

# ON FAITH

Our original plan was to have our annual meeting today, and I planned on teaching a little bit on what it means to be reformed. Wednesday evening it became clear that the annual meeting would need to be moved back a week. I didn't want to continue on in Matthew, since the next passage in [Matthew 26](#) is where Jesus initiates the Lord's Supper. I want to teach that on a Sunday when we will celebrate the Lord's Supper together.

So this morning I want to speak about faith in Christ.

Puritan pastor Thomas Watson said, **"Faith is the precious grace that lays hold of Christ."**

Another Puritan, William Perkins, said, **"Faith is a notable treasure."**

Theologian Joel Beeke writes, **"Real faith is a living faith that has legs on it, that sits up and walks, and moves out in obedience to God."**

Faith is the heart of biblical worship. It is the foundation of our salvation. It is the basis of our peace with God. It is the means by which we are justified and sanctified, and will one day be glorified.

So let's take some time this morning and think biblically about faith. Here's the roadmap for the sermon. We will look first at how faith receives Christ, then how faith takes in all of Christ, third how faith brings perfect righteousness, and finally, how faith motives us to action.

First, then, faith receives Christ. Turn with me to [John 1:9](#).

## Faith Receives Christ

[Speaking of Jesus, John writes]

There was the true Light which,  
coming into the world,  
enlightens everyone.  
He was in the world,  
and the world was made through Him,

and the world **did not know Him**.

He came to what was His own,

and those who were His own **did not receive Him**.

But **as many as received Him**,

to them He gave the right to become children of God,

*even* to **those who believe in His name**,

who were born,

not of blood

nor of the will of the flesh

nor of the will of man,

but of God.

John 1:9–13 (2022 LSB)

The Gentiles were all made by Him, but they **did not know Him**; they didn't recognize Him. The Jews were His own, but **they did not receive Him**.

I came to Christ at a time when becoming a Christian was often described as “receiving” Him. “Have you received Christ?”, someone would ask. Yes, I *received Christ*. Evangelists would urge people to *receive Christ*. Preachers would call on people to come to the altar and pray to *receive Christ*.

The thing is, I never heard anyone explain *how* to receive Christ. I know what the word *receive* means. I know how to receive visitors, or receive a phone call, or receive a gift. I just had no idea about how to receive Christ. It was something of a mystery.

Well, [John 1:12](#) is the key to that mystery, which isn't actually mysterious at all. To *receive Christ* means to *believe in His name*.

But **as many as received Him**,

to them He gave the right to become children of God,

*even* to **those who believe in His name ...**

John 1:12 (2022 LSB)

To receive Christ means to believe in His name. If you believe in the name of Jesus Christ, then in the language of [John 1:12](#), you have received Him.

# The Verb Believe

The verb “believe” in John 1:12 is both present tense and active voice, which means that it is ongoing and continual. John is not talking about someone who believed a few times in the past, but those whose believe is ongoing and continual. Biblical faith is not sporadic, but present. Biblical faith is not dormant, but active.

But what sort of relationship with Jesus does this ongoing faith create? Turn with me to [John 6:26](#), and let’s listen to Jesus describe it.

## Faith Takes In the Whole Christ

We begin with a group of Jews speaking to Jesus. The day before Jesus had miraculously multiplied bread and fish, feeding about 5,000 men, plus women and children. He has urged these men not to labor for physical food that perishes with the eating, but for spiritual food that remains when it has been eaten.

Jesus answered them and said,  
 “Truly, truly, I say to you,  
 you seek Me,  
 not because you saw signs,  
 but because you ate of the loaves and were filled.  
 Do not work for the food which perishes,  
 [as physical food perishes when it is eaten]  
 but for the food which endures to eternal life,  
 [that is, spiritual food that continues to nourish forever]  
 which the Son of Man will give to you,  
 for on Him the Father, God, set His seal.”  
 Therefore they said to Him,  
 “What should we do,  
 so that we may work the works of God?”  
 Jesus answered and said to them,  
 “This is the work of God,  
 that you believe in Him whom He has sent.”  
 John 6:26–29 (2022 LSB)

What “work” does God require? Faith in His Son. As in [John 1:12](#), this is ongoing, continual faith,

not a single or momentary act of faith.

They want proof from Jesus:

So they said to Him,  
 “What then do You do for a sign so that we may see, and believe You?  
 What work do You perform?  
 Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness;  
 as it is written, ‘HE GAVE THEM BREAD FROM HEAVEN TO EAT.’”  
 John 6:30–31 (2022 LSB)

Boy, they were really fixated on getting another meal out of Jesus, weren’t they?

By “he” they meant Moses; in their minds, Moses had given them manna, and that validated him as God’s prophet. They were wrong, and Jesus corrects them.

## Jesus is the True, Everlasting Bread from Heaven

Jesus then said to them,  
 “Truly, truly, I say to you,  
**Moses** has not given you the bread from heaven,  
 but **My Father** gives you the true Bread from heaven.  
 For the Bread of **God**  
 is that which (a) comes down from heaven  
 and (b) gives life to the world.”  
 Then they said to Him,  
 “Lord, always give us this bread.”  
 Jesus said to them,  
 “I am the Bread of Life.  
 He who comes to Me will never hunger,  
 and he who believes in Me will never thirst.  
 But I said to you that you have seen Me,  
 and yet do not believe.”  
 John 6:33–36 (2022 LSB)

They want a fresh delivery of bread every day, just like the manna came in the wilderness. Jesus says, No, that’s not necessary, and it’s not how the Bread of Heaven works. Physical bread perishes as

we eat it. But the Bread of Heaven remains living and active within. It is a source of constant life and nourishment.

And how do we eat the Bread of Heaven? We believe in Jesus. Again, the word believe speaks of ongoing, continual faith, not just a moment of faith here and there. When we truly believe in Jesus, we will never need more of Him, or another portion of Him, or a second helping of Him. The “Bread of God” is not some thing or power Jesus gives to us, but Jesus Himself. And He never perishes within us, but gives us eternal life.

Our ongoing, continual faith takes in all of Christ and brings an end to all spiritual hunger. He sustains us for eternity.

But faith does even more. It satisfies the Father’s righteous requirements. Turn to [Romans 4](#) with me.

## Faith Equals Righteousness

Sinners have many problems, as we know. One of those problems is that God requires righteousness from everyone. How do we know what righteousness means? God has given His Law, which defines righteousness in detail. But God has also given people a conscience, so that we recognize the basic requirements of God.

### The Ten Commandments Written in Scripture and the Heart

For instance, the first four of the Ten Commandments address the worship of God. [Romans 1:20](#) says that creation reveals God’s eternal power and divine nature, so that those who refuse to worship Him (as the first four commandments describe) have no excuse.

And, the rest of the Ten Commandments address moral behavior: honor your parents, don’t murder, don’t commit adultery, don’t steal, don’t lie, don’t covet. But those six commandments are also part of our conscience. People know that murder and adultery are wrong even without the Bible.

Now, the problem is that with or without the Bible, we can’t fulfill the righteous requirements of God’s Law. It’s no good saying, “Well, I keep most of them,” or “Well, I don’t break them very often.” [James 2:10](#) says that breaking even one Law of God makes us guilty of breaking the entire Law of God.

So, God requires righteousness of us, but we are utterly unable to meet His requirements.

Praise God for [Romans 4](#)!

## Justified Not by Works but by Faith in Him Who Justifies The Ungodly

What then shall we say that Abraham,  
our forefather according to the flesh, has found?  
For if Abraham was **justified by works**,  
he has something to boast about—but not before God!  
*[being justified means being declared righteous by God]*  
For what does the Scripture say?  
“ABRAHAM **BELIEVED** GOD,  
AND IT WAS COUNTED TO HIM AS **RIGHTEOUSNESS**.”  
Now to the one who **works**,  
his wage is not counted according to grace,  
but according to what is **due**.  
But to the one who **does not work** [at all]  
but **believes upon Him** who justifies the ungodly,  
his **faith** is counted as **righteousness**,  
*[As though he or she had lived a completely and perfectly righteous life.]*  
just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man  
**to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:**  
“BLESSED ARE THOSE  
WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN,  
AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED.  
BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE  
SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.”  
Romans 4:1–8 (2022 LSB)

It is not that faith is counted as a **righteous work**, one of many righteous works a person might do. Faith is counted as **righteousness** itself. Because of our sin nature, no one is righteous. There is none righteous – no, not one – [Romans 3:10](#) says. So there is no point trying to *earn* righteousness when we have already been judged to be unrighteous. It's too late for that. No amount of good works can change our nature.

But, God can make that change within us. He is not only the Lawgiver and the Judge, but the Creator. He made us to begin with, and He can remake us as He pleases. And He is pleased to justify us when we do nothing more than believe in Him to justify us.

Will we be righteous in fact one day? Yes, but again, by the power of God. He alone can, and will, make us exactly like His Son.

The question is not how many good works we do, but whether we believe upon Him who justifies the ungodly. Justification is not for sale, not at any price. But it is completely ours if we have ongoing, continual faith in God to justify us.

Finally, this morning, I want to talk about genuine faith motivation us to action. Turn with me to Matthew 9:20.

## Faith Motivates Us to Action

*Matthew 9 20-22*

And behold,  
a woman who had been suffering from a hemorrhage for twelve years,  
came up behind Him and **touched** the fringe of His garment;  
for **she was saying to herself**,  
“If I only **touch** His garment, I will be saved *from this*.”  
But Jesus turning and seeing her said,  
“Daughter, take courage; **your faith** has saved you.”  
At once the woman was saved *from her hemorrhage*.  
Matthew 9:20–22 (2022 LSB)

How was the woman healed? By touching Jesus’ robe? No. Jesus says that her **faith** saved her.

It’s interesting that faith isn’t mentioned before this. The woman first **thought** to herself, “If I only touch His garment, I will be saved from this.” Then she went and found Jesus, moving through the crowd surrounding Him, and reached out and **touched** the hem of His robe. In that instant she was healed.

## How Was the Woman Healed?

She wasn't healed by her thoughts. Nor was she healed by physical contact with Jesus' clothes. She was healed by her faith. But that faith motivated her to action. She believed that Jesus had the power to heal her; so much power, in fact, that simply touching His robe would heal.

James explains this in [James 2:14-17](#),

What use is it, my brothers,  
if someone says he has faith  
but he has no works?  
Can that faith save him?  
James 2:14 (2022 LSB)

James is not talking about faith on the one hand and good works on the other hand. He is talking about the works that are produced by genuine faith. He illustrates his meaning:

If a brother or sister is without clothing and in need of daily food,  
and one of you **says** to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and be filled,"  
and **yet you do not give them what is necessary** for *their* body,  
what use is that?  
Even so faith, if it has no works, is dead by itself.  
James 2:15–17 (2022 LSB)

I regularly encounter men in the jails who insist that they are Christians, but whatever "faith" they have does not motivate them to any kind of **godly behavior**. Faith that doesn't move us to action is **useless, pointless, and meaningless**. It isn't faith at all. Biblical faith is not so much an **attitude** as an **engine** within us.

[Second Timothy 3:5](#) describes people like that as "having a form of godliness, but having denied its power," and cautions us to "keep away from such men as these." Avoid them. Don't believe their claim to be Christians. Don't welcome them into the fellowship. Instead, keep preaching the Gospel to them.

Was the woman's faith genuine? Yes. How do we know? Because it motivated her to action.

## Bringing it Home



Let's review and apply these things to our lives. Ask yourself four questions.

**“What sort of faith do I have this morning? Is it ongoing and continual?”** I've discovered over the years that my faith is stubborn. It doesn't want to quit. I admit that there have been times when I felt it would be easier – for the moment – to not have faith in Jesus. But I do, and my faith continues on in spite of my old nature. Genuine faith is ongoing and continual.

**“What kind of faith do I have this morning? Have I taken in all of Christ, so that I am permanently nourished by Him?”** Some pursue a constant stream of emotion; their faith is dependent on having an emotional experience. When – and not IF – those emotions die down, they describe themselves as being in a spiritual crisis, or in need of a special anointing of God. That's not how we are supposed to live in Christ, though. Having come to Jesus and believed in Him, His people never again hunger or thirst. We have no need of anything more. If you are tempted to pursue something else, I urge you to immerse yourself in the Word and learn what the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have already given you.

**“What kind of faith do I have this morning? Do I happily rest in God's justification?”** I want to be better and do better; perhaps you do as well. But I rest assured by the Word of God that God does not require me to be and do better. He has declared me righteous because I have trusted Him. His justification cannot be improved on. It is perfect. He receives me as He receives His only begotten Son. That knowledge brings enormous peace!

**“What kind of faith do I have this morning? Does it motivate me to action?”** I quoted from Joel Beeke at the beginning of the message: “Real faith is a living faith that has legs on it, that sits up and walks, and moves out in obedience to God.” Does your faith have legs? Does it get up and move in obedience to God? Well, I'll tell you something: you are here this morning, early as it is, as cold as it is. You are willing to gather with fellow believers, listen to the Scriptures, praise God, confess your sins, be taught from His Word, and lift your heart in prayer. That sounds like faith with legs to me. Is there something else your faith would move you to do?