

“Counterfeit Faith”  
John 2:23-25  
(Preached at Trinity, June 28, 2017)

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

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

1. We've been following the beginning of our Lord's ministry. He attended a wedding with His disciples where he performed His first miracle.  
After Jesus and His disciples left the wedding they traveled about a day's journey to Capernaum where they remained for a few days. They then traveled to Jerusalem for the Passover.
2. As Jesus entered the Temple He found the chaotic scene of commercial transactions going on. The entire area was filled with the sounds of animals braying, the sound of coins changing hands, and loud bantering as pilgrims tried to get the best deal. It was hardly a scene conducive to worship.
3. In a great display of fury, Jesus made a scourge, overturned the tables, and drove out the entire group.
4. At this point Jesus would have been a nobody. He grew up in Nazareth doing lowly work as a carpenter's son. Now, all of a sudden, Jesus marches into the Temple and empties the place. The merchants and money changers had probably conducted this activity for years. Who does this man think He is barging in and throwing us out?
5. They wanted proof of His authority. They demanded to see a sign.  
**John 2:18 NAU** - "The Jews then said to Him, "What sign do You show us as your authority for doing these things?"
6. His answer was clear and obscure:  
**John 2:19 NAU** - "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up."
  - A. The Jews immediately responded in unbelief. Their hearts were hardened and they could not grasp the meaning of our Lord's words.
  - B. The disciples, on the other hand, hid these things in their hearts and when the resurrection occurred they understood clearly. Their belief was based upon the testimony of Scripture.  
**John 2:22 NAU** - "they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken."
7. Now in **Verse 23** we find the danger of faith without the testimony of Scripture.  
"many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing."
  - A. It is not revealed to us the nature of the miracles Jesus did in Jerusalem during the Passover Feast. So far, we've only seen the changing of water into wine at Cana. Whatever the nature of the miracles, many in the crowd were amazed with the abilities of Jesus and believed in Him.
  - B. But what we find here is Jesus rejecting their belief. Not all faith is saving faith. It is possible for a person to have faith that is not genuine.
10. Tonight I want to take a few minutes to preach on the danger of counterfeit faith.

- I. Counterfeit faith is the result of insufficient knowledge about Christ
- A. Notice, they “believed in His name.”
1. A person’s name in the Jewish mind was an expression of his character.
  2. They were embracing the person of Christ. But they had an faulty understanding of who He was. What they saw of Him was a miracle worker. They saw Him as powerful and possessing authority; someone worthy of following.
  3. But they were lacking in knowledge essential for salvation. There is a difference between embracing Jesus as a miracle worker and embracing Him as Savior.
  4. Embracing Jesus as Savior demands sufficient knowledge. This can only come through the Word of God.
- B. The Gospel is inseparably tied to the Scriptures
1. Compare those of **Verse 23** with the disciples in **Verse 22**:  
**John 2:22 NAU** - "So when He was raised from the dead, His disciples remembered that He said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had spoken."
  2. The disciples believed the testimony of the Scriptures.  
 The disciples would come to believe the resurrection which is at the heart of the Gospel.  
**1 Corinthians 15:1-4 NAU** - "Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, <sup>2</sup> by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. <sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures,"
    - a. To believe the resurrection is to comprehend the nature of Christ’s sacrifice on the cross. The resurrection is the validation.
    - b. To believe the sacrifice on the cross is to understand our guilt and condemnation.
  3. The “believers” of **Verse 23** believed only on the basis of seeing miracles, not on the testimony of Scripture. It was a spurious or counterfeit faith. Jesus knew their faith was not genuine.  
**John 2:23-24 NAU** - "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the Passover, during the feast, many believed in His name, observing His signs which He was doing. <sup>24</sup> But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men,"
- C. Genuine faith addresses the issue of sin
1. The multitude only saw their immediate earthly needs  
 They were concerned about healing, about being fed
  2. Christianity addresses the issue of sin
    - a. It recognizes our true need. It recognizes that our sin has separated us from God. True Christianity desires that relationship to be restored. True Christianity hates sin desires to flee from it

- b. True Christianity sees one solution for sin – the atoning sacrifice of Christ. It sees the sacrifice of Christ as the only sufficient means of restoring us to God.

## II. Counterfeit faith is not a lasting faith

- A. At this point in our Lord's ministry people flocked to Him in great multitudes
  - 1. They were amazed at His miracles. Many sought His healing. Many traveled great distances because they believed in Him as a great healer. **Mark 6:53-55 NAU** - "When they had crossed over they came to land at Gennesaret, and moored to the shore. <sup>54</sup> When they got out of the boat, immediately *the people* recognized Him, <sup>55</sup> and ran about that whole country and began to carry here and there on their pallets those who were sick, to the place they heard He was."
  - 2. In the end, however, they would despise Him. Some of the ones who were most zealous left Him. We'll see this later in John's Gospel
    - a. Turn to **Chapter 6**  
**John 6:1-2 NAU** - "After these things Jesus went away to the other side of the Sea of Galilee (or Tiberias). <sup>2</sup> A large crowd followed Him, because they saw the signs which He was performing on those who were sick."
    - b. But notice what happened when He revealed His true nature to them. **John 6:60-62 NAU** - "Therefore many of His disciples, when they heard *this* said, "This is a difficult statement; who can listen to it?" <sup>61</sup> But Jesus, conscious that His disciples grumbled at this, said to them, "Does this cause you to stumble? <sup>62</sup> *What* then if you see the Son of Man ascending to where He was before?"
    - c. They quickly turned away.  
**John 6:66 NAU** - "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore."
- B. Counterfeit faith is only a temporary faith
  - 1. Simon the Sorcerer continued faithfully for a season but then exposed himself to be counterfeit  
**Acts 8:13 NAU** - "Even Simon himself believed; and after being baptized, he continued on with Philip, and as he observed signs and great miracles taking place, he was constantly amazed."  
**Acts 8:21-22 NAU** - "You have no part or portion in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. <sup>22</sup> "Therefore repent of this wickedness of yours, and pray the Lord that, if possible, the intention of your heart may be forgiven you."
  - 2. Again in John 8  
**John 8:30-32 NAU** - "As He spoke these things, many came to believe in Him. <sup>31</sup> So Jesus was saying to those Jews who had believed Him, "If you continue in My word, *then* you are truly disciples of Mine; <sup>32</sup> and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free."  
**John 8:59 NAU** - "Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple."

- III. Counterfeit faith is only interested in what it can get *from* Jesus
- A. This describes much of the Christianity we see in the United States today
1. People embrace Christ not as Lord and Savior but because of a desire to receive something from Him.
  2. Much of the preaching today is focused on our “felt needs.”
  3. Worship is judged according to what it does for us, not according to what is pleasing to God. *We* have become the focus—our likes, our desires.
  4. This is why there is such a lack of service in the church today. People don’t come to give. They come to receive. They want to serve on their terms. They move from church to church seeking to have their needs met. It’s all about them.
- B. Genuine faith perseveres because it is built upon a trust in the fullness of Christ. He alone is all glorious. It isn’t about me; it’s all about Him.
1. Notice the response of His true disciples in **Chapter 6**  
**John 6:66-69 NAU** - "As a result of this many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore. <sup>67</sup> So Jesus said to the twelve, "You do not want to go away also, do you?" <sup>68</sup> Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have words of eternal life. <sup>69</sup> "We have believed and have come to know that You are the Holy One of God."
  2. We have found Jesus to be the only source of life. We have found Him to be the treasure of treasures and continue pursuing Him.
  3. Christianity is about finding a treasure so vast and wonderful that all other earthly treasures become as dung.
  4. The multitude had no regard for Christ. They only had a regard for what He could do for them

#### Conclusion:

1. Some additional characteristics of counterfeit faith:
  1. The counterfeit believer wants Christ, but not without exception
    - a. He wants the grace of Christ, but not the government of Christ  
It’s like the prodigal son who wanted his father’s goods but not his father’s government
    - b. He wants to go to heaven without bowing before Christ. He wants to be saved from the consequences of sin but not from the sin itself.
    - c. He wants Christ but he wants to hold on to his other lovers also
  2. The counterfeit believer does not want Christ as He is offered in the Scriptures
    - a. In the Bible Jesus is the only Mediator between God and man
    - b. As Mediator His has three offices: Prophet, Priest and King
    - c. The counterfeit believer only wants Christ as Priest to procure his pardon from sin
      - (1) He doesn’t want Christ as Prophet to instruct him
      - (2) He doesn’t want Christ as King to rule over him
  3. The counterfeit believer does not want the inconveniences that come with following Christ
    - a. He doesn’t want the inconvenience of living the Christian life

- b. He wants Christ on his terms. He knows nothing of sacrificial service. He will not be inconvenienced. Any service will be done when it's convenient for him
  - 4. The counterfeit believer has not had his heart changed.
- 2. Jesus taught that there would be many who would possess a counterfeit faith
 

**Matthew 7:18-23 NAS** - "A good tree cannot produce bad fruit, nor can a bad tree produce good fruit. <sup>19</sup> "Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. <sup>20</sup> "So then, you will know them by their fruits. <sup>21</sup> "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven; but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven. <sup>22</sup> "Many will say to Me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name perform many miracles?' <sup>23</sup> "And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness."
- 4. Genuine faith looks to Christ alone. It rests upon His righteousness because our own righteousness is defiled by sin. It rests upon His atoning sacrifice upon the cross because our guilt and condemnation is great. He rests upon Christ alone because Christ alone is sufficient.
 

**Isaiah 53:3-5 KJV** - "He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were *our* faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not. <sup>4</sup> Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. <sup>5</sup> But he was wounded for our transgressions, *he* was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed."