

True Saving Faith

Passion

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Congregation, young people, tonight it is about believing. Believing. What is believing? Well, some say don't talk about that, just believe. Just believe. Don't think, don't make it so difficult. Keep it simple, simply believe that you're fine, that God is gracious, you're going to heaven. Don't make it so complicated. And yet what is believing in the Bible because we cannot afford making a mistake here. We cannot afford that. Suppose you think you believe and you don't and you come before God and you say, "Lord, I this and I that and I such and I so," and the Lord says, "I don't know you. You missed the truth faith." So we need to know what believing is, how do we define that, what does the Bible say about it because we should not deceive ourselves, right?

So let's read the Catechism first, Lord's Day 7, and you will see that it is all about believing. The Heidelberg Catechism, Lord's Day 7, Questions 20 through 23.

Q. 20. Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ?

A. No, only those who are ingrafted into Him, and receive all His benefits, by a true faith.

Q. 21. What is true faith?

A. True faith is not only a certain knowledge, whereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in His Word, but also an assured confidence, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel in my heart; that not only to others, but to me also, remission of sin, everlasting righteousness, and salvation are freely given by God, merely of grace, only for the sake of Christ's merits.

Q. 22. What is then necessary for a Christian to believe?

A. All things promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic undoubted Christian faith briefly teach us.

Q. 23. What are these articles?

A. I. I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth; etc.

So tonight as I said, the theme is true saving faith. We need to know what it is. We need to know for sure. True saving faith. Three thoughts. Keep it simple. Faith needed. Why? What difference does it make? Secondly, faith defined. Some details on how we describe believing and faith. And in the third place, faith confessed as you see in the articles of faith. So true saving faith: faith needed, faith defined, and faith confessed.

Congregation, suppose you have a complaint physically, there's something wrong in your body and you go to the doctor fearing the worst, and the doctor says, "Don't worry. There's a good medication for this. Here is a prescription and you go to the drugstore and you get your medication and you take it and you'll be fine." You're so happy. So you do that, you go for those tablets, you take them home, and you put them on the kitchen counter, and you say to your wife, "See, I have the pills now. I have the tablets, now I will get better the doctor says." One thing you forgot: to take them. They're still standing there untouched. Nobody took them. You didn't take them either. You're so happy you could get better. You don't take them. You don't eat them. You look at them. You had one in your hand but you did not eat them. Do you know what I mean? There is something spiritually wrong with us. We're not saved by nature. You have sins and guilt and pollution and we need to be saved from the wrath of God, and there is a physician, there is a medication but not to eat it, to take it, to receive it, to digest it, that's something else.

So many are close to the kingdom of God. They have been, so to speak, at the office of the doctor and they had that prescription and they have the medication, and they fall short of eating it. So close to God's kingdom. So close to being saved and yet not at all. So what's needed is not only to come to the door, think of "Pilgrim's Progress," to the door, to the gate, close to the gate, look at the gate, seeing those letters, those letters over the gate, "Enter Ye In," but it is necessary to go through the gate. It's an all decisive moment to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, to personally believe him, to touch with your hand, with your spiritual hand, the hem of the garment and to be saved because at the same moment as that lady touched the hem of the garment of Jesus, her bleeding stopped. Immediately she felt better, at the very moment of touching the hem of the garment. Of course, it's nice if you are encouraged by the word, have some hope that you can be saved, that you hear that it is possible with God, that he is a willing Savior. You go home and you say, "It was nice to hear." But again it needs to come so far that you personally believe in him, not only believing, not sometimes believing that everything is okay.

Do you know that's what some people think? Just you're okay, nothing needs to happen. Just think positively. But we need a biblical faith in order to be connected, and let us look at the Catechism. "Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ?" What does it say? What is the question? The question is this, automatically nothing needs to happen, automatically we are in Adam. Adam is our covenant head. His sin is our sin. His position is our position. He is our representative. Automatically you don't have to do anything for that. So are all men then, as they perished in Adam, also saved by Christ? Is it also automatically? Automatically perishing. Automatically be damned. Automatically perish in Adam. Also automatically saved, all people? No. "No, only those who are ingrafted into him."

You know that example, right, of a tree and the root is very strong but the fruits are small and you can't sell them. So you have a strong root and you ingraft a good apple, a good fruit to the tree there, and the root is now very strong and there are fruits on that tree. So it was ingrafted, connected, they make an incision, put it in there, putting some chemicals around it to seal it off and it will be fine. And the root connects to that piece of fruit tree and so we need to be ingrafted in Christ. Without that connection, we are dead. So something needs to happen, we need to be cut off from our old tree and be inserted and ingrafted in the new tree. That's something. What is that? What is that connection? You say that's a new heart. I wouldn't say that. Of course, it's connected but I wouldn't say that. What makes that connection between the root and the root stock? That's faith. No, only those who are ingrafted into him and receive all benefits by a true faith.

You know, God's children are not saved from eternity, not forgiven from eternity. It's not enough to be chosen and elected. When you are chosen you can still be unconverted and you need to be raised from the dead. You need to be ingrafted in Christ. You need to be made alive yet, and that's what's necessary. Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ? No, only those ingrafted into him received in all his benefits by a true faith. The answer is not by good works. The answer is not by doing your best. The answer is not by just believing you're okay. It's not by experiences. It's even not by election. It's even not by regeneration. It says by faith, on purpose. By faith. Faith. By faith only.

That's the difference between the Roman Catholic Church and the Protestant churches. In the Roman Catholic Church believing is not important, believing is just believe what the priest says. Just give it over. You don't have to understand it as long as you receive the sacraments. It's by the sacraments, it's by the seven sacraments that you're saved and then you're fine. You just live accordingly. Our fathers have said, no, we read in the Bible it's by faith only. Faith makes that connection.

Now it's quite something to state that you have Jesus, that you have Christ, that you know him, yet it's important to know him, of course. We must know him. We must have him. But for many of God's people those words are such big words. "Have him? Know him? Who really knows him? How can you know Christ and know God?" To know is such a big word so let me go over it very low and not ask if you know him, I'm not asking if you even trust him, but I'm asking you do you believe in him which is the same as trusting, right? Do you believe in him? That's the most crucial thing, "but as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name," John 1. As many. As many, all of them. As many as received him, received him not only with their hand but in the mouth, have eaten him, because his flesh is meat. Indeed as many as received him, to them gave he the power, the authority, the status to become the sons of God. Explanation: even to them, namely to them that believe on his name. To believe in is the same as receiving. Receiving him, receiving Christ, and that's a very special way of receiving. John 6:69, "And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God." It's the faith, it's the believing in the Lord Jesus Christ.

So back to Question 20. Are all men then, as they perished in Adam, saved by Christ? No, not all will be saved. Many won't. Many perish. Many when they die, they are not going to heaven. No, only, only when ingrafted in Christ. What a serious matter. What a difference when we die, to some eternal bliss, for others eternal damnation. The Bible is right about that, it's clear about that. It's you're saved or you're not saved.

Let me elaborate on that and you choose for yourself on what side you are, how you feel about that. I said saved or not saved? Are you saying, "Not saved, pastor. I'm not saved." So you're on your way to hell or heaven? What do you say? Answer, where are you heading to? Give an answer, please. You're dead in your life spiritually. Are you an enemy or a friend of God? Are you in Christ or are you not in him? In one planned with him or not at all? Are you on the narrow pathway or on the broad way to your destruction?

Listen to this, Isaiah 65:13 and 14 you see that difference, very plain. "Therefore thus saith the Lord GOD, Behold, my servants shall eat, but ye shall be hungry," forever he means, "behold, my servants shall drink, but ye shall be thirsty," forever, "behold, my servants shall rejoice, but ye shall be ashamed," forever, "Behold, my servants shall sing for joy of heart, but ye shall cry for sorrow of heart, and shall howl for vexation of spirit," forever. There are two ways so not everyone is saved. No, only them ingrafted into him, receiving all his benefits by true faith.

Receiving his benefits. If you receive Christ, you receive eternal life, justification, sanctification, redemption. Everything is in him to receive it. Now when you receive something, you can receive it in two ways. I see someone sitting in a chair, I put something on his lap, "Here, it's yours." He did not accept anything. I did not see his hands moving. They just lay in his lap. He received it. He was not involved in receiving it. He just got it. They just lay it on his lap. You can also differently, you can just hold it out for him, "It's yours." And he has to get his hands up and he has to receive it. So receive in the passive way, just putting it on your lap, or receiving it actively by accepting it, what is the real faith? Well, the Bible says that it is a receiving in an active sense, with the hands of faith.

Alexander Comrie wrote the famous book, it's probably in the bookstore. A little old-fashioned English but I like it still. "The A, B, C of Faith." It's an excellent book. I read it when I was young. "The A, B, C of Faith." And he speaks about the exercises of faith, activity. Exercise of faith and putting on Christ, and drinking, and cleaving unto, and touching the hem of the garment, and taking it. Taking? I looked at that, taking? That's what it says. "Take my yoke upon you," right?

So is that not kind of Arminian, then, to receive it and to get it yourself in your hands? No, because that's a work the Holy Spirit teaches. The Holy Spirit gives hands and he gives hands to receive it. You can see that in Article 12. Tonight we heard Article 11, right, from the Canons of Dort to the Third and Fourth as a doctrine. You can also look at the next one, page 108. Article 12, the last part, "Whereupon the will thus renewed is not only actuated and influenced by God, but in consequence of this influence, becomes itself

active." So the Holy Spirit works it in the heart and therefore the will becomes active. "Wherefore also, man is himself rightly said to believe," himself to believe, "and repent, by virtue of that grace received."

So it is the grace of God and by God's grace, God's children receive it and I see those hands receiving it and a willingness to receive it. That's needed. It's not enough that it's offered. It's enough that we hear about it. It needs to be believed in. It needs to be received. So that's why it is called a living faith. Our fathers spoke about the deeds of faith, that's an activity of the soul that goes out unto him and that's absolutely necessary.

So that was the first point, faith needed, right, that connection? There's no connection, there's no sap stream going to the branches, then the medication is not doing any good. That faith makes the connection. Let's go to the second thought: faith defined. Young friends, if I would ask you, "Please tell me what is faith, what is believing?" If your friends ask you, "What do you believe, then? What is believing? I never heard of that." An atheist friend, neighbor, "What is believing?" What will you say? It might be a hard question as we listen to it. What is a true faith? True faith is not only a certain knowledge, not only but also a certain knowledge. It starts with knowing things very well, realizing things. Things sink in and you understand them. Knowledge. Not a knowledge like math and science but to know things personally like you know your mother, like you know your father. You personally know those things and you can say, "My mother has this character. My father is this type of a person."

And so this is also a knowledge. Faith is not only but also a certain knowledge. You're convinced of them, of that knowledge. Convinced about what? Convinced about the whole Bible. Convinced about creation. Convinced of the fall. Convinced of the fact that you're sinners. Convinced that we have death in ourselves, cannot help ourselves. We are hopeless cases. Believing there is nothing we can do to save ourselves with. Believing also in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ that may come without money, without price. Believing is knowledge, a certain knowledge that is put in your mind and your heart. Not only a certain knowledge thereby I hold for truth all that God has revealed to us in his word. It's Bible-based. The first thing you would say if people asked what we believe, we would say, "I believe the Bible. I believe the whole entire Bible. My faith is based on truth and the truth is conveyed in the scriptures, the holy scriptures." We are a book-based religion, the word.

So that's part of it and I don't mean only in an historical way but also tasting it, that you really believe in the fall, really believe in the fact that we fell into sin, that you realize those things deeply, and in that believing, it's not only in certain knowledge whereby hold for truth all of God as revealed in his word but also in a sure confidence, in a sure confidence and a persuasion. "I know it for sure. I trust it, which the Holy Ghost works by the gospel. The word in my heart. He works it in my heart, that not only to others but to me also remission of sin, everlasting righteousness and salvation are freely given to me by God." Merely grace. I didn't pay a dime for it, only for the Savior, Christ's merits.

So it's a certain knowledge and also an assured confidence, and that confidence is not only, it's not your confidence that has been received a brain-washing, but it's the Holy Spirit's work in the heart. So this makes it clear that believing is not just a stroke of believing, not just facts. Some people it effects only. The whole Bible is true, they are convinced of that, but that's it. It doesn't touch their hearts. It doesn't affect them. It doesn't change them. Just historical faith. Historical faith is cold. Historical faith is effectual and not very emotional, not experiential at all.

So in that sense, I hope that we all believe, you all have historical faith to a certain extent. Others have a miraculous faith. Do you know what that is? Did you ever experience that the Lord heard your prayers? No? You were concerned about something and you just thought there's only one way to go, and you intensely for days prayed about that, "O Lord, help! O Lord, I can't do this myself. I need wisdom. I need courage. Lord, I can't do it myself." And you really felt in those circumstances that you were helpless and you cried for God's help in those circumstances, and in a miraculous way you were helped out, and you were so convinced God heard you. Let me tell you something: I don't deny that at all. I believe it. I have no reason to doubt it, that God heard your prayers, but it's not saving. It's not saving. "Yeah, but he heard me." He hears the birds. He hears all people. He hears all people of the whole earth but that's not saving. You need that faith in the Lord Jesus Christ himself personally to know him, to appreciate him, to treasure him, to follow him, the Lamb of God, hear his voice.

Others have a temporary faith. Remember that parable of the seed and the sower? Some seed fell on the wayside and was picked away by the birds, and some fell on stony places, remember? With a very thin layer of topsoil and the soil was warm very quick, and the seeds germinated very fast, and before you know it, the field was green, looked so promising, but the sun came up and within a few weeks it was just withered and there was no moisture anymore left in the soil. There was too thin of a layer. And so it's possible that people's faith looks promising and warm and real and alive, and it's green and lush and you say, "It looks so healthy." But just for a while and it's hard to distinguish that.

What is the real difference between that temporary faith and a saving faith? It looks really similar. It's hard to say the big difference is this. Temporary faith is temporary. It's more because if it's not a true faith, everything is missing. The true humility is missing. The trusting is missing. The Spirit is missing. The heart is missing. The regeneration is missing. Everything is missing in temporary faith but it can look very good for a while. So we need that saving faith, and that saving faith that is clear of this kind of doing nothing.

You know Abraham, right? You talk about the sermons on Galatians, Abraham, it was promised to him that he would receive seed and he believed it and God accounted it to him for righteousness, but yet it was also that unbelief and he said, "Let us marry Hagar," actually it was Sarah's proposal to marry Hagar, and he got involved himself to do something yourself for God, to help him to fulfill the promises. If it is anything the Lord hates, it is help. The Lord resists that. He does not want to help you, he wants to do

everything himself. By grace only. "Him that worketh not but believeth on him that justify the ungodly, his faith is counted unto him for righteousness," the apostle says. But that believing is important and it is a knowledge and a sure confidence, it's whereby the Spirit in the heart but by the gospel, by the gospel, by the word of God.

So faith is not something that comes in your hands, it's not something that you put in your mouth, believing is not something that you see only, it is mainly something that goes into your ears. Faith involves your ears because faith is by hearing, and we have no hearing, that we need to hear the word of God and that you hear it, it goes inside and it changes people's hearts. But it's a hearing thing. Faith is by hearing and hearing by the word of God. How then shall they call on him in whom they have no belief? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without the preacher? Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by the faith of Jesus Christ even we have believed in Jesus Christ that he might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by the works of the law, for the works of the law shall no flesh be justified. By faith only.

So therefore I encourage you to read the word and especially to read the gospel, by the gospel of the heart. Look at 22, "What is then necessary for a Christian to believe? All things promised us in the gospel, which the articles of our catholic undoubted Christian faith briefly teach us." The gospel. The good message. The news. It is news. People like the news, right, especially today. They chase the news constantly all day. The news. They want news. News addicted. But this is the great news in the Bible and faith hears that good news and comes to the Lord because of it, receiving all the benefits out of his hand for free.

Now can we believe ourselves? Can you do that? I can't. I can't. It's always a gift time and again. It's a work of the Holy Spirit, right? And he works it in the heart and then you begin to admit your sins, you begin to see what you haven't seen before. You haven't seen that sin was so heinous, so vile. First you thought there are mistakes, but then you see it's offensive to God because they begin to hurt, you begin to cry inside, "O God, I didn't know it was that bad." And you see yourself in the mirror God's holy law, you begin to believe the whole word of God and be getting really worried about your salvation and your death and eternity, begin to see the Lord and to open the word of the living God. You want to know the truth. You begin to love the truth. Your heart is opened and the Lord comes like he opened Lydia's heart, and so God reveals himself by the gospel in my heart, not in my brain. This talk of faith is brain faith. This is also in the brain but more than that, not only knowledge, also in a sure confidence, trusting.

Now that faith is sometimes weak. Let me give you an example of that. Two fishermen are fishing on Lake Ontario and they come in the wrong current and a strong wind and the boat capsizes, the boat is in the water heading for Niagara Falls. They realize that and someone throws a rope over the water. They're both able to grab it, and one grabs it and the other one says, "It's such a thin rope. I'd rather take this log," and he climbs on a log. This is a really firm, heavy log that looks so much more trustworthy than the thin rope, but the rope is connected to the shore and he makes it. And the man on the log just goes

down the Falls and dies. He preferred that big, that huge log over the thin cord, over the rope. Now do you see what I mean? Some people have a very thin cord but they're still connected to the shore, to the Lord Jesus Christ. So weak faith, not strong at all, but although a thin cord, they are saved by the work of God, saved by faith only so even if that faith is weak, it's still saving.

So faith needed, faith defined, and faith confessed. Our last thoughts. First we sing.

Faith confessed. But you study the 12 Articles of Faith mentioned in Question and Answer 23, you can see that they are Trinitarian. Trinitarian? I've heard of the Trinitarian Bible Society but what does Trinitarian mean? Well, Trinitarian means it comes from Trinity, you hear the word "three" in there, thrice, tricycle, Trinitarian. And so the confession is of a Trinitarian character, of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Why is that? We don't exactly know but we think it is like this. In the olden days of the Christian church, people came to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and they were baptized with their children, and before that they did confession of faith. So before they said, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost," the question was, "Well, do you believe in the Father? Do they believe in the Son? Do they believe in the Holy Ghost?" And then the answer with those 12 Articles and it says, "I believe in God the Father, Maker of heaven and earth. And in Jesus Christ his only begotten Son, our Lord," and they went on and they confessed, confessed all those 12 Articles, and then the minister said, "Now you believe in the Triune God, I can baptize you in the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost." It's a confession.

So it is the content of faith and it's also the confession of faith. We're going to see the content in the third point. Faith confessed or faith's content, it's the same. So again, we see that faith is based upon the scriptures, upon the gospel, upon what we hear in the word of the living God, and that believing is a gift of God. It's not something you do, or something you make or fabricate yourself, it's something that the Lord works in your heart.

Faith is a gift of God. Do you like that sentence? Do you like the gospel, faith is a gift of God? There was a time in my life that I didn't like that. I didn't like it at all. Faith a gift, too bad. I wish it wouldn't be that way. I wish I had to do it myself. I wish the Lord would not stop me and say, "You can't." No, I'm still so dependent. I feel nothing. I don't feel validated. I don't feel acknowledged. I feel pushed away by the Lord. "Faith is a gift so probably not for you," that's how I read it.

Later on it became a comfort. I still remember that stage I was in. I had to believe. I felt the need of the necessity of believing and I took it seriously. I tried. I couldn't. I was stuck completely. "I have to believe and I cannot believe, Lord." To give my heart over, to trust, to rely, to acknowledge, to believe the gospel, to give it all over? I couldn't. And then I read a sermon of one of the Erskine's about all things are of God, and he explained it so nicely that faith is a gift of God and I just looked at the other side of the coin, not on the side of you can't do anything, but on the side of God is doing it, and it opened up for me and I saw so much beauty in that. Faith is a gift of God. Now I can be saved. I can be

saved because faith is a gift. If it would not have been a gift, it would be hopeless. So tonight I may tell you faith is a gift and there is a willing God to give it.

One of the most impressive Bible stories about this is the one we have read tonight about the lunatic boy. He almost drowned and threw himself in the fire and his father was desperate and didn't know what to do anymore, how to solve this. And he asked the disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ, at least nine of them and they couldn't help him either, and he felt let down. And the Lord Jesus came and the people were thronging around him and this father as well with his son, and he complained that the disciples could not help him and the Lord Jesus asked him what he could do, and he said, "If thou can do something?" If the Lord can do something. And in the meantime that devil came and tore him and his was foaming on the ground and his father wanted his son to be healed and to be better, and the Lord Jesus heard that question, "If thou can do something?" And the Lord Jesus said something that amazes me. He said, "If thou can believe." If thou can believe, is that not Arminian? Is that not asking too much of people, if thou can believe? But the Lord Jesus knew what to say to corner this man and to invite this man to make it sure that he is a willing Savior.

So that's what he meant, Jesus meant, "I can do that if you believe on the condition of faith." And this hit him so hard, it was an arrow that went straight in his heart and he began to cry. He began to show tears and said, "Lord, I believe. Help thou my unbelief." He couldn't believe himself but he could not help it that he believed either. He had to believe it now. He felt it. The Lord opened it. The Lord meant it so well. He heard him, he heard him say, "If thou believest." It opened the door for him. While he could not be proud of his faith and although he was not saved because of his faith, yet the Lord gave him at the same time that faith. At the same time that the Lord said, "If thou can believe," at the same time the Lord gave it.

So let us not be too amazed by it. "If thou believest." The Bible tells us more than just ask for it. The Lord is asking more than pray for it. The Lord Jesus did not say to this man, "Pray for it. Pray for faith." But he said, "If thou believest." Anyone before the door this evening hour with his sins and hesitating? "May I? May I flee to that Savior? Are you sure? Really? Is it allowed?" No, it's not allowed, it's commanded. It's even deeper, the door is even wider open than my saying it is allowed. It's commanded. Did the Lord really really want sinners to come unto him without money and without price and does he delight in mercy? I hope you hear that. I hope that the Lord works faith by his Spirit in your heart right now to believe that and to come and to touch the hem of his garment, and to take the medication and to eat it, so you don't fall short of that believing in the Lord Jesus Christ. You remember that, right, from "Pilgrim's Progress," that that gate he talked about? Look back. So many are shooting at those seekers and like to kill them before they go through the gate. Is that how you would like to die, just before the gate? Close to God's kingdom without having believed in him? Because that believing is so necessary.

So believing is a gift of God. It's not doing something for God. It's not to squeeze something artificially out of your soul. It is something the Holy Ghost works in the heart by the gospel. By the gospel. So my task is to preach the gospel, to let you know that

you're welcome with the Lord with all your sins and shortcomings. Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace are ye saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God." What a text. Don't look at that text from the dark side as if it's holding you up. May that text encourage you, "For by grace are ye saved through faith," the Lord speaking to God's people. Or John 6:29, "Jesus answered and said unto them, This is the work of God." What? "That ye believe on him whom he has sent." That is the work of God. It's the work of God to let sinners believe in Jesus.

So what then is necessary for a Christian to believe? All things promised us in the gospel, in the gospel of promises. "Repent ye, repent ye, why would ye die? If thou believest in me thou shalt not perish." With the Articles of our catholic meaning, universal undoubted Christian faith briefly teach us. So tonight open that Bible and seek him, ask the Lord to reveal him, and keep in mind the Lord is commanding us to repent to believe. May you just have no excuses anymore and have nothing to defend yourself with anymore, and just lay yourself at his feet and say, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner," and don't let go, wrestle with the Lord, don't let go. Like the Canaanite Syro-Phoenician woman, she kept asking, she kept going, she kept following the Lord Jesus even although he gave the appearance that he did not want to hear her. Just keep going. Take it by storm for God's glory. Amen.