

Non-counterfeit Faith

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- [0 : 00] Well, I want to ask you this morning to identify something for me, a picture behind me. Can anybody tell me what this is? Sorry? Money, more specifically?
- 200 Rand note. Okay, you see that? 200 Rand note. Well, you would be wrong, because that is not a 200 Rand note, it's a forgery. But it does look very much like a real 200 Rand note, doesn't it?
- Until you compare it to a real one, which is in the next picture. The one above. And if you start to look at the details, then you actually realize how different the forgery actually is.
- In a number of little places on the note. But people often use and get away with forged notes, because most of the time we don't look very carefully at the money we receive, and the money that changes hands.
- It looks like a 200 Rand note, so we'll take it. We won't actually examine it. And so most people who use forged notes do get away with it. Try to deposit it in a bank, however, and that's a different story.
- [1 : 02] Have you ever noticed how the bank tellers examine whatever notes you deposit? They examine, sometimes they even put it in little machines to test whether it's real. You won't be able to get a forgery past them, even if you get it past most other people.
- Now, the reason I'm talking about that is I think the very same concept applies to the Christian faith. Anybody can call themselves a Christian. Anybody can look like a Christian. Anybody can come to church and sing songs.
- But when it comes to the day when they stand before God, as we were warned about in Hebrews 4 earlier, their faith may then be discovered to have been counterfeit all along.
- Jesus warns of that, of people who will stand before him on the day when we stand before God. And their faith, or their supposed faith that they displayed in life, is seen as fake.
- There is such a thing as fake faith. And so this morning, really, there's no more important question, if you profess to be a Christian this morning, there's no more important question that you can ask yourself than, is my own faith the real thing?
- [2 : 05] Is my own faith not counterfeit? You see, the Bible says we must examine ourselves to see whether we're in the faith. And sometimes it's something we don't want to do, but we've got to do it.
- We've got to make sure that if we profess faith, it is genuine faith. And it's a vital question, because if you've come to church for any length of time, you'll know that we are saved from our sins through faith, not through works.
- The Bible is quite clear on that. That's why Jesus came to it. Jesus came to live the perfect life that we couldn't live on our behalf, and he died for the sins of all who put their faith in him.
- Which is amazing news, that we don't have to earn our way into heaven. Jesus did it for us. All we've got to do is have faith in him. But what does that mean, faith in Jesus? What does saving faith in Jesus look like?

Do you see why it's such an important question for us to ask ourselves? What is saving faith? What is genuine faith? And do I have genuine faith? How do you know that your faith is not counterfeit?

[3 : 09] Well, the best way is to compare it to the real thing, like we did with those 200 Rand notes. And that's why throughout the Bible, as you read it, we come across examples of genuine faith.

Little snapshots of what genuine saving faith looks like. And we come across one such example in Joshua this morning, in the man of Caleb, who's given to us.

It's almost like the narrator stops from all these descriptions of land claims. And he has this little snapshot of Caleb, this man, and his faith. We're going to study Caleb this morning.

Because Caleb's genuine faith resulted in him gaining his promised land, just as genuine faith for a Christian today will result in us gaining our promised land, which is eternal life and the new creation.

But that is all dependent on having genuine faith. And so I want to examine four characteristics this morning of Caleb's genuine faith, to which we should soberly compare ourselves.

[4 : 14] So let's have a look. Firstly, genuine faith is wholehearted. Now, if you don't know the background, Caleb's story starts way before the book of Joshua.

We first come across him in the book of Numbers, where we discover he was one of the spies who went to spy out the land way before Israel even entered Canaan, the land that God had promised to give to his people.

Now, when the spies returned, we read in Numbers. You can read it when you're at home, Numbers 13 and 14. When they returned, most of them failed to believe that God would carry out his promise.

They went into the land and they realized that the enemies were far bigger and far more ferocious than they thought. And so they thought, no, we can't possibly take this land. And so they said, no, we'll, you know, there's no hope.

But then Caleb stood up and he said this in Numbers 13. He silenced the people before Moses and he said, we should go up and take possession of the land for we can certainly do it.

[5 : 10] This is just a faithful man. And as opposed to the rest, he believed that his God was bigger than any opposition they might face, which sadly was a minority position.

But listen to God's response. It's up on the screen behind me. This is what God had to say about Caleb's faith. Because my servant Caleb had a different spirit and follows me wholeheartedly, I will bring him into the land he went to and his descendants will inherit it.

Notice how God describes Caleb's faith here with the word wholeheartedly. That's a very interesting word. And it's quite a commendation, isn't it, from God for this man Caleb?

Wholeheartedly. You see, Caleb was no Sunday Christian. He didn't just express his faith once or twice a week when he was expected to. Caleb's wholehearted, 24-7, was focused on God and on God's kingdom priorities.

God and God's kingdom and God's promises were what drove Caleb's ambitions in life, what directed his energy in life. That was his focus from the moment he woke up to the moment he went to sleep.

[6 : 25] He wasn't a once-a-week Christian by any means. He was a wholehearted faith. So I guess what we've got to ask ourselves is, can we say the same about our relationship with God at present?

Can you say that about your relationship with God at present? Is it wholehearted? It's a good question to ask. It's the reason why we're given this example in the Bible to compare ourselves to.

Do you follow God wholeheartedly or just when you feel like it? Be honest. Does God just have a slice of your heart, if any at all?

Does he have to compete for your attention with other passions in life? Or does he have your whole heart? Remember what the law of God requires that we see in our catechism question in your notices, that we love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Not just part of our heart, and part of our soul, and part of our mind, and part of our strength. Which makes sense, because God has given us everything.

[7 : 32] God gives us every breath we breathe. But we tend to love the things he gives us more than we love the giver of those things, the source of those things. Things in life that he has given us to enjoy make us happier than God makes us.

We turn our back on the source of all those things and chase after them. And that is the human tendency. Our tendency is that we don't love God with our whole heart.

We're not wholehearted. And if that's the case for you, if you're realizing that as we look at Caleb this morning, and you feel that, you know, I'm not loving God wholeheartedly, I'm not following God wholeheartedly, then you've got to realize what the problem is, and repent of it.

You know, if you love the things that God has given you more than God himself, if God doesn't have rightful ownership of the heart and the life he gave you, then repent of it. God is merciful, and he has made a way of forgiveness, and he's made a way to come into a wonderful relationship with him through repentance and faith and following Jesus.

And so he is always opening the door for you to recognize where you're lacking and to repent of it and to change. But you've got to recognize it. And that's why I think Caleb is here in the Bible, because he helps us to recognize where our faith falls short.

[8 : 50] Repent and decide to follow God completely from this day onwards without compromise, because that is what God calls of his people and what is exemplified in this man Caleb.

That's the first characteristic of genuine faith, wholeheartedness. Secondly, we learn that genuine faith is unpopular. We don't really like this one.

But going back to numbers, when Caleb said to those Israelites that they should go and conquer the land, and, you know, while 10 out of 12 of the spies said that it was too risky, he wasn't the most popular guy around camp after that.

In fact, we read on in numbers that the whole assembly at one point decided, hey, let's just stone them, Caleb and Joshua, for saying what they said. And it's quite a, quite a, wouldn't like to live in that camp when people can just off the cuff decide, hmm, well, let's stone them.

But they did. Fortunately for Joshua and Caleb, they didn't go ahead with it, because God kind of intervened. But why? Why didn't they like what Caleb was saying?

[9 : 53] Why didn't they like what Joshua was saying? Well, they didn't like this, you know, fanatical religious talk about having faith in God's promises, in something you can't see. They wanted to do things their own way.

They wanted to see things in front of their eyes. They wanted to trust in their own judgment rather than God. So they didn't want to hear it from Caleb, this talk of faith. It reminds us, doesn't it, of how people today often respond to Christians talking about Jesus.

They don't like all this fanatical talk of faith in Jesus, because they want to do things their own way. They want to trust in their own ideas of life after death, rather than take the only way that God has given in Jesus Christ.

And so any talk of Jesus and the need to follow and trust him will be unpopular, I can guarantee you. In fact, just this week I saw a video of a preacher in London, on the streets in London.

You're allowed to stand in certain areas in London and preach or speak publicly. But this preacher was arrested. The crowd started getting wild in London, a very civilized, supposedly, city.

[10 : 58] And the crowd started going wild. The police came and they arrested and they dragged him off, violently dragged off this preacher, just for preaching what is in the Bible, because people didn't like it. People didn't want to hear it. And cases like this are getting more and more frequent in our societies today, where Christians, for talking about Jesus, are silenced, are suppressed.

But genuine faith will always be unpopular. And if that is your faith, if your faith is genuine faith, you won't be able to hide it.

That is one of the marks of genuine faith, is that it comes out of you. It reflects in the way you think, the way you speak, the way you live, and what you live for. And because you won't be able to hide it, because genuine faith comes out naturally, in your attitudes, and in your conduct, and in your speech, you will at times be unpopular for that.

And the decisions you make will be unpopular when you don't engage in the activities of the rest of the guys in the office. You'll be unpopular for it. You'll be excluded when you refuse to badmouth the person who everyone else is skinning about.

You'll be unpopular. When you take a biblical stand against same-sex marriage, and transgenderism, and abortion, you'll be unpopular. People won't like you.

[12 : 17] Genuine faith will result in unpopularity. So get used to it, first of all. And if you're never unpopular for what you believe, you really should stop and ask yourself, why? Because the Bible assures us.

In 2 Timothy, listen to what it says. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. That's one of the promises of the Bible that you don't find in the little promise cards or fridge magnets.

And yet it's right there. Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. So don't be surprised when you become unpopular for what you believe. Don't keep quiet about it.

Rather, be encouraged. Be encouraged because it's a sign of genuine faith in Christ. So that's the second characteristic. The third characteristic of genuine faith that we see in Caleb is that genuine faith is based on God's word.

So now after 45 years, after God promised Caleb the land that he had once spied out, I mean, imagine waiting 45 years patiently for God's promise.

[13 : 25] And yet Caleb did. This grisly 85-year-old veteran Caleb comes hobbling along to Joshua and requests that he be able to now go and take this land that still happens to be filled with deadly enemies in simple faith that God would give it to him because God said he would.

It's a great picture, isn't it, of just simple, wholehearted faith. You can imagine the scene, can't you? And Caleb coming up to Joshua, all these young fit warriors behind them, standing watching this conversation, just listening in, these two great legends of the war, now talking about one last final campaign.

And Joshua asking, you know, that's great, Caleb. It's really good that you want to do that. But don't the ferocious Anakites, those giants, still live in that land? And Caleb replying, Anakites?

Who's scared of Anakites? Let me at him. You know, what a guy. I mean, what a guy. Caleb waving his walking stick around, shouting, I'm still as strong today as I was 45 years ago. Don't hold me back.

And this is a great example of simple faith in God's promises. And he must have really inspired those younger soldiers around them, watching them, listening, with his immense faith.

[14 : 42] And you've got to ask, you know, a man like this, where did this immense faith come from? How come Caleb had so much faith? Why could he stand as an example of faith?

Was it just the kind of person he was? You know, you come across people that just seem to have more faith than others? Well, no. It wasn't because of the kind of person he was. What we discover is that all his courageous faith was based simply on the Word of God, what God had said.

That's what his faith was based on. That was the foundation of his faith. If nothing more, nothing less. Notice, if you have your Bible in front of you, which I hope you do, notice how many times in this passage, Caleb states, as the Lord has said, or something similar.

So verse 6, you know what the Lord said to Moses. Verse 10, just as the Lord has promised. Verse 10 again, as he said this to Moses.

Verse 12, give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You see what Caleb's faith was actually based on? It wasn't because he was a particular type of person who happened to have strong faith.

[15 : 44] It was because he stood firmly on the promises that God had made in his Word to Caleb. See, Caleb's faith wasn't based on emotions, and it wasn't based on just positive thinking, like often faith is seen today.

Caleb didn't get this faith, this great faith, as a result of, you know, listening to a TED talk, or going to an emotional worship service with lights and smoke machines.

That wasn't the source of Caleb's faith. And neither was his faith based on faith itself. This happens a lot in our churches today, where people believe that they'll get something only if they manage to have enough faith.

Have you come across that kind of thinking? Where people say, well, this is what I want, I'm going to pray to God, and then I'm just going to have faith, and if I don't get it, it's because I haven't got enough faith, and I've got to have more faith. It's actually what the prosperity gospel teaches, and it's wrong, because it kind of implies that the faith, your faith is the thing that gives you what you want.

And so people end up having faith in faith itself, not in God and His Word. See the difference? It's very subtle, but it's very important. We mustn't have faith in faith itself. We mustn't think that if I'm strong enough in my faith, then I'll get what I want.

[17 : 01] No, you must have faith in what God has said He promises to give His people and live by those promises. See, Caleb's faith wasn't based on emotions. It wasn't based on positive thinking.

It wasn't based on faith itself. It wasn't based on any of the sinking sand, because all these things are just sinking sand. Caleb's strength of faith came from his knowledge of God's unchanging Word.

And of course, the application to us this morning is clear, isn't it? If you want to have the faith of Caleb, it will come as you read and believe the Word of God, like He did. And as you embrace the sure promises of the Gospel, and as you absorb yourself in God's Word and in His promises, and in all of the implications for life and eternity in your life.

Faith based solidly on what God's Word says. See, faith based on anything else, and faith can be based on a lot of different things, but anything else just creates flimsy faith that will be blown away as soon as the wind of trial comes along.

And so if you don't want flimsy faith, I encourage you to get to know God's Word inside out, because the more you know, the more foundation there is for your faith to stand strong on.

[18 : 21] Get to know God's Word. You know, we live in a culture of messages of less than a hundred characters, and we're kind of only used to reading tiny, small chunks.

Maybe we'll read a Bible verse to get us going for the day. But that's not how we get to know God's Word, and it's vast story, and the great themes of God's Word, and the great doctrines of God's Word.

And that's one of the reasons we've got this catechism in the notices, so that you learn the great doctrines of God's Word. Simple, but profound. And that's one of the reasons that next term, if you haven't heard yet, we're going to be starting an evening service here at St. Mark's, with a difference.

What we're going to be doing is, well, the purpose of it is to get to know the Bible better, so that we can base our faith solidly on God's Word, because we get to know it more. And so what we're going to do in the evenings from next term is we're going to step back from the detailed learning we do in the morning, and we're just going to get a bigger picture of the whole message of the Bible.

We're going to look at the grand themes of the Bible by looking at big sections of it at a time, in a way that's easy to understand. And so do come along. Get to know God's Word better, so that your faith will have a firm foundation like Caleb's did.

[19 : 35] Because that's the third mark of genuine faith, that it's based solidly on God's Word. And then fourthly and finally, genuine faith leads to action. You see, Caleb's faith, we read in the story, Caleb's faith in God's promise didn't cause him to go, okay, great, God may be in that promise, well, I'll just sit back and wait to see what God does.

No, that's not what he did. Caleb's faith caused him to go and claim what God had promised. Very different response. And that's the response of genuine faith. Genuine faith doesn't sit back and wait for God's promises to be fulfilled, but it goes out and acts in preparation of that fulfillment.

And what's more, Caleb's faith led him not just to action, but notice, to courageous action against adverse conditions. Verse 12, Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day.

You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and that their cities were large and fortified, but the Lord helping me, I will drive them out, just as he said. He took a bit of courage to do that.

Let me tell you about the Anakites. If you haven't heard of them in previous Bible studies and sermons, the Anakites were giants. Giants actually existed. These Anakites were huge giants of men who terrified anybody who came into contact with them.

[20 : 53] Goliath was probably a remnant of their race. And we learned back in Joshua 11 that the Anakites were eventually driven out of Canaan. But here we find out how that happened.

These huge, terrifying giants of men were beaten by a pensioner, basically. But a pensioner who trusted in God's word.

And that's what made all the difference. And a pensioner who did what seemed to be insane to anyone looking on. I mean, imagine what they would have thought seeing Caleb ask Joshua if this 85 probably stooped over on a walking stick going to Joshua and saying, can I attack the Anakites, please?

You know, let me at him. And imagine all the other soldiers who were too scared to attack the Anakites thinking of how ridiculous this request was.

But that's what happens. That's what genuine faith does. It leads us to do things that seem crazy to people without that faith. Like, for example, turning down a promotion or taking a salary cut so that you've got more time for ministry.

[22 : 04] That's crazy. Your work colleagues would think you're insane to do that if you've got these opportunities. They don't understand why you'd want to do that. Genuine faith, though, leads us to do crazy things.

Like moving to a more dangerous area because you'll better be able to fulfill the Great Commission there. It's crazy. It seems crazy. Like, here's one. Knocking on doors to share the gospel and risking your reputation.

Doing courageous things because you trust in God's word and you have the hope of eternal life and you have the desire to see God's kingdom come and more people to find eternal life. And so you will do crazy things because that's a mark of genuine faith.

Let me ask you, is that what characterizes your faith? Is it a faith that leads to action in your life? Is it a faith that translates in a different way of living?

Is it a faith that moves away from your head and your heart and into your action and into your life? Is it a faith that leads you to step out of your comfort zone to do God's work and grow His kingdom, even if that's scary?

[23 : 07] Is that what characterizes your faith? Because that's what Caleb did despite the difficulties that he was going to face. And not just external difficulties, he had internal difficulties too.

He was 85 years old. I mean, he was a little past his fighting prime, you would think. And yet even that didn't stop him because he followed God wholeheartedly. He wasn't constrained.

You see, Caleb wasn't looking to fade away quietly in retirement. He wasn't about to waste his last years at a bowling club or on his couch watching Super Sport or fixing up his seaside holiday cottage.

No, even though he was getting old, that didn't weaken his zeal for God's kingdom. His zeal grew with age. And that's what burned brightly in his eyes and that's what he channeled all his remaining energy into.

Because that's the attitude of wholehearted faith, a desire to do the work of the kingdom until your last breath. Even if you're getting on in years, there'll always be something you can be doing for God's kingdom.

[24 : 14] Sharing the gospel to those that you live near. Meeting up with a younger Christian and discipling them in the faith. Praying strategically for the growth of God's kingdom in your community.

Giving your skills and time towards the outreaches that happen from this church. You see, we never retire from serving God. We never take a holiday from serving God.

As another preacher said, like Caleb, we should want to go out in a blaze of glory for Christ, not rotting away on a cruise ship. And that's the attitude of genuine wholehearted faith.

And so there, this morning, I just wanted to give you this snapshot of the kind of faith which will lead us, like it led Caleb, to inherit God's promise.

The promise of eternal life in a new creation through following and trusting Jesus who has done everything for us. There's nothing more we need to do. We just need to put our faith in Jesus.

[25 : 14] And make sure it's genuine faith. Not just saying it. You're not just going through the motions. Is your faith genuinely in Jesus? Are you following Him as your Savior and Lord? And if you haven't done that yet, if you haven't made that decision to follow Jesus, let me tell you, it's not too late.

Come and speak to me or come and speak to the person who brought you here this morning. But if you have, if you have made the decision to follow Jesus and to give your life to Him, then be aware, you may have to wait until you see those promises come to fruition.

Caleb had to wait 45 years. But they will come to you if your faith is the real thing. And so ask yourself, does this example of Caleb describe your own faith?

Is it wholehearted faith? Is it faith that you're willing to suffer persecution for? Is it based solidly on God's Word? And does it drive you to courageous action for the Kingdom of God?

Well, I'm going to pray that that would be true of all of us here at St. Mark's. Let's bow our heads. Yes, Lord, we thank you for giving us the snapshot of wholehearted faith in your Word.

[26 : 28] Thank you that we could open it this morning and think through what it means for us. And Lord, help us to have that same faith as Caleb. Help us to have wholehearted faith in your promises.

Help us to absorb ourselves in your Word and in your promises and the hope of eternal life that you give through Jesus, your Son. Lord, may that be our guiding principle in life.

May that direct our steps. Help us not to be Sunday Christians. Help us to go out and live life according to your Word, according to your promises. And so that we, like Caleb, would inherit those promises and that we would wait for them patiently and with joy.

And we do pray these things through Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.