

“Saving Faith”
Mark 6:47-46
(Preached at Trinity, March 2, 2011)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In **Verses 37-44** we read the account of the feeding of the 5000. Jesus performed a miracle before their very eyes. There were 5000 men present beside the women and children and they were far from any place to purchase provision. After searching the crowd the disciples found a mere five loaves and two fishes. Jesus proceeded to multiply these meager provisions in such a mighty way that all 5000 ate to their fill and they filled 12 baskets with the leftovers.
2. After the feeding of the 5000 Jesus sent His disciples to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. As they crossed the winds picked up and after several hours they were still rowing trying to get to the other side. John’s Gospel records that they had gone 3-4 miles, about midway.
Mark 6:48 – “Seeing them straining at the oars, for the wind was against them”
The situation seemed grim. They were skilled seamen but after rowing hard for hours their strength was beginning to fail.
3. While in the midst of their peril Jesus comes walking on the water. The text says His plan was to simply pass by them on His way to the other side. Of course, we know He had a greater plan.
 - a. Seeing Jesus they cried out in fear.
Verse 50 describes their reaction: “for they all saw Him and were frightened”
The word for “frightened” describes intense agitation. They were shaken, smitten with fear.
 - b. Jesus gives them a mild rebuke: "Take courage; it is I, do not be afraid."
4. These were our Lord’s disciples. They were believers. They had left all to follow Christ. And yet they were filled with fear and doubt.
5. In **Verses 54-56**, on the other hand, we find the multitudes flocking to Jesus with great trust. They knew that if they could but touch the fringe of His cloak they could be healed. But we also know that this vast multitude were unbelievers. They would soon forsake Christ and cry out for His crucifixion.
6. So what is the difference between these two types of belief? Both groups had faith but only one had saving faith. Tonight I want to examine this matter again. At risk of needless repetition we need to look at it again and again. We need to be clear on the subject. With so much confusion today we cannot afford to have muddled thinking. The Gospels present this to us over and over and they present it clearly. There is a distinction between the wheat and tares, between the good fish and bad fish, between the sheep and the goats.
7. I want to set this before you tonight under three heads:
 - I. First, we’ll look at the faith of the disciples
 - II. Second, we’ll look at the faith of the mixed multitude
 - III. Third, we’ll look at the nature of genuine faith

- I. First, we'll look at the faith of the disciples
- A. They had left all to follow Jesus
1. Peter, Andrew, James, and John left their livelihoods as fishermen
 2. Matthew gave up his coveted position as a tax collector.
 3. One by one Jesus called each of the twelve and they followed
 4. Each of them were embraced by Christ and protected
(with the exception of Judas who was unconverted)
- John 17:11-12** – “Holy Father, keep them in Thy name, *the name* which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one, even as *We are*.¹² “While I was with them, I was keeping them in Thy name which Thou hast given Me; and I guarded them, and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled.”
- B. Yet, in this passage we find them filled with fear and unbelief
1. The text even tells us that their hearts were hardened
Mark 6:52 – “but their heart was hardened”
 2. Who hardened their hearts?
 3. It is important to make the distinction here
 - a. God is hardening the hearts of the wicked as an act of judgment – we refer to it as judicial hardening. They have hardened their hearts against God and God gives them over to their reprobate minds.
 - b. We read of Pharaoh that he hardened his heart but that God also hardened his heart
Exodus 7:13-14 – “Pharaoh's heart was hardened, and he did not listen to them, as the LORD had said. ¹⁴ Then the LORD said to Moses, “Pharaoh's heart is stubborn; he refuses to let the people go.
Exodus 8:15 – “But when Pharaoh saw that there was relief, he hardened his heart and did not listen to them, as the LORD had said.
Exodus 8:32 – “But Pharaoh hardened his heart this time also, and he did not let the people go.
Exodus 9:12 – “And the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart, and he did not listen to them, just as the LORD had spoken to Moses.”
 - c. Those who continue in unbelief God gives over to confusion and further unbelief.
2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 – “and with all the deception of wickedness for those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved. ¹¹ And for this reason God will send upon them a deluding influence so that they might believe what is false, ¹² in order that they all may be judged who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness.”

4. For the elect, though, God indwells them with His Spirit who teaches and guides them unto all truth.
2 Thessalonians 2:13 – “But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and faith in the truth.”
 5. So who hardened their hearts? They did!
 - a. Notice their failure to consider the mighty works of Christ
Mark 6:52 – “for they had not gained any insight from the *incident of the loaves*”
 - b. They had witnessed the wondrous power of Christ and yet they soon forgot
 - c. This is true of us every time we fear, every time we doubt. We harden our hearts against the clear revelation of Christ.
 6. Listen to the charges of Scripture
^{KJV} **1 Peter 1:13** – “Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ;”
- C. How can we explain their unbelief? Saving faith can still be a weak faith
1. We can possess true faith in Christ. We can have an absolute confidence in His redeeming sacrifice. We can have assurance in our knowledge of Him and find great comfort in our soul.
 2. We can have this comfort and see the evidence of Divine grace in our lives and still have times when our faith is quite weak.
 3. Saving faith can start off quite small. In fact this is the norm. New born babies are frail and weak. It takes time to grow to maturity.
Thomas Watson - “True faith is at first nothing but an embryo, it is minute and small; it is full of doubts, temptations, fears; it begins in weakness. It is like the smoking flax, Matt. 12:20. It smokes with desires, but does not flame with comfort; it is at first so small, that it is scarce discernible. They who, at the first dash have a strong persuasion that Christ is theirs, who leap out of sin into assurance, have a false and spurious faith. The faith which comes to its full stature on its birth-day is a monster. The seed that sprung up suddenly withered, Matt. 13:5.”
 4. Charles Bridge – “Oh, what a mighty deep of discouragements may the saints and people of God fall into, and yet be godly and gracious.”
 5. A weak faith can lay hold on a strong Christ
Hebrews 11:34 – “from weakness were made strong,”
2 Corinthians 12:10 – “Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.”

- II. Second, we'll look at the faith of the mixed multitude
- A. Notice their apparent great faith
1. As soon as Jesus landed on the shore they recognized Him. They knew Him. They had an interest in Him.
 2. They ran quickly to tell others that Jesus had arrived
 3. They flocked to Him in huge numbers
 - a. They came with great zeal
 - b. Many had traveled a great distance

Mark 6:55 – “and ran about that whole country”
- B. The problem with this multitude is they were not drawn by the person of Christ.
1. They were not amazed by His glory. They were not filled with a sense of His infinite worth.
 2. They came to Him for one reason. They all came to have their needs fulfilled. They came selfishly.

Mark 6:55 – “and ran about that whole country and began to carry about on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was.”

John 6:26 – “Jesus answered them and said, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Ye seek me, not because ye saw the miracles, but because ye did eat of the loaves, and were filled.”
 3. In some ways, their faith was stronger than the disciples
 - a. The disciples hardened their hearts to the might and power of Christ
 - b. The multitudes were convinced of His power.

Mark 6:56 – “they were laying the sick in the market places, and entreating Him that they might just touch the fringe of His cloak”
- C. In the end they would despise Him.
1. We see this in John's Gospel

John 6:1-2 – “After these things Jesus went over the sea of Galilee, which is *the sea* of Tiberias. ² And a great multitude followed him, because they saw his miracles which he did on them that were diseased.”
 2. When He taught them concerning Himself and His demands they quickly turned away.

John 6:66 – “From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him.”
 3. Again in John 8

John 8:30-32 As he spake these words, many believed on him. ³¹ Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; ³² And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.

John 8:59 – “Then took they up stones to cast at him: but Jesus hid himself, and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.”

- D. This describes much of the Christianity we see in the United States today
1. They come not for the person of Christ but because of a desire to receive something from Him.
 2. Much of the preaching today is focused on our “felt needs.”
 3. Worship is judged according to what it does for us, not according to what is pleasing to God. *We* have become the focus
 4. This is why there is such a lack of service in the church today. People don’t come to give. They come to receive. They move from church to church seeking to have their needs met.

III. Third, what is the nature of genuine faith

- A. Genuine faith deals with the issue of sin
1. The multitude only saw their immediate earthly needs
They were concerned about healing, about being fed
 2. Christianity addresses the issue of sin
 - a. It recognizes our true need. It recognizes that our sin has separated us from God. True Christianity desires that relationship to be restored. True Christianity hates sin desires to flee from it
 - b. True Christianity sees one solution for sin – the atoning sacrifice of Christ. It sees the sacrifice of Christ as the only sufficient means of restoring us to God.
 3. The multitude knew nothing of their condition before God. They were satisfied. There are millions of church members today that are satisfied with themselves. They’ve never dealt with the issue of sin.
- B. Genuine faith is seeing Christ as most precious. It is all about Him.
John 6:66-69 – “From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. ⁶⁷ Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? ⁶⁸ Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God.”
1. Genuine faith sees infinite value in Christ
 2. Christianity is about finding a treasure so vast and wonderful that all other earthly treasures become as dung.
 3. Genuine faith is setting our heart upon Christ
 4. The multitude had no regard for Christ. They only had a regard for what He could do for them
- C. Genuine faith perseveres
^{KJV} **Hebrews 10:39** But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.
1. Many of these very people would be among those crying “Crucify Him”
 2. We’ve seen many who seem zealous for a season. We’ve seen many who speak impressive words. But they don’t continue.
- D. Genuine faith bears the fruit of holiness
These people would go away with their bodies healed but their hearts unchanged.

Conclusion:

1. As weak as the faith of our Lord's disciples appeared it was of an entirely different sort.
2. LBC, Chapter 14 – “Of Saving Faith” – Paragraph 3
“This faith, although it be different in degrees, and may be weak or strong, yet it is in the least degree of it different in the kind or nature of it, as is all other saving grace, from the faith and common grace of temporary believers; and therefore, though it may be many times assailed and weakened, yet it gets the victory, growing up in many to the attainment of a full assurance through Christ, who is both the author and finisher of our faith.”
3. May God grant us to press on in genuine faith in love and good works, living for His glory and pursuing Him with our whole heart.