

True Saving Faith

by Richard Owen Roberts

Revival is a time when God draws near to his people, and it is an act of the sovereign God, not something we can make happen.

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Scripture: 2 Peter 1:5

Topics: "True Faith", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

This sermon emphasizes the importance of true revival, contrasting it with shallow understandings of revival prevalent in many churches. It calls for a deep examination of faith, urging believers to add qualities like moral excellence, knowledge, self-control, perseverance, godliness, brotherly kindness, and Christian love to their faith. The speaker highlights the need for diligence in spiritual growth and warns against being blind or short-sighted in one's faith, stressing the significance of an abundant entrance into the eternal kingdom through a life marked by these qualities.

Transcript

Talking about revival, and if I thought a revival was what a lot of people think a revival is, I'd go home tonight and forget the whole matter. The term revival has been used in such a cheap and shabby way by so many within the Church that it's almost absurd to pray for what they think revival is. Now, if you're ignorant and you love your ignorance, well then, believe the wrong thing and the Lord understands your stupidity.

But the Lord did not create us to be stupid. Isn't it perfectly wonderful that the Lord gave us incredible minds, and then he gave us a book of incredible depth, and then he gave us a Holy Spirit of incredible wisdom to interpret an incredible book of incredible depth and to make us wise unto salvation. And part of being wise unto salvation is understanding what true revival is.

I have the privilege of ministering in churches of all kinds of denominational flavors. Some that strike me as unusually good, and some that trouble me as unusually bad. But one quickly observes as they travel America that there are sections of the country where viewpoints are held concerning revival that are just terribly tragic.

In the South, the term revival has been used for so many years to describe special meetings, and normally they're evangelistic in their nature, weak, paltry, semi-biblical, but nonetheless are called revivals. And I

have spoken in a pastor's conference in the southern states and upbraided the men for referring to something they do as a revival and pled with them to refer to revival only in connection with that which God does. And then a man will get up during the course of the conference and come up to me and say, I'm sorry to have to leave early, but I'm going to preach a revival.

And I groan and say, what would it take to correct this man's thinking on this urgent subject of revival? But this isn't the South, and most of you do not have that unfortunate notion of revival. In fact, some of you have a worse notion than that. Everywhere I have gone in recent years, people have said to me, what do you think of Toronto? The Toronto revival, as they call it.

The Toronto revival? If that's what revival is, I'm sure going back home tonight, and I'm going to stick it home the rest of my life. A revival is not a time of noise or confusion or physical notions or sensational phenomena. If you want to call that a revival, shame on you.

And more recently, we've been informed repeatedly that there's a marvelous revival going on in Pensacola, Florida. If that's revival, it's the first time in the history of the world that revival ever looked like that. We all know that there are things about us that are displeasing to the Lord.

Now, how could a person experience a revival and still be the same as they were? Now, preachers, certain numbers of them at least, I suppose to boost their own sagging egos, speak in language that we call evangelistically speaking. Have you heard that expression? What we mean by that is if there are 95 people who come forward in a meeting, the evangelist goes away very humbly thanking God that he gave us 100 wonderful converts in that meeting on Friday night. Well, there were only 95 that went forward, and 75 of them went forward to shake the preacher's hand, and 10 of them came forward because there was somebody in the front they wanted to talk to, and five of them came forward because they felt a little conviction.

The likelihood is there was not one single convert in that meeting, and yet the boast is made that God gave us 100. When a revival comes, even boasting ceases. All exaggeration ends, for a revival is above all else, God drawing near to his people.

Now, there are many who cannot understand the concept of revival because they don't know God. Everywhere I go, I'm contradicted by someone who says, Mr. Roberts, you just don't understand. My Bible says, Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.

And you go around telling people that God withdraws his manifest presence when he's displeased with his people. My God would never do such a thing. Well, it's possible that your God wouldn't, but somebody has to have the courage to remind you that your God is not the God of this book, because the God of the Bible does just what he pleases.

When he's pleased with his people, he draws near to them, and when he's displeased, he draws away from them. You have only to know the Psalms to know the validity of what I've just said. Why do you suppose that frequently in the Psalms, the psalmist cries out, Where are you, Lord? How long will you be gone? Will you be gone forever? There's a gross misunderstanding of the nature of God.

As if God were at our beck and call, as if God were a puppet whose strings we pull. But the plain truth is, God is holy, and he hates all unholiness, and he has nothing to do with that which is unholy. He never remains near anyone who practices unholiness.

He is never in any church in power where there is the practice of unrighteousness. When our lives are in conformity to his will and purpose, he has the right to draw near. But when our lives are out of harmony with him, he has the right to draw away.

Now, many are confused because they don't understand the nature of God's presence. It really needs to be spelled out for us in language that we can relate to. When we speak of God's presence, we need to understand the three dimensions of his presence.

That which I have already referred to as his manifest presence, that which must be referred to as his essential presence, and that which we need to understand as his cultivated presence. Let me explain those matters to you. The psalmist wrote as follows, If I ascend to the highest mountain, thou art there.

If I descend into the depth of the deepest sea, lo, thou art there. Whither shall I flee from thy presence? The young people will relate to what I'm about to say if it was possible for us to put you on a rocket ship tomorrow morning and shoot you out into space. If you traveled outward for ten thousand years, you would never pass a single place where God is not, because God fills the heavens and the earth.

That is God's essential presence. He is everywhere, and he cannot be avoided. But it would be a tragedy to confuse his essential presence with his manifest presence.

Most of you have read the story of Moses when he encountered the burning bush. Some of you are familiar with the experience of the prophet Isaiah when his lips and his tongue were touched with coals of fire. Many have read the experience of John the Apostle on the Isle of Patmos when he was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and the Lord manifested his presence to him.

No one who understands their Bible would confuse God's essential presence with God's manifest presence. For when God manifests his presence, there is always one unmistakable aspect of that presence, and that is holiness. That is why Moses cried out as he cried out, why Isaiah spoke the words that he spoke, why John the Apostle recorded what he recorded in connection with the experience of the manifest presence of God.

Now, I'm going to be very gentle and yet very pointed in what I say next. For years, Pentecostal and Charismatic people have sought to embarrass the rest of the church and to cause the rest of the church to believe that you have something they don't, the Holy Spirit, in a power that they don't have. But many of you have not been wise enough to know that you have lied about this.

There is one unmistakable way to discern when the Spirit of God is present in power, and that is by this unmistakable mark of holiness. Surely you are wise enough to know that the devil can duplicate virtually anything in the realm of religion. Can we discern that God is present because there is enthusiasm? Can we discern that God is present because there are prophetic messages? Can we discern God's presence by the use of tongues? Do we know God is with us in power because physical phenomena is occurring? No, dear friends.

Satan can and does duplicate all of those. But there is one mark of God's presence that Satan cannot and would not, if he could, duplicate, and that's holiness, because he despises holiness. And he is so far from holiness, there is no way he could even begin to imitate it.

But when a congregation is made utterly quiet before God, and there is an awesome sense of the holiness of God, and people begin to fall on their faces before him, crying out such things as, Woe is me, I am

undone, I am a man of unclean lips and an impure heart. When holiness rises to the fore, and all of us learn to freshly despise ourselves because of our lack of holiness, then we have some evidence that God is near, that he has manifested himself. And I'm saying to you that a revival is a time when God draws near.

If you've ever studied the history of revivals, you know that in every revival that has ever occurred, there is a level of repentance that takes place in the lives of believers that goes deeper than anything they ever knew. The reason why there are so many multitudes of people converted during seasons of revival is simply because the church, which has been driven to new levels of holiness, begins to look and act like the Lord Jesus. And the world, seeing the radical change in the church, comes rushing to the church to discover what made this incredibly wonderful change.

Now, we need revival. But we don't need special meetings, and we don't need seasons of shouting and excitement, or rolling in the aisles, or laughing like hyenas. We don't need to have our plain fillings turned into gold.

We need to have our dirty hearts made pure. We need to be changed from self-centeredness to Christ-centeredness. Revival is the desperate need of the hour.

Now, I want to add this very consequential thought. If I were to put this question to you, when you think about heaven, what is the most attractive or the most alluring aspect of heaven that comes to your mind? How would you respond? Would you say to me, I can hardly wait to get heaven. I've always wanted to walk on streets of gold.

I would look at you kind of strange and say, you want to walk on streets of gold? Why, I can slip and fall on concrete. I can imagine how dangerous golden streets might be for an old codger like me. Or will you say God could make non-slip gold? Well, yes, granted he could.

But frankly, golden streets have no appeal to me at all. Gold anything doesn't appeal to me. Well, you say the foundations of heaven are precious stones.

Well, granted, the Bible indicates that. But I can go by a jewelry store twelve times a day and never be tempted to even look in the window, let alone enter. I don't find any appeal there.

Well, you say in the midst of heaven is the tree of life. Well, that's interesting. But I've got a lot of life in me.

What do you find the most alluring aspect of heaven to be? Oh, well, you say, let's talk about personality. Now, my dear mother is there, and I long to see her again. Well, I can relate to that.

There's some beloved friend from the past who's gone on to glory. Yes, that warms me up also. But is that the best thing that I can say about heaven? That some loved one from the past is there? No.

Let me tell you what appears to me to be the great allure of heaven. In heaven, we will know the unbroken presence of God. Now, I have been a Christian, by God's grace, for a long time.

But in all these years, I've never known the unbroken presence of God. Oh, I've known days that were like glory on earth, even occasionally weeks when the presence of God was perfectly marvelous. But I've never known the unbroken presence of God, because it seems before too many weeks pass, I sin again.

And that sin rises as a barrier between God and myself until that sin is brought under the blood of Christ. I have known many an interruption in my walk with God. Maybe some of you honest folk here would admit to the same thing.

But to be where God is and where his presence is unbroken, that strikes me as the great allure of heaven. And the reason I am so fond of the subject of revival, and why I'm glad to go anywhere at any time I can to speak of it, is because revival is a time when heaven draws closer to earth than at any other time in human history. And right now, it appears to me that our dear nation needs God to draw near.

But just as I have pointed out the unbroken presence of God as the greatest mark of heaven, so I need to warn you that hell has a mark as well. If I put the question this way, what is the most awful aspect of hell that you can think of? Would you say to me, well, the thing I dread about hell is that hell is a place where the worm never dies. I don't like worms.

They just make me feel crawly all over. I can't imagine going to a place that is simply swimming with worms everywhere you look. Worms! Worms! Worms! Undying worms! Well, now, I acknowledge that is a horrible aspect of hell, but I don't believe it's the worst aspect.

Somebody else says, well, no doubt the worst feature of hell is it's a place where the fire is never extinguished. It burns, and it burns, and it burns, and it burns. Somebody else raises an objection and says, that's impossible.

Nothing can burn forever and not be consumed. Nonsense. Get out an old National Geographic magazine and study the pictures of volcanoes that seemingly have been inactive for hundreds of years, and then suddenly once again, they explode and pour molten lava in every direction.

God has made things with the capacity to burn unceasingly. But is that the worst aspect of hell? Or someone else says, Mr. Roberts, I'm sure that the worst aspect of hell is that hell is a place where sin reigns unchallenged, unchecked. It is simply unleashed.

Day and night, evil prevails on every hand. There is no dark corner that one can flee to and avoid the most gross wickedness. Wickedness reigns in hell.

But is that the most awful aspect? No. No, I'll tell you what the most awful aspect of hell is. Hell is a place where a person can be a thousand years, or a hundred thousand years, or a hundred million years, and not once in all that time can they entertain the thought, sooner or later God will come.

Because just as heaven is marked by the unbroken presence of God, hell is marked by the unbroken absence of God. But I remind you of what I've said already. Revival is a time in the history of men and women like us when heaven draws closer to earth than any other time, and we experience the presence of God.

If that doesn't excite you, if that doesn't stir your heart to longing for revival, then I'll tell you the reason you remain unexcited. You have an unregenerate heart, or you may have religious experience, and you may be able to testify in your own way, but the regenerate heart craves the presence of God. But now, some who believe in revival, and believe in the kind of revival I'm describing, are unwise enough to believe that revival is something that we can make happen.

For a long time in this nation, it was understood by our spiritual leaders that revival was an act of the sovereign God. It happened when he determined it should happen. And then, along about 1820, 1830, a whole new viewpoint was launched, and that could be represented by these words.

A revival is nothing other than the right use of the right means. If you want a revival, you can have a revival any time you choose to have it. And that is the prevailing view among professed Christians today.

If we wanted revival bad enough, we'd have it. But in all the years that that viewpoint has been gaining ascendancy, revivals have been nonexistent in this nation. And they will remain nonexistent until that time when the Church comes back to an understanding of a God who does exactly what he pleases.

So I'm not here tonight or tomorrow to tell you the six things you need to do to force the hand of God in revival. There are no six things that will force God to do anything. First, God is the only being in all the universe who does exactly what he pleases.

Now, many a young person thinks they're going to do just what they please, but they never succeed. When I met and married my one and only wife, she made it clear to me early on that she thought it would be lovely to fly. No, she never meant that she wanted to get on an airplane.

What she meant was she wanted to be able to flap her arms and just take off. Many a time she said to me, Can't you think how lovely it would be just to be gliding around among the trees? I wonder if you are able to notice how worried I am tonight. Worried, you see, that my wife may be flying somewhere today and have a crash landing.

No, friends, there are many things we will do and cannot, but God has never willed anything but what it's immediately accomplished, for God has only to will a thing, and it happens. So don't misunderstand. I am not here to tell you how to force the hand of God.

But I have no hesitancy about encouraging you to long for the finest, the best, the grandest, the greatest of blessing ever known to man on earth, the manifest presence of God in revival. But now, my theme tonight is different from that. I haven't started to preach yet, so if you're one of those time watchers, or clock watchers, or time keepers, in a moment I'll tell you when it would be appropriate to start the watch and time the sermon.

I've just been speaking as friend to friend up until now, and in a moment I hope to begin the sermon. But just before I do, I want to put a very important question to you. In that, we cannot cause revival, or in any way, as I've said, force the hand of God in this matter.

The question that I pose is, what ought we to do while we're waiting on God to send revival? Ought we to continue to backslide? Ought the church to grow weaker and weaker? Surely you know that in the last twenty years, the church has gone from a position of strength to a position of almost unbelievable weakness. There was a time when the church could speak out against the matter and would be heard. Now when the church speaks out against the matter, we're laughed at.

The world regards the church as perfectly ridiculous, and we live at a time when a very high percentage of those people who belong to our churches, who believe that they are Christians, are no more Christian than Satan himself. For instance, the Southern Baptist denomination, which says they are the largest Protestant body in America, some sixteen million members, has acknowledged privately that the evidence is overwhelming that at least seventy percent of those sixty million are lost. Though every one of those

sixteen million can tell you the day and the hour they accepted Christ, but their lives prove that they're lost.

There was a time when assemblies churches had as many people in the evening as in the morning. Is that true here now, Pastor? No, no. Where in America would you find a church that had as many people in the evening service as in the morning service? Why, the national average now is two thirds of the people that come Sunday morning never come any other time, and have no spiritual interest.

They never read their Bibles, they have no family altar, they have no ongoing interest in Christ, they have Sunday morning religion only. So the question that I put to you is, in that we cannot force the hand of God in revival, what ought we to do during this period when we are calling upon him in prayer and pleading with him to revive us again? Well, you've brought your Bible, and up until now you've been wondering whether I was going to get to the Bible or not, but as I told you, I hadn't started the sermon until now. And now you can start your stopwatch, because we are turning to the word of God, and I'm inviting your careful attention of the second book of Peter, the first chapter.

Second Peter, please, at chapter two. I don't know whether you're familiar with this wonderful passage or not, but by God's grace you will be by the time we leave here this evening. Second Peter, at chapter two.

Let me read to you from this blessed book of God. Simon Peter, a bondservant and an apostle of Jesus Christ. To those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours, by the righteousness of our God and Savior, Jesus Christ, grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord, seeing that his divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness through the true knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and excellence.

For by these he has granted to us by his precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. Now, for this very reason also, applying all diligence in your faith, supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, Christian love. For, now catch these words, for, if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about his calling and choosing you. For, as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble.

For in this way, the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you. Now, let's carefully work our way through these words. I am talking, I repeat, about what to do until the Lord manifests his presence in great revival power.

This passage teaches us three tremendously consequential things concerning faith. First, it speaks of the source of saving faith. Secondly, it describes the appearance of saving faith.

And thirdly, it tells us how to conduct ourselves in saving faith. Let me repeat those. First, the source of saving faith.

Second, the appearance of saving faith. And third, the conduct of saving faith. Now, let me tie it in with what I've said already this evening.

We are living at a time when literally millions of people who call themselves Christians are as unsaved as Satan. They never understood the source of saving faith. You study their lives, and you say to yourself, they don't look like a Christian, they don't act like a Christian, and in many cases you can even say, they don't even smell like a Christian.

But they say they're a Christian. If you don't understand the source of saving faith, you'll be confused about the appearance of saving faith, and you surely won't know how to conduct yourself in saving faith. So let's be certain we understand the source of saving faith.

Now, saving faith the faith that saves is not something that dwells within me, naturally. One does not search around in the bottom of their soul until they discover faith and then exercise it. Because saving faith does not belong to us.

We are not its source. It is not something innate within every person. This passage makes it crystal clear what the source of saving faith is.

Let me read it to you again. Verse one, Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ to those who have received a faith. Saving faith is always received.

Now, there are millions who have never received the gift of faith who have gone forward in a meeting, signed a decision card, prayed some kind of a sinner's prayer, announced themselves or were announced by someone else as Christian. You don't have to have saving faith to walk an aisle, to sign a decision card, or to pray a prayer. But you have to have saving faith to be saved.

And the only source of saving faith is God. Saving faith is a gift. We are in the remarkable difficulties we are in as a nation because we have lost sight of the gift of faith.

And we have urged people to believe, and they have sought to do so when they had no capacity in and of themselves. If you believe that the single source of saving faith is as it's gifted by God to the individual, what then can you do to increase the prospects of people having saving faith? Well, now, our Bibles are pretty plain. Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.

Much of what is preached in the pulpits of America today is sheer malarkey, nonsense, utter foolishness. Very little real Bible preaching occurs. You cannot preach biblical preaching in a wicked day like this without making at least some people roaring mad.

And the average pastor won't run that risk of offending anybody, so he can't possibly preach in such a way that God can quicken the Word and bring to the people who hear it the faith that saves. Now, I want to ask you a question personally. I wished I could come to each one of you individually and do this.

Have you received saving faith? It's important that we recognize that not only is saving faith a gift of God, but true repentance is a gift from God. Now, one can go through what appears to be a repenting experience and yet not be repentant. The only truly repentant people are the people who have received these two blessed gifts of faith and repentance.

Now, I am seeking to say to you tonight that we desperately need revival because for decades now we have been saving people on our own. The Holy Spirit has not been involved. In fact, this has become such a major problem that now we have a special term to describe it.

We speak of it as decisional regeneration. Now, in the Bible, regeneration is that quickening of the Holy Spirit where a person is brought from death to life. But in decisional regeneration, it doesn't require the Holy Spirit at all.

A person makes a decision and is said to be a Christian on the basis of their decision. And if you analyze what's happening in most of our evangelistic endeavors, you'll soon see that we have millions of people who've made decisions for Christ who have never been made alive by the Holy Spirit. Now, I'm asking you, do you have faith which came to you as a gift? And can you say, by the grace of God, I am in possession of the gift of faith? Well, now, if one is a little uncertain about that and yet honestly grappling with the matter and desiring to know for sure, then the second point of this passage is of great consequence.

Let me read again from verse 1. Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have received a faith of the same kind as ours. Now, what is the appearance of saving faith? Why, it looks just like the faith that the apostle Peter received after the resurrection. It looks just like the faith that the apostle Paul received.

It looks like the faith of Timothy. It looks like the faith of all New Testament believers. You look at a New Testament believer who has received faith, and you look at a present-day believer who has received faith, and both have the same identical faith.

Is your faith the same faith that Peter had, that Paul had? Or do you have some cheap, some shoddy imitation, some attempt to be me? Now, if you analyze the faith of those persons in the New Testament that I've named, or dozens or even hundreds of others like them, there are certain things that naturally appear in connection with their faith. Their faith was not passive. It was active.

In the Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke in particular, when a person is described as having faith, they were ordered to do something, and they did it. Or in the book of Hebrews, in that classic passage in Hebrews 11, that great array, that cloud of witnesses, that glorious presentation of persons who are said to have faith in every instance, you analyze the chapter, in every instance, what they were told to do, they did. Noah was told to build an ark.

He didn't argue with God. He didn't say, why, there's not enough water on the ground to float a canoe, let alone a huge ark. If you send the rain, and the rain begins to build up great reservoirs of water, then I'll see that you're serious about this matter.

No, no, he was told to build an ark, and he got busy building it, even though there was no physical evidence that an ark could possibly be useful. He had faith. Or take the case of Abraham, described beautifully in Hebrews 11, or even Rahab, the harlot.

Every person mentioned in Hebrews 11 had an active faith. Not a passive faith. Everywhere I go, I'm meeting people who know nothing of active faith.

They live in complete passivity, and yet they think they have the faith that saved. The faith of the New Testament Christians was a life-transforming faith. They were radically different for the rest of their lives as a result of the faith that they received.

You study their lives, and you will see that it was also a stabilizing aspect to their lives. Before Peter received the gift of faith, he had a big mouth, and he often had his foot in that big mouth. But after the

resurrection, and he received the gift of faith, he became a pillar, a giant, a steadfast, reliable man.

Not perfect, of course, but gloriously helped by the Lord Jesus Christ. All the New Testament saints had their lives made stable. They became pillars of the church, and of the church not only in their lifetime, but in our lifetime.

We still look back and see their glorious lives lived out to the glory of Jesus Christ. What does saving faith look like? It looks like something that turns a wishy-washing person into a steadfast giant. You have that kind of faith.

Now, true faith also involves doctrine. And the preachers tell me today, you can't preach doctrine. Doctrine is divisive.

Well, of course it's divisive. It was intended to be divisive. It was intended to separate the sheep from the goats.

Why are there so many goats in our churches these days? Because there's so little doctrine preached. But true faith embraces the great doctrines. Take the objectionable doctrine that I've already mentioned, the doctrine of God's sovereignty, that God and God only does just what he pleases.

Many men don't want to believe and think of themselves as sovereign, but those who have saving faith have no difficulty embracing the sovereign God who does just what he pleases, saves those he pleases to save, and allows to slip into a Christless eternity those that he doesn't give saving faith to. Oh, that's objectionable. Some stumble all over that.

But the apostles didn't stumble over that. They had received faith that enabled them to embrace the doctrines of Scripture. Well, I needn't explore this matter further.

I'm asking you, have you received the gift of faith? And does the gift of faith, you claim, look like the very faith of the New Testament saints? But now, those are two points out of a three-point sermon. You say, my word, this is going to be short after all. Oh, no.

No, no, no, no. Don't misunderstand. These points are totally unrelated to each other in terms of length.

The third point is the big point. It's going to take me a while to be faithful to the word of God. If you're unfaithful to the word of God, you might as well get up and leave now.

But if you're faithful, then you won't have any problem hearing the end of this matter. Let's drop down in this passage to these words in verse 8. If these qualities are yours and are increasing, now you say, what qualities? Well, the seven qualities that are going to constitute the third point. Look at these qualities just so you're sure that I'm talking biblically.

In verse 5, the first quality is adding diligence to your faith. The second quality is adding moral excellence to your faith. The third quality is adding knowledge to your faith.

The fourth quality is adding self-control to your faith. The fifth quality is adding perseverance to your faith. The sixth quality is adding godliness.

Then we have brotherly kindness and Christian love. We'll come back to those seven qualities. But now let me read again verse 8. If these qualities are yours and are increasing, now let's get this straight, there are

seven qualities that mark all those persons who have received saving faith.

They are the qualities that identify us with others who have received saving faith. But it is possible to have these seven qualities but not have them increasing. Now that might be sad, but that's a fact.

These qualities can be yours by right of sonship, by right of being a joint heir with Jesus Christ. But you may be lazy. You may be careless.

You may have allowed something in your life to rob you of growth and development. You might be like a retarded person. You know what a sad thing it is when a family discovers that the child whom they have prayed over and longed for is a retarded child.

Oh, but they rally in their love and they gather around that child and they pour their hearts into the child, but the child is always retarded. And there are people in the church like that, retarded. They've never grown past the infancy stage spiritually.

They may have been professing Christians thirty years, but the qualities that are theirs as a result of receiving saving faith are not increasing. I want to ask you, are these seven qualities present and increasing in your life? Now notice what is said in connection with this. If these qualities are yours, verse 8 again, and increasing, then they render you neither useless nor unfruitful.

Now my observation is that a high percentage of the members of the average church are useless and unfruitful. I've never been here before. I've never met your pastor until tonight.

But I dare to assume that a high percentage of the members of this church are useless and fruitless. If that's not true, this is an extraordinary church. But I don't see anything here tonight that makes me think it's extraordinary.

Looks quite ordinary to me. Hopefully I'm wrong, but I doubt seriously that I am. I have to ask you, have you been rendered useful and fruitful, or are you in this great number who are basically useless and fruitless? Now read on with me and notice what is added here.

For he who lacks these qualities is--now two options are presented. He who lacks these qualities is blind. That's the first option, blind.

Or the second option is short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. If these qualities are not in you, and are not increasing, and therefore rendering you neither useless nor unfruitful, there is one of two reasons why that is true. Either you are blind.

Now those of you who love your Bibles know that in Scripture blindness and lostness go together. You may think of yourself as a Christian, but if you're blind, you're not a Christian at all. Christians are those who have received light and life.

They're not blind people. So if the qualities are lacking, if the fruitlessness is present, if the uselessness is there, the two options are either you have been deceived, you have thought yourself a Christian when you never did receive saving faith, or else. The other option is you're short-sighted.

And notice how this is worded, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Now what is said here is very powerful. If you're lacking usefulness and fruitfulness, it's either, as I've said, because you're blind, spiritually deceived, or else, short-sighted.

Somehow you got the silly notion that God just wanted to save you from hell and take you to heaven, and you've lived in a short-sighted fashion. You've been content with thinking yourself saved from hell. You've forgotten your former purification from sins.

You've forgotten why Christ purified you. Christ never purified anybody to leave them there. He purifies us to move us onward, to equip us, to make us useful, to make us fruitful.

But notice now what is added in addition. Therefore, brethren, verse 10, be all the more diligent to make certain about his calling and choosing you. For as long as you practice these things, that is, these seven qualities, as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble.

Now, it's very sad for me to say this, but everywhere I go I seem to meet people who have stumbled. They can tell me about former days that were happy and useful days, but they admit, I'm useless now, I'm fruitless now. If you abandon these qualities, if they're not increasing in you, you're going to be a stumbler.

And I want to tell you ever so plainly that America is cursed by a stumbling church. The big thing wrong with America is not rotten politicians, though we certainly have plenty of them. It's not a rotten judicial system, though our judicial system is a farce.

It's not even our lousy educational system. The big problem in America is a stumbling church. The vast majority of people in the world cannot believe in Christ because they cannot believe in the people who call themselves Christians.

If these qualities are in you, you will not be stumbling. But look at these words in verse 11. 11 For in this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, will be abundantly supplied to you.

Now look, if you have received saving faith, and you can prove that it's saving faith because it has the same appearance as that of the apostles and the first-century believers, and you know that these qualities are in you, and that these qualities are increasing, you are guaranteed an abundant entrance into the kingdom of heaven. But I want to ask you to think for a moment about how sad it is that some people who sincerely believe they are going to heaven are sure their entrance is not going to be abundant. I've had people say to me, Well, all I care is that I just squeak in.

As long as I make it, that's all that matters. And if you have that kind of a feeling, I want to rebuke you in the name of what is righteous and holy. If I was saving myself and I was just barely saved, well, that'd be all right.

But I'm not my Savior, and you're not your Savior. The Lord Jesus Christ is the one and only Savior. And do I want to blackmark against him? Do I want his reputation to be that of one who barely saved? No, the grace of Christ is abundant grace.

Well, you say, What do you think is meant, Mr. Roberts, when it talks about an abundant entrance being supplied? Well, let me put it this way. There might very well be some here tonight who have received saving faith, and there was a time when there were evidences of this by the similarity between their faith and Paul's faith. And they did have something of these seven qualities, but they haven't been exercising them for a long time, and so now basically they're neither fruitful or useful.

But still, by the grace of God, they're going to enter heaven. But they're just going to slip in. But on the other hand, there are some who are going to have an abundant entrance.

Let me picture it this way. Word begins to spread among the ranks of heaven. He's coming.

He's coming soon. And so the question is, Who? And your name is the name that's given. You don't mean to say that he's coming soon.

Yes? Yes. Well, let's get the banners unfurled. Let's get the band and the orchestra tuned up.

Let's get ready, because he has been promised an abundant entrance into the kingdom. And so when you approach the gates, why, everybody is in readiness. All the preparations are made, and there are a host of angels ready to escort you immediately into the presence of your Savior, Jesus Christ.

And if you have a choice between barely slipping in and an abundant entrance, which would you choose? Well, now it depends on whose glory you're focused on. If you've caught something of the glory of Jesus Christ, and you long that he might be honored, why, an abundant entrance into the kingdom will assure his honor in your connection. Which kind of an entrance do you expect? An abundant entrance or merely slipping in unnoticed? But come along now to the third point.

I said there were three--the source of saving faith, the appearance of saving faith, and the conduct of saving faith. All those, as I've said, who have received saving faith have received these seven qualities. But these qualities are to be increased, they're to be utilized, they're to be exercised.

Let's take a few moments to look at these seven qualities. Have your Bibles still open? Notice now in verse 5 that the first of these qualities that is spoken of is the quality of diligence. Diligence.

But it's not a separate quality. It's the quality that is to mark all seven. Notice the wording now.

Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence in your faith supply moral excellence. Do you know what moral excellence is? A number of years ago, at a time, in fact, when my daughter seemed to be bewildered about spiritual things and didn't really seem to have taken a direction that was Christ-honoring, her mother and I were constantly praying and hoping that her life would begin to conform to Christ, but we weren't at all sure at this juncture. But one day I said to my wife, I'm home on Sunday, not preaching, and we've got a new preacher in town who I hear wonderful things about.

Let's go and listen to this man. And she said, you think we would dare to invite Gwen? Yes, I said, let's invite her. So our daughter went along to hear this new preacher in town, and he was quite eloquent.

But when we left, my daughter turned to me and she said, Dad, I have often heard you use the expression moral earnestness. Yes, I said, that is one of my favorite expressions. She said, in my opinion, that's what this preacher is lacking, moral earnestness.

Well, I could scarcely believe what she was saying. That was exactly what I had said to myself. This man enjoys preaching, and he does a great job, but he might also enjoy hunting or fishing or playing marbles, for all I know.

He doesn't put any more into preaching than he would into playing marbles, as near as I can tell. It doesn't matter to him what he's doing. He's just having a good time doing it.

But there was no evidence of moral earnestness. It didn't really seem to matter whether anybody's life was transformed by his preaching or not. I had the feeling he had a good-paying job and liked it.

Now, I know that was pretty critical, and I hope I'm wrong. But all of us who have received the gift of saving faith are to add to that saving faith this gift of moral earnestness. When people study your life, what is their conclusion? Do they go away saying, I tell you, if there's ever a genuine Christian on earth, there she is, I've just been talking to her? Or do they go away shaking their head and saying, I don't know about her.

She seems to speak out of both sides of her mouth. I can't tell whether she's serious or not. I don't honestly know whether this person has this moral earnestness, this moral excellence.

Have you been adding that quality to your life? Do you find that with each passing month there is a deeper level of earnestness about your walk with Christ? Or have you stagnated? Have you just gone up so high and then leveled there and never gone above that? Look at the second quality that the apostle mentions. Having added this moral excellency, now go beyond that and add knowledge to your faith. Now, not the knowledge concerning Christ and his saving grace and the power of his blood.

Those are essential elements to saving faith. But knowledge in becoming discerning, in studying the scriptures, in understanding the will and the purpose of God and living to the glory of God. You see, there's many a Christian who has never yet used their Bible rightly.

I am regularly meeting people who act as if the Bible was written about them, as if they were the primary subject of the Bible. They're so self-centered that they think that God himself can't help himself but be in love with them. But those who are adding knowledge to their saving faith are people who've gotten serious about discovering the God who reveals himself in Holy Scripture and arranging their lives so that they are in conformity to this God.

Oh, there's much I might say about each of these seven qualities, but I'm used to preaching longer than you're used to listening, so I don't want to offend you this first time among you. Notice the third thing that he says is to be added to knowledge. He says, add self-control.

Oh, how tragically missing this is for most professed Christians' lives. Most people seem to be governed by their passions, by their emotions. Few seem to exercise self-control.

We rise to great peaks and we sink to deep valleys because all the circumstances of our lives keep churning us up and turning us over. But people who have added self-control have learned to walk stably with their God, uniformly, and they're not disrupted by the experiences of life. How about you? Have you added self-control? Is there any habit in your life over which you do not have control? Any pattern of thought that keeps leading you astray and you can't control it? Any response to what other people say or do that repeatedly results in an uproar? I am thinking of a person that I've known for a long time who, no matter what is said, somehow always seems to interpret what is said as being a slap in her face.

She doesn't have self-control. She's never learned to act reasonably and justly. Christ didn't just come to save us from hell.

He came to save us from our sin. And if you're still under the government and control of sin, what grounds do you have to describe yourself as a Christian, and what hope do you have of an abundant entrance into the kingdom? But take the next word that the Apostle utilizes here. First, moral excellence, then knowledge, then self-control, and fourth, perseverance.

I've known many people who seem to come to saving faith, who seem to have experience to change life. But a few years later, you meet them again, and they're nowhere in the kingdom. They're lacking perseverance.

How about you? I wonder how many here tonight have added to their faith perseverance. And no matter what happens, you are going to march straight forward with Christ. You're not experiencing hot and cold.

You're not up and down. You are a persevering person. You've added this spirit of perseverance to your faith.

And look at the next word that the Apostle utilizes. Add to perseverance godliness. Godliness.

There was a time when godliness was a much-used term in our churches, when holiness was expected of all professing Christians. But somehow we've lost sight of this quality. Have you been adding holiness to your life? Can you honestly say before God, God is my witness.

I am increasing in holiness. Year after year, others see the change in me as I grow in Christlikeness. And look at the next term that he uses.

He speaks in the sixth place about adding brotherly kindness. Now, in the church, we talk a lot about Christian fellowship, but we don't even like one another often. I've been in many a church where there has been conflict and tension and war going on.

Many a great church has been dragged down to the bottom by a lack of brotherly kindness. Brotherly kindness is to be increasing among us. And his last word, Christian love.

Brotherly kindness is what we exercise, believer to believer, and Christian love is what we exercise, believer to unbeliever, as we manifest the love of Jesus Christ to others. Well, dear friends, I put in front of you this truth. Revival happens when God determines to send it.

And what ought we to be doing in the meantime? Well, we ought to be adding these qualities. And if we're doing so, this church, your church, will never be useless and never be fruitless. But if you have been failing to add these qualities urgently, systematically, regularly, then you're part of the problem and not part of the solution.

And I want to plead with you tonight to think in terms of an abundant entrance into the kingdom of heaven. If you're going, then why not go with flying colors? Why not be received by a glorious reception committee? Why not have others in heaven anxious for your arrival? And why not be determined while on this earth to never know a day when you are not useful and not fruitful? And if you long to be useful and fruitful and to look forward to an abundant entrance, then get busy adding these qualities to your faith. Revival might come this week.

It might not come for another ten years. And are you willing to be near useless and unfruitful until revival comes? I'm not. By God's grace, I've said it in my heart to follow this passage.

If these qualities are yours and increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ, for he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about his calling and choosing you. For as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble, for in

this way the entrance into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be abundantly supplied to you.

O God, help us. Some of us have been mighty careless about these things. Some of us have foolishly supposed that we had a lot more of true faith than we ever knew anything about.

And some of us need to come to deep levels of repentance right now and turn away from the patterns of uselessness and fruitlessness that have mocked us so long. Visit us, we pray, by thy Spirit, and may our response be altogether appropriate to the one who loved us and gave himself for us, our dear Lord Jesus Christ, in whose name we've met and prayed. Amen.

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