

NOT FOR THE FAINT OF HEART

LUKE 8:16-25

JESUS GIVES US SOME WAYS IN WHICH WE CAN EVALUATE THE AUTHENTICITY OF OUR FAITH.

I. PERSEVERANCE IN OUR OBEDIENCE (VS 16-18)

ONE OF THE EVIDENCES OF SAVING FAITH IS THAT WE CONSISTENTLY OBEY AND FOLLOW JESUS.

- A. THE NATURE OF LIGHT (16)
- B. THE EFFECTS OF LIGHT (17)
- C. THE CONSEQUENCES OF LIGHT (18)

II. PERSEVERANCE IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS (VS 19-21)

ONE OF THE EVIDENCES OF SAVING FAITH IS THAT OUR RELATIONSHIPS FIND THEIR PROPER PLACE ONLY AS AN OUTFLOW OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS.

- A. THE NATURE OF RELATIONSHIPS (19-20)
- B. THE FOUNDATION OF RELATIONSHIPS (21)

III. PERSEVERANCE IN OUR TRUST (VS 22-25)

ONE OF THE EVIDENCES OF SAVING FAITH IS THAT OUR FAITH IN JESUS GROWS AS WE LEARN TO TRUST HIM MORE AND MORE.

- A. PERFECTLY IN THE CENTER OF GOD'S WILL (22-23)
- B. PERFECT PLACE TO RUN (24)
- C. PERFECT LESSON TO LEARN (25)

Not For the Faint Of Heart

Luke 8:16-25

One of the things I would like you to learn as we study through the Gospels is this. Because we have four Gospels, we can see that the material is not necessarily arranged in chronological order. We tend to make this observation because the same events recorded by the Gospel writers often appear at different times in their arrangement of the material. Therefore, we should assume that they arranged these events in a particular order for a particular reason.

Now I said all that in order to get us to understand the passage we study in the placement of its immediate context. Now this is an important practice in all of Bible study. However, it may have an intensified importance when we know the writer arranged it in a particular order other than chronological. If we continue to take this principle into account, we can see how the events of Jesus' life dovetail into one another. Last time we met, we studied through Jesus' parable of the farmer sowing seed. Jesus described four types of soil the seed fell into and the destiny of each.

He then went on to make the point that the good soil represented people who listened carefully, heard, understood, and obeyed the Word of God. We also said that God still speaks to us through the Bible. We are commanded to hear as Jesus defined hearing.

The problem that Jesus uncovered in that passage was that people choose not to hear for a variety of reasons. I think that many of us are simply guilty of selective hearing. We hear what we want to hear but are deaf to those commands we really don't want to obey.

Let me give you an example of selective hearing. There was a 92-year-old man who went for an annual physical. He was in pretty good shape. About a week after his physical, his doctor saw him walking down the street with a gorgeous young lady on his arm.

At his follow up visit, his doctor said, "You're really doing great, aren't you?"

The man cheerfully responded, "Just doing what you told me to doc, 'Get a hot mamma and be cheerful!'"

The doctor responded, "I didn't say that! I said you got a heart murmur! Be careful!"

This old man heard what he wanted to hear. I'm sure that we are often tempted to simply hear what we want to hear. But in this morning's text

Jesus will pick up on the theme of hearing and obeying His Word and His commands.

Again, I think that it's important that we define what saving faith means to Jesus and the New Testament writers. It's important because the doctrine of salvation is important. We are saved by grace through faith and that alone. However, down through the years, we have defined faith as just giving an intellectual nod to something. We have replaced faith with simple acknowledgement. So we think that if someone says they believe Jesus is the Son of God and that He rose from the dead, then they are Christian. But for New Testament writers, faith is always the action that we take based on what we believe. So the question for us becomes, when have we from simple intellectual belief made the jump over to saving faith? That's the main idea of this morning's text. JESUS GIVES US SOME WAYS IN WHICH WE CAN EVALUATE THE AUTHENTICITY OF OUR FAITH.

This is how this morning's text dovetails with the text we studied last time. We talked extensively about the command to hear. Let me just quote the last sentence of the text we studied last time. In describing people who would clearly hear and understand His message He said this:

"15But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop" (Luke 8:15 / NIV).

Jesus is saying that authentic Christians will hear His word, understand and retain it, and then produce a crop. In other words, authentic Christians will be obeying God's Word and will produce works of righteousness. We talked about that last time. However, I did not spend any time on the word perseverance. Works of righteousness just don't happen. To be sure we are led and empowered by the Holy Spirit. But it is our responsibility to pursue holiness. Jesus describes the attitude in which we go about this task as persevering. Jesus said that we will produce works of righteousness by perseverance. If any of you have ever studied any theology, you will have come across the theological system called Calvinism. One of the five major tenants of Calvinism is known as the "Perseverance of the Saints". What that doctrine means is this. Once a person is authentically saved, he or she can never lose their salvation. God will make sure they persevere until the end. The Puritans were Calvinists. However, they did not take this doctrine for granted. They were hard workers at everything. In fact they felt that God would only bless them if they faithfully pursued holiness everywhere, at work, at home, in society, and in church.

Here is where their doctrine of "once saved always saved" differs from the modern day version. The common understanding today of this means that one can make a profession of believing in Christ, then no matter what he or she does, good or evil, they cannot lose their salvation. The true Calvinist

would never believe this. They would say if the professed believer's life did not produce consistently good works, then they were not authentically saved in the first place. The Puritan's view of salvation is much closer to Jesus' view than ours. Jesus believes that a person who has truly submitted to Him as Lord will be consistently growing in their attitudes and works of righteousness.

PERSEVERANCE IN OUR OBEDIENCE (VS 16-18)

Jesus continues with this theme in verses 16-18 as He describes the necessary growth in our perseverance in our obedience. This section teaches that ONE OF THE EVIDENCES OF SAVING FAITH IS THAT WE CONSISTENTLY OBEY AND FOLLOW JESUS. Throughout this morning's passage, Jesus narrows humanity down to two groups; believers and unbelievers. There is no middle ground. Jesus now picks up on the people He described as good soil. These people have heard, understood, and are all set to obey God's Word.

Now Jesus decides to switch the similitude. He changes from a farmer sowing seed in good soil to a similitude of light. In the last parable the Word of God was described as seed. In this similitude the lamp refers to Jesus and His message. So how should a believer respond when he or she receives the Word of God? Jesus describes the nature of light in verse 16. The purpose of light is to illuminate the dark. When there is a power outage, what do we do? We get out our flashlights, candles, and lanterns. We don't turn on our flashlights and hide them under the covers of our beds. Well we did that when we were kids and that was fun. But we light candles and set them on the living room tables and in other rooms so we can see what we are doing. The light points out obstacles and dangers to avoid. Have you ever gotten up in the middle of the night and tripped over something left out on the floor, or nicked your toe on the corner of a chair or a table? Oh, I'd love to hear the words that came out of your mouth. Look, light is meant to enable our sight. It helps us to avoid dangers and obstacles that may harm us.

Light shows us the way. When we neglect to read, study, and apply the Bible to our lives, we are stumbling around in the dark. We become a danger to ourselves and to others we come in contact with. The Psalmist said:

“102I haven't turned away from your laws,

for you have taught me well.

103How sweet are your words to my taste;

they are sweeter than honey.

104Your commandments give me understanding;

no wonder I hate every false way of life.

105Your word is a lamp for my feet

and a light for my path" (Psalm 119:102-105 / NLT).

Is that our attitude towards studying and applying the Bible to our everyday lives? If not then we are merely stumbling through life. Jesus said that one of the marks of a believer is that we will persevere in our study and application of the Bible.

That is the application as it applies to the believer's personal light. However, there may be a secondary meaning here. If we have received this incredible gift of Light, then we should set the light on a stand so that others may see the light. If we had guests over when the power went out, we would light the candles: not only so that we could see, but so that our guests could see and avoid harm as well.

If we are authentic believers, then through the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit, Jesus the Light of the world lives in us. Jesus safely leads us through this life and Jesus will lead us through the grave to eternal life with Him in heaven. Jesus is the Light of the World. As believers, it is our duty to share Jesus with others so that He can light their way as well.

The nature of light is that it shows things for what they are and where they are. In verse 17 Jesus points out the effects of light. Let's continue with our modern day comparison. We set the candles up in our living room. Now we can see the dining room table is there, the couch is there, the dog is there, and the coffee table is there. We can also see the door to the bathroom and hopefully there will be another candle in there so we can close the door and see what we are doing. Here in verse 17 Jesus says that nothing can be hidden or concealed from it when the light shines on it.

In last week's text, Jesus said that we would know who and what people were when they heard the Word of God. He did that by describing people according to types of soil. In this morning's text, Jesus says that we will be able to tell what kind of people we are when He shines the truth of His Word on our lives. When true believers are confronted with God's truth, they submit to it and get their lives to line up with the truth of God's Word. Unbelievers find all sorts of excuses not to submit to the truth of God's Word. So the test for us is this. Are we reading and studying the Bible? Are we letting God the Holy Spirit shine His light on us and examine us? Are we letting the Holy Spirit point out areas in our lives that we know God wants us to change? And the final question is, are we submitting to that truth and changing our lives so they conform to God's will? The truth is that none of us are perfect. Therefore if we are not growing, then we are dying and it seems

to me the Bible's evaluation of that is to say we are probably not saved. Listen to King David's desire to submit to this process:

"23Search me, O God, and know my heart;

test me and know my thoughts.

24Point out anything in me that offends you,

and lead me along the path of everlasting life"

(Psalm 139:23-24 / NLT).

It is the nature of Jesus to shine His light of holiness into our lives.

He does this as we read the Bible, study the Bible, listen to preaching and teaching that explain the Bible. We will definitely demonstrate what kind of people we are when we stand in the light of Jesus.

How we respond is critical in assessing the authenticity of our faith in Jesus. In verse 18 Jesus lays out the consequences of light. I'm not saying this is important to consider, Jesus is. Verse 18 starts out by Jesus saying, "Therefore consider carefully how you listen." Jesus is giving us fair warning that listening carefully is important because good listening leads to hearing, understanding, and ultimately obedience. Jesus' brother James put it like this, "Do not only be hearers of the word but be doers of the word as well." Jesus will judge us based on this. He in essence is making this a test of authentic faith. In other words, if one truly believes what Jesus is saying, they will obey.

We are in an age where we have come to think of equality as a God-given right and a God-given Bible doctrine. Pay attention here because there is no such thinking here. Jesus says that He will keep on giving more and more to those who listen, hear, understand and obey. And those who don't listen and chose not to follow for whatever reason will lose all they have. In fact Jesus says that He will take it away from him or her and give it to the one who already has a great deal. Those who listen and submit will keep on getting more. Those who don't listen will lose all they have. Jesus will take it away from them and give to those who already have.

But there is even one more shot Jesus gives in passing. He is going to take away all they have. But the point is that those who don't follow Jesus really don't have anything. They are proud and assume all they have they have earned and attained on their own. Jesus will even take away their pathetic imaginary wisdom and ego away. The world talks big and makes all sorts of

boasts. Many even claim to be Christians. But Jesus will simply shine the truth of His Word on them, and they will be exposed as counterfeit Christians. Jesus has given us a simple test to apply to our lives. ONE OF THE EVIDENCES OF SAVING FAITH IS THAT WE CONSISTENTLY OBEY AND FOLLOW JESUS.

PERSEVERANCE IN OUR RELATIONSHIPS (VS 19-21)

I hope and pray that we take these teachings as seriously as Jesus delivered them. I'm sure these teachings rocked the world of the people who heard them for the first time and I know that these teachings have been shaking up my life. In verses 19-21 Jesus goes on to say that we must be persevering in our relationships. ONE OF THE EVIDENCES OF SAVING FAITH IS THAT OUR RELATIONSHIPS FIND THEIR PROPER PLACE ONLY AS AN OUTFLOW OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS. It may sound strange that our relationships are a test of our faith.

In verses 19-20, we are introduced to the nature of relationships. Jesus was always on the move after He left home at around age 30. He was called for a specific mission by God. That mission was to announce the initiation of the Kingdom of God and then to die as an atonement for our sins. We often don't take a great deal of time to think about this, but Jesus had a real biological family. There is some debate in the Christian community whether Jesus had actual biological half-brothers and sisters. Roman Catholics believe that Mary remained virgin all her life. However, most of the rest of the Christian community believes that Jesus had actual half-brothers and sisters. Here Jesus' mother and brothers travel to visit Him. He has just finished an intense teaching session when He is notified that His mother and brothers are waiting to see Him outside. From other Bible passages, we know that His family was worried that He may have lost His mind. They loved Him and worried about Him.

Further we know that Jesus loved His mother because with His dying breathe He told John to take care of her. And Jesus' brother James seems to be the writer of the New Testament book of James. Jesus had an emotional bond with His family. Another interesting fact is that after the incident where they lost Jesus in the temple, His father Joseph is not mentioned again, indicating that he probably died.

Here is something that pastors' families know well. They must share him or her with the congregations they serve. There is not much of a private life for pastors' and their families. Oftentimes congregations show their appreciation for their pastors but seldom recognize or show their appreciation to the pastors' families for the sacrifice they make.

Now I want you to see how Jesus often teaches using the shock method. In verse 21 Jesus shows the foundation of all successful relationships. This

sounds kind of cold and would no doubt shock the people who informed Jesus that His family was there to see Him and all the people who heard His response. Jesus seems to be putting His family down when He says, "My mother and brothers are those who hear God's word and put it into practice." Jesus also said that if we don't hate our mothers and fathers in order to follow Him, we have no part in His Kingdom. Jesus' method is to shock us into the truth. Although He does not mean this literally, there is a great deal of truth for us to uncover. First of all, our first love and our best love is reserved only for God. Anything less amounts to idolatry. I know people who have put their spouse, children, or grandchildren above God. Jesus is saying this. In comparison to our love for Him, it should look like we hate our spouses, children, or grandchildren. I have heard people say things like Christmas is about family. Christmas is not about family. Christmas is about the love of God expressed in the incarnation of Jesus Who would grow up to die for our sins. Our primary task in life is to know, understand, and obey God's commands. Doing God's will is of primary importance.

Now that sounds really cold ... until you stop and think about it. If we truly want to obey God's Word and put it into practice, then we will see that loving our spouse is the most important human relationship we have. It surpasses love for anyone else in life; parents, children, grandchildren, friends, etc. This relationship is to be characterized by mutual submission, sacrificial love, and faithfulness. God also commanded us to love our children and not to cause them to lose heart. Loving and caring for our parents is commanded in the Ten Commandments and reinforced by Jesus. Jesus commanded us to love one another and even to love our enemies. The point is, when our first love is Jesus, all our other relationships will find their proper place. The best thing I can do for my wife is to love and obey Jesus. The best things parents can do for their children is to love God and to love one another the way God commands. If we truly love God, we will hear His Word and put it into practice. If we do this we will be great lovers in all our human relationships.

We know that in the end, Jesus' mother and brothers fit the category He has just laid out. Mary was with Him at the crucifixion and at His resurrection. His brother James became an important figure in the early church.

This is really a good test for us. As we love Jesus more and more, would our husbands or wives say they feel more loved by us? In other words, my wife should feel and experience that I love her more and more each day. My children ought to feel and experience more and more love from me as I fall more in love with Jesus. My friends and even my enemies ought to experience a deeper quality to my love as I grow in Christ. Love that is grounded in Christ is sacrificial, other-centered, and truly engaged. If I am truly a believer, I should be becoming a better lover each day. ONE OF THE EVIDENCES OF SAVING FAITH IS THAT OUR RELATIONSHIPS FIND THEIR PROPER PLACE ONLY AS AN OUTFLOW OF OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS.

PERSEVERANCE IN OUR TRUST (VS 22-25)

I hope that we can start to see that it takes a great deal of perseverance if we want to claim to be followers of Jesus. We have to persevere in our obedience and in our relationships. In verses 22-25 we see that we are required to persevere in our trust. ONE OF THE EVIDENCES OF SAVING FAITH IS THAT OUR FAITH IN JESUS GROWS AS WE LEARN TO TRUST HIM MORE AND MORE.

I think that one of the hindrances to our growing in faith is that we live in conditions where not much faith is required of us. In other words, we are able to purchase our food or have places to get food. We have doctors and hospitals to treat us when we are sick. For the most part, we depend on science to meet our needs. And therefore, we tend not to be forced to trust in God. However, that is really not the case at all. In fact we have fooled ourselves into thinking that we don't need much help from God. Oftentimes Jesus has to bring us into difficult situations in order to force us to grow in our faith. Let's watch how Jesus does this with His disciples. I think this is important for us to know. In verses 22-23, we find the disciples perfectly in the center of God's will. Jesus told them He wanted to go over to other side of the lake. And so, the disciples all got into the boat and I assume that Peter, James, John, and Andrew, did the navigation and sailing since by trade they were fishermen and familiar with the lake.

As they set out on the cruise, Jesus decided to take a nap and leave the driving to the disciples. They obeyed Jesus perfectly and they were all with Jesus. We assume that if we are perfectly in the center of God's will, then everything should go smoothly for us. But look what happens. All of a sudden, they find themselves in the middle of a storm that threatens their lives. Verse 23 informs us they were in great danger. The Sea of Galilee is 600 feet below sea level and surrounded by mountains. The winds come whipping through the valleys and the lake can get rough as quickly as our Lake Michigan. Those of us who live here know how easy it is for people to get caught in storms on Lake Michigan and how dangerous it is. Here is the situation. The situation is dangerous. The disciples are trying to keep the boat afloat. They are steering and bailing. They are panicking. Oh, and Jesus is sleeping in the back of the boat.

If we want to grow in our faith, then God has to put us in situations where we must trust in Him. These seasoned fishermen sailed this lake time and time again. But now, all their sailing experience is useless. They have sailed into a storm that is more powerful than their collective skills.

Verse 24 describes the perfect place to run. I don't know about you, but this perfectly describes how I handle crisis. I am not calm. I am not cool. I am

like Barney Fife in a crisis. The disciples run to Jesus shake Him up and wake Him up. They say, "Jesus, we're all going to die!" (my translation). Jesus wakes up, gives a yawn, looks around and tells the winds and the seas to calm down. Now watch this. Luke tells us that Jesus was indeed rebuking the wind and the water. But the disciples did not know that. Perhaps after Jesus stretched His arms and yawned, He simply said, "Calm down!" If I were in the boat, I would probably have assumed He was talking to me. I'd be running around yelling, "We're all going to die!" and hearing Jesus say something like, "Be still, calm down," I would be sure He was talking to me when in reality He was talking to the winds and the waters.

I think this is something we need to remember when difficult situations come into our lives. When we face temptations, suffering, and painful situations, we need to remember that Jesus is in the boat with us. At least the disciples had enough sense to run to the One Who could actually help them. And Jesus did help them.

In verse 25, the perfect lesson is described. After the winds and waves calmed down, Jesus said to them, "Where is your faith?" Okay, now I'm a little concerned. I was just facing death. And even though I was freaked out of my mind, I did manage to run to Jesus. And yet, Jesus not only rebuked the waves and the waters, He is rebuking the disciples here, and us. Where is our faith when we face trials? Why is it we so often lose heart, become afraid, depressed, or discouraged? Jesus wants us to successfully navigate through the storms in our lives. That is the only way He can stretch our faith. As we successfully come through these storms, we learn to trust Him more and more.

Yes, the disciples learned a lesson here. But it's not what we may think. They were afraid out of their minds in the storm. But now they are afraid of Jesus. Who is this man who is in the boat with them? He tells the winds and waters to calm down ... and they do. If nature obeys Jesus then human beings certainly need to obey Him. You see, we have come full circle. Last time we were together we talked about hearing the Word of God and obeying. Here this incident ends with nature obeying and becoming a lesson for us to obey. ONE OF THE EVIDENCES OF SAVING FAITH IS THAT OUR FAITH IN JESUS GROWS AS WE LEARN TO TRUST HIM MORE AND MORE. The older we get the more we realize how much we need to trust and depend on God. The older we get the more we want to be sure of our salvation. JESUS GIVES US SOME WAYS IN WHICH WE CAN EVALUATE THE AUTHENTICITY OF OUR FAITH. Our faith ought to be growing as Jesus continually stretches our faith through trials of all sorts. Perseverance is a great Christian word. We must continually be growing in obedience, in our relationships, and in our trust in God. But solid growth only comes through perseverance. We can even see this in nature. Neil Orchard writes:

"I was talking with a farmer about his soybean and corn crops. Rain had been abundant, and the results were evident. So his comment surprised me: 'My crops are especially vulnerable. Even a short drought could have a devastating effect.'

'Why?' I asked.

He explained that while we see the frequent rains as a benefit, during that time the plants are not required to push roots deeper in search of water. The roots remain near the surface. A drought would find the plants unprepared and quickly kill them.

Some Christians receive abundant 'rains' of worship, fellowship, and teaching. Yet when stress enters their lives, many suddenly abandon God or think Him unfaithful. Their roots have never pushed much below the surface. Only roots grown deep into God (Col. 2:6-7) help us endure times of drought in our lives.

The Calvinists call the doctrine "The Perseverance of the Saints." We would do well to make sure we persevere in growing in obedience, growing in our relationships, and growing in our trust in God.