

Genuine Saving Faith

Tim Conway | illbehonest.com

I'd like you to open your Bibles to Acts 5. We're going to be looking at several different verses here throughout our New Testaments. Acts 5:14. "And more than ever, believers were added to the Lord; multitudes of both men and women."

Let's pray. Father, I pray for our brother Brandon as he's preaching at the prison today; Brother Craig as he's preaching up in Austin and Temple; our brothers and sisters in many different places. I think of Kevin there in Manchester. I think of Adam having served the brethren there in Poland and Switzerland. I think of Javier speaking this morning and if he was able to get to where the brethren are; our brother Matt Wilkinson and Alberto as he takes the pulpit; our brethren in many different places. I think of Justin over there in New Mexico. Lord, these men laboring - our brother Mark down in Corpus. Father, we ask for grace. May great grace fall upon all of Your people in the places they are today. We need Your help. We need Your grace. Lord, we don't ask You to deal with us according to our righteousness, but deal with us according to Christ's righteousness. Deal with us according to His merits. Deal with us in a gracious fashion. Give us what we need. Empower us, Father. I pray in Christ's name, Amen.

Christians Are Called Believers

Acts 5:14. "More than ever, believers were added to the Lord." You know what the reality is? You know what the reality is, but a lot of times we just need to rethink what the reality is. Before these people were added to the Lord, they were not the Lord's. They were lost and they were hellbound. And that's the reality. What do you call somebody who's been added to the Lord? Well, what does the text call them? Believers. Let's not lose the significance of this. Christians are called "believers." This is at the very heart and soul of Christianity. This is what I want to talk about today. I want to talk about genuine saving faith. Christians are believers. The Christian is a Christian because he or she possesses faith in something.

Think of some of the very common verses. "The righteous shall live by faith." "We walk by faith, not by sight." "We're saved by grace through faith." Exactly. Faith. Faith. It's at the heart of what it is to be a Christian. This is essential to everything that a Christian is. The most popular verse in the Bible - we dealt with it a couple weeks back. But, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, so that whosoever believes in Him should not perish..." Perish - that means go to hell. That means you die eternally. Unless you believe in Christ.

So what is faith? Faith - if we were to define it. Faith very simply is this - I know, I know... you can look at the theologians and they break it up into these different components, but I'll tell you this, at the end of the day, true faith is this: It is a conviction of the truth of something. That's what it is. Conviction. You don't just know the facts, you're convicted about those facts. You're convicted. You can tell when somebody has conviction about something, or, versus just a casual, oh yeah, they recognize something may be true.

That being said, I want to point something out. Everyone in the world who can think, they believe. They believe something. I mean, think with me. Unbeliever. That's what we call people

who are not Christians. Unbelievers. What does that mean? That they don't believe anything? Unbelievers believe a lot of things. And the reality is, unbelievers believe a lot of things that are true. You know what? Most of the people up and down this street who are not Christians, if you ask them what two plus two is, they're going to tell you it's four. They believe that. An unbeliever believes lots of truth. You know what? Unbelievers believe a lot of truth about God. They may believe truths about Jesus Christ. By and large, the majority of unbelievers in this world believe that Jesus Christ was a historical reality. There are some that reject that.

Unbelievers are Blinded

I want you to turn in your Bibles to this text: 2 Corinthians 4:4. Unbelievers. The Bible talks about unbelievers. Do not be unequally yoked with unbelievers. An unbeliever. That's what we call a person that is not a Christian. You know what? There's a lot of believers that believe that Jesus Christ is a real, historical figure. They believe He went to the cross. They believe that there's a heaven. They believe that there's a hell. And yet, they're an unbeliever. Why? What is it? What's significant about that? Well, right here. 2 Corinthians 4:4. "The god of this world..." That's Satan. That's the devil. We're not playing any games here. The devil is not something to laugh at. He blinds eyes to keep you from seeing the only thing that can save you. He is in the business of keeping people's eyes blind so they're damned. You should know that. "The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers." Blinded their minds to what? Two plus two is four? No. No, not that at all. To what? Not even to the fact that Jesus was an actual historical character. A person - a real person. That's not what he blinds the eyes to. Notice: "...to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God."

You know what? You may have a man - high IQ - have you see some of these guys? Stephen Hawking who just died not too long ago? Some of these guys - their IQ can go through the roof. They can understand quantum physics. But I'll tell you this, that's not what the devil blinds their minds to. They can know all about those things.

What is it? There's only one thing. What is a believer? A believer is someone whose mind sees a glory. They're convicted about that glory. They embrace that glory. That's what it says. And it's a glory that other men don't see. And so what inevitably happens is men find glory in other things. And they are blind to this glory. And so you know what they do? They pursue the other glory. That's exactly what happens.

Look, what this is telling us is this: The devil keeps men's minds, women's minds blinded, so that they can't see this. Because the reality is, if people can see it - listen, who would not want this? After the things I've done, all my sins can be forgiven and God will take me to paradise? And to see what salvation really is - God delivers me from everything that's bad, everything that's wicked, everything that's sinful, everything that's destructive, everything that hurts me and harms me, and will take me where I'll have life abundantly. And the reality is, Jesus Christ has a beauty and a glory - who would not want that? The only reason men don't want that is because their eyes are blind. And they're made to see that a football team, or a basketball team, or sex, or alcohol, or money, or cars have a greater glory. That's what the reality is. What is it that makes a person a true believer? That's what we're talking about right now and I want you to see something. Because there's something in Scripture that ought to disturb us.

What Makes a Person a True Believer?

I want you to turn now in your Bibles to Acts 8. This is the essential question: What is it that makes a person a true believer? Because this is life and death. Life and death. Coming to church is not what determines this reality. It's being a believer. But it's being a believer of a certain sort. Notice this. Many of you are familiar with this, but let's remind ourselves. Acts 8 - Simon. What is true saving faith? I want to start looking at a believer who looks good at first sight, but upon closer examination, there's a defect. So Acts 8:9, "There was a man named Simon. He had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the people of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great." So, notice this. This guy was very stuck on himself; very proud. Probably, he had real magic abilities. Probably, he was dabbling in the occult. Probably there was real supernatural power - powers of darkness, not light. He probably was dabbling in real witchcraft. "They all paid attention to him from the least to the greatest, saying this man has the power of God that is called great." So, not only did he call himself great, other people were looking at him and saying this guy really is great. This guy is amazing us. "They paid attention to him because for a long time, he had amazed them with his magic."

But here comes Philip. Philip - one of the deacons from the church at Antioch. A man has come here with the gospel and he begins to preach it. And I'll tell you this, God began to move. And God began to move in ways that got people's attention, even more than they were paying attention to this Simon. "They believed Philip as he preached good news." There's the gospel. The good news. He was lifting up Christ crucified for sinners. Christ dying in the place of wicked men and women. Sins forgiven. He's preaching this message about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ. "They were baptized, both men and women." People were believing. And here's the thing - verse 13. "Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized, he continued with Philip."

And I'll tell you this, if we stopped right here, we'd think: Wow! God saved a big sinner. That's what we would think. And we'd have no reason not to think that. Except for what comes after it. "And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed." This ought to be a giveaway. Remember what the devil hides us from seeing the light of the glory of the gospel. That's the thing. The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ. But see, this guy, it doesn't say that he's really seeing and being amazed by Christ, or by the wonder of having our sins forgiven. He's amazed by the miracles. "So when the apostles at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the Word of God, they sent to them Peter and John." I mean, here's two pillars. Men who walked with Christ. "...Who came down and prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit, for He had not yet fallen on any of them, but they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord." And you know this. "They received the Holy Spirit..." Verse 18, "Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.' Peter said to him..." Now notice this. I want this gift. I want this power. And Peter doesn't skip a beat. He looks at him and he says you, sir, are going to hell. You are fake. You are false. You are not the real thing. Why? Because he wanted to buy the Holy Spirit or the ability to impart the Holy Spirit. He wanted to buy that with money. "May your silver perish with you." Peter's saying, "You're perishing." "...Because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money." You see, he doesn't understand grace. There's no sense of God giving me a

gift when I don't deserve it. I've done nothing to deserve this. "You have neither part nor lot in this matter. Your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore this wickedness of yours and pray to the Lord that if possible the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." He's in the bond of iniquity. There's bitterness and iniquity.

What do you have here? True preaching? Yep. True miracles? No doubt about it. And then what happens? He believed. He was baptized. But he wasn't real. Why? Because you know what miracles are? Miracles are a sign. We're going to talk about it in a little bit, but you know what John said: I've recorded these miracles that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ. These miracles are like a big arrow pointing to Christ. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And that by believing in Him, you might have eternal life. They're a sign. Who goes down the road and you see the sign that says, "Exit here," and it's like, yes. Yes. That's my exit. That thing is pointing to where I want to go. And so what do you do? You get off the exit and go to where you want to go. What if I slammed on the brakes and you're in there, and it's like, we just sit there in front of the sign? You say, yeah, that's funny. That's the kind of funniness that will take men to hell. And that's exactly what's happening here. Signs are meant to show us something about Christ. And you see, he got stuck on the sign. He got stuck on the miracle. He got stuck on the amazement. No heartfelt sense of sin. Not a need: Oh, Christ! None of that.

True Saving Faith

I want you to turn to another well known passage. John 2. You know this. I know you know this. But let's think about this again, because listen, I know this... I know this. There are people around us whose faith is not real. And that's what I want to talk about: true saving faith. How can we tell? Listen, if we don't know this, if we're not clear on true saving faith, then we're going to accept that as being genuine which is not genuine. And we're going to teach other people like that, and we're going to lead people wrong. And the danger is, if we don't know what true saving faith is over against unsaving faith - the faith of an unbeliever - isn't that a strange concept? The faith of an unbeliever. And yet, Scripture at times calls them believers. They're unbelieving believers. It's a crazy thing, but it's a reality. It's a biblical reality. And men will be damned for it. How do we know? We need to know. Why? Because your soul and my soul is at stake. We don't want to be wrong about this.

So, John 2:23. John 2:23, "Now, when He (this is Jesus Christ our Lord) when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast, many believed in His name." Mark that. It doesn't say that they didn't believe. It says they do believe. They did believe "in His name when they saw the signs that He was doing." But watch this: "But Jesus on His part, did not entrust Himself to them because He knew all people, and needed no one to bear witness about man, for He Himself knew what was in man." Now, you know what? V. 23 - think about if we were just reading that. "He was in Jerusalem at the Passover feast. Many believed in His name when they saw the signs that He was doing." If we stopped right there, it sounds like revival. If Diego and I come back from Ecuador and we basically give this report: "Many believed in His name." Whoa! That's a mighty move of God! We would think... But, then there's v. 24. You know, this literally could be read: "Many believed in His name, but... Jesus did not believe in them." It's the same *pisteuo* word group that we get "faith" from. They believed in Him. He didn't believe in them. Did they

have faith? I mean, read what it says. "Many believed in His name." It doesn't say they didn't believe. It says just the opposite. They did believe. But Jesus knew something wasn't right. And notice His words: It says that "He Himself knew what was in man." In man. Where others can't see. There's something wrong. This is life and death. Do we have the faith that Jesus would entrust Himself to? Or does our faith fall short of that? And you see the defect is somewhere where you and I can't see in others. We've probably got some idea about it in ourselves, but it's somewhat hidden from others. But Jesus knew what was in man. So, we need some help here. What's going on? What is this?

The Parable of the Soils

Okay, over to Matthew 13. Matthew 13:20. We're going to dive into the middle of Jesus' well known parable of the soils. Now, you know the second soil type is the stony ground. Jesus gives us a picture of a man throwing seed. Sowing seed. And some of that seed falls on ground that's called stony ground or rocky ground. The idea is not so much that it's rocks interspersed with soil, as much as there's rock underneath shallow soil. And so when a plant begins to grow in it, there's no place for the roots to go. It can't go down into the moist soil. And so what happens? The sun comes out and it withers. What's that a picture of? Well, Jesus tells us right here. Matthew 13:20, "As for what was sown on rocky ground..." Now, what you want to notice, this is not theoretical. Jesus is saying when the gospel is preached, this is one of four common results. Here it is. Here's the Word - somebody's preaching the gospel. Somebody's hearing the gospel. The person who hears the gospel immediately receives it with joy. That sounds good. But, notice verse 21. "Yet he has no root in himself." Now, that's very similar to John 2 because we're talking about where people cannot see.

You know, when I lived out in the country, I planted a pine tree. It was a four or five foot pine tree. And a gopher chewed the roots off that thing. I couldn't see it. But how did I know that its roots got chewed off? At first, it began to look pale. Now, it was a pine tree, so it wasn't the kind of tree that the leaves are immediately going to wilt. It just started looking bad. The color was not deep green, and it was looking sickly. And then, the thing was not good.

That's what we have going here. No root in himself. "...Endures for awhile, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the Word, immediately he falls away." Now, I know the word "faith," the word "believe," are not here, but they are in Luke's.

Don't turn to Luke's, but listen. Here's the Luke account. "The ones on the rock are those when they hear the Word, they receive it with joy, but these have no root. They believe for a while..." Receiving and believing - they're synonymous words. You know that from John 1. "To all who did receive Him, who believed in His name, He gave the right to become sons of God." Receive; believe. It's the same idea here.

So here in this parable, Jesus tells us wherever and whenever the gospel is preached, there are going to be people who hear the gospel; they receive the gospel, they get excited. Through the years I've seen that. Gospel preaching. I've seen it. People are all excited! Boy, they've got a testimony! Oh, the Lord has saved me! It's glorious! Joy. That's what he says. They want to join! They want to get baptized! They have a testimony! But look, before long, back to the world they go. We see this all the time. But something is wrong. Where is it wrong? Below the surface where you and I can't see. But here's the thing, this is critical. Persecution

and tribulation - difficulty - it exposes this faith for what it really is. This is very helpful. This is very helpful. If we think carefully, I think we can all discover the defect in this faith.

Persevering and Counting the Cost

Let me ask you a question. Why would someone embrace Christ with joy today and walk away tomorrow? Why would they do that? When persecution comes? Or tribulation comes? I mean, this is getting right down to the heart of what true saving faith is all about. Do you know why a true believer does not walk away from Christ no matter how hard things get? There's a reason. It's because he or she believes at the deepest level something. Think about this. Jesus says, "Follow Me, and I will lead you to glory." You know, He said that. He said that to the rich, young ruler. "You follow Me, you will have treasure in heaven." "I'll take you there. I'll take you all the way there. You follow Me." "Follow Me."

And as you follow Him, what happens? I'll tell you what happens. He says, "Follow Me." Your mother, your father - they don't like it. "You joined a cult!" Your friends - they laugh; they mock. You may be in some countries, you'll lose your job. Your families will disown you. They threaten your life. You may be in some countries where they'll throw you in prison. Jesus does that. He says, "Follow Me, but I want you to know this. I'm going to take you to the valley of the shadow of death. I'm going to take you to the dark chasm. I'm going to take you to the furnace. I'm going to take you to the fire. And I'm going to take you to the brink of it and I'm going to pass through ahead of you because I'm asking you to follow Me. And I'm going to bid you to come. I'm going to bid you to follow." And you see, right at that time; right at that point, it tests what you truly believe. You see, you're not tested when the sun's out. Now, the sun as far as persecution in the parable is a bad thing, but I'm talking about when life is easy. That's not when you're tested. That's not when what you really believe is put out on the table. It's right here. It's persecution. It's tribulation. Because it tests at the deepest, deepest level. And you see, when you're faced by that, you're standing at the edge of the fire and He's telling you to come, and everything inside of you is resisting. It's recoiling. I want to go back! But what? There's a conviction. I desperately need Christ. I don't want to go through that fire, but I know at the deepest level, I need Christ! I cannot turn back! Because if I turn back, where am I going to go? I have no place to go. And you follow. And you put one foot ahead of the other.

I mean, you just consider these two cases. You consider the case of persecution. My friends laugh at me. My friends mock me. They avoid me. They don't invite me to the thing anymore whatever it is. That's a reality. Or maybe they threaten me. Maybe it's the government that threatens me. Do you see what my faith is confronted with? My faith is confronted with what they were confronted with in Jesus' days. And He said to those Jews, "How can you believe when you desire the glory of men?" And you know, it said that of the Jewish leaders too. It specifically says in John 12, "The authorities believed in Him, but for the fear of the Pharisees, they did not confess it so that they would not be put out of the synagogue..." Here's the reason: "...They loved the glory that comes from men more than the glory that comes from God."

See, it tests, do I want the approval, the applause? Do I want the acceptance? Or am I willing to follow Christ though the whole world turns against me? And see, that tests you. God made us social creatures. We don't like to be rejected. We don't like to be outcasts. We don't like to be in isolation. They put men in isolation in prison. Why? Because that's considered the

most extreme way you can punish a guy without actually putting him to death in our system. Why? Because we don't like that. You're tested right then. Christ - the other. Family. Ah, family! The approval of our parents. But see, then you have tribulation. What's that one all about? Remember, the person joyfully received this gospel.

But what happens when God lays your joys in a pile of ruin? I'll tell you this, He never will or can - if you'll let me use that word - if your joy is in this: I was a wicked wretch. And the main thing I want out of this deal: I want Christ, and I want His salvation. And I know that no matter what comes, I can't lose that. You see, the problem is that the joy that people are coming with, it's often: it's my ticket out of hell. You know, Jesus said to count the cost. Because you know when people hear: "Oh, this is great! There's going to be no hell in the end." They get all excited. But you know what? Some people believe: I can become a believer. There's no hell in the end, but I can live my life - I'll just live my life just the same. But see, you have to remember, Jesus is calling us all the time to follow Him; to follow Him. They call His name Jesus because He's going to save His people from their sin. He's not going to leave you in it. And you see, some people didn't bargain for that. It's like, well, no, I wanted to keep this sin. I wanted to miss hell, but I wanted to hold on to my sin.

Or we have this idea - you know, there is this idea, we kind of associate Christianity with forgiveness and heaven and happiness and joy, and rightly so. But then when people get in there, they're thinking, "I thought I was getting earthly blessings here. I thought life was going to be better and easier. I mean, I imagined the blessed life - like God's going to bless my work, and He's going to help me to make money, and He's going to bless my family, and things are going to get good. It's like I didn't see in this fine print He brings swords into the family. What's all this?"

You see, there are people who haven't really counted the cost. And you know what happens when things get difficult? When your joy was set on something else? You get angry. What's this? I'm getting a raw deal here, God. And you know that happened in John 6. You remember? He's saying, "eat My flesh." And they're looking at this thing and they're saying, "Man, this is too hard. This is too hard. Your teaching's too hard, Jesus." And you remember what happened to many of those disciples? They turned tail and they were out of there. That's what happens to people all the time. It just gets too hard. This is not what we bargained for. This wasn't what we were thinking up front.

And Jesus - you know what? He wanted to test men at the deepest level. Jesus was not for cheap decisions. Listen, He is in the business of not entrusting Himself to people whose faith doesn't go deep. And He'll test it. And He even turns to the twelve, and He says to those guys, "Are you guys going to go too? There's the door." And you know what answer is the only right one? The one Peter gave. You see, when you're faced by the hard times and the difficulties and the fires and the persecutions, that's the right answer. "Lord, where are we going to go? We don't have anywhere else to go. You're our only hope. Lord, we've put everything in this bag! I mean, Lord, it's You, or we perish. You have the words of eternal life. There's nobody else that has them. There's no other place of our hope. We're not going." Mark well those words. "Lord, yes. What You are saying is hard, but where will we go?"

You know when Geoff Thomas was just here? He's sitting on our sofa. And he told a story that I'm not going to forget the rest of my life. He told about a man from the U.K. A

pastor/preacher who Geoff said was powerful, effectual preacher. This man - his 18 year old daughter went with friends to India - some kind of vacation. She went out one day with one of her friends, and the friend wanted to go do something. And the girl didn't want to do it. And so she stayed put. They never saw her again. Geoff said that her dad went to India every single year for years trying to follow up reports on a white girl that might be seen somewhere. Geoff talked about the people that heard him weeping. I think he mentioned in the hotel, the people in India would hear him just weeping. Can you imagine that? I thought about that with this. Is this what this man bargained for when he threw in with Christ? But when Christ called him to stand in those flames, can you imagine? Angry - "I'm Your servant! Where is my daughter?" He never found her. He never found her. He died two months ago and never found her. He never turned his back on Christ. Why? Because there's where your faith is tested. What do you believe most? As much as his heart hurt, he believed, "I need Christ more." "I need Him more."

You see, the issue here is saving faith is more than just grasping truth intellectually. It is that. Your mind needs to be engaged. We need to know the Christ of Scripture. This is not a mindless religion. A lot of people would have us believe that. It is not. We believe in a Christ who is revealed for us in Scripture. But there's more. There's conviction. There's commitment of your will. See, that's what happens. When you so are convinced in your brain, your will, by conviction, lays hold and will not let go.

And we've got some people, somebody out of this church going around right now and blasting this whole Lordship thing and saying it works. Let me tell you this, if your faith will not continue to follow Christ and to obey Christ, it is cheap; it is false; and it has no root. It is keeping on. That's what faith does. It's throwing in with Christ. All or nothing. There's no backup plan. You see, too many people have that. They come: Well, I'll try this. If this doesn't work... No contingency plan here. It's all or nothing. You throw in with Christ. If He doesn't save you, you perish. There's no backup. When things get hard, we must consider this. And the thing is this, if you're not going to follow Christ, it's like Peter said, who are you going to follow? Where are you going to go?

Real Disciples

John 8. Turn in your Bibles to John 8. Because Jesus in His parable talks about people who believe but then fall away. I want us to look at what does that mean to fall away. It doesn't mean you're standing there and you fall over backwards. It doesn't even necessarily mean that you leave the church. It might. "They went out from us because they were not of us." But you know, at the deepest level, what does it mean to fall away from Christ? Let's look at John 8 here. Verse 30. "As (Jesus) was saying these things..." He's preaching. He's proclaiming the truth. "...Many believed in Him." But you see, Jesus, again, is not so quick to just jump on the bandwagon. He has a warning for them. Verse 31, "Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in Him..." Not, "oh, great, you've all believed in Me, so you all must be genuine." Nope. None of that. "If you abide..." Now you need to get this. We need to get this. "If you abide in My Word, you're truly My disciples." Did you get that? "Truly My disciples." In Acts 11:26, it says in Antioch, the disciples were first called Christians. You know what a disciple is? A disciple is a Christian. The disciples were called Christians. There's too many people that want to say, "Oh, well, disciple is another class." No, it's not. It's a Christian. And what Jesus is saying is this. Hey,

I know, you can go places in Scripture and show where some of the disciples walked away. That's true. There are false disciples and false Christians in Scripture. But Jesus isn't talking about them, because look what He says. He says, "If you abide in My Word, you are truly My disciples." That's what Jesus is concerned with here. He's concerned with true disciples. Here are these believers. It says, "many believed." But you know what? Jesus sees two categories of believers. We see that. There are those who abide in His Word and those who do not abide in His Word. And this is the very heart of what it means to fall away.

Now, you want to pay close attention to this. Many who fall away don't even realize that they have. Because they didn't burn their Bible. They didn't raise up and shake their fist at God. They may even still be coming to the church and to the meetings. That isn't the issue. To fall away from Christ - notice, you're not abiding in His Word. You're not following Him. See, when He says, "Follow Me," that means, "Follow My teaching." "Follow My instruction." That's what the Great Commission is. "Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded." That's following Christ. You remember, Jesus said to His disciples, "Follow Me." And what does He say at the end when He's praying to His Father in John 17? "They have kept Your Word." That's what it means. It's not everybody that says, "Lord, Lord." "It's those who do the will of My Father in Heaven." It's always been that. That's the issue.

What does it mean to fall away? To fall away simply means when difficulty comes or when trial comes, when mocking comes, when persecution comes, you say, I think I'm going to go pursue money. I think I'm going to go pursue sex. I'm going to go pursue alcohol. I'm going to go get high. "You know what, Jesus??" We don't say it like that. But it's like: This is hard. This is hard. I think I'll go pop some pills and get drunk. You see, that's what falling away is. That's where you're tested. Didn't Jesus say it in Luke 6? He says, "Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do the things I say?" If you're living your life and you claim to be a Christian, whatever it is - boredom? Loneliness? People giving you a hard time? The pressures? The world drawing you? Listen, if those trials come upon you, and you can depart from His commandments and walk away - you still may come to church the next Sunday. That's not the issue. That's not the issue.

Do You Really Believe?

Do you believe? Do you really believe that Jesus is everything? Do you believe He is wisdom? He is Wonderful Counselor. Do you believe He's Lord? You see, that's what Jesus is saying. You call Me Lord like you believe it, but then your actions show that you really don't believe it. You're not doing this. Somebody will say - this is what's being said out there on the Internet. Some of you have seen it. "Oh, this is being saved by works!" No, this is not being saved by works. This tests what you believe at the deepest level. This is faith. Faith always acts on what it believes. Jesus leads you to this difficult place; to this chasm, to this darkness, to this difficulty, this trial, this fire, this thing in your life. And He still beckons to the man whose daughter was lost. "Yes, I took your daughter. Will you still follow Me?" And see even then, you want the answer that Peter had. "Lord, You've broken my heart. I will weep and I will cry before You. And I'll not get over this my whole life. But I'm going to follow You, because You have the words of eternal life. You're the Savior. There is no other. Where else am I going to go? Though You kill me; though You slay me; though You throw all my joys in this ruinous heap..." You see,

you can receive Christ with joy, but if God's got the ability to pop that joy bubble to where you walk, then you see, it shows what you really believed and it shows where your joy really was.

Brethren, I can tell you this. The two greatest things as I've examined my life, my thoughts, my everything, I can honestly say to you, I want two things more than anything else. I want to see Christ. I want to have Him. And I want to be perfect. I want to be done with sin forever. Those are my two greatest desires. And so far, everything that has tested them, there hasn't been anything more compelling that I've said, no, I'm throwing in the towel. I can't do this. He's my only hope. Brethren, I don't have a backup plan. Peter didn't have a backup plan. It's not like if this doesn't work, we're going to go try Allah. That's not even on my radar. And it's not like if this doesn't work, I'm going to go back to my old life, or to the world, or to money, to power, to the stuff.

I'll tell you this, a lot of times people, when they throw in the towel, they don't blame Christ. And they don't say, "Well, I'm falling away." They blame the church. That's so common. "Ah, they're a bunch of legalists. They're teaching salvation by works." No, it's not that. Our obedience is so much an expression of what we believe. It's an expression of faith. Oh, I know, you can do works where you've got no regard to Christ at all. And it's all done in pride and in the flesh. That's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about the stuff that James is talking about. He says, "You show me your faith without works, I'll show you mine by my works." Why? Because they say what you believe.

Look, you've got the title Christian, but you'll run after your sin in a second. And you know what you do every time you do that? You call Jesus "Lord" but you don't do what He says. "Not everybody that says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' is going to inherit the kingdom. Those that do the will of My Father..." Why? That shows what you believe. And if that's not reflective of your life, don't be deceived. You will not inherit the kingdom. There is a true faith. And there is a faith that Jesus commits Himself to. There is good soil out there. And I'll tell you what, (incomplete thought) You think about faith - saving faith involves a Person as its object. What is it that John said? John said I've given you these miracles. What miracles? The healing of the official's son. The first one - changing water into wine. You think of all the things that you find in John's Gospel. Blind man - John 9. The raising of Lazarus. Jesus Himself rising from the dead. You think of feeding of the 5,000. You think of these. You know what John is saying? "I have written these things so that you might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God." You see what's supposed to happen? What's supposed to happen is not like Simon, where you just get all: "Oh boy, that was neat! Give me the power. I'm amazed!" No. It's a sign. And you're supposed to follow the arrow beyond the feeding of the 5,000 to the One that did the feeding and say, "What is it about Him?" "If He can do that..." There's something that needs to grab hold of your will and your conviction that I need Him. I need Him. And have you got some running sore of the soul? You've got some leprosy? Spiritual wickedness there? And you're seeing: "I will. Be clean." I mean, can you imagine them? People are watching. It's like, lepers are unclean! We don't even get that today. Ah, you know, we go to the hospital. Somebody's got some kind of leprosy. They had to walk around in that day saying, "unclean, unclean." They didn't cut their hair, so they had a mop of hair. And some of you heard Paul Washer's message - you could smell them before you see them. Can you imagine this just filthy mess of a man? Unclean. People just avoided; people ran from them. People went on the other sides of towns or streets to get away from

people like this. Here he comes at Jesus and everybody's like, "ahh!" And He doesn't move. He doesn't budge. "I will. Be clean."

See what John is saying? You should find something in that that would cause you to embrace Him and not let go, even if God took your 18 year old daughter away and you could never find her. See, the difficulty of that situation - there was no closure. You don't find a body. Where is she? I'm not going to let go. I will weep before Him, but I will not let go. Why? I am convinced of these things in Scripture. Saving faith is believing the facts concerning the feeding of the 5,000, but it's believing it with such conviction that will keep my hope from shifting when all hell breaks loose against me. That's the issue. God has given you these stories.

Remember 2 Corinthians. Don't turn there, but listen to it again. "The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the glory of the gospel of Christ who is the image of God." Have you seen something today? You know, it's interesting, Isaiah said, "Who has believed our report?" Who has believed? But you know, he keeps saying it. He says, "To whom has the arm of the Lord been revealed?" It's like: have you seen it? Have you seen the arm of the Lord revealed? Who has believed? "He grew up before him like a young plant, like a root out of dry ground. He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him." You see the difference? That's the devil blinding. There's nothing. I don't see any attractiveness in this Christ. "No beauty that we should desire Him." You see the difference? When the blinders are taken off, and we behold, there's a beauty, and there is something to be desired, and there is something necessary for your soul. It embraces - it's a Person. Our faith is based on a Person. The angel said, "He will be great." The angel said, "No end to His Kingdom." He is going to be the very offspring of David. He is going to take his throne - David's throne. He's going to be on that - an everlasting Kingdom. We're told that He is going to be born of this virgin. This is the offspring of the woman. He's come. It's the hope; it's the desire of the nations. He's come. There is no other hope. This is the test. This is the test of our faith. This tests it at the deepest level. Christ - He came. And He came to lay His life down as a ransom for many. And He went to the cross. And you know, Peter tried to distract Him. Peter pulled out the sword. "No, Peter. Put it away." "I will drink the cup that My Father is giving Me to drink." "I will drink it." There was no wine in that cup. There was no water. There was no milk. There was wrath in that cup. Wrath. God is angry. God is angry with sinners! Jesus stands in the way. Fury. Words like that. Fury. Anger. Wrath. That's where our faith needs to cling. Lord, to whom will we go? You have the words of eternal life. May God help us clearly to grasp the true from the false. This is life and death. Father, I pray open our eyes. Some here, Lord, may the scales come off. The god of this world - yeah, we know he's at work. But You're stronger, Father. You're mighty. You can hold his hand. You can subdue Your enemies. We read of One who's stronger than the strongman, who's able to bind him and take his goods.

Lord, we pray, do that. Do that in our midst. May we be able to see these mighty works. I pray in the name of the living Christ, Amen.