

Jesus Knows What Is in Every Man

John 2:23–25

Have any of you heard of Freddy from Germany discovering America during the World Cup? A number of people — including some Reformed guys I follow — have jumped on “Team Freddy.” He seems like a fun, likable guy. He discovered Whataburger, and Buc-ees, and other American treasures. I have jumped on the Team Freddy wagon! But here’s the reality: I don’t know anything about him. I don’t know if he’s married, what he does for a living, or whether he’s a believer or an unbeliever. I wouldn’t know him if he walked through the door. Yet many are quick to claim him as one of their own based on his fun social media posts, because he’s liking what we like!

Today we come to a challenging place at the close of John 2 where we see a very sobering truth about Jesus. It comes in the context of people who have seen Jesus from afar, like of the stuff he does— I mean, he just shut down the profit-making racket that religious leaders were running in the temple courts and put those guys in their place. Those guys have been taking advantage of them for a long time. So they are quick to run to join team Jesus. They don’t know what he demands. They don’t know what it’s going to cost them. They just like him, and they are ready to say, “Sign me up!” The sovereignty of God in his offer of salvation to his elect is on display, and the omniscience of God – the reality that he knows absolutely everything – is presented in a way that should either leave us terrified, or comforted, reassured, and encouraged. Our focus passage today will be the last three verses of the chapter, but will put it in context and read into it from v 13.

John 2:13–25 — ¹³ The Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ¹⁴ In the temple he found those who were selling oxen and sheep and pigeons, and the money-changers sitting there. ¹⁵ And making a whip of cords, he drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and oxen. And he poured out the coins of the money-changers and overturned their tables. ¹⁶ And he told those who sold the pigeons, “Take these things away; do not make my Father’s house a house of trade.” ¹⁷ His disciples remembered that it was written, “Zeal for your house will consume me.” ¹⁸ So the Jews said to him, “What sign do you show us for doing these things?” ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, “Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.” ²⁰ The Jews then said, “It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will you raise it up in three days?” ²¹ But he was speaking about the temple of his body. ²² When therefore he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this, and they believed the Scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken.

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²³ Now when he was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in his name when they saw the signs that he was doing.²⁴ But Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them, because he knew all people ²⁵ and needed no one to bear witness about man, for he himself knew what was in man.

PRAY

John's Gospel is about belief in Christ and faith, which is the vehicle, if you will, that brings us into salvation. We have memorized that fundamental truth in the prologue: those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God. So when we get to v 23 here in Ch 2—many believed in his name — our expectation that there is a big baptism party that follows their belief is abruptly dismissed by Jesus' response to them. Jesus on his part did not entrust himself to them. That is a hard saying. The crowd has seen miraculous signs; they've seen the temple cleansed, seen the religious leaders humiliated for their self-serving ways, and perhaps some have even seen or heard about or tasted the water transformed into wine. They've seen signs, and grown in knowledge of who Christ is. But they have not come to saving faith.

Saving faith. I use that term to differentiate faith in Christ that saves the sinner, and a wasted faith that does not move them into Christ. The crowd described in v 23 is quick to be on Team Jesus, but Jesus knows what is in them and he does not give himself to them. That is a hard saying, is it not? Isn't Jesus waiting nervously, wringing his hands, hoping that everyone will turn to him on any terms they define so that his mission of salvation is not wasted, and heaven is populated? No. The faith that God gives as a gift to unbelievers — which is all of us, by nature — always accomplishes what God intends. The faith that God gives saves. It is saving faith. But there are other categories of faith that are not rooted and fully trusting Christ, but rooted in merely an acknowledgment of who he is – mental assent – or rooted in what he can do for me, or some degree of an awareness that Jesus is a nice guy and I need his help to be made right with God, but I'll also contribute to my salvation by working hard to earn it. None of those things are saving faith, and I want to look at them now. It's hard to imagine anything more important or urgent than the question, is my faith in Christ, genuine, or am I putting my confidence in other things which will leave me hell bound in the end?

I want to consider three types of wasted faith – faith that does not save – from the Scriptures.

First: Demon Faith. James 2:19 says, You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! The faith of demons is a faith that acknowledges that Jesus Christ is Lord, but

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does not submit to him and is not transformed by him. The hosts of hell absolutely know who Jesus, the son of God is, but will not bow to him in worship as he is worthy. They simply acknowledge that he is Lord, but continue in their defiance and in their rebellion against him. They even know that they will ultimately be judged by him, but refused to submit. Jesus has an encounter with 2 demon-possessed men, and they say, "What have you to do with us, O Son of God? Have you come here to torment us before the time?" They know who he is. They know the appointed time of his judgment is coming for them. They remain in rebellion. Acknowledge that Jesus is Lord with mental assent, yet remain in the death grip of sin, existing on their own terms, right up to judgment. This faith in who Christ is does not save.

Second: Happy Meal Faith. In John 6 we have the record of the feeding of 5000 men with five loaves and two fishes. It is an astonishing sign, an astonishing miracle. The crowd recognizes the miracle and begins to say among themselves, "this must be the prophet come from God." The next day they are looking for Jesus and find him in Capernaum. Jesus, who knows what's in their hearts, says the only reason you are looking for me is because you had your belly filled yesterday. You like my sandwiches. You like what I can do for you, but you have not come to bow before me as Lord. You were not denying yourself. You were not putting your flesh to death; you're feeding it! They came to Jesus on a transactional basis. In other words, I'll believe in you in order to get the things out of you that I want. But a faith that does not put the flesh to death is not a faith that can save from the flesh that produces death. A happy meal faith is a wasted faith.

Third: Religious Investment Account faith. In Matthew 7:21-23 Jesus tells us there will be many on that day who say to him, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?" They correctly identify who Jesus is as Lord. But rather to simply come to Christ in a transparent acknowledgment of their sin – rather than coming and saying, "Nothing in my hand I bring; simply to the cross I cling— they are relying on their religious efforts to earn their way into heaven. And so they give a list of everything that they have done for Christ. They pull out their religious investment account book and waving in his face, and say, we did all of this stuff. You owe it to us. We appreciate the fact that you died for sin. We acknowledge that and add our own efforts to it. They are working for him, but do not have a new heart to love God. Such a religious investment account does not save because salvation is rooted in knowing that the flesh is no help at all. Saving faith is total confidence in Christ; nothing else, no one else.

How, or why does someone live their lives with a worthless or wasted faith? I think the parable of the soils recorded in the synoptic Gospels is helpful for understanding why some seem to express some kind of faith for a season, but at some point fall back into unbelief. As the sower spreads the seed of the gospel, some will reject it outright. That's the seed that falls on the path. Some will quickly accept the gospel call with joy, but they will wither and fall away because they have no root. They did not count the cost, and when promised persecution came, they said, "Not for me. That's not what I bargained for." Others see and value what Jesus is offering and respond, but they are more in love with the world and what it has to offer than they are with God and his kingdom. They are choked out at some point. Half-hearted faith is a thing that will last only so long. But there is also a category of faith that brings one all the way into Christ, rejecting all self-effort, denying themselves, rejecting the world, and that faith is transformative. That saving faith produces a harvest that endures.

So some faith lasts only for a season. But there is another kind of faith — the faith that God Himself gives — that brings a person all the way into Christ and keeps them there. What does that saving faith look like?

What is saving faith?

Saving faith is first of all given by Christ. For by grace are you saved through faith, and this is not of yourselves. This kind of faith that saves is not of your own doing. It is a gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one can boast. Ephesians 2:8–9. Salvation is of the Lord.

Hand in hand with God-given faith is a **new birth from above**. The crowd sees signs in John 2 and recognizes that Jesus is the prophet from God. In John 3 Nicodemus acknowledges that the signs Jesus has done indicate he is from God. But Jesus responded to his mental assent that the signs show that he is from God by saying "You must be born again." Nicodemus, your mental awareness will not save you. You must be born from above. You must be given a new heart. Again, salvation is of the Lord.

Saving faith is one that **surrenders fully to Christ**. It does not retain autonomy or hold onto self-authority. Saving faith turns from following the world and following one's own plans to following Christ. That turning is called repentance, and it's what Jesus calls everyone to in **Mark 1:15**. In **Mark 8:34–35** Jesus said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." ³⁵ For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my

sake and the gospel's will save it. It is not possible to come to Christ in surrender and yet not surrender. That's exactly what we see playing out in the war with Iran. They want peace with the United States, but want to dictate the terms. They want to retain nuclear weapons. Many come to Christ in the same way. I surrender to you, but I'm going to retain the right to do what I want to do. Such surrender is no surrender at all. Saving faith surrender is fully to Christ.

Saving faith rests fully on Christ alone. Romans 4:3–5 says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.” ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. ⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness...” Saving faith trusts and rests in Christ's finished work of atonement on the cross. **Hebrews 10:12–14** — But when Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God, ¹³ waiting from that time until his enemies should be made a footstool for his feet. ¹⁴ For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. There is settled confidence that I contribute nothing to my salvation but the sin that made it necessary. I cannot improve myself. I cannot improve on Christ's work. Saving faith rests on the promise of Jesus in **Matthew 11:28** — Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

The crowd that is coming to him with the faith that will not save has not experienced the new birth. They have not surrendered to Christ. They are not resting in Christ's work, but are coming to be on team Jesus because it's kind of exciting right now. But Jesus on his part has not given himself to them, for he knows what is in their hearts. He sees their selfish motivation. It looks like they're following him, but looks can be deceiving. Man looks on the outward appearance, but God looks on the heart. And knows it.

His knowledge of your heart should terrify you. There is no sin hidden from his sight. There is no motivation that he does not understand. There is no hidden corner that has escaped his notice. And as such there will be no lack of account entered on the great day of judgment for every single sin you have committed. Every sin of commission. Every sin of omission. Every second of your life where you have failed to love God, with all of your heart, soul, mind, and strength. Every second of your life for you have failed to love your neighbor as yourself. Every hypocrisy. Every rebellious inclination. All known and transparent to Christ. Should not this knowledge of Christ and the impending judgment

drive every unbeliever quickly to bow before Christ and ask for forgiveness, and plead for a new heart? This precise judgment based on his perfect knowledge of the heart is what everyone will face.

We've covered the terrifying part, pastor. How could this possibly be comforting?

Here is the comfort for the believer: Christ knows you at your worst and still sets His redeeming love on you. It is the great hope for the believer, knowing that Christ knows what is in man, absolutely everything that is in you, and because of his great love for you has set about to redeem you. Not because you have anything good to offer, but out of the riches of his grace and love. He knows you at your worst and still set you as an object of his redeeming love. Every sin was perfectly paid for. There is no hidden sin that slipped by that will catch you in a trap on the last day. Every bitter thought, every evil deed crowned his blood stained brow, and he paid the price fully. He became sin who knew no sin – every single sin of yours he knows about, and became sin – so that you might become the righteousness of God in him. This is the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it is the power of God and salvation to everyone who believes. To everyone who believes.

Examine yourselves in light of this crowd that has a faith that cannot save. Do you simply acknowledge the Christ is Lord, but refuse to bow and submit to him? Is your faith in Christ rooted in some motivation to get something from him? Are you resting in Christ, fully trusting him, or are you trying to add religious works to improve your standing before him or make yourself feel better about yourself? Flee all of these wasted faiths. Come to Christ fully trusting him and rest in him.

Today is the day of salvation. Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.