

# Exposing False Hope

*Are You a Christian?*

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Well, if you were with us last Sunday, you know that we have started a brief interlude of a series that I've titled, "Are You a Christian?" And we started that last week with a message titled, "Exposing False Faith." I went through seven points then, and I'm going to review those briefly here this morning in just a moment, but we want to clarify the nature of salvation. Ultimately, we could explore all kinds of different Bible doctrines and teachings and all of that, but we have to keep coming back over time to this central question about the nature of salvation and calling each one to examine themselves in light of biblical teaching to see whether or not you are a Christian because if you are a Christian, everything comes out perfect in the end. If you're not a Christian, no matter what other doctrines you may know or whatever barns you may build in the course of your life, it's all futile and vain as we read from Psalm 127, "unless the Lord builds the house the builder labors in vain."

And so this is just of colossal, incalculable importance that we would look seriously at these matters related to the matter of are you a Christian? And as I explained last time, I've learned over the years in ministry just how important it is to clarify your terms because in a room of this size I can't assume that you and I mean the same thing by the term Christian when we communicate with each other. I have a biblical sense of the meaning of the term Christian when I use it here, especially from the pulpit, but I realize that people come in from a lot of different backgrounds, have been told a lot of different things about Christianity, and I'm saying one thing and I'm just desperately concerned that you're hearing and thinking something else and so I want to be clear about this. And so last week and this week, I'm clarifying what I am not asking when I ask are you a Christian, and that's kind of a weird way to do things homiletically, but I think it communicates, so that's why I'm doing it; that's all I care about is whether it communicates and imparts understanding to you by the help of the Holy Spirit. We have 14 points of clarification. We covered seven last time, seven new ones here today. Today's message, if you want to write a title down on your notes, is "Exposing False Hope." Exposing False Hope. Last week's was titled "Exposing False Faith." Now, this is just a little bit of inside, these are the kinds of things that I think about at my desk. What's the difference between exposing false faith and false hope? Absolutely no difference as far as you're concerned. It's making the same point. It's expounding the same theme. I just don't like to have part one and part two of messages. I like each message to have its own unique title and so "Exposing False Hope" is just the same as a saying "Exposing False

Faith," part two, all right? But that's just a personal preference on my part that these are the things that your unworthy pastor thinks about in his time at his desk.

So what I want to do here today is this, I want to quickly review, very quickly review the seven questions that we covered last time just to set the stage and we're going to go through them so quick that if you haven't heard that message, this is going to be far too quick for it to set in. Just go to the message available from last time. When I ask you, are you a Christian, my dear friends, I am not asking you this. I am not asking you this. And by the way, before I go any further, let me just say one other thing, is that for those of you that have grown up in Christian families, or if you are growing up in a Christian family, I understand that there's a particular challenge that sometimes occurs for you, knowing, trying to distinguish is my faith real? Do I just believe because my parents believe? You know, sometimes in the home I get kind of confused and it's hard to even ask the questions for whatever reasons. I'm here to help you in particular, particularly for young people trying to figure out where they themselves stand with the Lord. I'm trying to help you here as well and so there's every reason for you to pay particular heed as a young person born to a Christian home.

So the question is, are you a Christian, and then there is this preliminary clarification process that we're going through so that we can get to the real issue eventually but we have to clear away the false issues first. And when I say false issues, it's this, what I want to do by the power of the Holy Spirit, what I'm asking the help of God in here this morning, is to do away with false hopes, false faith, to have you stop looking at incidental things so that you're confronted with the real matters in the end. Because people, it's not easy to become a Christian. It's not easy to be a Christian and I suppose I should have you turn to Matthew chapter 7 as a start, and this will kind of give us a biblical orientation for why we must answer this question so carefully. Are you a Christian? I would venture to say that everyone, everyone is tempted, if not in actual practice, to just treat that question glibly, superficially, and not earnestly take it to heart. "Yeah, everything's fine with me," and you just kind of, you know, this is the ultimate question of all of eternity and yet people will spend more time searching a baseball box score than they will contemplating the state of their soul, for example. And we just need to see that Christ himself, Jesus Christ himself, warned us about not treating this matter superficially.

In Matthew chapter 7 verse 13, he said this, "Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few." You know, if you think about Noah and the ark and judgment on the world, you know, there were millions of people living at that time. How many were saved that entered the ark? Eight. Scripture says that those who find true salvation are few. Now, I'm not suggesting that that's the proportion in this dispensation, but it does give us a sense that there are few who find true salvation. Jesus says it right here and only a fool would dismiss the words of Christ when he talks about salvation because Christ himself is the only way. He said, "No one comes to the Father except through me." And Jesus said, "Those who find true salvation in me are few, comparatively few, that it's easy to be deceived, it's easy to walk the broad road to destruction." And so, if you would just put

yourself in my shoes for just a moment, and try to imagine what it's like to be a pastor communicating the message of an exclusive salvation to a broad range of people, many of whom are very careless in their spiritual considerations, wouldn't you, if you were in my shoes, want to belabor the point in order to make it as difficult as possible for people to dismiss the question without taking it seriously? I think you would. That's certainly what motivates me.

And so when I ask you, are you a Christian, I need to clarify it and last time I said this, when I ask you if you are a Christian, I'm not asking you this, I am not asking you whether, number one, do you believe in God? I'm not asking that question. It's good as far as it goes to believe in God, but that doesn't make you a Christian. Demons believe in God and they're not redeemed, they're doomed for the pit. And so that's not the question that we're asking. We're asking something more specific than that.

Secondly, for those of you that grew up in fundamental Baptist, independent Baptist backgrounds, I'm not asking you this question, I'm not asking, have you said the sinner's prayer? I'm not asking if you've said the sinner's prayer. I'm not asking if you signed a decision card. I'm not asking if you raised your hand at a meeting. I'm not asking if you walked forward at the invitation after hearing the 15th verse of "Just As I Am." I'm not asking you that question. There is no formula prayer that guarantees that anyone automatically by saying outward words becomes a Christian. Covered that last time, not going to go any further here today.

Thirdly, I'm not asking do you attend church? It's fine to attend church. It's really good to attend a church that preaches the Bible, but that's not what I'm asking when I ask you, are you a Christian? I'm not asking if you attend church because you can attend church and not be a Christian. Millions of people across our land are attending church today and they are not currently on the path that leads to heaven. So it's not about whether you attend a church. It's not a matter of entering into a building. Think about it, beloved. There are people who think just because they walk into a physical structure that they're a Christian when Christian is a matter of an inward reality wrought by the Holy Spirit. Does walking into a car dealer make you an automobile? Does walking into a restaurant make you a pork chop? I don't know where some of these illustrations come from. But just walking into a building, even if you do it on a regular basis, doesn't make anyone a Christian whatsoever. We covered that last time.

Fourthly, I am not asking you whether you're a moral person, whether you're a patriotic person, and for decades, Christians in America were conditioned to think that way, and we are kind of the inheritors of that very sad and unfortunate legacy. Beloved, respectable morality, feeling sentimental effects when you look at the American flag, being careful to vote in every election does not make you a Christian. Maybe you're a fine American citizen, but that doesn't make you a Christian. There are lots of patriotic Americans over the past 250 years that have woken up in hell so why should we talk about in this setting, why would we talk about patriotism or citizen kind of morality when we're asking, are you a Christian? That's ridiculous. So I'm not asking you about your morality or your patriotism here. I'm asking, are you a Christian? Different question altogether.

Fifthly, I'm not asking you, do you think Jesus is Lord? I'm not asking you that. Your personal opinion about Jesus standing alone, that's really important, your personal opinion about Jesus standing alone does not save you. Jesus said, "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven." Beloved, you know, it makes me weep inside, if not outwardly, the monumentally trivial way that people approach these matters. "I think Jesus is Lord. I asked Jesus into my heart, therefore I'm a Christian." You know, and people just kind of defining it on their own terms without taking seriously what Jesus said. Jesus talks to people who put his name as Lord on their lips and says, not everyone like that is going to heaven. But to find people that take that seriously and stop in their tracks and say, "Well then what about me?" That's a different matter altogether.

Sixthly, when I ask are you a Christian, I am not asking whether you were born into a Christian family. I'm not asking that question at all. Beloved, and speaking to those young people that I mentioned at the start, your parents' faith, even if they are genuine Christians, your parents' faith does not mean that you have saving faith. Your parents' faith does not mean that you have saving faith. You see that there must be a distinction there? The faith that belongs to your parents is not necessarily yours. Yes, your parents may teach you the faith, and it's good if they do. And sometimes parents are overzealous, and because they want the best for their children, there are parents who are careless in giving assurance to children, "Yes, you're saved. I remember praying with you when you were on my knee before you went to bed when you were a little boy or a little girl," instead of helping their children think through these things. It's far more comfortable for a parent to say, yes, you're saved. Yes, you've been baptized or whatever. It's far more comfortable that way because then as a parent, you're not dealing with the anxious concern about the well-being of their eternal soul. You just say, "Well, of course you're saved. You prayed that sinner's prayer and so there's nothing to worry about." Oh, beloved, that's not good parenting. That's not good Christian parenting to minimize the significance to your progeny of the questions that we're asking here. Young people, you have to go directly to Christ. You have to deal with this directly in your heart before the Lord because the fact that your parents have saving faith is not a guarantee that you do. Very important for you to understand that and take your own soul seriously and you're not too young, if you can understand anything that I'm saying, you're not too young to deal with these matters earnestly on your own. You're not.

Seventhly, this is the last question of review from last time. When I ask are you a Christian, I'm not asking do you practice religion? You know, I could step into a Catholic church and say, I'm not asking whether you're practicing your religion here. I'm asking, are you a Christian? Something completely different. God has always, always, always, always rejected worship that was only outward in form without a corresponding heart reality. If you read the Old Testament at all, you see that from the very beginning. Cain offered a sacrifice and God rejected it. That's Genesis 4. Another way I'm looking for all kinds of different ways to express this, what I'm trying to do is let's think of a balloon and there is a big, massive, beautiful balloon that's filled with hot air and that hot air is presumption about your spiritual condition. And there's no substance to it. It's just all hot

air, but it fills the room. Well, what we're doing here together today, beloved, is we're just taking a very long needle and puncturing it through the latex of that balloon so that all of the air goes out and we're left to deal with what the real question actually is. We have to do some more needle insertion into the balloon here with the new material that's now about to follow.

Okay, so we've reviewed seven questions from last time. Do you believe in God? Have you said the sinner's prayer? Do you attend church? Are you patriotic? Do you think Jesus is Lord? Were you born into a Christian family? Do you practice religion? None of those are the questions I'm asking. I don't even care about those questions by comparison to the question that we are actually asking. Now, new material, point number eight in this two-part series, separately titled, "Exposing False Faith" and "Exposing False Hope." Point number eight, I am not asking you this question. have you been baptized? I'm not asking the question, have you been baptized when I ask if you are a Christian. It's good for true Christians to be baptized, but that's not what I'm asking here today and I've made this point numerous times over more recent years. Many people, and I'm going to turn to Scripture in a moment, many people whom I have personally baptized now oppose the faith and make no pretense whatsoever of actually walking with Christ and baptism alone says nothing about whether you're born again or not. Baptism, standing alone, says nothing. So when I ask you, are you a Christian, you should not respond by saying, "Yes, I've been baptized." That's not the question, beloved. Okay, you've been baptized, but when I ask the question, are you a Christian, and you say I've been baptized, well, maybe it's this, maybe you're just all wet. Maybe you're just all wet and not really converted if that's where you limit and what you restrict and what you think about being a Christian, if you make a one-to-one correspondence. Christian baptism, uh-uh. Scripture itself in the era of the apostles, records a man who was baptized in apostolic baptism and proved to be a false convert.

Look at Acts chapter 8 with me. I have two or three messages on this passage prepared, just sitting waiting for the right time to preach them. Today is not that day. We're not going to go into all of this; I just want you to get a taste of what we're talking about here. In Acts chapter 8 verse 12, in these exhilarating days of the spread of the gospel through the apostles, there came this occasion, verse 12, "when they believed Philip as he preached good news about the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women." Verse 13, "Even Simon," this is referring to Simon the magician, not Simon Peter, "Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip." So he had gotten wet, he was walking with the apostles, he had made an outward response to the verbal proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and verse 13, seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. Now drop down to verse 18 after the Spirit of God came upon some of these believers. "Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me this power also, so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit.'" He saw a gig here. He saw prominence. He saw power and he wanted it for himself, evidence of his unregenerate heart. And Peter said to him, "May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before

God." And he calls him to repentance in the verse that follows. Here's a man baptized in the apostolic circle, beloved, who proved not to be a Christian at all. There is biblical warning, therefore, not to trust in your baptism as proof positive without question that you are a Christian. Every believer should be baptized. Don't misunderstand me. And if you have not been baptized while you're professing Christ, that's a different question and you ought to grab one of the blue folders on your way out. But the fact that you have been baptized is not a direct answer to the question, are you a Christian?

Now let me just step back and ask you sympathetically whether this is starting to get uncomfortable. Is this starting to get uncomfortable in your heart to just see one by one biblically different planks being flicked out from under you? Good. That's kind of the point because I don't want your faith to rest on false assumptions, false presuppositions. I want you to go to heaven. That's why we're doing this. I want you to go to heaven. It is the commanded will of God that you believe in Christ and be saved and go to heaven. But if you're thinking wrongly about what it means to be a Christian, you won't go to heaven and so that's why we're doing this.

Now point number nine, and this is coming at things from a different direction, speaking to those of you that are prone to a lot of deep introspection and you get caught up in all kinds of confusion because you look in your heart and you see that there's not perfection there; this question will help you and deliver you from that controlling introspection that is in your heart. When I ask, are you a Christian, I'm not asking this question, number nine, I am not asking you if you have stopped sinning. I'm not asking if you have stopped sinning. Have you stopped sinning, that's not the question. Oh, there are perfectionist teachings out there and, you know, those of you with Armenian or Nazarene backgrounds, you know, you've been conditioned to think this way and look inside and, you know, if there's any sin in your life, you question your salvation or if you stumble along the way, there's a broad circle of people ready to pronounce you as unsaved. How could you be a Christian? That's not what we're doing here. That's not what we're asking here today. The question I'm not asking is have you stopped sinning because, beloved, this, the testimony of a true Christian is not that he is now sinless, that he no longer sins. The perfectionist theology of some is not biblical. And beloved, if we would just read our Bibles with any kind of paying attention as we do, we would never fall into such traps. In 1 Kings chapter 8 verse 46, we read, "There is no one who does not sin." In 1 John chapter 1 verse 8, the Scriptures say explicitly, "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." Beloved, perfection does not come on this earth. Glorification is still future for the Christian. True Christians are in a process of sanctification, becoming over time more and more like the Lord Jesus Christ but the fact that it is a process, the fact that it is progressive, indicates that there will be sins and stumbles along the way. And so I'm not asking you when I ask you, are you a Christian, I'm not asking you whether you have a besetting sin or not. That's actually quite liberating. The Bible says we all stumble in many ways in the book of James, in a letter that was written to believers.

We all stumble in many ways and so I'm not up here hovering over you with a condemnatory spirit saying, "Oh, you still have a sin in your life? How could you be a

Christian?" That's not what I'm doing. That's not what I'm asking because whether you have a besetting sin or not does not answer the question, are you a Christian? The Scripture assumes, teaches explicitly, that Christians need to grow in grace. The New Testament epistles are written to people who were dealing with sin in their lives, who needed sin exposed, who needed to repent. Think of the church at Corinth, how Paul writes to those Christians, greets them as fellow believers, and then spends 16 chapters trying to sort out the mess that they were. So I'm not asking that. Set aside your self-absorbed introspection and deal with the question, are you a Christian? It's actually quite liberating. I remember years ago having a conversation with a young woman in the third or fourth row in this building, and as she came to grasp and understand that point, what a point of liberation it was, and to just see the shining nature of her testimony these days is a great blessing to my heart.

Going to point number 10 here, kind of jumping to the other side of the spectrum now. Point number nine assumes and recognizes that you break the rules, that you still have sin in your life, and we've said that's not an indication that you're not a Christian. Well, on the other side, point number 10, I'm not asking you do you keep the rules? Do you keep the rules? I'm not asking that question and I'm not picking on Independent Baptists here in my message here today but if you're from an Independent Baptist or a legalistic background, where it's just all the different rules about what you can have on your head, what kind of clothes you can wear, and all that stuff, very liberating to know that when the Bible asks you the question, are you a Christian, it's not asking you whether you keep all the rules. You do not... oh, my dear friends, my dear friends, you do not establish the fact of your conversion by taking pride in your obedience. In the last question we said your despair over your sin shouldn't keep you from contemplating this question, now we're saying your pride and your obedience shouldn't cause you to avoid the question and assume an answer that may not be true. Do you keep the rules? That's not the question when I ask you, are you a Christian?

Turn to Philippians chapter 3 with me. Philippians chapter 3 in one of the great autobiographical portions of the writings of the Apostle Paul, here in Philippians chapter 3, he looks back on his former life as an unconverted Jew and talks about how perfectly he kept all of the rules that were required in that brand of religion. He says, beginning in verse 4, he says, "I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh," that is, in human performance, if you think you have reason for confidence in human performance, "I have even more reason than you do, or I had more reason than you do." Verse 5, I was "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless." Paul is saying, "I kept all the rules. I had the right genealogy. I had the right genetics. I was from the right tribe. I was in the right religious circles." And what does he say about all of that? He dismisses it all as complete dung. Verse 7, he said, "whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ." I thought it was an asset. It was actually a debt. It was not an asset that showed that I was a Christian. My pride and works and self-performance was actually a sin against God because it was a matter of personal boasting to me, pride in my spiritual accomplishments.

And he goes on in verse 8. He says, "Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish," as dung, as manure, as the most vile, detestable thing that you can imagine, I count all of that self-righteousness as dung, as rubbish, "in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him." And look at what he goes on to say there, "not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith." He says as he's writing and explaining what it means to be a Christian, he says, "I am not resting in my personal righteousness. I am not resting, I am not trusting, I am not made acceptable to God by things I have done. In fact, if I were, those things would be a hindrance to true faith." So he says, "I've rejected all of it, even though from a human perspective it was blameless, I've rejected all of that so that I would have a righteousness, a true righteousness that was not my own. Separate and apart from any of my obedience," he says, "I want a righteousness that is not my own. I want a righteousness that comes from Christ and is received through faith, not by self-performance."

And so, beloved, this is all very unsettling. If you find this unsettling, take heart because it means that you're understanding what I'm saying from Scripture. No one should hear these things and just be comfortably laying back on a poolside lounge saying, "Ah-ha, this is great. Isn't this warm and inviting here? Look at the clear water in front of me." It's not that. This is unsettling, unsettling in a way that is fitting with Jesus having said there are few who find the small gate and the narrow way that leads to heaven. If that doesn't unsettle you, you haven't come to the first bit of grips with what Scripture says about true salvation.

Let me go on a little tangent here that I've been thinking about a lot based on different reading I'm doing, and I think this is fair to say. It makes explicit what lies under the surface in ministry. I'm convinced that there's something of an implied contract between congregations and their pastors in most places, implied contract where the congregation comes and says, "I'll be here and I'll stay, just don't you say anything that upsets me." And the pastor is very tempted to say, "Oh, I want you to stay. I won't say anything or do anything that offends you." And it's just so easy for churches to go along with that comfortable arrangement where the congregation keeps coming, the pastor, whatever he does, doesn't say anything that confronts or risks offending anyone. I mean, isn't that the whole premise of seeker-sensitive ministry, "I won't offend you by what I say"? And so you just go along, riding the boat along the surface of the water, content with that arrangement. "You stay, and I won't say anything that bothers you. You don't say anything that bothers me, I'll stay." I can't prove that but I'm convinced that it's true. Can't prove it to unwilling minds. That's the tangent.

And beloved, I realize that when I say things like this, that it's unsettling, it upsets people. You know, Bible teaching is like that. Jesus taught, People gathered for a while, then most of them left, John chapter 6. That's okay. It comes with the territory. You see, the most important thing is not the implied contract that I was alluding to. The most important thing is that we get down to truth, that we honor the truth of the word of God



preeminently and say what the Bible says and explain what it means by what it says, and we let the consequences of that process play out no matter what. We can't operate on this implied contract of, you know, "Do what I say, say what I want you to say, and I'll stay." We don't play that game. God helping us, we'll never play that game because, you see, eternity matters. Your soul matters. The nature of true biblical ministry is for someone to love you enough to tell you the truth even if it makes you angry and you walk away. Read what Jesus did in ministry. Look at the response of the Pharisees, of the crowds, even of some of the disciples at different times and see that point. The response to a biblical ministry is not necessarily a measure of whether the ministry is biblical or not.

So, with those 10 questions laid out, let's come to point number 11, which is this. When I ask you, are you a Christian, I am not asking you this, do you believe what other people believe? I'm not asking you that. I'm not asking whether you believe what others believe. And having read Matthew 7, let me ask you to turn back there again, kind of jumping in to this text a couple of times here this morning. When I ask, are you a Christian, I'm not asking whether you believe what other people believe. When it comes to eternal life, beloved, you should not seek to be with the majority. You should not follow the world. You should not follow the biggest church, because as we saw earlier, Jesus said, that the gate is wide, the way is easy, and that which leads to destruction, those who enter by it are many. There's no safety in numbers, beloved. Do you understand that? Oh, dear friends, do you understand that? The fact that you say, "Well, I believe what all these other people believe," is no indication if you're a Christian or not because many people follow a way that leads to destruction. The true way, the true way of salvation, the true door into heaven is narrow. The way is hard. Those who find it are few. Beloved, I'm not making this up. I'm just telling you what Jesus said. If Jesus said that, then we ought to take it seriously.

You know, those of you that know my background know that I came from a very large church before we came to Cincinnati, some would call it a mega church. I'm glad and grateful for that background that the Lord gave to me. But Lord, no one in that... There I go again. The difference between preaching and praying to me is pretty narrow. That's why sometimes I'll misspeak like that. But no one gathered in that great congregation should say, "I must be okay because I believe what that pastor teaches." Or you know, "I'm with this church, I'm with that pastor." So what? So what? The fact that you're riding along with a big group, or, you know, in what I originally had more in mind, the fact that you belong to a major denomination, you know, you belong to a Catholic Church that has 1.25 billion people, and the question's asked, can one and a quarter billion people be wrong? The answer is yes, absolutely, and they are. You can't just go by what others believe. When it comes to eternal life, do not seek an answer by, "Well, I believe what the majority believes." Majority vote may win you an election in America, it won't send you to heaven. Beloved, I say this sympathetically, but get that straight in your mind so that you can come to a point where your faith is intelligent, it is understanding, it is built on Scripture, and it is well grounded rather than in the false hopes that animate so many people throughout all of the world, throughout all of the church, and probably within the walls of this church. It's not a question of what others believe that we're asking.

So, coming to point number 12 here, and having offended Independent Baptists, Nazarenes, Catholics so far today, I might as well puncture another balloon as well. Point number 12, and being mindful of the fact that, you know, I speak within these walls and sometimes outside the walls also as the Lord takes our ministry into other places through social media. Number 12, I'm not asking you this, have you had an exciting experience? Have you had an emotional experience? I'm not asking you that question at all. Beloved, the entire Charismatic movement is built on this false premise and offers false hope to people that if you just have an experience, if you speak in tongues, if you've been slain in the Spirit, then obviously you're saved. Not true. Not true. And I ask you, beloved, joined sympathetically with the question I ask it generally, not in a pointed way to anyone in this room, do people not care that Scripture warns precisely against that? Against immediate reactions under the influence of a Charismatic, so to speak, preacher and thinking that that makes them saved? Jesus warned against people getting worked up and placing their hope in something that's temporary.

Look at Mark chapter 4 with me. Mark chapter 4. You know, I see ads, I have no idea what it is, but I see ads come up in my Facebook feed for something called Life Surge. I don't know if you know what that is, but it's, you know, speakers and singers and all of that and, you know, "Join us for a one-night experience of the best of Christianity," something like that. That whole mindset is just totally bogus and conditions people to associate Christianity with an experience that inevitably fades away if not the same night within a following day or two. It's like drinking 20 espressos and being really energized and energetic, but there's a crash that's coming. When that's your approach to Christianity, you're on the wrong path. What can I say?

Look at what Jesus said in Mark chapter 4, verse 16. In the parable of the sowers, he warns against this, he says, "these are the ones sown on rocky ground: the ones who, when they hear the word, immediately receive it with joy. And they have no root in themselves, but endure for a while; then, when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately they fall away." He's referring to what he had said in verse 6 when he's talking about seed that fell on the rocky ground, verses 5 and 6. It didn't have much soil. It immediately sprang up. It had no depth of soil. When the sun rose, it was scorched. And since it had no root, it withered away. It died. It was not living. and the prospect of people pointing to, and this is just the mindset of the subjective postmodern world in which we live, pointing to experiences and living on experience and, beloved, when I ask you, are you a Christian, understand I'm not asking you any of that. Quite liberating for those of you that have not had experiences and those of you that had to not build your hope and faith on that. You know, we've had people come through our ministry, come through our church over the years out of Charismatic environments. Some have stayed, some have moved on. Dear friends, when I ask, are you a Christian, I'm not asking you to tell me about some past experience you had. That's not relevant to the discussion. That's not an answer at all.

And in like manner, number 13, I'm not asking you, have you seen miracles or have you experienced a miracle? I am not asking you that because so-called signs and miracles, the very things that are at the root of the New Apostolic Reformation out there in Redding,

California, and all kinds of other manners, you know, in days gone by they called it Power Evangelism. You know, people need to see signs so that they can believe, you know, and the sheer force of the sign compels people to belief in Christ. Not true.

Look at Mark chapter 13. Look at Mark chapter 13 and, beloved, there's no excuse for anyone, there's no excuse because Jesus warned in advance about these very things. You know, there will be people at judgment, Jesus himself said, "Lord, did we not do mighty miracles in your name?" He said, "You didn't know me, depart from me." In Mark 13, verse 21, the Lord in speaking about latter-day events, says, "if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it." Do not believe that nonsense. He goes on to say, verse 22, "For," because. I'm telling you the ground of why you shouldn't run after that nonsense, he says, "For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect." Don't be swayed by the fact that you saw what looked like something miraculous. Don't be swayed by major events where healing ministries supposedly take place and people come forward and it looks like they're getting healed on the platform. The truth of the matter is that those people who come forward are preselected by those in charge of the event. Don't go by signs and wonders when I ask you the question, are you a Christian?

And it's more insidious than just the outward humans involved in the deception. Look at 2 Corinthians chapter 11. 2 Corinthians chapter 11. The Apostle Paul in verse 12, 2 Corinthians 11 verse 12, says, "what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light." The deception in these things, beloved, is that they are made to look like the real thing. They are held out as the real thing and yet, like bait on a hook dropped into the pond, there's a hook that takes you places that you don't want to go.

So don't go by the fact that you've seen miracles. We're not asking have you been baptized? Have you stopped sinning? We're not asking do you keep the rules? We're not asking do you believe what others believe? We do not ask if you've had an experience. We're not asking if you've seen miracles. The last point, perhaps the most surprising of them all in a place like this, in a place that preaches the Bible or at least tries to. When I ask, are you a Christian, my friends, I'm not asking you this, I am not asking you this, I'm not asking whether you read your Bible. I'm not asking whether you read your Bible. It's good to read your Bible but it doesn't answer the question, are you a Christian? And let me just take you to three brief passages in the time we have remaining.

Turn to John chapter 5. John chapter 5. Jesus, again, it's amazing how precise and pointed and direct you can be if you simply follow the words of Jesus on matters like these. John chapter 5, verse 39, Jesus says, "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life." He's speaking to people, reading the word of God, and he says, "You think that in that you have life, and yet inside you refuse to come to me." Reading the Scriptures did not make them a Christian.

Look at 2 Corinthians chapter 3. 2 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 14. 2 Corinthians 3 verse 14. Speaking of the Jews, he says, "their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away." Verse 15, "Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read," Moses being the word of God, "whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts." Being exposed to the word of God, but refusing to come to Christ. Being exposed to the word of God, but a veil over their hard, stony hearts.

One more in the book of Hebrews, chapter 4 and it kind of brings us full circle. This final text brings us full circle and if I may say so, vindicates the attention that we've given to this theme today and last Sunday. Hebrews chapter 4, verse 1. "Therefore, while the promise of entering his rest still stands, let us fear lest any of you should seem to have failed to reach it." Beloved, do you know why I wanted to preach these two messages and the ones that follow? It's because I'm afraid. I'm afraid lest any of you would be found outside the kingdom. Verse 2, "For good news came to us just as to them," and this is the gospel of which he is writing and speaking. The good news, "good news came to us just as to them," but look at this, beloved, "but the message they heard did not benefit them, because they were not united by faith with those who listened."

Oh my dear friends, every day someone reads the Bible while he is lost in sin. It is possible, my dear, dear friends, it is possible to sit under this pulpit and wake up one day in hell with no possibility of escape. Few people, few people take the likelihood of self-deception seriously. They may think that others should take it more seriously, but very few people actually look into the mirror with concern about their own soul, having earnestly worked through what Scripture says about these matters. Beloved, someone having heard these 14 points, with the exception of the one about never sinning, someone could say, "I've kept all these things from my youth. All those things are true of me. I believe in God. I've had an experience. I read my Bible. I'm moral. I attend church. Jesus is Lord. I've even got the bumper sticker on my car." You could claim all those 14 points that we have gone through and still be lost in your sin. How is that possible? It's because they start in the wrong place. They start their self-assessment, they start from their journey, so to speak, from the wrong starting point. They omit, they overlook, they pass by the essentials of what it means to be a Christian in order to glory in the incidental effects of being a Christian.

Are you a Christian? We're going to deal with these things over the next three weeks, I hope, what I'm about to say. If you want to know if you're a Christian, beloved, look at those 14 points and say, I've got to set these aside. Something else is at stake here. Those don't answer this question, are you a Christian? If you want to know if you're a Christian, you have to ask different questions first. First. You need to ask questions, three questions like this. Do you believe the gospel of Jesus Christ? Do you even know what the gospel of Jesus Christ is? Can you even explain the gospel of Jesus Christ? That's the first question. Do you know the gospel? Do you believe the gospel of Jesus Christ? How can you be a Christian if you don't know what the gospel is, I ask you, the gospel whereby you must be saved? Secondly, if you want to know if you're a Christian, you need to be

able to answer this question: are you born again? Jesus says unless you've been born again, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven. Well, what are the signs of being born again? Beloved, it's more than those 14 points that we looked at. It's far more fundamental than those 14 points that we looked at. To know if you're a Christian, you need to be able, do you believe the gospel of Jesus Christ, number one? Are you born again, number two? Number three, what is the key to true Christianity? What is that without which Christianity does not exist? When you ask those questions, now you're starting to get someplace and that's what I hope to do in the weeks to come just with three more messages.

Beloved, the key to Christianity is not your self-effort but the death and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ. The call of the gospel is not to congratulate you on your self-righteousness and how good you are. The call of the gospel comes to you and says repent and follow Christ. True salvation has spiritual effects on those who believe. And so next week we will explore true faith and true hope having exposed false faith and false hope in our time here together. My desire for you, my prayer to God, is that the Spirit would be powerfully at work in each one of us.

Let's pray together.

*Gracious Father, may your Spirit have his way with us. May you expose false faith in many, in order to lead them to true faith and true salvation. Father, this hasn't been a harangue against anyone. It's been an urgent explanation to prepare hearts that they might be saved. Father, it's your commanded will that people repent and believe in Christ. You're not willing that any would perish, that all would come to repentance. You put forth a good faith offer of good news to everyone who will listen. And so, dear God, having sought to honor your revelation and your purposes, bring forth fruit that would be pleasing to yourself and to the long-term, eternal benefit of souls who perhaps have been dwelling in self-deception but now find themselves face-to-face with the truth. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*

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