

Am I Really a Christian-Part 1
Being Rightly Concerned About Real Faith
Pastor Mike Fabarez

We're here to study the book of Hebrews and as we study it you know that we are studying passage by passage. A kind of preaching we like to call Expository Preaching and one of the advantages of Expository Preaching is that you get to move through the Bible passage by passage and the text itself sets the agenda for you. I don't have to sit around and sit there and wonder what am I going to preach on this week. I preach on whatever comes next and that's certainly an advantage of this kind of preaching. It's an advantage but it doesn't always feel like an advantage because occasionally you run into passages that, well they're a little more difficult to preach than others. It's not that they're difficult to preach because I wouldn't mind preaching them if I were all by myself in a closet or something. It's that they're difficult to hear.

It's the difference between sitting down at a meal at my Mom's house at the kitchen table or going to the old Souplantation down the street. Have you discovered that place? Wow. Gobs of food. All kinds of food and like you've got, I don't know, eighty yards you get to walk down and just choose whatever you want. Now Mom's house is not that way, she serves it up for you, it's all going to happen in sequence and you're going to eat what she puts there in front of you, it's the way it's been. But the Souplantation it's easy to skip by what doesn't look good, what doesn't smell good or whatever, what you don't care to eat. But Mom's house, you know, if you say to Mom, "Mom, I'm going to skip the vegetables." Remember how your Mom responded to that? Same way my Mom responded. "No you're not." But at the Souplantation what great is, my kids have learned if I'm not looking they can just create the dream meal, right? Just a big pile of macaroni and cheese, a soda and the ice cream thing that soft serves. That's it! And if I'm not paying attention that's what they get away with and they would do that every single time for every single meal. That's how they're just bent to get the good stuff. And Dad by the way doesn't rebuke them too harshly because, I'm pretty selective about what I choose when I have the opportunity to, at the Souplantation.

Now unfortunately that's the way a lot of people approach the Bible. It's a big cafeteria, we go through it, find the stuff we like and we just indulge in that and we leave all the vegetable for the seminary students or something. But there's no skipping the vegetables. And we've gotten to the spinach part of the book of Hebrews. That sounded like a good analogy to me at that point, because I hate spinach, but here's a passage of scripture that's tough. And it's tough because most people skip it and you can't preach Expository and skip passages without people noticing it. They throw a flag up, you're missing something. We're not going to skip it, but it's a tough text. It's a tough text because it's telling us to do some things that are so overlooked in the modern church that most people think it's heresy. As a matter of fact even our English translators have mitigated the passage a bit, because it is so countercultural. And I mean the church culture today. But we are obligated to teach all of what the scripture says and we want to approach it without any embarrassment, without any shame, without any apology and say this is what the Bible says. We didn't write the book we're just here discussing it, studying it and trying to live it out. But I just warn you this is going to come as a bit of a shock to a lot of you. Cause it doesn't fit well with the modern approach to Christianity or Church or Christian Counsel.

I tried to be as clear and forthright as I could with the title of the series. Have you seen the title of the series? Even the question itself is a bit offensive to people, right? How dare you ask that of me, you know, that not something you ask people. Are you really a Christian? Well, of course I am,

you know, that's none of your business. I've had all kinds of people respond to sermons that touch on that, and I thought well we might as well go to the wall. We're just going to name the whole series that. So for four weeks we're going to see that title and we're going to say this is the essence of what Hebrews chapter 4 is asking. And you may say, well that's a question I might ask of someone on the street or a coworker or maybe someone I'm trying to share the gospel with, but what you need to know is the context. And the context is this is a message designed for people just like you sitting in church. It's not a message for your evangelistic efforts; this is a message for you, as you come to church, Sunday after Sunday.

Here the writer of Hebrews says now let's just wait a minute. Let's just make sure that you really know that your relationship with Christ is real and not fake. The temptation is for you to take this message and to hear it and to say I know someone who needs it. My old pastor called that the L shaped Amen, right? Which means that's good pastor because, I got someone over here that needs to hear this sermon. What we need to do is to minimize this and we need to say God this is a good question for each of us to ask I don't care how long you think you've been walking with God, it's a question that we all need to be confronted with because the Holy Inspired word of God is asking this question of us. And so let's make this very direct today and say we need to be asking the question regardless of where we think we stand. Are we really in step with Jesus Christ? We're going to take four weeks to get through this and then we're going to take a week at the very end to go back and pick up some very familiar verses of scripture in verses 12 and 13. They're familiar because they're powerful and they have a lot to add to our understanding of the scripture itself. But today three and a half verses. You have your Bibles open; take a look at verses one, two and the first half of three. If not, you need to open your Bibles, if you don't have a Bible, shame on you. We'll have to get you one.

Follow along on your worksheet part of it there is printed. All of it actually we're going to deal with today verses 1 through 3, first half of 3. Here it comes. Therefore, verse 1, since the promise of entering his rest still stands, timeout, "rest" is in chapter 3. And I know this is like 18 weeks ago when we took a break, but think back to chapter 3. The rest was the picture of the people in the Old Testament in the 15th century BC who are wandering through the wilderness, actually they haven't started the real wandering proper, they were just up to the front door of the Promised Land at a city called Kadesh Barnea. And God had said, "Trust Me and I'll lead you into the Promised Land" and they failed the test. We've been talking about that in chapter 3. That's the "rest". It is an analogy of salvation and here's what the text says, therefore since the promise of entering his rest still stands, now we're coming off an illustration so these are illustrative words they are an analogous to being saved because the offer of salvation still stands, the NIV reads, let us be careful that none of you be found to have fallen short of it. For we also had the gospel preached to us, just as they did; but the message they heard was of no value to them, because those heard it did not combine it with faith. Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, "So I declared on oath in my anger, they shall not enter my rest." Then he begins a contrast based on the tense of when that rest is available and what rest is all about. We'll get into all that next week. But take a look at this text and break it down real simply verses 1, verse 2 and verse 3. Try and understand that as God is challenging these pew sitting Christians these Sunday Christians who are going every week, filled with genuine believers and people that think they're believers and some people who know they're not believers. He says listen, you got to examine yourself. I pause at that because the NIV which we use here and I know some of you have other translations in your lap. They really take this text and water it down a bit.

Now I've given you this grammatical insight in the past, New Testament was written in what

language? Greek. You guys know that, it's not a trick question. New Testament was written in what language? Greek, initially and it's translated from Greek into English for us. And Greek is a language that is highly inflected, that means the endings of all the words and the beginnings of all the words tell us what role it plays in the sentence, whether it's the, you know, direct object, or the subject or whatever. So it's highly inflected, the word order is not important for deciphering the sentences meaning. OK, is that clear? The word order is not important for deciphering the sentences meaning. In Greek instead they use word order to give it emphasis. It's much like italics. So what they put forward in the sentence becomes the important part. As a matter of fact that they want it to be really important they stick it right up at the very front and they use it as the very first word. It's akin to how Yoda talks, right? Worried, you are? Right? I'm not very good at it and whatever. But you know, how it goes. Yeah. It doesn't say you're happy to be, "Happy you are". The point is the focus you can picture it that way that Greek is a lot like that, that whatever is important is first thing right at the beginning of the sentence.

Now what I want you to do is put some brackets or a circle around what's very first in this Greek sentence. It's translated into English, "Let us be careful". Let us be careful. Four words. Unfortunately, that a really, really wimpy translation of the word. The word comes from the word, I'll use this word because you know it, it's got cognates in English it's the word "phobia". Does that sound familiar? Phobia. We say, you've got a phobia. Arachnophobia, Claustrophobia, right? All the phobias. I even found one this week called, sitophobia, you know what that is? It's one most of us don't have, it's the fear of food. Sitophobia. I don't have that. All kinds of phobias. Phobia means fear, afraid, if you were to take the Greek word Phobia, which is phobos, phobeo the verb and just look through the New Testament, it's translated, fear, be afraid, it's the word that should make us feel uneasy. It's like climbing up to the top of a big step ladder and having that feeling of, Whoa. Right? Fear. Be Afraid. The very beginning of the sentence it reads this way, Be Afraid. You need to but that in the margin of your Bible, just don't write it on your notes, put it somewhere in the margin of your text. Be Afraid. Let us be afraid he says. Let us be afraid that none of you miss this promise that's still being held out to us. Don't anybody miss it and you ought to be afraid that you don't miss it.

Can you see where that doesn't play real well with kind of how we approach things in church the today? Matter of fact, fear is a bad thing, but in reality in scripture though fear is generally a bad thing, you do understand that it's a fear of the object that God is very concerned with the Bible. As a matter of fact that wasn't well put. Let me illustrate it for you, turn if you would to the book of Luke. And let me show you what Jesus says about fear. These are the verses that don't end up on the Hallmark Cards, they're not crocheted into the art work at the Christian bookstore. Well half of the verse might be, but not the other half. Luke chapter 12, that's where we're turning, verse number 4, Luke 12:4. Please take a gaze at this verse, look at 4 and 5, I tell you my friends, that's important, circle that; we'll get back to that word. Do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that they can do no more. I saw a news report this afternoon on the study this guy did, and he infiltrated this really bad gang and it's supposed to be the baddest street gang in America today. Did anybody see that? I got scared watching that, because they were showing tape of these guys and they were all, you know, they were all the gang guys. They just look at you like they just want to kill you, right? Now I spent some time living in downtown Chicago, you know, fairly had a sense of being, someone streetwise, so I look at those guys and I start feeling like I'm at the top of the step ladder. And if I'm looking through a TV screen that's ok but I wouldn't want to be hanging out near those guys, right? I went up to LA, I had something to do here last week and I had to go up there and I looked around real carefully and I thought, "Wow, this looks like a dangerous place". And I'm wondering how many these people want to kill me right now. I had that fear for a minute.

It's a natural fear, exactly, I had the natural fear. And I look at them, and I think that's what Jesus is appealing to. All of us have a natural fear of bad people that want to hurt us. And he says listen, don't be afraid of that, because if they kill you, which I'm thinking is pretty bad, he says that's all they can do to you. I'm thinking that's bad. You know, that's the point, Jesus. But he says, "No, no, no I will show you whom you should fear, that's the part that doesn't end up in a Day Spring card. Fear him who, after killing the body, has the power to throw you into hell. What did you say? Yes, I tell you, fear him. Now wait a minute. That didn't sound right. Does that sound right to you? That sounds like all wrong. I'm supposed to fear God; because not only can he kill me then he can like torture me forever. Yeah, Jesus says, if you want to know who to be afraid of, that's who you're afraid of. Because the point is, if you put your fear in the right place, all these other fears they go away, because really ultimately this is the ultimate fear. Now what I'm trying to do is to make peace with Him. Now if I make peace with Him, as he goes on to talk about in this text, see all these other fears because very secondary in my life.

But the point is you got a concern here, and the concern is spelled out in the end of this verse, verse number 5. H-E-double tooth picks, right? Hell. Oh hockey sticks, you do the hockey sticks. H-E-double hockey sticks, then for you. That's the focus of Jesus' concern. We ought, to be concerned that we don't miss heaven and end up in hell. Now I got people already that are formulating the e-mails to write to me about that, right? That's not right, because they hear people that preach hell, fire and brimstone and they think that's not right. You're scaring people into the kingdom. Let me read the verse again, verse number one. Let us be afraid, that none of you miss or fall short of the promise of this rest that still stands for you. That's what the scripture says, that be afraid that you don't miss it. And the only way you're going to be afraid to miss it is being to concentrate on things that the modern Christian church doesn't like to concentrate on. Number 1 on your outline, let's just put it this way: Here's what God is wanting us to feel, which is going to be based on what we think. And we need to think, number 1 on your outline. Think seriously about heaven and hell.

1. Think Seriously About Heaven and Hell

That's what we need to think seriously about, number one on your outline. Think seriously about heaven and hell, because that's what's constantly put before us. Start at the beginning of the Bible, go to the very end, whether their understanding was short term in terms of this life or the afterlife is developed in the later prophets into the New Testament the point is you got two choices. You're going to end up here in a place of blessing or you're going end up here in a place of torment. You got a choice to make. And that sends a shiver down your spine or at least it ought to. And the Bible says you ought to be afraid that you don't miss it. We ought to be fearing, we ought to be, here's one, here's a new word, wasn't in my dictionary, hellaphobic. I just made that one up this week. Hellaphobic, you're darn right, I don't want to go there. I need to be concerned that my Christianity is real because I'm looking down the corridor of life and saying it dumps into 2 places, one goes to a place of blessing and protection and one goes into a place of suffering. And I don't want to go there. And I need to be concerned, concerned, that's how the NIV translates it, doesn't it, or be careful. That's a bit of a weak word, you just need to know the power of the word, you ought to be afraid. What does that mean? Crippled with fear? I'm not saying that. It ought to be the thing that provokes us to be careful. Remember how Jesus started this in verse number 4 of chapter 12, Luke 12. He said, my friends, because here's the misperception about the whole thing about teaching on hell and fire and brimstone. You know who the original hell, fire and brimstone preacher was? Jesus. That's usually the right answer in church, right? 90% of the time you'll be right just say Jesus. Who is the original hell, fire and brimstone teacher? Jesus. He was saying this all the time. And he is saying this not because he hates us, not because he dislikes us, he's saying it cause he's

saying to us you're my friends. And so I want to make sure you're concerned about where you end up when you die, my friends. Same reason you, when you have a fifteen year old who's getting ready to get his driver's license want him to see that red pavement movie in that driver's ed class. Where it's when you sit there and give them those talks, or when you watch an accident on the side of the road and your fifteen year old is studying to take his DMV test you say look there and you give your lecture, you better be careful. Why do you do that? Cause you hate him? Do you do that because you like to scare him? Or do you do that so that he's careful and he doesn't end up in a mangled wreck by the side of the road. Jesus loves us, and that's why he wants us to ponder seriously, think seriously, about the issues of heaven and hell.

Are you in Luke 12? Go a couple chapters later 16, Luke 16. Jesus talked about it all the time. Have you heard that before? Jesus talked about hell more than he talked about heaven. He talked about the peril of falling into a place of torment after this life is over. It was the focus of his preaching. Here's an example. Luke 16, verse number 19 he tells a story there was a rich man, who was dressed in purple and fine linen, and he lived in luxury every day. And at his gate was a beggar name Lazurus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table, even the dogs came and licked this guy's sores, he was a bad shape. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. That sounds like a good place because the Jews always taught that this was a great place of having a banquet and a feast with the patriarchs. It's a great place to be, now he's got food. He's at Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried in hell, there it is, he talked a lot about this, where he was in torment and he looked up and he saw Abraham far away with Lazurus by his side so he calls to them, he says, "Father Abraham have pity on me, send Lazurus to dip the tip of his finger in water to cool my tongue because I'm in agony in this flame." But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your life time, you received your good things when Lazurus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all that, forget the lectures on the opportunities you missed, here's the deal between us there's this great chasm that's been fixed so that those who want to go from here to you cannot. Even if Lazurus wanted to help you he couldn't go, nor could anyone cross over from there to us, which seems obvious, verse 27. And he answers, then I beg you father, send Lazurus to my father's house, check this out, for I have 5 brothers and let them warn them so that they will not also come to this place of torment. And Abraham replied, they have, and note this, Moses and the prophets. Now Moses and the prophets were dead, what did they leave behind though? Scripture! They got the Bible, man. Let them listen to them. No Father Abraham he said, but if someone from the dead goes to them they'll repent. Notice what this all hinges on, repentance. And he said to him, "If they do not listen to the Bible, to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead, and that's a bit poetic cause that's what Jesus ends up doing. Isn't it? And no one's going to listen to him anyway.

This is real to Jesus. Jesus pointing people back to the Bible and the Bible is replete it is full of teaching of your destiny and mine. You've got 2 choices, 2 places, we ought to be fearful that we don't end up in the wrong place and that ought to drive us to introspection. We ought to make sure we don't miss the off-ramp to the kingdom of God. We cannot miss it, because Jesus said it all the time. Here's a great statement in Matthew 25, it says when I return on my glorious throne and I sit before the nations I will separate people like a shepherd. I will separate people like a shepherd separates sheep from the goats, remember that? And I'll say to those on my right, enter into the kingdom of God, prepared before the foundation of the world, enter into your rest, into my Father's glory. Then I'll say to those on my left, depart from me, into a cursed fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. You and I face that. Oh, you're scaring people into the kingdom. Great. It's exactly what Hebrews chapter 4 verse 1 says that we ought to do. We ought to be fearful we don't

miss it. You got to get right with God. I've got to make sure I'm right with God. I've met plenty of pastors that do not know Jesus Christ personally. It has nothing to do with how long you've been in church. It has nothing to do with how much Bible you know. It has to do with the reality of your faith and if it's not real, and if your repentance isn't genuine you will wake up in this terrible place, Matthew chapter 7 says many will come to me on that day and say, "Lord, Lord, did we not..." and He'll say depart from me I never knew you and that will be a wakeup call for a lot of folks. Make sure that's not you. I want to make sure that's not me. Think seriously about heaven and hell.

The back of your worksheet, as always, I've provided a box full of books and resources and there's some there you can tell by the title that are pertinent to this first point. And some of the titles on there relate to the veracity or the reliability of the documents that we're reading, because you and I can say well, you know what, I don't think Jesus would say those things. And then we've got to discover whether or not the Bible is an accurate record of what Jesus actually said. And if Jesus is, who he says he is, and he said what's recorded in the New Testament, and he died and rose again, we better be listening to Him. And that's an accurate record of what he said then we got no argument here. People are going to 1 of 2 places, and you ought to fear that you're not going to the wrong place. Some of the greatest revivals in all of history have hinged on sermons that have come from this text, directly or indirectly where people stood up like Whitfield, like Edwards, like Westley, and they said, "Guys, its heaven or hell. Have you thought about that lately?" And it changes the course of history. And today we don't even like talking about it because we think for some reason we shouldn't be talking about things that might make people afraid. We know exactly what you do, someone prays a prayer, walks an aisle, we got a list of things we tell them so they'll never ever question their walk with God, right? I was trained in that. All the verses of assurance, quick feed them all these verses. Well, wait a minute, I don't find that in the Bible. I find that we ought to periodically stop and say "Now, wait a minute is this relationship real or not?" Think seriously about heaven and hell. It is our Christian obligation to do so. We ought to fear that none of us will be found to have fallen short of God's rest an analogy for the kingdom of God.

Verse number 2, Hebrews chapter 4, he makes an analogy back in our minds to the 15th century BC when here Moses with Caleb and Joshua are standing in the shadow of the promised land and they are about ready to march in and here he says, you know what, they are just like us in that they were presented with a proposition, with a contract, with a promise. And the promise was, if you trust me, we'll go into the kingdom together in that sense it was this physical place called Canaan, the Promised Land. If you trust me, we'll go to this place of promise. The people had that good promise of God. The commitment of God, you trust me, we'll go in. That's called the Gospel. Their gospel was temporal it was physical it was based on the promised land of Canaan. For us it's spiritual, it's an analogy, it's a real place but the point is my spiritual salvation hangs on this. And it's the same thing, trust Him. And it's a trust that's got to go beyond mentally saying, I know that message because the bottom of verse 2 says, they had that message it was received in that they heard it, but it was of no value to them because those who heard it did not combine it with faith. They didn't really trust him. Lot of people said they did, a lot of people looked like they did, but when I came down to it, representative of the nation, only 2 guys were willing to stand up among 12 and say I trust God, we can take it and we're going in, we're just going to hang on to God I don't know how it's all going to work out, but we're going to trust him. Only 2 out of 10, were willing to say that. Now if you asked the people that were walking up the front door at Kadesh Barnea, ready to walk into the Promised Land, and said, "Are you God's people?" You know what they'd say? Absolutely we are. We are God's chosen people. Is God with you? God is with us. Look at the cloud, Look at the pillar, Man, God is all around us, he's guiding us, He loves us, we're his people. But if you could peel back the veneer and look into their heart. Very few of them actually trusted

God. And you know how you could tell people that trust God for their salvation? They can trust Him for everything less than that.

And I find people saying, well I trust God. I trust God for my salvation and you watch their lives and there's no evidence of trust in their life for the daily concerns of what they face everyday. And I'm saying to myself you think you can trust God for eternity and you can't trust God for your job. You can't trust God for your income. You can't trust God for whatever it is you're facing in your life. What kind of faith is that? You cannot dichotomize your faith, either you trust Him and you're going to follow Him. And you know why the real faith is demonstrated, you how I can say absolutely sure that real faith is demonstrated by trust in everything less, because that how Jesus approached people all the time. He said to people like the rich young ruler, "Follow Me", and he looked through the vainer of his life because he's God and Jesus says, "You don't trust me." And to test him, he said this, sell all your stuff then. And you know what he said, "I can't do that". Well then you don't really trust me. How about Luke Chapter 9 verse 57-62? Where 3 people come up to Jesus and they want to follow Jesus and Jesus says, fine then, we're going to go without a house for you. And the guy says, "Well I can't do that". Well we're going to go right now. You're going to have to forsake some of the relationships you have in your family. "Well I can't do that." That's why Jesus was popping off all the time with statements like this, if you love son or daughter more than me, you're not even worthy of me. Can't be in my family, why? Cause real faith in God to march us into the kingdom of God is evidenced by my ability to trust him for everything less. Are you tracking with that paradigm? I can trust Him then for the other stuff. He's first in my life and I can see that as is evidenced by my trust. I follow Him. That's why he comes up to people, people say, you are the messiah. He says, well great, then leave your nets and follow me. Can you do that? They go, "Yeah, we can do that." Then off they go and he says, "I'm glad to give you the kingdom. Cause God's hidden it from the wise and the learned, but he's revealed it to you." You trust in the king. They had the message, the good news preached to them, just as we do. Ours is on a larger magnitude obvious. But the message they heard wasn't combined with real faith. It was more this, head knowledge. Number 2 on your outline: Objectively evaluate your Christianity

2. Objectively evaluate your Christianity

Objectively evaluate it, the focus is on your faith. Is it genuine? Take a look at it. What is the essence of your Christianity? You think you're going to heaven, great. Tell me why? You know what people normally do? They look to the dumbest things, they look to thing like, well, I go to the right church. I read my bible. I pray. That's not what it's about. You realize that, right? Here's a passage I want you to jot down. Revelation chapter 3, verse 1 says, to the angel, this is Jesus postcards to the churches in Asia minor, he says, to the church in Sardis, write this, here comes the message, Revelation 3:1, these are the words of Him who holds the 7 spirits of God, and the 7 stars, he says I know your deeds Jesus says, you have a reputation of being alive but you are dead. Here's the problem. If you think you're going to heaven because you're associating with people who are the right people, the right crowd, you go to church, you have the right alliance, you're kidding yourself. The Bible looks at churches where everyone is saying that looks like a good church, wow, look at that church. And the Bible says, Jesus looks at some of those churches and says, "Everybody thinks you're rip-roaring and you're great, but you know what I know, you're dead, you're not alive. Entire churches, God's just going, well no, no real faith there. It's funny when you talk to people about what they're trusting in as it relates to their salvation. You will find them point to the dumbest things, and you've got to say, it cannot be the reality of our lives. We have to look past the vainer. We have to do this, we have to look into the place of 2 Corinthians chapter 13 verse 13, we've got to ask this kind of question we've got to do this kind of thing. Because you ask

those people in the wilderness at Kadesh Barnea, “Are you in God’s team”, “Are you on God’s team”, “Are you in God’s family”. Yes-yes-yes. And let me throw a few more out there, cause here’s some of the dumb things we point to, to say I know I’m going to heaven. We say things like this, I’ve experienced God’s presence in my life. Do you think the people at Kadesh Barnea could say they have experienced God’s presence in their life? They had seen God’s miracles taking place before their very eyes. That’s why I think in Matthew 7 Jesus throws that in. I don’t care if you’re a miracle performer he says. God might say to us, “Depart from me, I never knew you.” Why? Well maybe we never ever looked at our faith. Maybe we never really examined it. Maybe we never put it to the test because we were told if you walk the aisle, pray the prayer, or say the right words, go the right church, carry the right Bible, or do whatever it is they’re telling us to do, then your faith will obviously be there by default. The text says, no, look for it, examine it.

2 Corinthians 13 verse number 5, look at these words, examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith. This is the second letter that we have that’s extant that we still have to the Corinthians, there was at least 4 letters. The apostle Paul is writing at least four letters to this early church. Their worshipping, they’re having communion, and hear what he says, make sure you’re real Christians. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you? Unless of course, you failed the test. He’s talking to church goers here. And I trust that you’ll discover that we have not failed the test. Look at the reality of our faith, examining our faith, examining ourselves it is such an integral part of the body. It should be a part of the church. It ought to be a regular part of what we do. Lamentations chapter 3 verse 40, same thought, examine yourselves, examine your ways, look in your life see if your repentance is real. And yet today if you do that to people, man, they get really uncomfortable. You know the apostle Paul even says to Timothy, a pastor, his own protégé, his own disciple, he’s already established as a senior pastor of Ephesus. And Paul writes to him and basically says, you know if you keep doing this you’ll prove your faith is real. What? God has no problem telling us, I don’t care if you’re “walking with God” for years, examine the reality of your faith. Is it genuine? Is it real?

Here’s another thing that you could say, about your Christianity that still doesn’t mean you’re going to heaven. You can say, my Christianity has changed me. You can say that, matters of fact here’s a good passage to write down in that regards. 2 Peter chapter 2, verse 20 is talking about false teachers, false teachers that God is going to punish in hell one day. And he says this, “They’ve escaped the corruption that is in the world.” There’s people that have cleaned their lives up. Well, look I’ve had an experience with God. I felt God’s presence. I’m in the right group. Hey, my life is really changed. Can you see that even that, a life change, because a life change could be from the outside in, can still be something that’s artificial and manufactured and not genuinely of God. It can still happen. Does it feel like spinach yet, vegetables? See, you couldn’t even laugh at that cause it feels like carrots, stewed carrots, gross. I preached on it so many times but do you know that the change that we can have because of Christianity is either going to be from the outside in, it will be the external conformity to a set of rules, I can stop cussing, I can stop smoking, I can stop carousing, I can stop doing all that, and I can say look at my life, it’s changed and it’s still a manufactured external plastic fruit. As a posed to the internal life change that Ezekiel talked about where my heart would be changed. And God would dwell in me and my faith in him would be resolute, real and abiding and therefore my life would be transformed from the inside out. You and I are going to be shocked. Not at the people that are Christians, we’re going to be shocked on judgment day of the people that are not. Let’s make sure are Christianity is real, by examining and evaluating our Christianity. Are we like the people at Kadesh Barnea who were in the right group, heard the right message, agree with it, have a mental assent to the facts. But our lives are not transformed and our faith is not abiding. Make sure that’s not a reality for you. Think seriously

about heaven and hell, objectively evaluate your Christianity.

One more verse number 3, Hebrews chapter 4. let me get down to what's floating around in the back of your mind somewhere, hoping that maybe all of this is too intense, too harsh, Mike's just had a bad Christmas, something's wrong. It's not God's mind, that Mike's angst, I don't know, whatever you're thinking. Let's deal with some of this. Verse number 3, Hebrews 4. Now we who have believed genuine faith are trust is real, we enter that rest. Current present tense, real Christians enter into that rest. The rest again, is an analogy of waking into Canaan which is the reality of us having genuine conversion to where we are children of the kingdom. We are going to the New Jerusalem one day. If our faith is real that's the reality for us. We enter that rest. And then he says, note this, flip it around, just as God has said so I declared on oath in my anger they shall not enter my rest, and he's looking back now at the contract with those people in Kadesh Barnea saying you know what? God didn't let them in. See here's the contract. You trust me, we'll go in. You don't trust me, you don't go in. And God is a God who lets folks into the kingdom because of the trust that is wrought in their hearts. But He's also a God who on the flip side just as, he says, God has said so I declared in my anger they shall not enter my rest. What you and I need to do, is we need to stand back, can you see the contract there? Number 3, we need to respect God's contract.

3. Respect God's Contract

We need to respect God's contract. God is a God who makes the rules and He's is a God that historically has shown us that He is willing to enforce those rules. You know what happen to the generation; you can read this in Number 14, and more specifically the summary of it in Deuteronomy chapter 1. You can read what happens to the Kadesh Barnea crowd when God says, Fine then, you don't want to believe Caleb and Joshua? You don't want to follow, you don't want to trust me, fine then, you can't go in, you're going to wander in the wilderness for 40 years. Remember that? You know what they did in response to that? You have any guess? Deuteronomy chapter 1 makes it very clear. Do you know what they did? They repented, they said, "Oh God we're sorry, you're serious. Wow, you're telling us, we can't go in, now". Oh, no, no, no, you know what Deuteronomy 1 says, they picked up their weapons and they came to the leaders, "Ok, we're ready now, we'll go in now." You know what God did? "Oh, all right, come on in." Is that what God did? No way, man. God honored his contract. His contract was, if you don't trust me at the front door of the Promised Land, you cannot come in. And when the door slammed in their face [Crashing sound] they all went, oh, man, he's serious, isn't he. OK, we'll do it, we'll do it. Your kids ever do that after they're totally busted, right? Oh, ok Dad, I'm sorry, we'll do it. And God says, "Listen, I'm a God of my promise." That's how this chapter started. The promise remains, epongelion, it is a contract, a quid-pro-quo, you trust me we go in, you don't trust me you don't go in. And when the door slams, that's it, done. Now we have various myths that we believe about God. That will make the reality of that, if we believe the myths seem absolutely unthinkable, and so really quick, let's go through 5 myths. Ok? Five myths that we believe that hopefully will erase this whole message. Now I just want to tell you if you're hoping with one of those in the back of your mind is going to mitigate this sermon, they're not true.

Myth #1: God wouldn't judge anybody. God is too nice, man. I've seen the Christian bookstore, I've seen the pictures. I've read the cards. I see the bookmarks. I've heard the music. God is a whole lot nicer than that. God would never slam the door on people and say, "Depart from me, I never knew you." 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9 make sure you jot that one down and grapple with that myth. Because the Bible is very clear, I will do that. God will punish those it says, who do not obey God, who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. He's going to deal out retribution to

those folks. They'll be punished the Bible says in 2 Thessalonians 1:9 with everlasting destruction, shut out from the presence of the Lord, the door will close at Kadesh Barnea so to speak and it will not open.

Myth #2: Well, he may have judged people then, in Bible times, but He wouldn't do it now. This is the a.k.a. God is evolving myth. God is evolving. God may have thrown some tantrums when He was young in the Old Testament. But you know what? He's gone to college now, and He's refined. God may have been mad, even in New Testament times but you know what? God has really mellowed out in his old age. How about this one, Malachi 3:6, I the LORD do not change. Is that clear enough for you? Jesus said the same thing about the second person of the godhead; I am the same yesterday, today and forever. If God gets mad at sin and keeps his promises in the Old Testament, he'll keep his promise for us. And if you don't trust him and your faith is not genuine the door will close.

Myth #3: Very popular today. Mark my words on this one. Check out every cult group and ask them what they believe about hell. Here's the modern view today. Hell, myth #3, equals annihilation. You know what that means right? Bug lamp. [Bzzzz] Dead. Done. Annihilation, the belief that God would never punish people in a place where they're shut out and have to experience conscious reality forever and ever, God would not do that. He may shut people out of the kingdom but they'll stop, they'll cease to exist. Many evangelicals are buying this now hook line and sinker and therefore failing to be defined as evangelicals any more, I would think. Revelation 20:10, here's some words Jesus used, day and night for ever and ever. Now those are strange words to describe annihilation, day and night for ever and ever. He describes that about a place called the lake of fire which is the final resting place, it's not a resting place, it's the final place of discomfort for people, the beast, the false prophet and everyone else is tossed in the lake of fire whose names are not written in the lamb's book of life. And the scripture describes it as a place of punishment day and night for ever and ever. Now you want to take your scissors and cut that verse out and throw it away, have at it, right? Cafeteria Christianity everybody else is doing it, you can do it. But God one day will judge us, based on His word not ours.

Myth #4: Kind of rings of the Deuteronomy 1, Numbers 14 myth. There's probably a second chance. People may end up there but they'll get their toes singed and then bang they're right in the kingdom man. Because they're going to see its bad there, man, they're going to flip, real quick. Quick flip right out of the flames of hell. Right into God's table man, you're there. We already read this verse, Luke 16:26, there's a chasm fix that no one can cross. We can't go there to help those people and they can't come and dine with us. No second chances. This whole absolute lie from the pit of hell about purgatory is a good example of the kind of false hope we give people. Wow, did he just say that? Yeah. I did.

Myth #5: There's the ultimate myth, myth #5, well it can't be all that bad. You've seen the bumper stickers right? I don't mind if I got to hell, all my friends will be there, man. We'll party. I'm going to high five Satan when I get there. Yeah, baby, party day and night. Yeah. It'll be a lot of partying alright. Here's how Jesus describes it in passages like Matthew 13:49-51. It'll be a great party where there's wailing and gnashing of teeth. It's going to be painful. Why? Because you're shut out from God's presence, here the key phrase, and the glory of his power. You don't want to trust God, you don't get God's benefits and you know what God's benefits are? Everything good. And you want to deny the savior you get none of his blessings. And that's a place Jesus describes as outer darkness. Happy New Year.



Spurgeon said it well when he said; it is shocking to reflect that a change in the weather has more effect on some people's lives than the dread alternative of heaven or hell. That's a good line. We're more bummed out about the weather forecast on our off day on Monday, than whether or not we see our lives heading in one of two directions. This is serious stuff. And if you've never come to the place of genuine repentance and authentic faith, today is the day for you. And if maybe like me, you have a testimony which I had for years thinking well I believe, I trust, I'm a part of the family of God, just like those people who wandered up to the front door of the Promised Land at Kadesh Barnea everything looked good on paper. But their hearts were not transformed by a real genuine and abiding faith. Maybe it's time to ditch the veneer of your Christianity and exchange it for genuine Christianity. I became a Christian in Bible School. Hello? You're supposed to be a Christian to get into that institution. I can be deceived, you can be deceived; we all need to examine ourselves.

Let's bow our heads and do a little bit of that right now. God, as Psalm 139 says we want to let you right now have full reign in our hearts to come in and examine our path our way our thoughts our lives and to see if our faith perhaps in this case is artificial. God, we do not want to minimize the threat of outer darkness that Jesus spoke of constantly in his ministry we don't want to neglect that, we don't want to minimize it. We want to have it do what it was intended to do. And that is sober us up. And say this isn't just about having a better paycheck and healthy children or a good life. This is about securing a place in the kingdom that is based on genuine faith and real repentance. And God if today we have any hope in ourselves any hope our resume any thinking in our hearts that might want to convolute or mix our merit and our achievement with what Christ has done, let us repent of that today. And say to you God, we want to trust you only, we bring nothing to this equation, but our sin and hopelessness and we are here today to reach out to you and to call out on your name and say God save us purely out of your grace. Not because of any righteous deeds we've done or could do but because of your great mercy for us. And God let our faith be genuine and real that is manifested in and born out in the daily decisions of our lives that prove that we trust you not only for some ethereal eschatological future thing, but we trust you as our Lord and savior on a daily walk of faith. You're God, you're king, we trust you. If we can trust you to walk through the threshold of death into the kingdom of God, we can certainly trust you for every other bump that is minor by comparison. God we want to hold tightly to your hand in complete authentic childlike trust. Believing that if you have accomplished for us what we could not do for ourselves. God help each one of us here to make sure before we ever leave this auditorium that we are right with you. God if that's the case we look forward to hearing testimonies at the next baptismal service people are expressing the way you've worked in their hearts tonight tomorrow. God maybe it's a person you're just tracking down he's been hard headed and stubborn, I know I was. Running from your spirit thinking the externals look good everything's right and I'm not breaking any major rules, that you must accept me. God help us today to examine ourselves so that we know that our faith is fully completely in you. God we thank you so much that the offer of salvation still stands, that the promise of forgiveness is still valid. That today, if we call upon you, you save us. God the door hadn't shut yet the ark is still open and we can still enter in. God we thank you for that, you're gracious and kind loving God. We reach out to you now in our hearts with genuine faith in Jesus Name. Amen.