

"WHAT IS YOUR RELIGIOUS FAITH DOING TO YOU?"

Ephesians 2:8-10

INTRODUCTION:

Some time ago, a minister gave an address to some students in an American College in Beirut, Lebanon. In that body of students, there were representatives of some 16 different religious faiths. In fact, the minister claimed that you could feel their faiths bristling at one another. Being a wise man, he began his address by saying, "I'm not going to ask one of you to change your religious faith. But, I am asking each one of you to face this question honestly. What is your religious faith doing to you? They were ready to argue for their faith. They were ready to defend it. But what an entirely different story they had to tell on the plain of experience. What they were asking to say that their religious faith was actually doing for them.

This is a good question for us to raise and for us to think about - what is your religious faith doing to you. There is, of course, many things that faith can do for us. And I could list some of these things. Faith can give us a deep note of joy. I feel, and I believe, we are happy people because we are followers of the Galilean. There is an old hymn they used to sing - you may have the joy bells ringing in your heart. And a peace from you never will depart. Walk the straight and narrow way, live for Jesus everyday, he will keep the joy bells ringing in your heart.

1 Boy trying to outdo each other - 1st said my uncle's doctor.
I can be sick for nothing! The 2nd youngster, shot back: "Big Deal!"
My uncle is a preacher. "I can be good for nothing!"

Now that is what religious faith can do for us - put joy in our hearts.

And yet, when we look at some people today - they have such a gloomy appearance - and they are so pessimistic. That they believe that God is gloom.

It seems as there are some people who have just enough religion to make them (unhappy). They have just enough belief in God, just enough idea about the moral law, and just enough vision about the moral life, and just enough faith in life that they cannot live like the pagans around them and be happy about it.

Now there are some people who talk about Heaven - and they ought to do so with the light of glory on their faces. There are other people who talk about Hell. And they ought to do that. In a way that they will invite others from it.

There are some people who have enough religion and faith to make them miserable. But not enough of the reality of faith that brings joy. Do you know the parable of the prodigal son, ended on the note of joy.

And if your religious faith is doing anything for you - it will sound a note of courage in your life. It will help you in the hard places of life. President Eisenhower once said, "this I did, for no other reason - than I believed it to be the right thing to do." It took courage, it took faith, to make a decision like that.

We need a faith that will stimulate us with a spirit of good will.

I read a story sometime ago of an elderly couple - way up in their 80's. They lived in a home for the aged. They thought they would go out on a date.

Have dinner and go to a movie. So they did! The gentlemen was dressed and ready to go on time! But of course, the ladies in the home, all came and helped the lady get dressed. They put a little corsage on her dress. A little ribbon in her hair. And then said to her, that when she came home - she must tell them everything that happened. Everything! The couple left around 5:30 and had dinner. They went to an early show, and they came back to the home around 10:00 P. M.

That was enough for the gentlemen - up to bed he went. But the ladies gathered around the other lady, and they asked her - what did he do? what did he say? what did he do? and what did he say? And she said, do you know something

"I had to slap him three times."

All were agog - they asked what happened? what happened? She said, I thought he was dead!

Now when we talk about what our religious faith is doing to us - one thing about it, it will stimulate us and it will bring some action in our lives.

I heard the story about a young man on a college campus and join in a crusade to make this nation clean! Why, he was going to clean up the city and the nation. He was against all of this pollution. His father came up to him afterwards - after he had made his speech. And said son, "I'm so glad to hear you say that. Now let's begin in your own room at home."

Did you not know, that is precisely where faith begins.

Did you ever see a child put on a jacket and put button number one in hole number two, What happened. The jacket ended buttoned up incorrectly. So it is - the starting point for Christian living is important. And that is what we are talking about tonight. It is faith - what is it doing in you.

Dr. Markus Dodd became a great preacher late in life. After he went to the Seminary and after he was ordained - he waited five years before being called to a church. In a statement about that trying experience, he wrote - I did not throw mud at the angels. He gave that time to further study and more careful preparation which must be the reason for the strong writings, which nearly a century later, are so highly regarded.

Exactly what is faith? John Patton was a missionary to the South Sea Islands. And was trying to translate the New Testament into the native tongue. He came to the word faith - and he could not find a word in their language that would match. Finally, one day, one of the native friends came by where he lived. He was very tired and he sat down on a chair and said. "It is so good to cast all of your weight on this chair."

And Patton said, (I've got it) - faith is casting all of your weight upon Jesus Christ! And so he translated that word, faith as putting your whole weight on Jesus Christ.

Now if we understand that statement, then we can clearly understand how a man is saved. Whether or not you have any religious faith at all. There are so many ways that you hear people talk about faith and religion in our society.

I am not surprised at all, that many people are confused about the real way, the true way, and how we can know that we are hearing so many voices. And some of these voices our forefathers did not hear.

But in our day, in our generation, by television - we are hearing about Eastern religions, all kinds of isms - and somebody has said wasms and spasms. That spring up in all kinds of places, and some people will believe just about anything. And some people will join everything that comes along. If it is some new twist, or offers some glamour or show-business aspect. But let us now get back to something about the Christian revelation. How can a man know his Lord, how can a man be saved, and how can a man have a right relationship with Christ.

There are several things that are here implied.

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I. A DESPERATE NEED

First of all, man had a desperate need. Every man has a need to know Christ in his heart. It is the only thing that will help this society of ours today and it will be for men to have the right kind of heart. Now this is not something that I have said. There has to be a change in man's heart. We are living in desperate times. Times when people need peace with God. And the need to have a victory. We need to know how, through faith, that our religion can become effective.

We come into this world with sin. And because we are sinners, we have a

desperate need. Because of this desperate need - we have all kinds of men doing all kinds of things today, and you can read in the newspaper about people all over this world. Who are having all kinds of experiences. And they are not embarrassed or ashamed of it.

Do you ever get used to sin - now God doesn't. But it shows the situation we are in. By the way we put up with it today.

Now two or three things about this desperate need - that the Bible gives you a clear understanding. One of these things is this - not everybody is going to be saved. Now you can talk to some people today, who will tell you that God is good. God is a loving God. He is not going to let anybody go to Hell. Well, you haven't read the Bible!

Because Jesus spoke twice as much about eternal punishment as he did about Heaven. The Bible says that men who are lost without Jesus Christ, are lost eternally. And not everybody is going to be saved.

2 I'll tell you another thing. It seems to indicate here - that there are more people who are going to be lost than are going to be saved. Jesus said this - there is a narrow way that leads to life. And there is a broadway that leads to destruction. And many are in it. The Bible makes it clear - that there are a lot of people that are going to be lost.

3 - A third thing that the Bible clears up is, that some people are going to be lost who thought they were saved. Jesus said that, there will be some who will say, well Lord, didn't we cast out demons in your name. Didn't we do great miracles. Didn't we call you Lord, Lord.

And he is going to say to them - that I never knew you. And yet, here are going to be people who will say, and will do that. And yet, they have never trusted him as Lord and as Saviour.

4 - A fourth thing, that is going to happen, the Bible says that will make it clear - is that there will be no chance for man to be saved after he dies. Now there are people preaching this doctrine today. Well, I just believe that God is going to give us another chance. I just don't believe that a loving God would let anybody go to Hell. God will give him another chance, maybe - he just didn't understand it right. Or maybe he can get half-way to Heaven. And God is going to get the message to him, and he will believe.

Now the Bible never indicates that in the slightest realm, and anybody who teaches that has not looked at the world of God. It is not going to be that way.

The Bible says this - it is appointed unto man, once to die. But after that, the judgement. Now Jesus told a story about a rich man. He went to Hell. And the poor man went to Heaven. Both were conscious - both of them moved in the same realm. And they were going to occupy eternity. So the Bible was clear. When the Bible talks about man's desperate need and some very awful things are stated about man - it says that man is a sinner. That man's sins by omission, that is by

putting it off. Man's sins by unbelief. Man's sins by lawlessness. He sins by his rebellion against God. Man is a sinner. And this is a desperate need that a man has. All have sinned. And that's the picture that you have. And what is your religious faith doing for you. Has it taken care of that sin. That you know about, in your life. Or have you tried to cover it over in a pious way.

By joining some church that doesn't even mention the Gospel in this way.

II. SOME DECEIVING SUBSTITUTES

Now as we think about your religious faith and what it is doing - I want to say two or three things to you about the substitutes that people use in their religion. Which is helpless when it comes to salvation.

There are some deceiving substitutes for salvation.

Did you know the Devil can duplicate almost everything. Almost everything that God made is good. But did you know that the Devil has perverted all of these good things and he has turned them into rebellion against God. For instance, God made us to worship. But the Devil will try to pervert that. God made beauty but the Lord created that to be admired. But the Devil takes it and perverts it. Satan comes in all of his forms and offers substitutes - he has some of these substitutes ready in the realm of religion.

Now there are some people who will say, but Preacher, we are all religious. Don't you know that nearly every American will say that he is religious.

1 - The first thing is, that one religion is as good as another. A man will say, yes, you have got all kinds of religion. So you can just say that any religion is as good as any other kind. That is one thing that you can say about it.

Another thing you can say about religion is, that man is religious by nature. Man is always going to worship something. And whatever you say that man is going to become a worshipper of God because it has been set in his heart.

Another thing you can say about religion is, that religion is man's upward reach for God. Men are going to reach for God - that is religion. But the thing we are talking about here is - your religious faith. But that is not Christianity. And the Devil will substitute - he will make you religious in order to send you to Hell. He doesn't want you to be tied up into Christianity and Christ Jesus. Now that is a terrible, deceiving substitute.

2 - First of all, he will substitute baptism. And there are people who will say, well, I got baptized. We ought to get baptized. But baptism will not carry us to Heaven.

Now there are really two kinds of baptism that are wrong. One is, the baptism of an infant. One who doesn't have a change of heart and a chance to trust Jesus. Because the baptism does not make the baby a Christian, and I am sure - agree with this. It doesn't make a child a Christian, just to baptize him. It doesn't make him grow as a Christian person.

The other thing is - that you have to be baptized to be saved. Some who believe that you have to do this. Well, you have got to trust, you have got to do this - but they say, you have got to be baptized before you can go to Heaven.

Did you know something, that when Paul accepted Jesus Christ as his Saviour and as his Lord, the Bible says that he was filled with the Holy Spirit - before he was baptized.

Why, and how could you be lost - not saved yet, and be filled with the Holy Spirit. Well, if you believe that you have got to be baptized to be saved, you'll have to run back and check on the book of Acts.

Read about Paul's conversion and check it out. See that it says that the Holy Spirit filled him, and came upon him, when they laid hands upon him after he had trusted. The scales fell from his eyes and he was filled with the Holy Spirit. Then he was - and that is what the Bible says, and baptism won't save you. You get baptized when you are saved.

3 - Another substitute that Satan makes is a matter of sincerity. People will say that I have got religion I am sincere about it. I really am very sincere about my religion. Now sincerity is a wonderful thing but it can get you into trouble. For example, the basketball player who went the wrong way and scored two points at the beginning of the game, and got so rattled - that the game was won by those two points. Now he was sincere - he was scoring for his school, but that was not what counted.

4 - Another thing that Satan uses to deceive us with, is the matter of good works. There are lots of people who say, well, I have religion. I am full of good works. But a religious person ought to be full of good works. But if you have a church of good works. And if your church has ten services every day, and you attended all of these services, and you were nice to your neighbors and your friends, and worked on all kind of boards in the community and the cultural things in the community, and you worked around good people. And you liked to fellowship with these nice people, well, you could do this and still be a lost person. The Bible says that good works will never take us to Heaven.

I remember reading a story out of the life of Bishop Manning. Once, in a time of great depression and doubt, as to God's plan for the future - went into a bookstore to purchase a copy of his own book. (Faith In God.)

The clerk called up to the stockroom, and shortly a loud voice called down - Manning's Faith In God, all gone.

The Bishop recorded that it was a rich lesson for his soul. For he realized

that faith was the thing that was needed, and if faith was all gone - he was in a bad, bad way.

5 There is another thing in which we are deceived through and that is reformation. There are people today who talk about reformation. There are people who say, I led a bad life - you know, drinking, gambling, and all kinds of things that you could think of. And then one day, I decided, and I said well - I am going to change. I am going to straighten up. I am going to go straight. I am going to fly right. I am going to quit drinking, smoking, and gambling. I am going to quit running around with the crowd. And I am going to stay home with my wife and be a good father. And from this day forth, I am going to begin to live a good life.

You may be able to see what has happened here. He really has changed. And that man begins to say what a good man I am. I've reformed my act, and now I know that I am alright.

It is good to reform your act. It is good to change. It is good to do nice things. But it won't take you to Heaven, because if you got to Heaven - you know what you'd say, what a good man I am. Look, here is how hard I've tried. And look what I have accomplished. And I've got to Heaven through my own goodness.

What a deceiving thing - he will look at Jesus and say, this is the way I got here.

III. THE DIVINE WAY

Here is a desperate need, deceiving substitute, but here is a divine way. What is your religious faith doing in you, Let us think about the divine way. Which Christ gives - for by grace are you saved, and not of yourselves - through faith it is the gift of God.

1- The first thing that a person has to do is repent. As he begins the journey with the Lord. Now that word repent is made up of two words.

First, it means a change of feeling. Second, a change of direction. It means ~~to be sorry~~. Not that you got caught in sin, not only recognizing that you are a sinner. But saying Lord, before you, I am a sinner - and I am sorry.

A man has to begin to sense some guilt, some losses, some separation, some alienation from a holy God. For he has sinned against Heaven, and against Heaven only. As far as God is concerned. That man is lost because he has sinned against the holy God. Therefore, it takes repentance. And repentance is a change of direction.

A change of mind, a change of heart, a change that he'll regret and his sorrow is in it.

Jesus said, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish.

John the Baptist came preaching repentance. So if you are going to come into faith in Jesus Christ, you must first have repentance.

I remember reading a story which Jim Henry told, he is a pastor down in Orlando, Florida. How he was a Junior in High School, and he had a young teacher. And she was a fine person. And he always called his teachers Miss, or Mrs, or Mr. As he was properly taught at home. But one day, the bell rang, and he was going outside. He walked by and he said, I'll see you Elizabeth. What did you say Jim Henry. He said, see you Elizabeth. She said, my name is not Elizabeth to you young man, I said, well, that was what was in front of your last name. It says your first name is Elizabeth. She said, you are a student and you may call me Mrs. And he said, it is a free country, I can do what I want to do. And she said, it sure is free. It is a free country, and you can stay after school until you learn to say Mrs.

Now those were the good ole days when schools were schools and they put the fear of the Lord in you. And your parents didn't ask you what the teacher did wrong. They asked, what did you do wrong! But Jim Henry said he wasn't about to repent. He said, alright, I'll stay after school. And all of his buddies went out and just left him. And he just sat there and so did Elizabeth.

We sat, and we sat, and we sat. The day grew longer and longer. Then he said, the great conflict in his mind begin to generate. I knew that sometime my mother and father was going to come home, and I wasn't going to be there. And I knew the next thing they would ask was, how come you were late coming home from school. And then I knew the third product of that kind of decision, so I pressed it as long as I could, and I repented. I said, Miss Kate, I want to tell you that

I am sorry. That I won't call you that anymore.)

Now, he said - in all honesty, there was not much emotional repentance in that - but he had an intellectual repentance. His heart still said you are Elizabeth. But his mind was saying, you are a Mrs.

So she let him go home. But she was not going to offer him any help until there came a repentance.

Now that is something that the Lord can't do anything for us. He can't move past a certain point. He can lead us. He can ~~convict~~ us. He can guide us. He can help us. To see, to help us to get to a certain place. But God says - this is all I can do. You've got to say, I am sorry Lord. I have sinned against you. Before repentance takes place. And if you are going to be saved by faith in Jesus Christ, there has to be the element of repentance in it.

You are going to have to repent.

2 - The next thing I want to say about the divine way is, "you have got to want to be saved." God never saves you against his will. A man has to say, Lord, I want you.

Now you don't want to get married to someone who doesn't want to be married

to you. Who doesn't want to have lovers who doesn't love him. He loves us already. And it is up to us, to want to turn and say, Lord, I am sorry. And I want you as Lord and Saviour, of my life.

The rich young ruler, you remember came forward to Jesus, and said - Lord, I want to follow you. What does it take? He had a long list of things - like keeping the Commandments. Honoring his father and mother. Not committing adultery, being a rich boy - I remember that some members of the church probably said, well, let's fill out a (card on him). We already have three jobs in the church picked out for him. But Jesus said, you sell all that you have and follow me. He went away sorrowful - do you know why. Because Jesus saw the man's heart. And Jesus offered, but he wasn't willing to give his heart.

Now there are lots of people in this world that love things - they love their cars, their boats, their houses - they love everything more than they love the things of God. And God says, unless you want me more than anything or anyone else in the world, you are not fit to be in my kingdom.

Another thing, if you are going to come the divine way, you've got to trust Jesus Christ. For by grace, our text says. That is what God does - who he is. We can't even define grace. We talk about unmerited favor. We don't deserve it. God simply loved us that much. And he says it is through faith.

The vehicle is faith, and faith is trust. All the way through the Bible - from beginning to end, it is faith, trust, belief. And Jesus wants the whole heart.

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All you need to do is trust Jesus, and say Lord - be mercy for me a sinner. That is the prayer of a contrite heart. We must recognize that Jesus is who he is and trust him. Now that's the joy of being a Christian. The trust is not a set of rules, not a creed, but it is a person.

That is hard for us, isn't it. We make it so hard that we try our own way. And there are people who try to do it their own way. Why? Because Jesus died on the cross and paid what we owed. In his own body.

Do you know what the cross means. It means two things - first, that man is a sinner. And this is what it cost God. His son.

The second thing it means is, that God loved man.

When you trust him, you receive him as Saviour. The wages of sin is death, and the gift of God is eternal life, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Eph. 2. That God's gift is salvation when we receive it.

And you can say, I've got to take Him into my heart. I've got to say, Lord, I believe. I've got to receive.

Acts 4:12, there is no other name given unto men whereby we must be saved. Only in Jesus Christ. A Christian is a Christ truster, and follower.

A young man came to faith in Christ as a grown man. And then when he met Jesus Christ, (he had a burden for his father.) One night, he went to his father - his father was way up beyond his 60's. He sat there and talked to him and shared with him some of the verses of Ephesians. About trusting Jesus to be saved. And he asked him, now wouldn't you like to receive this wonderful gift which God holds out to you. He just looked - and he said, all you have to do is reach out, take it, receive it and repent of your sins. And trust him - wouldn't you do that. He said, I don't know if I am ready for that or not. And then he said, how much longer do you think you have to live? He said, I don't know. Well, you could die tonight. He said, that's right. Then he called his wife - come in here. I want you to be in on this. Then he looked him straight in the eyes and said, yes, I'll take Jesus Christ, and got down on his knees and prayed - Lord, I am a sinner. If you will have me, take me. Come into my heart. I want you. Come into my heart and save me. He got up hugged his wife and said, I'll be in church on Sunday. When the invitation was given, he made a decision that was public. And was baptized.

But what that man said, was this - he said, you know I had been a member of a church many, many years, but I had never really given my heart to Jesus Christ. What is your religious faith doing in you?

Years after that experience, the preacher was in the critical unit of the hospital, and he heard an invitation, and someone led him to this friend. What are you doing here. The man said, my old ticker is giving me trouble again. Awe, he says, man, you'll be out of here in no time. They tell me they are going to roll me into another room after awhile. And so, they had a prayer together. And before the Preacher left, he said, come here - I want to tell you something. You know what - I am not going back home. No, I'm not going over there in that

other room, I'm going up there. Well, the nurse, just said you are going in the next room. He says, I am going up there. That night, he got a call after he had been home for about an hour. And heard the news that he had gone up there. But he repented, and he trusted in Jesus Christ.

Faith is like that. In Jesus Christ. Ask him to forgive you and to come into your heart right now. It can be done. If you mean business with God. God means business with you. What is your faith doing in you.

There is an old story of a ship that was drifting long after the crew had fallen in exhaustion. When a passing ship was sighted, they signaled for water. The reply came, drop your buckets where you are. No action was taken by the thirsty crew who thought that was mockery. The second ship seeing no action, signaled again. You are in the wide mouth of the Amazon - which is fresh water, drop your buckets where you are. For miles, the mighty Amazon flows fresh water into the ocean. At its mouth. In what they thought was salt water had come abundant fresh life-giving water.

All is not despair. We live in a world of sin. But all about is the grace of God which is ours for the taking. And the first point of this fact, is faith to believe.