

Series: Luke
Text: Luke 7:1-10
August 16, 2015: Gospel Community Study Guide

This Study Guide is based on a sermon by Dr. Joshua Mack. You will find the link to the sermon here.

<http://www.sermonaudio.com/sermoninfo.asp?sid=8181577167>

Getting Started:

We are saved by faith in Christ. There is hardly anything the Bible states more clearly. But what is the kind of faith that saves us?

That's our subject for today.

Now obviously, we are not expecting a perfect answer (since we are just at the beginning of our study!) but how would you explain saving faith? What makes saving faith different than a faith that does not save?

Remembering Sunday:

Maybe this will help. We are not going to spend much time in Luke 7:1-10 today, but let's begin by remembering what we learned about faith from this passage this past Sunday. What happened in this story? What does Luke say Jesus' response was to the centurion? What was so amazing about this centurion's faith? What can we learn about saving faith from him?

Into the Bible:

A couple of hundred years ago now, there was a great revival that occurred in a number of different places in the world. Many people were saved. At the same time however, the devil was very active and many people became more religious, without necessarily having been truly converted.

Looking back on that revival, caused one pastor, to ask himself, what is the nature of true Christianity? What is at the heart of saving faith? One of the places he turned to help answer this question, was to the book of James, James 2:14-26.

Have someone read this passage out loud and then answer the following questions:

What is the specific question James asks in verse 14?

(In other words, what is the person saying in verse 14, and what does James ask about that? I am trying to get you to notice that James is not simply asking can faith save a person, but can a certain kind of faith save a person – can a faith that doesn't produce works save someone.)

What is his answer to that question? (See verse 17)

To perhaps be a little more clear, in James' mind, there are two different kinds of faith. There is a saving faith and a non-saving faith. The difference between these two kinds of faith is not necessarily information. A non-saving faith might have the right knowledge about God. The difference is that it doesn't produce transformation in a person's character.

In verses 18 and following James gives some illustrations to help us see that a faith that does not produce works is not a true saving faith.

I want you to focus especially on the illustration he gives in verse 19. Read this verse out loud once again.

What does the person believe in this verse? What does James say about the fact they believe that? Why is it good? What does he say however that indicates he doesn't think that kind of faith is enough?

Now, I am drawing your attention to this verse because this is the verse the pastor I was speaking of earlier focused on in a sermon entitled "True Grace Distinguished from the Experience of Devils." This pastor's name was Jonathan Edwards and he summarized James argument in this verse saying, **"Nothing in the mind of man, that is of the same nature with what the devils experience, is any sure sign of saving grace."**

What do you think he meant by that?

Obviously believing that there is one God is a good thing. You can't be a Christian if you don't believe in God, and you can't be a Christian if you don't believe in the one true God. But this kind of belief is not enough to provide assurance that you really are saved and in a right standing with God because even devils have that kind of belief in God and we know that devils aren't holy and aren't recipients of God's saving grace.

Let's think about this a little more deeply. Demons know a lot about God, but that knowledge doesn't equal holiness and it doesn't lead them to be holy. Therefore, knowledge of God by itself doesn't mean someone has experience salvation. What's more in this text in James we see that the demons belief impacts them, we might say emotionally. After all, look back at the text, what does James say the demons do in response to their belief in God?

If knowledge alone isn't the final proof of saving faith and even certain feelings aren't the final proof of saving faith, what are some of the signs of the saving grace of God's Spirit? What is the proof James gives here?

Digging Deeper:

I know we have been talking for a while now, but if you still have time, let's go a little further. This is important. We can take this question a bit deeper.

What is so different about saving faith that it produces these kinds of works? This non-saving faith doesn't produce works, but saving faith does. Why?

I want you to take a moment to discuss the way Jonathan Edwards answers this question. Now, I know this quote is a little too long and maybe some of the ideas are a little hard at first, but try! Read it a paragraph at a time, and then stop when you need to, discuss, ask questions (here's looking at you G.C. leaders), learn and then start reading again!

“The first difference is the foundation of saving faith.

The *foundation* of saving faith is the sense of the *overwhelming holy beauty* and loveliness of the things of God. When a person grasps in his mind, or better yet, when he feels his own heart held captive by the attractiveness of the Divine, this is an unmistakable sign of God's working. The demons and damned in hell do not now, and never will experience even the tiniest bit of this. Demons have very clear ideas about how powerful God is, his justice, holiness, and so on. They know a lot of facts *about* God. But now they haven't a clue about what God is *like*. They cannot know what God is like any more than a blind man can know about colors! Demons can have a strong sense God's awesome majesty, but they don't see his loveliness. They have observed His work among the human race for these thousands of years, indeed with the closest attention; but they never see a glimmer of His beauty. No matter how much they know about God (and we have seen that they know very much indeed) the knowledge they have will never bring them to this higher, spiritual knowing what God is *like*. On the contrary, the more they know about God, the more they hate Him. The beauty of God consists primarily in this holiness, or moral excellence, and this is what they hate the most. It is because God is holy that the demons hate Him.

Wicked people, including those alive today, will on the day of judgment see all there is to see of Jesus Christ, except His beauty and loveliness. There is not one thing about Christ that we can think of, that will not be set before them in the strongest light on that brilliant day. They will see his outward glory, which is far, far greater than we can possibly imagine now. You know the wicked will be thoroughly convinced of all who Christ is. They will be convinced about His omniscience, as they see all their sins replayed and evaluated. They will know first-hand Christ's justice, as their sentences are announced. His authority will be made utterly convincing when every knee will bow, and every tongue confess Jesus as Lord. When that happens, all their knowledge

of God, as true and as powerful as it may be, will be worth nothing, and less than nothing, because they will not see Christ's beauty.

Therefore, it is this seeing the loveliness of Christ that makes the difference between the saving grace of the Holy Spirit, and the experiences of demons.

This sight or sense is what makes true Christian experience different from everything else. The faith of God's elect people is based on this. When a person sees the excellence of the gospel, he senses the beauty and loveliness of the divine scheme of salvation. His mind is convinced that it is of God, and he believes it with all his heart. When a most wicked sinner is caused to see Christ's divine loveliness, he no longer speculates why God should be interested in him, to save him. Before, he could not understand how the blood of Christ could pay the penalty for sins. But now he can see the preciousness of Christ's blood, and how it is worthy to be accepted as the ransom for the worst of sins. Now the soul can recognize that he is accepted by God, not because of who he is, but because of the value God puts on the blood, obedience, and intercession of Christ. Seeing this value and worth gives the poor guilty soul rest which cannot be found in any sermon or booklet. When a person comes to see the proper foundation of faith and trust with his own eyes, this is saving faith. It is this sight of the divine beauty of Christ that captivates the wills and draws the hearts of men.

A sight of the outward greatness of God in His glory may overwhelm men, and be more than they can endure. This will be seen on the day of judgment, when the wicked will be brought before God. They will be overwhelmed, yes, but the hostility of the heart will remain in full strength and the opposition of the will continue. But on the other hand, a single ray of the moral and spiritual glory of God and of the supreme loveliness of Christ shone into the heart overcomes all hostility. The soul is inclined to love God as if by an omnipotent power, so that now not only the understanding, but the whole being receives and embraces the loving Saviour. This sense of the beauty of Christ is the beginning of true saving faith in the life of a true convert.

This is quite different from any vague feeling that Christ loves him or died for him. These sort of fuzzy feelings can cause a sort of love and joy, because the person feels a gratitude for escaping the punishment of their sin. In actual fact, these feelings are based on self-love, and not on a love for Christ at all. It is a sad thing that so many people are deluded by this false faith. On the other hand, a glimpse of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ causes in the heart a *supreme genuine love for God*.

This is because the divine light shows the excellent loveliness of God's nature. A love based on this is far, far above anything coming from self-love, which demons can have as well as men. The true love of God which comes from this sight of His beauty causes a spiritual and holy joy in the soul; a joy in God, and exulting in Him. There is no rejoicing in ourselves, but rather in God alone. The sight of the beauty of divine things will cause true desires after the things of God. These desires are different from the longings of demons, which happen because the demons know their doom awaits

them, and they wish it could somehow be otherwise. The desires that come from this sight of Christ's beauty are natural free desires, like a baby desiring milk. Because these desires are so different from their counterfeits, they help to distinguish genuine experiences of God's grace from the false.

False spiritual experiences have a tendency to cause pride, which is the devil's special sin. "He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil." (1 Tim 3:6) Pride is the inevitable result of false spiritual experiences, even though they are often covered with a disguise of great humility. False experience is enamored with self and grows on self. It lives by showing itself in one way or another. A person can have great love for God, and be proud of the greatness of his love. He can be very humble, and very proud indeed of his humility. But the emotions and experiences that come from God's grace are exactly opposite. God's true working in the heart causes humility. They do not cause any kind of showiness or self-exaltation. That sense of the awesome, holy, glorious beauty of Christ kills pride and humbles the soul. The light of God's loveliness, and that alone, shows the soul its own ugliness. When a person really grasps this, he inevitably begins a process of making God bigger and bigger, and himself smaller and smaller.

Another result of God's grace working in the heart is that the person will hate every evil and respond to God with a holy heart and life. False experiences may cause a certain amount of zeal, and even a great deal of what is commonly called religion. However it is not a zeal for good works. Their religion is not a service of God, but rather a service of self. This is how the apostle James puts it himself in this very context, "You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that-and shudder. You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?" (James 2:19-20) In other words, deeds, or good works, are evidence of a genuine experience of God's grace in the heart. "We know that we have come to know him if we obey his commands. The man who says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him." (1 John 2:34) When the heart has been ravished by the beauty of Christ, how else can it respond?"

To Think About:

What are some of the main encouragements or challenges you have taken from what we have studied together today? Is there any specific word of praise you would like to give to God for what you have learned about Jesus today? How about questions? Do you have anything you are still wondering from what we have talked about? What are some of the practical differences what you studied makes on your life? What would you like to share with someone else? Is there any specific issue that this study has brought up that you want the members of your gospel community to be praying for you about?