesus simply says, “You may go. Your son will live.”
Shouldn’t Jesus have to do something?

Instead Jesus simply says trust me.
Why should the man trust him?

Why doesn’t the man exercise his authority as a government official and demand that Jesus return to Capernaum with him?

Why doesn’t he turn in anger and vow to get even with Jesus for not coming?

This is a real crisis of faith; what is the man to do?

Unspoken in this text but taught to us in Scripture, God apparently does an amazing work in this man’s heart.

Jesus said in John 6:65, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him.”

Ephesians 2:8 “For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this (faith is) not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”

God places within this man a faith that he did not have before.

He came seeking Jesus’ miracle-working power but he leaves trusting Jesus.

Jesus will say in John 6:37 “All that the Father gives me will come to me...”

In that moment as the official stands wondering what to do, evidently God was doing a work in his heart.

As I said, theologians call it “effective calling” – it is a special “calling” from God that produces, without fail, what God intended.

“Effective calling is the work of God’s Spirit whereby convincing us of our sin and misery, enlightening our minds in the knowledge of Christ and renewing our wills, he both persuades and enables us to embrace Jesus Christ as he is offered in the Gospel.”

All of that, I believe, is concentrated in the very few words of John about the official: John 4:50 “The man took Jesus at his word and departed.”

What a statement! “He took Jesus at his word.”
He trusted Jesus.

Something happened that moment.

The man changed from merely asking for a miracle to actually believing the person – the person of Jesus.

Imitation or self-centered faith changed to saving faith – trusting the person of Jesus.

Again from A.W. Pink, "And the man believed the word that Jesus had spoken unto him, and he went his way. This is very blessed. It shows us the power of the spoken word not only on the boy that was healed, but on his father, too—"Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). The (official) had heard the word of God from the lips of the Son of God, and real faith, saving faith, was now birthed in him. He raises no objections, asks no questions, makes no demurs; but with implicit confidence in which he had heard, he believed, and went his way. No "signs" were needed, no feelings required to impart assurance. "He believed, and went his way."

Has your “faith” moved from self-centeredness to Christ-centeredness?

Has it ceased being just about what you can get from him and become a true trust and attachment to him for his glory not just your immediate good?

But the story is not over yet.
 God continues to act.

We have already seen that God acted through a “general call” to the man and also in an “effective call” of the man and now we see God granting the grace of assurance.

And we will again see the response of the man.

John 4:51-53 “While he was still on the way, his servants met him with the news that his boy was living. ⁵² When he inquired as to the time when his son got better, they said to him, “The fever left him yesterday at the seventh hour.” ⁵³ Then the father realized that this was the exact time at which Jesus had said to him, “Your son will live.” So he and all his household believed.”

God graciously confirmed the man’s faith by healing his son at the exact time that Jesus had spoken to him.

The servants met him and told him his son was well.

The evidence of the genuineness of this man’s faith in Jesus is that he didn’t simply take the healing and run.

Too many pray for the intervention of God and when it happens, simply attribute it to circumstances or to their own contribution.

Once he knew that his son was healed **why did he still inquire as to when** it happened?

Because by this time the central issue was no longer his son but the identity of this man Jesus.

If this man truly was the Son of God, the Messiah, then healing would be a small thing compared to the greater issue.

Again God acted, **confirming the identity of Jesus** and **the genuineness of this man’s faith** and the man responded.

This man didn't just tell about the miracle of healing but **he led his household to trust the Savior.**

“He and his household believed.”

The man believed Jesus earlier, but here we see his faith deepening and growing stronger.

Where are you on your faith journey?

What kind of “faith” do you have?

Is it an imitation “faith” that believes only as long as God keeps producing for you?

Do you, out of fear or wishful thinking, hope that God will bless you physically and materially and so you keep up the religious front mainly to get what you want?

Or has God granted you saving faith **to now want him more than even what he provides.**

Is your faith based on God “coming through for you” or is it now based on **his character** even when your senses tell you nothing is happening?

I'm convinced that even if the boy had not been healed, that man would have continued to follow Jesus.

Like Job he could say, “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him!”

God has initiated, how are you responding?

You know that Jesus is the Son of God, that he is the Savior of the world, do you trust and obey HIM?

Will you?

Chronological review of Jesus' ministry from John 1-5

Jesus grew up in Galilee (Luke 4:16, 23). John doesn't repeat the information about Jesus as a boy at the Temple (Luke 2:41ff) nor about Jesus' baptism (Luke 3:21ff) and so we see him first in the Gospel of John as an adult in John 1:35-36 when he went to where John the Baptist was baptizing near Bethany on the other side of the Jordan (probably east of Jericho). There Jesus first encounters some of his later disciples.

In John 1:43 Jesus returns to Galilee and performs his first miracle at Cana of Galilee.

Jesus then went to Capernaum for a few days (John 2:12) and then on to Jerusalem for Passover (John 2:13).

While in Jerusalem he not only drove the merchants from the Temple area but he also performed miraculous signs (2:23)

It was in Jerusalem that Jesus encountered Nicodemus (John 3)

After this he went to where John was Baptizing (John 3:23) and we heard John the Baptist's testimony about Jesus.

When the authorities began to pay closer attention to Jesus (John 4:1), Jesus determined to return to Galilee via Samaria (John 4:3-4) where he encounters the Samaritan woman.

He then left Samaria after two days and returned to Galilee and to Cana where the "royal servant" requested healing for his son. (John 4:43-54)

John is then silent about a period of Jesus' ministry: Jesus' sermon in Nazareth (Luke 4) and his move to Capernaum (Luke 4), the permanent calling of the disciples (Matthew 4; Mark 1; Luke 5); ministry tour of Galilee; healing of the leprous man, the paralytic man, and the call of Matthew.

Then Jesus went to Jerusalem (John 5:1)

Comment on John 4:48

Regarding John 4:48 “Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders,” Jesus told him, “you will never believe.” A.W. Pink wrote:

“The force of Christ’s reply seems to be this: ‘You are demanding signs of Me before you will fully trust your boy’s case into My hands.’ This is a serious mistake which is made by many seeking souls. We must not be so wickedly presumptuous as to tell God how to act and what to do. We must state no terms to the Lord Most High. He must be left to work in His own way. “Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe.” How this brings out the omniscience of Christ! He knew this man’s heart. A measure of faith he had, but he was afraid to fully commit himself. The Lord knew this, and so addressed Himself to the suppliant accordingly.

“Except ye see signs and wonders ye will not believe.” How searching this is! Is it not a word that many of us need? Is it not at this very point we most often fail? We ask God for a certain thing, and we have a measure of faith that it will be given us; but **in the interval of waiting the bare word of God is not sufficient for us**—we crave a “sign.” Or again; we are engaged in some service for the Lord, and we are not without faith that our labors will result in some fruitage for Him, but ere the fruit appears we become impatient, and we long for a “sign.” Is it not so? Is it true of you, dear reader, that “except ye see signs and wonders, ye will not believe?” Ah! have we not all of us cause to cry, “Lord, I believe; help thou mine unbelief” (Mark 9:24)?”

Faith and Regeneration

by C.H. Spurgeon

A Sermon

(No. 979)

Delivered on Lord's-day Morning, March 5th, 1871

At the Metropolitan Tabernacle, Newington

*In the following sermon, Spurgeon teaches with the correct biblical tension that **saving faith** is both the **duty of man** and is the **gift of God** (through regeneration). Spurgeon's doctrinal position so parallels my own convictions on the matter, that I feel the need to get many essays and sermons like these in the hands of modern evangelicals. The **highlighted** sections of his sermon are concepts that I think are particularly illuminating*
-JWH

Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ **has been born of God**, and everyone who loves the Father loves whoever has been born of him. -
1 John 5:1

FOR THE PREACHER of the gospel to make full proof of his ministry will be a task requiring much divine teaching. Besides much care in the manner and spirit, he will need guidance as to his matter. One point of difficulty will be to preach the whole truth in fair proportion, never exaggerating one doctrine, never enforcing one point, at the expense of another, never keeping back any part, nor yet allowing it undue prominence. For practical result will much depend upon an equal balance, and a right dividing of the word. In one case this matter assumes immense importance because it affects vital truths, and may lead to very serious results unless rightly attended to; I refer to the elementary facts involved in the work of Christ for us, and the operations of the Holy Spirit in us. Justification by faith is a matter about which there must be no obscurity much less equivocation; and at the same time we must distinctly and determinately insist upon it that regeneration is necessary to every soul that shall enter heaven. "Ye must be born again" is as much a truth as that clear gospel statement, "He that

believeth and is baptized shall be saved." It is to be feared that some zealous brethren have preached the doctrine of justification by faith not only so boldly and so plainly, but also so baldly and so out of all connection with other truth, that they have led men into presumptuous confidences, and have appeared to lend their countenance to a species of Antinomianism very much to be dreaded. From a dead, fruitless, inoperative faith we may earnestly pray, "Good Lord, deliver us," yet may we be unconsciously, fostering it. Moreover to stand up and cry, "Believe, believe, believe," without explaining what is to be believed, to lay the whole stress of salvation upon faith without explaining what salvation is, and showing that it means deliverance from the power as well as from the guilt of sin, may seem to a fervent revivalist to be the proper thing for the occasion, but those who have watched the result of such teaching have had grave cause to question whether as much hurt may not be done by it as good. On the other hand, it is our sincere conviction that there is equal danger in the other extreme. **We are most certain that a man must be made a new creature in Christ Jesus, or he is not saved;** but some have seen so clearly the importance of this truth that they are for ever and always dwelling upon the great change of conversion, and its fruits, and its consequences, and they hardly appear to remember the glad tidings that **whosoever believeth on Christ Jesus hath everlasting life.** Such teachers are apt to set up so high a standard of experience, and to be so exacting as to the marks and signs of a true born child of God, that they greatly discourage sincere seekers, and fall into a species of legality from which we may again say, "Good Lord, deliver us." Never let us fail most plainly to testify to the undoubted truth that true faith in Jesus Christ saves the soul, for if we do not we shall hold in legal bondage many who ought long ago to have enjoyed peace, and to have entered into the liberty of the children of God.

It may not be easy to keep these two things in their proper position, but we must aim at it if we would be wise builders. John did so in his teaching. If you turn to the third chapter of his gospel it is very significant that while he records at length our Saviour's exposition of the new birth to Nicodemus, yet in that very same chapter he gives us what is perhaps the plainest

piece of gospel in all the Scriptures: "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." So, too, in the chapter before us he insists upon a man's being born of God; he brings that up again and again, but evermore does he ascribe wondrous efficacy to faith; he mentions **faith as the index of our being born again, faith as overcoming the world, faith as possessing the inward witness, faith as having eternal life—indeed, he seems as if he could not heap honour enough upon believing, while at the same time he insists upon the grave importance of the inward experience connected with the new birth.**

Now, if such difficulty occurs to the preacher, we need not wonder that it also arises with the hearer, and causes him questioning. We have known many who, by hearing continually the most precious doctrine that belief in Jesus Christ is saving, have forgotten other truths, and have concluded that they were saved when they were not, have fancied they believed when as yet they were total strangers to the experience which always attends true faith. **They have imagined faith to be the same thing as a presumptuous confidence of safety in Christ, not grounded upon the divine word when rightly understood, nor proved by any facts in their own souls.** Whenever self-examination has been proposed to them they have avoided it as an assault upon their assurance, and when they have been urged to try themselves by gospel tests, they have defended their false peace by the notion that to raise a question about their certain salvation would be unbelief. Thus, I fear, the conceit of supposed faith in Christ has placed them in an almost hopeless position, since the warnings and admonitions of the gospel have been set aside by their fatal persuasion that it is needless to attend to them, and only necessary to cling tenaciously to the belief that all has been done long ago for us by Christ Jesus, and that godly fear and careful walking are superfluities, if not actually an offence against the gospel. On the other hand, we have known others who have received the doctrine of justification by faith as a part of their creed, and yet have not accepted it as a practical fact that the believer is saved. They so much feel that they must be renewed in the spirit of their minds, that they are always

looking within themselves for evidences, and are the subjects of perpetual doubts. Their natural and frequent song is—

"Tis a point I long to know,
 Oft it causes anxious thought;
 Do I love the Lord, or no?
 Am I his, or am I not?"

These are a class of people to be much more pitied than condemned.

Though I would be the very last to spread unbelief, I would be the very first to inculcate holy anxiety. It is one thing for a person to be careful to know

that he is really in Christ, and quite another thing for him to doubt the promises of Christ, supposing that they are really made to him. There is a tendency in some hearts to look too much within, and spend more time studying their outward evidences and their inward feelings, than in learning the fullness, freeness, and all sufficiency of the grace of God in Christ

Jesus. They too much obscure the grand evangelical truth that the believer's acceptance with God is not in himself, but in Christ Jesus, that we are cleansed through the blood of Jesus, that we are clothed in the righteousness of Jesus, and are, in a word, "accepted in the Beloved." **I**

earnestly long that these two doctrines may be well balanced in your souls. Only the Holy Spirit can teach you this. This is a narrow path which the eagle's eye has not seen, and the lions whelp has not trodden.

He whom the Holy Ghost shall instruct will not give way to presumption and despise the Spirit's work within, neither will he forget that salvation is of the Lord Jesus Christ, "who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption." The text appears to me to blend these two truths in a very delightful harmony, and we will try to speak of them, God helping us.

"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God" We shall consider this morning, first of all, ***the believing which is here intended***; and then, secondly, ***how it is a sure proof of regeneration***; and then, thirdly, dwelling for awhile upon the closing part of the verse we shall show how it ***becomes an argument for Christian love***: "Every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him."

I. WHAT IS THE BELIEVING INTENDED IN THE TEXT?

We are persuaded, first of all, that the believing here intended is that which our Lord and his apostles exhorted men to exercise, and to which the promise of salvation is always appended in the word of God; as for instance that faith which Peter inculcated when he said to Cornelius, "To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive the remission of sins;" and which our Lord commanded when he came into Galilee, saying to men, "Repent ye, and believe the gospel" (Mark i. 15). Certain persons have been obliged to admit that the apostles commanded, and exhorted, and besought men to believe, but they tell us the kind of believing which the apostles bade men exercise was not saving faith. Now, God forbid we should ever in our zeal to defend a favorite position, be driven to an assertion so monstrous. Can we imagine for a moment apostles with burning zeal and ardor, inspired by the Spirit of God within them, going about the world exhorting men to exercise a faith which after all would not save them? To what purpose did they run on so fruitless an errand, so tantalizing to human need, so barren of results? When our Lord bade his disciples go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature, and added, "he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved," the faith which was to be preached was evidently none other than a saving faith, and it is frivolous to say otherwise. I must confess that I felt shocked the other day to read in a certain sermon the remark that the words of Paul to the jailor "were spoken in a conversation held at midnight under peculiar circumstances, and the evangelist who wrote them was not present at the interview." Why, had it been at high noon, and had the whole world been present, the apostle could have given no fitter answer to the question, "**What must I do to be saved?**" than the one he did give, "**Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.**" It is, I repeat, a mere frivolity or worse, to say that the faith enjoined by the apostles was a mere human faith which does not save, and that there is no certainty that such faith saves the soul. That cause must be desperate that calls for such a defence.

Furthermore, the faith here intended is the duty of all men. Read the

text again: "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God." It can never be less than man's duty to believe the truth; that Jesus is the Christ is the truth, and it is the duty of every man to believe it. I understand her by "believing," confidence in Christ, and it is surely the duty of men to confide in that which is worthy of confidence, and that Jesus Christ is worthy of the confidence of all men is certain, it is therefore the duty of men to confide in him.

Inasmuch as **the gospel command, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," is addressed by divine authority to every creature, it is the duty of every man so to do.** What saith John: "*This is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ,*" and our Lord himself assures us, "He that believeth on him is not condemned: but he that believeth not is condemned already, because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son of God." I know there are **some who will deny this, and deny it upon the ground that man has not the spiritual ability to believe in Jesus, to which I reply that it is altogether an error to imagine that the measure of the sinners moral ability is the measure of his duty. There are many things which men ought to do which they have now lost the moral and spiritual, though not the physical, power to do.** A man ought to be chaste, but if he has been so long immoral that he cannot restrain his passions, he is not thereby free from the obligation. **It is the duty of a debtor to pay his debts, but if he has been such a spendthrift that he has brought himself into hopeless poverty, he is not exonerated from his debts thereby. Every man ought to believe that which is true, but if his mind has become so depraved that he loves a lie and will not receive the truth, is he thereby excused?** If the law of God is to be lowered according to the moral condition of sinners, you would have a law graduated upon a sliding- scale to suit the degrees of human sinfulness; in fact, the worst man would be under the least law, and become consequently the least guilty. God's requirements would be a variable quantity, and, in truth, we should be under no rule at all. **The command of Christ stands good however bad men may be, and when he commands all men everywhere to repent, they are bound to repent, whether their**

sinfulness renders it impossible for them to be willing to so or not. In every case it is man's duty to do what God bids him.

At the same time, this faith, wherever it exists, is in every case, without exception, the gift of God and the work of the Holy Spirit. Never yet did a man believe in Jesus with the faith here intended, except the Holy Spirit led him to do so. He has wrought all our works in us, and our faith too. Faith is too celestial a grace to spring up in human nature till it is renewed: faith is in every believer "the gift of God." You will say to me, **"Are these two things consistent?" I reply, "Certainly, for they are both true."** "How consistent?" say you. "How inconsistent?" say I, and you shall have as much difficulty to prove them inconsistent as I to prove them consistent. Experience makes them consistent, if theory does not. Men are convinced by the Holy Spirit of sin—"of sin," saith Christ, "because they believe not on me;" here is one of the truths; but the selfsame hearts are taught the same Spirit that faith is of the operation of God. (Col. ii. 2) **Brethren be willing to see both sides of the shield of truth. Rise above the babyhood which cannot believe two doctrines until it sees the connecting link.** Have you not two eyes, man? Must you needs put one of them out in order to see clearly? Is it impossible to you to use a spiritual stereoscope, and look at two views of truth until they melt into one, and that one becomes more real and actual because it is made up of two? **Many men refuse to see more than one side of a doctrine, and persistently fight against anything which is not on its very surface consistent with their own idea.** In the present case I do not find it difficult to believe faith to be at the same time the duty of man and the gift of God; and if others cannot accept the two truths, I am not responsible for their rejection of them; my duty is performed when I have honestly borne witness to them.

Hitherto we have only been clearing the way. Let us advance. The faith intended in the text evidently rests upon a person—upon Jesus. *"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God"* It is not belief about a doctrine, nor an opinion, nor a formula, but belief concerning a person. Translate the words, *"Everyone who believes that Jesus is the*

Christ," and they stand thus: "Whosoever believeth that the Saviour is the Anointed is born of God." **By which is assuredly not meant, whosoever professes to believe that he is so, for many do that whose lives prove that they are not regenerate; but, whosoever believes it to be the fact, as truly and in very deed to receive Jesus as God has set him forth and anointed him, is a regenerate man.** What is meant by "Jesus is the Christ," or, Jesus is the Anointed? First, that he is the Prophet; secondly, that he is the Priest; thirdly, that he is the King of the church, for in all these three senses he is the Anointed. Now, I may ask myself this question: Do I this day believe that Jesus is the great Prophet anointed of God to reveal to me the way of salvation? Do I accept him as my teacher and admit that he has the words of eternal life? If I so believe, I shall obey his gospel and possess eternal life. Do I accept him to be henceforth the revealer of God to my soul, the messenger of the covenant, the anointed prophet of the Most High? But he is also a priest. Now, a priest is ordained among men to offer sacrifices; do I firmly believe that Jesus was ordained to offer his one sacrifice for the sins of mankind, by the offering of which sacrifice once for all he has finished the atonement and made complete expiation? Do I accept his atonement as an atonement for me, and receive his death as an expiation upon which I rest my hope for forgiveness of all my transgressions? Do I in fact believe Jesus to be the one sole, only propitiating Priest, and accept him to act as priest for me? If so, then I have in part believed that Jesus is the Anointed. But he is also King, and if I desire to know whether I possess the right faith, I further must ask myself, "Is Jesus, who is now exalted in heaven, who once bled on the cross, is he King to me? Is his law my law? Do I desire to submit myself entirely to his government? Do I hate what he hates, and love what he loves? Do I live to praise him? Do I, as a loyal subject, desire to see his kingdom come and his will be done on earth as it is in heaven?" My dear friend, if thou canst heartily and earnestly say, "I accept Jesus Christ of Nazareth to be Prophet, Priest, and King to me, because God has anointed him to exercise those three offices; and in each of these three characters I unfeignedly trust him," then, dear friend, you have the faith of God's elect, for it is written, "*Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God*"

Now we go a little further. True faith is reliance. Look at any Greek lexicon you like, and you will find that the word *pisteuein* does not merely mean to believe, but to trust, to confide in, to commit to, entrust with, and so forth; and the marrow of the meaning of faith is confidence in, reliance upon. Let me ask, then, every professor here who professes to have faith, is your faith the faith of reliance? You give credit to certain statements, do you also place trust in the one who glorious person who alone can redeem? Have you confidence as well as credence? A creed will not save you, but reliance upon the Anointed Saviour is the way of salvation. Remember, I beseech you, that if you could be taught an orthodoxy unadulterated with error, and could learn a creed written by the pen of the Eternal God himself, yet a mere notional faith, such as men exercise when they believe in the existence of men in the moon, or nebulae in space, could not save your soul. Of this we are sure, because we see around us many who have such a faith, and yet evidently are not the children of God.

Moreover, true faith is not a flattering presumption, by which a man says, "I believe I am saved, for I have such delightful feelings, I have had a marvelous dream, I have felt very wonderful sensations;" for all such confidence may be nothing but mere assumption. Presumption, instead of being faith, is the reverse of faith; instead of being the substance of things hoped for, it is a mere mirage. Faith, is as correct as reason, and if her arguments are considered, she is as secure in her conclusions as though she drew them by mathematical rules. Beware, I pray you, of a faith which has no basis but your own fancy.

Faith, again, is not the assurance that Jesus died for me. I sometimes feel myself a little at variance with that verse—

"Just as I am—without one plea
But that thy blood was shed for me."

It is eminently suitable for a child of God, but I am not sure as to its being the precise way for putting the matter for a sinner. **I do not believe in Jesus because I am persuaded that his blood was shed for me, but rather I discover that his blood was shed especially for me from the fact that I have been led to believe in him. I fear me there are thousands**

of people who believe that Jesus died for them, who are not born of God, but rather are hardened in their sin by their groundless hopes of mercy. There is no particular efficacy in a man's assuming that Christ has died for me; for it is a mere truism, if it true as some teach, that Jesus died for everybody. On such a theory every believer in a universal atonement would necessarily be born of God, which is very far from being the case. When the Holy Ghost leads us to rely upon the Lord Jesus, then the truth that God gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him might be saved, is opened up to our souls, and we see that for us who are believers, Jesus died with the special intent that we should be saved. For the Holy Spirit to assure us that Jesus shed his blood for us in particular is one thing, but merely to conclude that Jesus for us on the notion that he died for everybody is as far as the east is from the west, from being real faith in Jesus Christ.

Neither is it faith for me to be confident that I am saved, for it may be the case that I am not saved, and it can never be faith to believe a lie. Many have concluded rashly that they were saved when they were still in the gall of bitterness. That was not the exhibition of confidence in Christ but the exhibition of a base presumption destructive to the last degree. To come back to where we started from, faith, in a word, is reliance upon Jesus Christ. Whether the Redeemer died in special and particular for me or not, is not the question to be raised in the first place; I find that he came into the world to save sinners, under that general character I come to him, I find that whosoever trusteth him shall be saved, I therefore trust him, and having done so, I learn from his word that I am the object of his special love, and that I am born of God.

In my first coming to Jesus I can have no knowledge of any personal and special interest in the blood of Jesus; but since it is written, "God hath set him forth to be a propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world," I come and trust myself to that propitiation; sink or swim I cast myself on the Saviour. Great Son of God, thou hast lived and died, thou hast bled and suffered, and **made atonement for sin for all such as trust thee**, and I trust thee, I lean upon thee, I cast myself

upon thee. Now, whoever has such faith as this is born of God, **he has true faith which is proof positive of the new birth.** Judge ye, therefore, whether ye have this faith or no.

Let me tarry just one minute longer over this. The true faith is set forth in Scripture by figures, and one or two of these we will mention. It was an eminent type of faith when the Hebrews father in Egypt slew the lamb and caught the warm blood in the basin, then took a bunch of hyssop and dipped it in the blood and marked the two posts of his door, and then struck a red mark across the lintel. That smearing of the door represented faith. The deliverance was wrought by the blood; and the blood availed through the householder's own personally striking it upon his door. Faith does that; it takes of the things of Christ, makes them its own, sprinkles the soul, as it were, with the precious blood, accepts the way of mercy by which the Lord passes over us and exempts his people from destruction. Faith was shown to the Jews in another way. When a beast was offered in sacrifice for sin, the priest and sometimes the representatives of the tribes or the individual laid their hands upon the victim in token that they desired their sins to be transferred to it, that it might suffer for them as a type of the great substitute. Faith lays her hands on Jesus, desiring to receive the benefit of his substitutionary death.

A still more remarkable representation of faith was that of the healing look of the serpent-bitten Israelites. On the great standard in the midst of the camp Moses lifted up a serpent of brass; high overhead above all the tents this serpent gleamed in the sun, and whoever of all the dying host would but look to it was made to live. Looking was a very simple act, but it indicated that the person was obedient to God's command. He looked as he was bidden, and the virtue of healing came from the brazen serpent through a look. Such is faith. It is the simplest thing in the world, but it indicates a great deal more than is seen upon its surface:

"There is life for a look at the Crucified One."

To believe in Jesus is but to glance the eye of faith to him, to trust him with thy soul.

That poor woman who came behind our Saviour in the press offers us

another figure of what faith is. She said, "If I may but touch the hem of his garment I shall be made whole." Taking no medicines, making no profession, and performing no ceremonies, she simply touched the ravelling of the Saviour's robe, and she was healed at once. O soul, if thou canst get into contact with Christ by simply trusting him, though that trust be ever so feeble, thou hast the faith of God's elect; thou hast the faith which is in every case the token of the new birth.

II. We must now pass on to show that WHEREVER IT EXISTS IT IS THE PROOF OF REGENERATION.

There never was a grain of such faith as this in the world, except in a regenerate soul, and there never will be while the world standeth. It is so according to the text, and if we had no other testimony this one passage would be quite enough to prove it. "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God." "Ah!" I hear thee say, poor soul, "the new birth is a great mystery; I do not understand it; I am afraid I am not a partaker in it." You are born again if you believe that Jesus is the Christ, if you are relying upon a crucified Saviour you are assuredly begotten again unto a lively hope. Mystery or no mystery, the new birth is yours if you are a believer. Have you never noticed that the greatest mysteries in the world reveal themselves by the simplest indications. The simplicity and apparent easiness of faith is no reason why I should not regard its existence as an infallible indication of the new birth within. How know we that the new-born child lives except by its cry? Yet a child's cry—what a simple sound it is! how readily could it be imitated! a clever workman could with pipes and strings easily deceive us; yet was there never a child's cry in the world but what it indicated the mysteries of breathing, heart-beating, blood-flowing, and all the other wonders which come with life itself. Do you see yonder person just drawn out of the river? Does she live? Yes, life is there. Why? Because the lungs still heave. But does it not seem an easy thing to make lungs heave? A pair of billows blown into them, might not that produce the motion? Ah, yes, the thing is easily imitated after a sort; but no lungs heave except where life is. Take another illustration. Go into a telegraph office at any time, and you will see certain needles moving right and left with unceasing click. Electricity is a great mystery, and you cannot see or feel it;

but the operator tells you that the electric current is moving along the wire. How does he know? "I know it by the needle." How is that? I could move your needles easily. "Yes; but do not you see the needle has made two motions to the right, one to the left, and two to the right again? I am reading a message." "But," say you, "I can see nothing in it; I could imitate the clicking and moving very easily." Yet he who is taught the art sees before him in those needles, not only electric action, but a deeper mystery still; he perceives that a mind is directing an invisible force, and speaking by means of it. Not to all, but to the initiated is it given to see the mystery hidden within the simplicity. The believer sees in the faith, which is simple as the movements of the needle, an indication that God is operating on the human mind, and the spiritual man discerns that there is an inner secret intimated thereby, which the carnal eye cannot decipher. To believe in Jesus is a better indicator of regeneration than anything else, and in no case did it ever mislead. **Faith in the living God and his Son Jesus Christ is always the result of the new birth, and can never exist except in the regenerate. Whoever has faith is a saved man.**

I beg you to follow me a little in this argument. A certain divine has lately said, "A man's act of believing is not the same as his being saved: it is only in the direction of being saved." This is tantamount to a denial that every believer in Christ is at once saved; and the inference is that a man may not conclude that he is saved because he believes in Jesus. Now, observe how opposed this is to Scripture. It is certain from the Word of God that the man who believes in Jesus is not condemned. Read John iii. 18, and many other passages. "He that believeth on Him is not condemned." Now is not every unregenerate man condemned? Is not a man who is not condemned a saved man? When you are sure on divine authority that the believer is not condemned, how in the name of everything that is rational can you deny that the believer is saved? If he is not condemned, what has he to fear? Will he not rightly conclude that being justified by faith, he has peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ?

Note, secondly, that faith in the fourth verse of the chapter before us is said to "overcome the world." "This is the victory that overcomes the world, even

our faith." What, then, does faith overcome the world in persons who are not saved? How can this be possible when the apostle saith that that which overcomes the world is born of God? Read the fourth verse: "Whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world:" but faith overcomes the world. **therefore the man who has faith is regenerate**; and what means that but that he is saved, and that his faith is the instrument by which he achieves victories.

Further, faith accepts the witness of God, and more, he that hath faith has the witness in himself to the truth of God. Read the tenth verse of the chapter: "He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself." It is not said, "He that does this or feels that," but "He that believeth hath the witness in himself," **his heart bears witness to the truth of God**. Has any unsaved man an experimental witness within? Will you tell me that a man's inner experience bears witness to God's gospel and yet the man is in a lost state, or only hopeful of being saved ultimately? No, sir, it is impossible. **He that believeth has that change wrought in him which enables by his own consciousness to confirm the witness of God, and such a man must be in a state of salvation. It is not possible to say of him that he is an unsaved man.**

Again, note in this chapter, at the thirteenth verse, that wherever there is faith there is eternal life; so run the words, "these things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life." Our Lord himself, and his apostles, in several places have declared, "He that believeth on him hath everlasting life." Do not tell me that a sinner who believes in Jesus is to make an advance before he can say he is saved, that a man who trusts Christ is only on his way to salvation, and must wait until he has used the ordinances, and has grown in grace, before he may know that he is saved. No, the moment that the sinner's trust is placed on the finished work of Jesus he is saved. Heaven and earth may pass away, but that man shall never perish. If only one second ago I trusted the Saviour I am safe; just as safe as the man who has believed in Jesus fifty years, and who has all the while walked uprightly. I do not say that the new born convert is as happy, nor as useful,

nor as holy, nor as ripe for heaven, but I do say that the words, "he that believeth on him hath everlasting life," is a truth with general bearings, and relates as much to the babe in faith as does to the man who has attained to fullness of stature in Jesus Christ.

As if this chapter were written on purpose to meet the gross error that faith does not bring immediate salvation, it extols faith again and again, yea, and I may add, our Lord himself crowns faith, because faith never wears the crown, but brings all the glory to the dear Redeemer.

Now, let me say a word or two in reply to certain questions. But must not a man repent as well as believe? Reply: No man ever believed but what he repented at the same time. Faith and repentance go together. they must. If I trust Christ to save me from sin, I am at the same time repenting of sin, and my mind is changed in relation to sin, and everything else that has to do with its state. All the fruits meet for repentance are contained in faith itself. **You will never find that a man who trusts Christ remains an enemy of God, or a lover of sin. The fact that he accepts the atonement provided is proof positive that he loathes sin, and that his mind is thoroughly changed in reference to God.** Moreover, as to all the graces which are produced in the Christian afterwards, are they not all to be found in embryo in faith? "Only believe, and you shall be save," is the cry which many sneer at, and others misunderstand; but do you know what "only believe" means? Do you know what a world of meaning lies in that word? Read that famous chapter to the Hebrews, and see what faith has done and is still able to do, and you will see that it is no trifle. Wherever there is faith in a man let it but develop itself and there will be a purging of himself from sin, a separating himself from the world, a conflict with evil, and a warring for the glory of Christ, which nothing else could produce. Faith is in itself one of the noblest of graces; it is the compendium of all virtues; and as sometimes there will lie within one single ear enough seed to make a whole garden fertile, so, within that one word "faith," there lies enough of virtue to make earth blessed; enough of grace, if the Spirit make it to grow, to turn the fallen into the perfect. Faith is not the easy and light thing men think. Far are we from ascribing salvation to the profession of a mere creed, we loathe the idea; neither do we ascribe salvation to a fond

persuasion, but we do ascribe salvation to Jesus Christ, and the obtaining of it to that simple, child like confidence which lovingly casts itself into the arms of him who gave both his hands to the nail and suffered to the death for the sins of his people. He who believes, then, is saved—rest assured of that. "Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been born of God"

III. Now what flows out of this? Love is the legitimate issue! We must love if we are begotten of God all those who are also born of God.

It would be an insult to you if I were to prove that a brother should love his brother. Doth not nature herself teach us that? Those, then, who are born of God ought to love all those of the same household. And who are they? Why, all those who have believed that Jesus is the Christ, and are resting their hopes where we rest ours, namely, on Christ the Anointed One of God. We are to love all such. We are to do this because we are of the family. **We believe, and therefore we have been begotten of God.** Let us act as those who are of the divine family; let us count it our privilege we are received into the household, and rejoice to perform the lovely obligations of our high position. We look around us and see many others who have believed in Jesus Christ; let us love them because they are of the same kindred. "But they are some of them unsound in doctrine, they make gross mistakes as to the Master's ordinances." We are not to love their faults, neither ought we to expect them to love ours, we are nevertheless to love their persons, for "whosoever believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God," and therefore he is one of the family, and as we love the Father who begat we are to love all those who are begotten of him. First, I love God, and therefore I desire to promote God's truth and to keep God's gospel free from taint. But then I am to love all those whom God has begotten, despite the infirmities and errors I see in them, being also myself compassed about with infirmities. Life is the reason for love, the common life which is indicated by the common faith in the dear Redeemer is to bind us to each other. I must confess, though I would pay every deference to every brother's conscientious judgment, I do not know how I could bring my soul as a child of God to refuse any man communion at my Master's table, who believed that Jesus is the Christ. I have proof in his doing so, if he be

sincere (and I can only judge of that by his life), that he is born of God; and has not every child a right to come to the Father's table? I know in the olden times, parent used to make their children go without meals as a punishment, but everybody tell us now this is cruel and unwise, for it injures the child's constitution to deprive it of necessary food. There are rods in the Lord's house, and there is no need to keep disobedient children away from supper. Let them come to the Lord's table, and eat and drink with the Lord Jesus and with all his saints, in the hope that when their constitution bestows stronger they will throw out the disease which now they labor under, and come to be obedient to the whole gospel, which saith, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

Let me beg the members of this church to exhibit mutual love to one another. Are there many feeble among you? Comfort them. Are there any who want instruction? Bring your knowledge to their help. Are there any in distress? Assist them. Are they backsliding? Restore them. "Little children, love one another," is the rule of Christ's family, may we observe it. May the love of God which has been shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us, reveal itself by our love to all the saints. And, remember, other sheep he has which are not yet of this fold; them also he must bring in. Let us love those who are yet to be brought in, and lovingly go forth at once to seek them; in whatever other form of service God has given us, let us with loving eyes look after our prodigal brothers, and who knows, we may bring into the family this very day some for whom there will be joy in the presence of the angels of God, because the lost one has been found. God bless and comfort you, for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.

Note: ESV Used for some texts of Scripture