

Saving Faith

by Catherine Booth

True salvation requires genuine repentance, conviction of sin, and a hatred for sin, which is facilitated by the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Isaiah 55:7

Topics: "Repentance", "Saving Faith"

Description

Catherine Booth preaches on the importance of genuine repentance and true faith in Jesus Christ for salvation. She emphasizes that belief in Jesus is not for unawakened, unconvicted sinners but for those who have been convicted of their sins by the Holy Spirit. Catherine Booth highlights the need for souls to be fully convinced of their sin, to hate sin, and to renounce sin before exercising faith in Christ. She explains that repentance involves seeing, hating, and renouncing sin, and true faith is trusting and committing oneself to Jesus Christ for salvation.

Transcript

ACTS 16:30, 31.--"And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house."

THIS is one of the most abused texts in the Bible, and one which, perhaps, has been made to do quite as much work for the Devil as for God. Let every saint present ask in faith for the light of the Holy Ghost, while we try rightly to apply it. Let us enquire: 1st, Who are to believe? 2nd, When are they to believe? 3rd, How are they to believe?

I. Who are to believe?

To whom does the Holy Spirit say, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved?" Now mark, I answer, NOT to all sinners indiscriminately. And here is a grand mistake in a great deal of the teaching of this age--that these words are wrested from their explanatory connexion, and from numbers of other texts bearing on the same subject, and held up independently of all the conditions which must ever, and did ever, in the mind and practice of the Apostles, accompany them; indeed, it has only been within the last 60 or 70 years that this new gospel has sprung into existence, preaching indiscriminately to unawakened, unconverted, unrepentant sinners--"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ."

It seems to me, that great injury has been done to the cause of Christ by thus wrongly dividing the Word of truth, to say nothing of the unphilosophical character of such a course, for how can an unawakened, unconvicted, unrepentant sinner believe? As soon might Satan believe. It is an utter impossibility. Thousands of these people say, "I do believe." My dear son, only a little time ago, on the top of an omnibus, was speaking to a man who was the worse for liquor, and using very improper language; trying to show him the danger of his evil, wicked course, as a transgressor of the law of God, "Oh!" said the man. "It is not by works, it is by faith, and I believe as much as you do." "Yes," said my son, "but what do you believe?" "Oh!" he said, "I believe in Jesus Christ, and of course I shall be saved." That is a sample of thousands. I am meeting with them every day of my life. They believe there was such a man as Jesus, and that he died for sinners, and for them, but as to the exercise of saving faith, they know no more about it than Agrippa or Felix, as is manifest when they come to die, for then these very people are wringing their hands, tearing their hair, and sending for Christians to come and pray with them. If they had believed, why all this alarm and concern on the approach of death? They were only believers of the head and not of the heart, that is, they were but theoretical believers in the facts recorded in this book, but not believers in the Scriptural sense, or their faith would have saved them.

Now we maintain that it is useless, and as unphilosophical as it is unscriptural to preach "only believe" to such characters; and Christians have not done their duty, and have not discharged their responsibility to these souls when they have told them that Jesus died for them, and that they are to believe in Him! Oh! dear no. They have a much harder work to do, and that is, to "open their eyes" to a sense of their danger, and make them, by the power of the Spirit, realize the dreadful truth that they are sinners, that they are sick, and then they will run to the physician.

The eyes of the soul must be opened to such a realization of sin, and such an apprehension of the consequences of sin, as shall lead to an earnest desire to be saved from sin. God's great means of doing this is the law, as the schoolmaster, to drive sinners to receive Christ as their salvation.

There is not one case in the New Testament in which the Apostles urged souls to believe, or in which a soul is narrated as believing, in which we have not good grounds to believe that these preparatory steps of conviction and repentance had been taken. The only apparent exception was Simon the sorcerer. He was, as numbers of people are in great religious movements, carried away by the influence of the meeting and the example of those around him, and professed to believe. Doubtless he did credit the fact that Jesus died on the cross. He received the facts of Christianity into his mind, and, in that sense he became a believer in the same sense that tens of thousands are in these days--and he was baptized. But when the testing point came, as to whose interests were paramount with him, his own or God's, then he manifested the true state of the case, as the Apostle said, "Thy heart is not right in the sight of God;" and nobody is converted whose heart is not right with God! That is the test. If Simon had been converted his heart would have been right with God, and he would not have supposed the Holy Ghost could have been bought for money. And Paul added, "For I perceive that, thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." And what further did he say to him? "Therefore at once believe?" No; he did not. "Repent, therefore, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee."

Repent first! and then believe and get this wickedness forgiven, and so we get a double lesson in the same passage. This Simon was the only person we have any record of, as believing, where there is not in the passage itself, taken with its context, a reasonable and rational evidence, that these preparatory steps of conviction and repentance were taken before the teaching of faith, or the exercise and confession of faith. Simon had this faith of the head, but not of the heart, and, therefore, it ended in defeat and despair.

Some have written me this week that they had believed. They had been persuaded into a profession of faith, but no fruits followed. Ah! it was not the faith of the heart: it was the faith of the head--like that of Simon's--and it left you worse than it found you, and you have been groping and grovelling ever since. But do not think that was real faith, and that therefore real faith has failed, but be encouraged to begin again, and repent. Try the real thing, for Satan always gets up a counterfeit. Therefore, don't go down in despair because the wrong kind of faith did not succeed. That shall not make the real faith of God of none effect--God forbid!

Look at one or two other cases--the 3,000 in a day. Surely this is a Scriptural illustration. Surely no one will call that anti-Gospel or legal. What was the first work Peter did? He drove the knife of God's convincing truth into their hearts, and made them cry out. He awoke them to the truth of their almost lost and damned condition, till they said, "What shall we do?" They were so concerned, they were so pricked in their hearts, their eyes were so opened to the terrible consequences of their sin, that they cried aloud before the vast multitude, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" He convinced them of sin, and thus followed the order of God.

Again, the Eunuch is often quoted as an illustration of faith; but what state of mind was he in? Was he a careless, unconvicted sinner? There he was--an Ethiopian, a heathen; but where had he been? To Jerusalem, to worship the true and living God in the best way he knew and as far as he understood; and then, what was he doing when Philip found him? He was not content with the mere worship of the temple, whistling a worldly tune on his way back. He was searching the Scriptures. He was honestly seeking after God, and the Holy Ghost always knows where such souls are; and He said to Philip, 'Go near, and join thyself to this chariot: there is a man seeking Me; there is a man whose heart is honestly set on finding Me. Go and preach Christ, and tell him to believe.' That man would have sacrificed or done or lost anything for salvation, and as soon as Philip expounded the way of faith, he received it, of course, as all such souls will. Saul, on his way to Damascus, is another instance. Jesus Christ was the preacher there, and surely He could not be mistaken. His philosophy was sound. Where did he begin? What did he say to Saul? He saw there an honest-hearted man. Saul was sincere, so far as he understood, and if, in any case, there needed to be the immediate reception of Christ by faith, it was in his. But the Lord Jesus Christ did not say one word about faith. "Saul, Saul, why PERSECUTEST thou Me?"--tearing the bandages of deception off his eyes, and letting him see the wickedness of his conduct. When Saul said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" He repeated the accusation. He did not come in with the oil of comfort; He did not plaster the wound up, and make it whole in a moment: but He said, "I am Jesus, of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest." He ran the knife in again, and opened Paul's eyes wider, and his wounds wider, too, and sent him bleeding on to Damascus, where he was three days before he got the healing. He had to send for a poor human instrument, and he had to hear and obey His words before the scales fell from his eyes, and before the pardon of his sins was pronounced, and the Holy Ghost came into his soul. I wonder what Paul was doing those three days! Not singing songs of thanksgiving and praise. That had to come. Oh! what do you think he was doing? He neither ate nor drank, and he was in the dark. What was he doing? No doubt he was praying. No doubt he was seeking after this Christ, who had spoken to him in the way. No doubt he was looking with horror upon his past life, and, abjuring for ever his accursed antagonism to Jesus Christ, and to His Gospel. Of course, he was bringing forth fruits meet for repentance, according to the Divine order--Acts 26:20: "And then came Ananias and preached Christ unto him, and he believed unto salvation, and the scales fell off, and his mouth was filled with praise and thanksgiving to God."

Cornelius is another instance, but what was the state of his mind and heart? We know that he feared God and wrought righteousness, as far as he was able. He gave alms to the people, and prayed day and night. That is more than some of you ever did, who live in Gospel times. You never prayed all night about your souls. No wonder if you should lose them! Not half a night some of you. But Cornelius did. Oh, yes! he was seeking God. He honestly wanted to know Him. He was willing at all costs, to do His will: consequently the Lord sent him the glorious message of the revelation of Jesus Christ.

I might go on multiplying instances, but I must not delay. We have said enough to show who are to believe. Truly penitent sinners, and they only.

This text is to a repenting, enlightened, convicted sinner. Now, some of you are enlightened, convinced, and so wretched that you cannot sleep. You do repent. You are the very people, then, to whom this text comes--Believe. You are just in the condition of the gaoler.

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved," and now let us look what state of mind the gaoler was in. We see, from the whole narrative, how his eyes had been opened. The earthquake had done that. Some people need an earthquake, before they get their eyes opened, and it has to be a loud one too. The gaoler's eyes were opened, and he made the best use of his time. He was lashing their backs a little while before! Talk about a change--here was a change. "Sirs, what must I do to be saved? I am ready to do anything, only tell me what?" And when a soul comes to that state of mind, he has nothing more to do but to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. And he came in trembling, and went down on his knees and washed their stripes. When you get to that state of mind you will soon get saved. You will have nothing more to do but to believe. You will find it easy work then.

II. When is a sinner to believe?

When he repents? Here again I am going to answer some of your letters. One writes: "I am afraid I do not realise my sin sufficiently. I have no particular agony on account of sin, but I do see my whole life to have been one huge error and sin." There is nothing more common than for souls to delude themselves on this point of feeling. That gentleman confounds feeling with conviction. He thinks because he has not this extreme agony which some have, therefore he is not sufficiently convinced, while the Holy Ghost has opened his eyes to see that his whole life has been one huge error and sin. He is convinced that it has been all sin--not one isolated sin here and there abstracted from his life, but such a perception of his true character has he, that he sees his whole life to have been sin. Surely, my friend, you are convinced. What else but the Holy Ghost could have shown you THAT? Now, the truly repentant soul first SEES sin; secondly, he HATES sin; thirdly, he RENOUNCES sin. Now, let me try you by each of these tests. Don't let Satan deceive you, and make you belie the exercises of your own mind. Face the facts, and when you have come to a conclusion, don't allow him to raise a controversy, but stick to your facts, and advance from them, or you will never get saved. Satan is an accuser of the brethren, and, I suppose, of the sisters too. I will be as honest and as searching with you as I possibly can. I will not spare the spade, but when we have dug down and found the truth, stand on it, for Christ's sake, and don't let it go from under your feet, because Satan may try to cheat you out of your common sense, conscience, and convictions.

You see sin. An entirely unawakened soul does not see sin; that is, in its true character, in its heinousness, in its consequences. He admits that all people are sinners. Oh! yes; but he does not see the deadly, damning character of sin. He does not see what an evil and bitter thing sin is in itself. Now, the Holy Ghost alone can open the soul's eyes to see this. Without Him, all my preaching, or any other

preaching, even the preaching of the angels, if they were permitted to preach, might go on to all eternity and it would never convince of sin. If you see sin it is the Holy Ghost who has opened your eyes. Praise Him, and take encouragement, my friend. If God has thus far dealt with you, and opened your eyes to see the character and consequences of sin, does it not augur well that He desires also to save you from it? He has opened your eyes in order that He may anoint them with eye-salve, and cause you to see light in His light.

III. How is the sinner to believe?

Now, have you got thus far? You have told me that your life has been one great sin; others confess only to one particular form of sin. Whatever it is, if you are convinced of sin, it is the Holy Ghost who has convinced you; therefore, thank God, and take courage thus far, come home to you Farther, the true penitent HATES Sin; that is, his feelings towards sin are quite different to what they were in the past. There was a time when you could commit sin almost without notice, without concern. People do not realise the great change that has taken place in them in this respect. They are brought gradually to it. Translate yourself back into your unawakened state. How did you live then? The very things that now cause you such distress you practised every day, and they gave you no concern. The things that horrify you now, in the very thought or temptation to them, you then were daily practising without compunction. You had no hatred to, no dread of sin. You were the willing bondslaves of Satan. Now you are his unwilling slave. Then you ran towards sin, now he has to drive you, and when you fall it is against your will. You hate sin.

Now, mind, this is not being saved from it. This is not saying you have power to save yourself from it. In fact, this is the very difficulty personified by the Apostle when representing the ineffectual struggles of a convicted sinner. The things you would not, those you do, and the things you would, those you have not the power to do. Nevertheless, you DESIRE to do them. There is the difference. Once you did not desire to do them, and, perhaps, those who did were a pack of hypocrites, in your estimation. Now you feel quite differently, and you struggle, and strive, and pray, and watch. Some of you have told me so, and yet you say, "I am again and again overcome." Of course you are, because you are not SAVED YET! But don't you see, YOU DESIRE to be. You hate the sin which enthrals you. You struggle against it. You watch against it, and you are not overcome half so frequently, perhaps, as you were before. People do not see what a great deal they owe to the convincing and preventing power of the Holy Spirit helping their infirmity, even now, to cut off and pluck out the right hand and the right eye, and bringing them up in a wailing attitude before God, like Cornelius and the Eunuch. You, my hearers, some of you are following after God. You are longing for deliverance, and striving against sin.

Take another illustration. I don't mean that the soul has power to save itself from its internal maladies. That you will get when Jesus Christ saves you, but I mean this,--Here is a soul convinced of sin. Here is a man who is daily addicted to drink. He is a drunkard. He becomes convinced of sin. Now, then, the Spirit of God says, will you give up the cup? Then commences the struggle. Now, the question is, Are you to teach that man that he is to go on drinking, and expect God to save him? Are you to keep putting before him faith, and telling him, "Oh! never mind your cup, but believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you shall be saved"--or are you to tell him, "you must put away your sin, cut off that right hand, and pluck out that right eye, renounce that drink for ever in your heart, in your purpose, in your will, and until you do, you cannot exercise faith on the Lord Jesus?"

Here is another person addicted to lying. He, when he is convinced of sin, sets a watch over his lips, that he may not offend with his mouth, and he does succeed in so guarding himself, or the Holy Spirit so helps

him to guard himself that he does not lie as he used. He is overcome now and then because he has not yet found the power, but he is resolutely, and as far as his will is concerned, cutting off this outward sin, and waiting in the way of obedience for full deliverance and salvation.

There is a servant systematically robs his master's till. He goes to a religious meeting and is convinced. 'Now,' the Spirit of God says, 'You must cut off that dishonesty. You cannot come to this meeting night after night pretending to want to be saved, while you are going on every day robbing your master! You must cut off that right hand, and give up that pilfering, and resolve that you will make restitution, and wait for Me in the way of bringing forth fruits meet for repentance.' You see what I mean. Now, you are just here, some of you--you know you are. If you are addicted to any evil habit, it is just the same. Jesus Christ wants you to forswear that habit in your will, determination, and purpose. You have not the power to deliver yourself from it. You may struggle, as some of you tell me you are doing, but it overcomes you, and down you go. He knows all about that, but He approves of the struggle, and the effort, and the watchfulness, and the determination, and when He saves you, He will give you the power, and then you will stand and not fall, for he will hold you up.

Now you know that you go thus far, and you know that at this moment if you had the power in yourself to extinguish the force of that evil habit over you for ever, you would do it without another moment's hesitation. You say, 'Oh yes, I would indeed. Would to God I had the power. That is repentance; that is GENUINE repentance. Now, what you cannot do for yourself, He meets you just where you stand, and says, 'I will do it for you; I will break the power of that habit; I will deliver you out of the hands of the enemy; I will save you out of that bondage. Only throw your arm of faith around me, and I will lift you up; I will inspire you with My Spirit you shall stand in Me and by Me; and what you are now struggling to do for yourself, I will do for you.' Then you have got thus far that you hate sin? 'Yes, I have.' You have said it in your letters to me, and there are others saying it who have not written to me. 'Yes,' you are saying, 'I desire to be saved from it. I would save myself this very instant if I could and never sin again.' Would you? Is not that repentance? What else is it, think you?

Suppose you had a disobedient and rebellious son, and he had been living irrespective of your law and will, wasting your money and trampling under foot your commandments. Suppose he comes back, he sees the error of his course. His eyes are opened perhaps by affliction, perhaps by want, or ten thousand other things. At any rate he sees it, and he comes home and says, 'Oh! father, what a fool I have been; how wicked I have been. I see it all now--I did not see it when I was doing it, I see my evil course, my sins that made you mourn, and turned your hair grey. Oh! how I hate it all. I repent in dust and ashes. Father! I forsake it all! I come home to you!' What would you say? Would you say, 'My son, you have not repented enough. Go! be gone! Wait till you feel it more!' No, your paternal heart would go out in love and forgiveness, and you would put the kiss of your reconciling love upon his cheek. 'Even so there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that REPENTETH!' as there would be joy in that family circle over the return of that wandering child.

But suppose that lad were to come and say, 'Father, I do thus repent; I do thus forsake my sins; but there are some companions who will follow me so closely that I am afraid I shall again fall under their power, and there are some habits so terrible that I am afraid they will again conquer. Let me, then, be always by your side. You must strengthen me.' What would you say? Would you not say, 'Then, come in, my son; sit by me, live with me, and I will shield you--I will deliver YOU? Thou shalt never cross this threshold without me. I will live with you; I will hold you up.' And, as far as a human being could shield another, you would shield your son; he would never lack your sympathy or your strength day or night. Your Heavenly Father

lacks neither sympathy nor strength. His eye never sleeps. His arm never tires, and you have only to go and lay your helpless weakness on His Almighty strength by this one desperate leap of faith, and He will hold you up, even though there were a legion of devils around you.

Lastly, you RENOUNCE your sins, that is, in will, purpose, and determination. You say, 'I never wish to grieve Him again.' You sing it, and you feel it. 'I never want to grieve Him any more;' and if you could only live without grieving Him, you would not much mind, even if it were in Hell itself. Is not that penitence? You know it is. You renounce sin. You do not say, 'Lord Jesus, save me with this right hand, with this right eye; Lord Jesus, save me with these forbidden things hanging about my skirts.' No; you say, 'Lord Jesus, save me out of them. Make me 'clean.' That is penitence. You see it. You hate it. You renounce it. Now then, believe on the Lord Jesus Christ. Oh, Holy Spirit, reveal the simple way of faith. You say, 'How am I to believe?' Some despairing soul asked me this in large letters, 'How am I to believe?' How does the bride believe in her husband when she gives herself to him at the altar? She trusts him with herself. She believes in him. She makes a contract, and goes home, and lives as if it were true. That is FAITH. How do you trust your physician when you are sick, as you lay in repose or anguish upon your bed? You trust him with your care. You commit yourself to him. You believe in his skill, and obey his orders. Have faith like this in Jesus Christ.

Trust and obey, and expect that it is going to be with you according to His Word.

Instead of this, the faith of many people is like that of a person afflicted with some grievous malady. A friend tells him of a wonderful physician who has cured hundreds of such cases, and gives him abundant evidence that this doctor is able and willing to cure him, if he will only commit himself to his treatment. The sick man may thoroughly believe in the testimony of his friend about this physician, and yet, for some secret reason, he may refuse to put himself into his hands. Now, there are numbers like that with Jesus Christ. They believe He could cure the malady of sin on certain conditions. They believe He "is no respecter of persons." They believe He has done it for hundreds as bad as they, and yet there is some reason why they do not TRUST Him. They hold back.

Now, what you want is to give your case into His hands, and say, 'Lord Jesus, I come as Thou hast bid me, confessing and forsaking sin. If I could, I would jump out of it now and for ever. Thou knowest I come renouncing it, but not having power to save myself from it; and now, Lord Jesus, Thou hast said, "Him that cometh unto Me, I will in no wise cast out." I do come; Thou dost not cast me out; Thou dost take me; Thou dost receive me. Blessed, Holy Father, I give myself to Thee. I put my sins upon the glorious sacrifice of thy Son. Thou hast said Thou wilt receive me, and pardon me for His sake. Now, I roll the guilty burden on His bleeding body, and I believe Thy promise, I trust Thee to be as good as Thy word.' THAT is FAITH. 'Oh!' said a dear lady, 'I do not feel it.'

No, you must trust first. Mark, not believe you are saved, but believe that He does now save you. "What things soever ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them, and ye shall have them." That is the law of faith. Believe that ye receive it, before you feel it; when you receive it, then you shall feel it. God shall be true, and every man or Devil who contradicts Him, a liar. Throw your arms around the crucified. Take fast hold of the hand of the Son of God. Put your poor, guilty soul right at the foot of His cross, and say, 'Thou dost receive; Thou dost pardon; Thou dost cleanse; Thou dost save,' and keep using the language of faith. I have seen numbers of souls step into liberty repeating those precious words in the first person, "He was wounded for (my) transgressions. He was bruised for (my) iniquities, the chastisement of (my) peace was upon Him, and by His stripes (I Am) healed." Keep using the language of faith all the way

home tonight. Go into your closet and say, 'I am determined to be saved, if there is any such thing as salvation.' Resolve that if you perish, you will perish in that room, at the foot of the cross, suing for pardon, and you will get it. I have never known a soul come to this who did not soon get saved. Get into the lifeboat. Put off from the old stranded wreck of your own righteousness or your own efforts; step right into the lifeboat of His broken, bleeding body. Take fast hold, and resolve that you will never let go until the answering Spirit comes into your soul, crying, "Abba Father," and you shall "know" of a truth that you "have passed from death unto life." The Lord help you. Amen.

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