



Am I Really a Christian-Part 4

Working & Trusting to Prove the Reality of My Faith

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Imagine for a minute with me that we lived a long, long, long time ago and imagine further that I had some inside information that God was really, really, really mad at the world because it was full of sin and corruption. Imagine also that I somehow got some gracious instructions because God is loving and gracious that He wanted me to build a big barge in my backyard. That could safely navigate us through this coming judgment, because God was going to judge the world because of sin. He's going to let this stuff fall called rain that we hadn't quite experienced yet and the whole place was going to be flooded. Then imagine further that you heard that news and you were convicted in your heart and you felt bad about the sin in the world, you felt bad about the sin in your life, you wanted to turn from that sin and you wanted to get on the barge. So you come over, you walk up the ramp, you got your suitcase, you find your little stall there and I say you're welcome to join us here on the barge you find your space on the barge. At that point, I could say to you, you're saved before the first drop of rain ever fell. But what I would mean by that is, that you found a place that is secure and guaranteed so that when the rain does come you will be saved. Last week we tried to make that distinction. We are saved but what that means is we're guaranteed a secure place for when we need that salvation ultimately when God's judgment comes.

Now imagine with me that we didn't live a long, long time ago. Imagine with me that we lived in the 21st century and that I had some inside information on reliable sources that God was really mad at the world because of all the sin and corruption in the world. Imagine further that I had not all the inside information that He was going to judge the world, but that I declared to you that God had sent a man to come and prepare a invisible barge for us and that if you would see your sin and repent of it and join him on this invisible barge you would be saved from the coming future wrath that God would expend on the world. If I said that to you, would you felt convicted in your heart and repented of your sin and you said I want to be saved from the coming judgment of God, I can say about you, you're saved.

The problem is, if I want you to be sure that you're saved it's a very different experience than when you got on the ark, way back in Genesis chapter 6, 7 and 8. The problem is, in the first ark, this is not a problem for them it was an advantage, if I you to be assured that you'd be saved, you would have some very tangible objective things you could point to. You could say this looks like a seaworthy vessel, whatever that means first barge. You could say, I smell the animals here, I feel the cypress wood, I can touch the gooey pitch that's on the joints of this place. I sense and feel objectively that I'm in a place that's probably good as opposed to the valley where my house use to be. You have some objective indicators. The problem is in this new covenant relationship with God. If I say you're saved it's very hard for us to have any kind of objective indicators that you're really in a safe place, because this is an invisible barge. This isn't tangible, you can't look around at your stall and say, I'm in it, I guess I'm ok. In Hebrews chapter 4 we've been studying the author's concern which is ultimately God's concern that all of us enter the barge. He calls it rest, enter God's rest. Get on the boat, get on the ark and if you do you will be saved. Now the future is what's of concern. He says enter that rest, he's says we ought to be concerned that we're not in that rest, and you need to be sure that you are and we looked at that genuine faith. We needed to understand that it was something we couldn't earn, we couldn't pay for it, we couldn't do enough good things to find a place on this barge. We had to be confident that God has done the work for us.

That was the first ten verses. The last seven verses of Hebrews chapter 4, and I made this case last week, or at least I mentioned it, I'll try to make the case this week. I'm sensing that there is a clear shift in the passage between verse 10 and verse 11 where no longer are we looking at entering the ark, now we're looking at getting in that place of being saved and awaiting our future salvation. There is on our chart, if you'll go back two weeks, seven rests, inferred or mentioned in the fourth chapter of Hebrews. Do you remember the chart? Just say "Uggh" if you remember. The ultimate rest is where we're headed, that's salvation. We're in this spiritual rest now and we're waiting for and anticipating that. Now there's a line that should be drawn I think in your minds between verse 10 and verse 11. And if you haven't already opened up to Hebrews chapter 4 you ought to. In Hebrews chapter 4 we ought to have a mental line that's is drawn between verse 10 and 11 and most of you if you have an NIV in your lap for instance there's a paragraph break just before verse 12 and the reason it is there is because often we see that verses 12 and 13 are a bit disjointed. There's those famous verses about the bible and after that we start talking about the Jesus the great sympathetic high priest and that looks like a whole other topic. Well I think the divisions of the chapters which took place hundreds and hundreds of years ago is probably a good division that we should see all of chapter 4 as a whole. Matter of fact we're still talking about spiritual rest and we're still talking about the safety that we have with Christ because of the future impending judgment. But what's happened between verses 10 and 11 is a shift between getting into the ark and the journey that we have once we're in the ark until we come out on the other side at God's ultimate rest.

Let me try and make this case for that line that you drew, if you didn't draw it, maybe in your mind you drew it. Let's start at the very bottom. Getting into the rest is a one-time thing. We trust Christ, we get into the ark, we get into the barge we have our spiritual rest. Now this doesn't sound like a one-time event. Let's start at the bottom of the passage, we'll work back, we'll read the whole thing in a minute, but let's just work backwards through the text. Look at verse number 16, Hebrews chapter 4 verse 16, let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. I suppose you could think in some eschatological way of the ultimate time of need but that sure sounds like an invitation for an ongoing help from God, does it not? Time of need, how many times of need do you have? One or several, is it punctiliar or is it an ongoing thing? You have several times of need I suppose. Christ wants to help you not just for one, he'd like to be of help to you in many.

The reference there seems to be clearly an ongoing need throughout the journey. Look up in verse 15. Verse 15 speaks of Christ, and we're supposed to have some hope here because the sympathetic high priest knows about our weakness in that, look in the middle of verse 15, he was tempted in every way as we are, yet without sin. Which is the goal for this journey to be more and more like Christ and he was one who was tempted one time or several? And the encouragement I should get is that I'm going to have help in my temptation. Is your temptation a one-time event or an ongoing thing? Ongoing, we have many, many seasons and many, many instances and many, many circumstances of ongoing temptation and Christ wants to be the sympathetic high priest who helps us through those many steps, occurrences and episodes of temptation. Keep going back up, look at verse 14. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. Do we need to hold firmly one time in our Christian experience or do we need to hold firmly continually and ongoing in our Christian life? Continually, ongoing. We need to do it at all times. Look at verses 12 and 13, these famous verses about the word of God, which by the way if you remember our layout of this series, next week we're going to do a little excurses on that.



The concern of the word penetrating my life and judging the thoughts and attitudes of my heart, verse 12, is something that should be of concern to me because of verse 13, nothing in creation is hidden from God's sight and everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account. Do we give an account for one episode in our lives or do we give an account for the entire going of our lives? The entire going, the entire thing, there's an ongoing concern here. The word of God does its work, it judges the attitudes and thoughts, not just one time but on going because I know I'm going to have to give an account for my life. The focus is ongoing.

Back up to verse 11. Let us therefore, now this is a key phrase, matters of fact you can bracket these three words, make every effort. That's one Greek word, *spoudazo*. Let us therefore, make every effort to enter that rest. I don't think that's the seat on the ark anymore. I think that now is we want to enter the rest, we want to sail through this thing, we want to safely arrive at God's ultimate rest that we looked at two weeks ago. So that no one will fall by their example, the Old Testament example, of disobedience. Which was not just a one-time disbelief at Kadesh Barnea that we spent so much time looking at in Numbers 14. It was an ongoing, they sat down to eat and drink as Paul said and they got up to play, they were disobedient, disobedient, disobedient. Now you got your seat on the ark, that seat that was there for you, enter God's rest. You're there, now here's the thing, don't fall, don't stumble, don't trip-up, you need to be obedient people. Don't fall in the pattern of disobedience. And the word, *spoudazo*, make every effort, is a word used 11 times in the New Testament, and almost every single time it's talking about me living the ongoing diligent life of obedience. Let me give you one example, turn with me to 2 Peter chapter 1, a parallel passage with a parallel word, I think saying the exact same thing that verses 11 through 16 in Hebrews is trying to say. 2 Peter chapter 1, look now at verse number 10, therefore, my brothers, Peter says, be all the more eager. Five words translate *spoudazo* here. Be all the more eager or as some translations put it, be diligent to make your calling and election sure. If you do these things, now 2 Peter chapter 1 has already discussed all these things, these virtues of the Christian life, this obedient set of ongoing virtues, the things that I do, the good works in my life. He says you'll never fall. That's a parallel concept from over there in Hebrews chapter 4 verse 11. And not only that, you'll receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our lord and savior Jesus Christ. They'll have a party for it, yeah. This guy didn't just walk through the gate, this guy's marching through the gate and we're going, "Yes!" And what comes of this *spoudazo*, of this diligence or making sure is a lifestyle of good works that makes me say, I know I'm in this thing.

Now, back to our original point, if you want to know you're in the ark, going to be saved from the coming judgment, in Noah's day you could look around at your cell, your stall or whatever, and say I feel safe, I'm here, I'm in it. If you want to be sure you're a Christian, what are the objective things that I can look at that say, "I'm here"? Let's work through the passage. Three things in our text, if you've found your worksheet, there are three things that verify the reality of your faith. And hopefully I've proved that we've moved and shifted in Hebrews chapter 4 into a focus on the ongoing journey. That's why we're taking so many verses. Verses 11 through 16, seven verses, I know that's a lot we're going to go back and pick up some points later after this series is over. But you need to realize we're taking so much of it because all these three sections, verse 11, 12-13, 14 through 16, they all make one point. That is you're on a journey to the other side, the ultimate rest of God. You need to know that you're in the rest, how do you do that? Verse number 11, it seems obvious. Let us, therefore, *spoudazo*, be diligent, make every effort, be eager to enter that rest. We're marching on to go to God's ultimate rest. So that no one will fall by their example of disobedience. Number 1 on your outline, you want to verify your faith, you want to make sure it's real, the reality of saving faith, then here's what you should look for an increasing obedience.

1. Verify the Reality of Your Faith by Looking for an Increasing Obedience

A diligent walking, moving through the Christian life and saying I'm adding to my faith. Which by the way sounds familiar because in a study I once did as you remember, 2 Peter chapter 1 we looked at all those virtuous and said the scriptures keep adding those through faith. Keep adding, keep piling those on top of your life. And the text here says, don't fall by an example of disobedience, be obedient people. Invert that, we need to be obedient people, in increasing measure. And the word spoudazo, the word be diligent or be eager I think should underscore something that will manifest a feeling that we'll have. This is not cruise control, this is going to be work. Spoudazo, to be diligent, is to expend effort at it and the point is if I'm really in this thing, if I'm really in spiritual rest, if I have a place on God's invisible barge in the new covenant, I will have the experience of working to do what is right. I will be seeing increasing success in that. Spoudazo. I'm looking at the 1 Timothy example, the end of 1st Timothy chapter 6. He makes the same statement by the way in 2nd Timothy but I love the way he surrounds this word in 1st Timothy chapter 6, so we'll use this example here. He just talked about virtue and godliness in the Christian life, he's talked about bad things that happen that people are doing and though they claim Christ look at their lives it's full of a mess. Drop down to verse 11 and he says this to Timothy, but you, man of God, flee from all this, and instead what you should be doing is you ought to be pursuing righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. And here's how he summarizes it, ready, fight the good fight, you've heard that before, right? The channel 7 sports guy says that. Fight the good fight, but look what it is, it's the good fight of faith and take hold of the eternal life to that which you were called when you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. Now you said you climbed up into the ark, now get in there and fight that good fight of faith. What does that mean? That means I got to work to say no to all this garbage in my life and in the world and I need to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. You've heard this word before but it's the word, agonizomai, means to the agony. We get the English word, agony from it. It's labor, it's struggle, it's fighting. Actually it's agonizomai, fight the good agon. The struggle, you're in a fight, and you got to fight to do what is right. It's going to be difficult, the Christian life is not a cruise control, it is a calling to do what is right and you will fight that fight. But you will fight that fight with an empowerment that you didn't have before. You will fight that fight with a new desire and you will fight that fight with a new level of success because God is in you making this stuff happen. You've heard that paradoxical truth laid side by side in scripture, right?

How about this one, one more passage, Philippians chapter 2, I just want to show you it's a internal empowerment to do right, and the reason you'll see increasing success in obedience which will prove to you that you're in this invisible barge is because God is going to make sure it happens. But it's still going to feel like agony, agonizomai, it's going to be hard. Doesn't mean you despise the commands of God, you don't, you love the commands of God, they're not burdensome, but they're hard to carry out because you're still fighting this world, you're still fighting a fallen flesh, and it's a lot of work, sweat, fight the good fight of faith. Philippians 2 verse 12, my dear friends, here's what we're talking about, obedience, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence, there's increasing obedience here—continue to work out your salvation, now here some things that you'll see with fear and trembling. It's like the guy at 24 hour fitness trying to pump weights he really, “ughhhh”, he's trembling, right? Now, here's the thing, you're not doing it by yourself, there's something in you driving you, for it is God who works in you, check that out, underline it. To will and to act according to his good purpose, He wants to do good thing through you, so He's working in you.

Now when you're a non-Christian you don't have that capability, matter of fact in the margin jot

this down, Ezekiel 36 verses 25-27, the bible says He's going to put a new heart in us, you've heard me quote this many times, He's going to remove the old heart of stone, He's going to give you a heart of flesh. He's going to put his spirit in us, He's going to move us to follow His decrees and be careful to keep His laws. He's in us, moving us pushing us. Now we have a new desire to do it, it's still hard to do but now there's something driving us. Last time I had my last kidney stone, which are always fun to talk about, I remember laying on a gurney, it was a Sunday, it always happens on Sunday for some reason. I'm all spent, right? It's 1 in the morning I think it was, I wake up, you've heard this story probably, and I'm at a gurney at Mission Hospital. And I've done this before so I know what this pain is, and it's just excruciating, right? How many passed a kidney stone before? Fun, wasn't it? Was that fun? Oh, the worst pain ever. I'm on a gurney in Mission Hospital and I'm in the emergency room, and there's nothing I want more than, to breathe normally, that's what I really want. There's nothing that I want more than for my head to stop pounding. There's nothing that I want more than to have my heart beat slow down. I need that, now I want it but I have no power to do it. But thankfully they walk in with a big syringe of Dylotid, a very strong narcotic. Right nurses? Oh Dylotid, baby, supersize me. They come in and whoa, they give me this Dylotid and man I'm telling you, what I wanted now was possible, and I was able to breathe and see things and have wonderful conversations with my wife. Now I was incapable of doing it, I desperately wanted to do it, but I couldn't do it until this thing was infused into my bloodstream. And it does whatever it does to the synapse of your brain or however it works, but it's wonderful when you need to breathe and when you want your heart rate to slow down. I'm telling you what; this is what God has promised to do. You will not only now have a desire to keep God's law but I'm going to empower you to keep God's law. You still have to work at doing it but you're not going to be working alone. You're going to be working out your salvation but God is going to be working in you. It's going to feel like a fighting the good fight, it's still going to be a struggle, but the reason you see increasing success is that now you have something in you that drives you on to give you success in that. That's what the Bible promises. Obedience the hallmark of having a seat on the ark, very clear in scripture.

Two passages I'll just send them home as homework for you, 1 John chapter 3, as a matter of fact if you do the discussion questions this week in your small group or you just do them as a family or however you do them you're going to be forced to interact with 1 John 3. But 1 John 3 is very clear the hallmark of the Christian life is a changed life. And increasing measure that's one passage you should study, 1 John 3. How about this one, 2nd Corinthians chapter 3 is another one. You should be able to see increasing progress. Now, did I say perfection? Help me now, Pastor Mike said all Christians have to be perfect if they're real Christians. Is that what I said? No. The bible says if you claim to be without sin you're a liar and the truth is not in you. If you claim you never make any sinful decisions. The point though is you will have a continual progressive success at being obedient in the Christian life. And if you see that, it's like reaching out and feeling the cypress wood on the panel of your stall on the ark. It's a very good sign that you're saved. Paul said you ought to test yourself to see if you're of the faith the place that scriptures goes is your life changing. Or as 2nd Corinthians 3 and I gave you the passage, how about the verse, the key verse in that text is verse 18. That says we are begin transformed into Christ-likeness with an ever increasing glory, I love this phrase, which comes from the Lord. God is making it happen. If you're not the same person you were 3 years ago, and you're seeing continual progress at becoming more and more like Christ it's a real good sign you got a stall on the ark. Good news, verify your faith by the increasing obedience. Cruise control, no not exactly, God will get it done but you're going to have to work at it, agonizomai, you're going to have to fight the good fight of pursing righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

Verses 12 and 13, this is often divorced from the rest of the passage, big mistake, the point here is, verse 13, bottom of the verse we're going to give an account to God. But now he gets into my relationship with God's word, take a look at it verses 12 and 13. For the word of God is living and active. It's sharper than any double-edged sword, now here's the key verb in the sentence, it penetrates or pierces even to dividing soul and spirit, more on that next week, joints and marrow, it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. Now why would that be important to me on this journey of faith? Because nothing in creation is hidden from God's sight. You're not going to pull a fast one on God. Everything is uncovered and it's laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account. And we're going to give an account for this journey. You sat there on the ark, what did you do? And there's going to be a time of reckoning and accountability. 2nd Corinthians 5 makes that clear, we're going to have to answer before Christ, the bema seat of Christ, we're going to have to give an account for our lives. Now the key indicator here is this work of God's word in my life, it now is something that I recognize to be penetrating or piercing my life and it's judging the thoughts and attitudes of my life so that one day I trust the accountability time for my life is better off, because now I'm being changed not just against the backdrop of some subjectivity but against the backdrop of the object and teaching of God's word. Now let's put it this way, you want to verify the reality of your faith, number 2 on your outline. Let's jot this down, you will verify the reality of your faith by exactly where the writer of Hebrews goes in this text, by convicting encounters with God's word.

2. Verify the Reality of Your Faith by Convicting Encounters with God's Word

You will verify the reality and saving quality of your faith by convicting encounters with God's word. I mean the text is saying here we are we're in this place, this spiritual rest that we have, heading to God's ultimate rest and now all of a sudden we're talking about the Bible, God's word, penetrating our lives and judging us so that we'll stand one day and give a better account for our lives then we would if we didn't have that relationship with God's word. Now here's the thing, if you want to know you have a place on the spiritual invisible ark of the new covenant, I shouldn't say new covenant because now you're thinking, you know, Raiders, don't think that. Maybe you didn't think that and I put that in your mind, I'm sorry...erase that. The ark, I'm talking about the barge, that's why I like the word barge, the barge, the new covenant barge. It doesn't sound very good, does it? How do you know you got a place there? Because your relationship with God's word has changed, and those of us who know what it's like to think through our relationship with God's word before we got a seat on the ark and after we got a seat on the ark you go yeah, that's right, that makes sense. In Ephesians chapter 2 it says that we are dead to God, remember that text? We are dead in our transgressions and sins. God is dead to us, we're dead to God and boom it's like it's dead. You know what the same reality is true of what God says, God word is dead to us.

As a matter of fact picture if you would Jesus telling the story of the seed and the Sower. Remember that story? Sometimes they call it the parable of the four soils. Now the thing about that parable is that the seed is the same in every soil, right? The seed gets tossed and there's no difference there, it's the same powerful seed, fruit bearing seed. The problem is it doesn't bear fruit, 30, 60, 100-fold except in one soil. The difference is not the power of the word, which Jesus said the seed represents, the difference is in the cultivated soil, or the rocky soil, or the shallow thorny soil, or the pavement that is hard packed that the birds just come along and take it. And that's the difference, Jesus can sit on a hillside by the Sea of Galilee, preach a sermon and you got people over here get radically impacts, it penetrates and pierces their hearts and their lives are changed. Then you got people that go that was a really good sermon I want to hear more, but when



it gets tough they fall away. You got people over here that really, they just kind of sit and go through it but they really love the world and they love their idols more than God so their not going to be in this thing long term. And you got people over here going, snore, because they don't get it and they don't care. And Jesus says, the word is the same in all cases, the difference is these people are ultimately dead to the word of God. But these people now have been prepared by God and they're not dead to the word, but they were at one time. But God got them on the ark and now because of the conviction and piercing judging nature of God's word their lives are different.

As a matter of fact here's a passage to jot down and you know this text, 1 Corinthians chapter 1, remember this, jot down verses 18, 22 through 24 if you're taking notes. 1 Corinthians 1:18,22-24 and you've heard this many times but listen to it, the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, remember that text? They don't get it, to them, they don't get it but they think it's stupid. But to those of us who are being saved, here it comes, it is the power of God. Wow, that was powerful. He says it again, the Jews they are demanding miraculous signs and the Greeks they're looking for "wisdom", but we're preaching Christ crucified and guess what it does? It stumbles the Jews and it makes the Gentiles think we're idiots. But to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, he's called people out from both groups, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. The word of God is no longer dead to them. And you and I need to recognize if you think you're in the spiritual ark, test your relationship to the word of God and you will know, yes, it verifies my faith, it's real or perhaps you're like three of the four soils, who either don't get it at all and I doubt you're in that category or you probably wouldn't be here, but you got the other two soils who kind of play around with it but they never really bear fruit in this thing. Or you got the people who really get it because that word penetrates deep in their lives and judges the thoughts and intentions of their lives and it's an evident sign that they really saved, they're on the ark, they've got a place on the barge and they're going to make it safely through onto God's eternal rest.

Great passage, I got to show you this one, 1 Thessalonians chapter 1, now remember they're going and preaching, they're preaching sermons, they're talking about God's truth, start in verse 4, for we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, we know you're on the ark, why? Because our gospel came to you not simply with words, now it was a sermon, right, they were words, but it also came with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. And if you think that means some kind of channel 40 miracle hour that's now what he's talking about here. The point is they were deeply convicted, they were the fourth soil. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, and in spite of suffering you, check this out, welcome the message with joy given by the Holy Spirit. And that's really odd because it's deeply convicting them, it's piercing their hearts, it's bringing in their hearts a judgment of their thoughts and intentions and yet they're glad to have it. Why? Because God's at work in their lives and not only that here's what it did, it changed their lives, you became a model to all believers in Macedonia and Achaia. And the Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith, that's what it's all about, in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we don't need to say anything about it. We don't have to prove it, you've proved it already. Verse 9, for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us and they tell, check this out, how you turn to God from idols, that's call repentance, to serve the living and true God, and to wait for his Son from heaven, you're on the ark, whom he has raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues you from the coming wrath, which doesn't come with water this time. But you got a place on the invisible barge, and it's proven by the way you embraced these words. You welcome them and it changed you. Look across the page, 1 Thessalonians 2, I quote this one all the time it's a great word, verse 13, we also thank God continually because, when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it, you dechomai, you embraced it, not as the word of men, but as

it actually is, the word of God, now note this phrase you should underline it, which is at work in you who believe. Same concept as in Hebrews chapter 4, it is living and active, it does work in your life. It changes you, it pierces you, it's not, "Oh that was interesting", it's not, "Oh that made me feel good", it's not, "Oh what did he say?". It's the people who say that did something in my life, whether it preached or read it's something that transforms you.

I mean the word itself, piercing, matter of fact I think this is the only time this Greek word in Hebrews chapter 4 ever shows up, we'll look at it more closely next week. Piercing, does that sound like it feels good? No. Let's go get pierced, right? I see these people that are very pierced, and I'm thinking that doesn't feel good. Doesn't look like it feels good and I know when it happened it didn't feel good and yet that's the word here, to pierce, like with a sword, with a weapon, to pierce. Here's a great commentary not only on Jeremiah's day but in ours. This is the second passage I said I have to turn you to, Jeremiah chapter 23. By the way, Jesus' words are often described as a two edged sword. In the book of Revelation in the 7 postcards to the churches, not only that in the first chapter of Revelation, Jesus comes and out of his mouth comes a sharp two-edged sword. The words he says they penetrate, they pierce. Jeremiah, now Jeremiah's day, you got to know before we read this, that the people were all into I want to have a message that makes me feel good. You know a culture like that anywhere? Do you think we live in an American culture that just wants to pat me on the back preacher, that's what I want. We want more feel good stuff, and that was going on all over the place in Jeremiah's day. As a matter of fact let's jump into the middle of this chapter, look at verse number 16. Jeremiah chapter 23 verse 16. This is what Yahweh Almighty says, "Do not listen to what the prophets are prophesying to you; they fill you with false hopes. They speak visions from their own minds, not from the mouth of Yahweh. They keep saying to those who despise me, Yahweh says: 'You will have peace. God loves you everything will be fine'. And to all who follow the stubbornness of their hearts they say, 'No harm is going to come to you.' God loves you too much to bring you any trouble. Verse 18, but which of them, speaking of the preachers, has stood in the council of Yahweh to see or to hear his word? Who as listened and heard His word? Then he talks about the coming wrath in verse 19 and 20. Look at verse 21, I did not send these prophets, yet they have run with their message; I didn't speak to them, yet they have prophesied. But if they had stood in my council, they would have proclaimed my words to my people and would have turned them from their evil ways and from their evil deeds. You know why that's not a popular message? Because it hurts, right? You're changing things, you're moving me from what I like, evil, it feels good, it's fun, it's pleasurable. I'm moving from that to doing what's right.

Verse 23, am I only a God nearby, which by the way is the exact emphasis of Hebrews chapter 4, we're going to give an account to God. He's sees us, everything is laid open in front of God. "Am I not a God far away? You can't hide from me. Can anyone hide in secret places so that I cannot see him?" declares Yahweh. "Do I not fill the heaven and the earth?" declares the Lord. Then God says you should have known the difference, verse 25, 26, 27, 28. Then He characterizes his word, look at verse number 29, is not my word like fire, declares the LORD, like a hammer that breaks a rock in pieces? Therefore declares Yahweh I am against the prophets who steal from one another words supposedly from me. What's the difference, the words that weren't from God were appeasing people, putting a false salve on peoples aches and saying, "It's ok. It's fine, let's get together and have another discussion about how loved we are and how everything is just fine." And the Bible says, now wait a minute, when I speak a word to people even in this loving new testament context, James chapter 1, it is to change us and conform us to the image of his Son. That's why it's going to feel painful and uncomfortable. It's going to sting. As a matter of fact is not just a sword, look how he describes his word here, fire, hide. He threw some fire at us today. Now that usually



wouldn't be a compliment about your pastor's sermons on Sunday. He was preaching fire, or how about this one, a hammer. He slammed us with a hammer this Sunday. Does that sound good? That's not a high five moment, right? Thanks for the hammer, man, you knocked us right inside the head, pastor that was great. And yet the Bible says right here, my word does that, it pierces, it convicts us, it judges the thoughts and attitudes of our hearts. And you know what, here's the thing about someone who's truly regenerate, they long for more.

You ever drive by the gym and look at those guys working out the free weights section of the 24 hour fitness? I try not to look, but there they are. I'm thinking back to my high school days, and I'm thinking I remember that. Here's what I remember about it, it hurts, really bad, to do what you're doing right there. And yet the same guys in the same room day after day, week after week, month after month. What's with those guys, crazy? Those are the guys who drink the powders and they have the vitamin supplements and they got the videos and sit around the mirror half the time looking at themselves between sets, they're totally into it. Because in their mind, here's the thing, they have an image of what they want to be. And they are addicted to that pain, call it endorphins call it crazy, whatever it is they want more of it. The scripture says the same thing about our convicting encounters with God's word. For instance in 1 Peter 2:2 it says we'll crave it like babies, we just want more of it. Give us more of that, we need it, why? Because they come through the pain of the workout with God's word, and guess what I'm looking and I'm saying, I'm a little bit more like Christ this week. Oh, let's get more of that, and we go back the next morning and we open our bibles and we let us convict us, and we say, Oh, I got to do that again. And the world looks at us and says, "You're crazy". I mean, let's just give you a bookmark from the Christian bookstore, a nice poem, a Hallmark card or something. Don't you just want the, as Pollyanna said "the happy text" won't that do it for you? No, I need God's word to do its work in my life. Why? Because I'm in the process of becoming conformed more and more to the image of God from one level of glory to the next. You know what, if you thrive on this as the scripture says we will, convicting encounters with God's word, it's an awfully good sign you got a seat on the invisible barge. It is confirming, because people who are converted, they love God's word, and God's word does its work in their life.

Therefore, which ought to be a clue that this will all stay together, if we're going to have to give an account for this journey to God's ultimate rest, we've already got our seat on the invisible barge, we got to know this, that's a lot of pressure man, being obedient, convicted of God's word, how we going to carry all this out? Well, here's the good news, you got a great high priest, speaking of Jesus here, who has gone through the heavens, the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, we've got one who has been tempted in every way just as we are—yet without sin. Let us approach then the throne of grace with confidence, that's a reference to reaching out as we did on our study on Thursday night, to God, saying God we need you, we're reaching out to you, we're praying to you. He says let us approach that throne of grace with confidence that he's going to give us that grace so that we can receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need. And when is it hard? When is our time of need? When we're tempted, not to obey God's word. When we're tempted not to be obedient. And on this path of increasing obedience and conviction of God's word there's another thing that should characterize our seat on this invisible barge a thing that convinces us that our faith in Christ is real, number 3 on your outline, let's jot this down. There ought to be a prayerful reliance on Christ.

3. Verify the Reality of Your Faith by a Prayerful Reliance on Christ

We are prayerfully reliant on Christ. We recognize that we can't do this on our own. It's like laying on that gurney and saying I can't breathe right, I need God, I need God's empowerment, I need God's help. He's got to be empowering me to do this. Now remember it's a cooperative effort or at least it feels that way. I recognize my weakness, I'm convicted by God's word, I want to be increasingly more like Christ, seeing success in that also means that every day I realize I can't do this without God. Here's a great text I won't make you turn there, Colossians chapter 1 verses 10 through 14 another reminder that this comes through prayer, we reach out in prayer and we pray that God would keep strengthening our lives so that we can move from one level of Christ-likeness to the next. And without that strengthening without that recognition of that strengthening we're in trouble. Which by the way is one reason that faith is always tested by trials doesn't that sound biblical, 2 Peter 1? It is something that is always tested by trials because the trials and suffering and pain of our lives is the thing as Peter put it, reveals the genuineness of our faith, because it's in those times we realize that if I'm going to keep walking this walk of obedience and increasing righteousness I realize I can't do it in human effort. I've got to be dependent on Christ. No book does this better than 2 Corinthians so let's look at two texts in this real quick, 2 Corinthians chapter 1. In 2 Corinthians chapter 1, Paul you got to know is being beat up hard by the Corinthian church. And it wasn't so much by the rank and file pew sitters but there were a lot of people that were looking at the Apostle Paul who were having influence on the Corinthians saying Paul is a loser, Paul doesn't know what he's doing, Paul doesn't know what he's talking about, then accused him of breaking the rules, and that he promised he would come at this time and instead of going through Macedonia but he didn't do it, and so he had a lot of detractors in Corinth. And Paul not only that, had lived this life of commitment that these Corinthians should have been able to see, and in chapter 1 he says, I want you to realize that all the difficulty and suffering I'm going through is to reveal something that's not only true about himself but should be true about every Christian in Corinth and elsewhere. 2 Corinthians chapter 1 verse number 8, I didn't want you to be uninformed about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure; now note this, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we even despaired of life. We didn't even want to live anymore. Indeed in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But, check this out, this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God. Now remember last week we said you can't get a place on the ark, you can't get a seat on the invisible barge by doing good works. And see the whole system of religion that says you can do enough good things to get right with God, if you get in this place on the invisible barge by trusting he wants to make sure you continue to trust as we saw in Galatians last week.

And here he says, if the difficulty comes and the trials come and you feel like you just can't do it that's right were God wants you. You keep on fighting the good fight but you'll have to rely on God and not yourself. And I love this phrase, we felt like dying but we had a trust in God who raises people from the dead. He's delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. And on him, underscore this, we have set our hope that's what a real sign of vibrant salvific faith looks like, is that the person keep putting their hope on God. He will continue to deliver us as you help us by your, what's the operative thing here? Prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the, there it is again, prayers of many. It's a prayerful dependence on God.

Look across the page, chapter 4 on the next page in your Bibles, 2 Corinthians chapter 4, now Paul you're saying well man you seem pretty strong for saying that you got to rely on God. Well that's exactly where God had it. Look at verse 7 remember this great familiar phrase? We have this



treasure in jars of clay, fragile clay pots, to show that this all surpassing power is from God and not from us. And every genuine believer with saving faith recognizes that, and if they start to doubt it, God will put them through more trials to remind them. This is not about you, and the power that is working in you is what you've got to rely upon. Power he says the all surpassing powers from God and not from us. And so here he is, this clay pot that's got some kind of silly putty inside of it, holding it together, hard pressed on every side but not crushed, perplexed, but not in despairing; persecuted, but not abandoned, struck down, but not destroyed. Always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body, total dependence on Christ. For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, now underscore this, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. That's the thing we're completely prayerfully reliant on Christ. So then, death is at work in us, but life is a work in you. And he goes on to talk about the fact that therefore he says I believe I have spoken with the same spirit of faith, drop down to the end of this text, verse 16, outwardly we are wasting away, inwardly though, check this out, God continues to renew us day by day. Not by our own strength or power but as we fight the good fight, God strengthens us internally. We're reliant on Him our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us and eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we're going to fix our eyes not on what is seen, can't touch the cypress wood, can't smell the pitch or the animals but what's unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. And what we're looking for is eternal rest, what we're looking for is salvation after this life, what we're looking for is to get safely where God has promised to take us and we're going to have to trust by our complete reliance on Christ, by convicting encounters with God word by an increasing obedience in our lives that we're seriously sitting on the ark. And if there's doubt about it, those three things ought to be clear indicators that we're there. And if those aren't there as Paul said, if you fail the test and you don't have salvific faith then you got to look at those things, say they're not there, because my faith isn't genuine. I don't really trust Christ and then the good news is if you get that, God's already at work in your life. Throw yourself on the mercy of Christ.

I had to think about Martin Luther this week, 500 years ago fighting the fight against the powers that be in his day, and I thought a lot like the apostle Paul he had the same kind of battle going on. The most famous hymn he ever wrote, "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God", remember that? Remember that second verse? I mean here is the crux of the issue for people that have genuine faith. He said, Did we in our own strength confide, remember these words? Our striving would be losing, were not the right man on our side, the man of God's own choosing, doest ask who that may be? Christ Jesus it is he, Lord sabioth, his name. What a great connection here, the work is done, it's finished, that's what we taught on two weeks ago. His name from age to age the same, and He must win the battle. What's interesting if we look at Martin Luther we see him winning the battle. But the thing is he's completely reliant on Christ. It may seem odd because the crux of all of this is, we're working and we're trusting. If that proves the reality of salvific faith, then that almost seems like a paradox, doesn't it?

I remember this wasn't so much of a paradox the day I was taken out real mountain climbing one day. I was a ninth grader, just getting into high school, I had a twelfth grade friend who took me up to the High Sierra in Central California and he took us out rock climbing. Which I don't know don't why my parents let me do this, it made no sense at all, looking back on it. And this very experienced twelfth grader took us up to this place where we got totally stuck on the side of this mountain we were absolutely, I mean stuck, we could not go up, we could not go down, we could not go right, we could not go left. So as we're perched on the side of this mountain completely done with our short little lives, he says, don't worry Mike, I got repelling gear in my backpack. So he does, like Spiderman, hanging on the side of the rock he pulls out all of his repelling gear. And



because he was older and I was younger, he volunteered me to go first to get off the side of this perch that we were on. And I literally strapped on the repelling gear on the side of this mountain and I hung on to this 3/8th inch nylon rope and I wrapped it around me and he said ok now, just step backwards and walk slowly down the mountain face. Have you ever been repelling before, do you know what this is like? Now you've been repelling with helmets and gear and licensed professionals, right? This was not like that at all, I thought I was going to die. But I'll tell you what, there was in that particular situation a confluence of trust and work that was the thing that got me off the side of that mountain. I mean I was working hard sweating but I'm telling you what, I was trusting and I was holding that thing like it was my life line, because guess what? It was, and were it not for the strength and the integrity of that 3/8th inch rope, I would have died. But the rope was going to hold, and my job was to trust that rope, and my job was to work diligently to walk my way down that mountain, and I'm here, I didn't die and I didn't fall. The confluence of work and faith. You got a place in the ark these are things you ought to see, you don't see them here's the good news, it takes one second to get right with God, repent of your sins, put your trust in Him and you will start to see increasing righteousness, convicting encounters with God's word from here on out, and you will see that your life will have to be a life of prayerful dependence on Christ.

Let's pray, God your Son was very clear in John 15 that we are called to abide in you, abide in Christ the vine. And Jesus said it so clearly if we don't abide in Jesus Christ we can do nothing. And so God we recognize that this walk of faith is one that is filled with sweat and difficulty. It is as Paul said fighting the good fight, to flee from unrighteousness and to pursue righteousness and faith and love and endurance and all those great things, but God in so doing as we see our lives unfold as real Christians, we know its also a life of utter dependence upon you. So I pray God for those here that can be encouraged this afternoon by these things and say yes I see that in my life. I am increasingly a different person as I'm transformed from one level of glory to the next, and God's word does pierce my heart, and it is something I crave, and it's like food for me. And I am seeing that my life even through the trials of my life are driving me back to fully rely on Jesus. God for them I know this can be a wonderful reminder from Hebrews chapter 4 that they not only have a place on the ark but this is more secure and more certain and more guarantee than any cypress wood pitch lined ark of Noah's day. That Christ is done it and it is secure and their inheritance is reserved in heaven for them. God for those that are called to question their faith because a sermon like this, I pray that even today they would be transferring their trust, throwing themselves on your mercy and real repentance, grasping the finished work of Christ as we learned last week, and God we look forward to hearing their testimonies at the next baptismal service. God we love you very much, we thank you for this great reminder from Hebrews chapter 4 and how eloquently the writer of Hebrews has put this through the inspiration of your spirit. God I pray it would send us back this week to be good Bereans and dig back into your word, particularly this text and many others recommended on the back of the worksheet this week, give us a great week of studying your word, let it penetrate and convict our lives may we be changed people more like Christ this week because of time in your word. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.