

What Does it Take to get to Heaven?

Slide -

I know, you know getting to heaven requires more than wanting to go there.

In this lesson, we are going to take a sobering look at the road to heaven and the many obstacles that makes getting there a bumpy ride.

Jesus explains what it takes to go to heaven for all those who want to go there.

Listen carefully if that's what you want:

1. Believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God

Slide - John 3:16 "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

2. Remain faithful until death

Slide - Mark 13:13 "And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures (bears patiently) to the end shall be saved."

All other teachings by Jesus and the Apostles about this subject can be folded into those two ideas.

For example:

Slide - The commands to repent, to be baptized, to love our brothers and sisters, to bear fruit, to worship in spirit and truth, and so on are all various ways to express our faith in Christ.

Slide - And those teachings that talk about personal holiness, prayer life, perseverance, fellowship which is developing relationships with God and others speak to the ongoing process of remaining faithful to the Lord for a lifetime.

Now, of those two, expressing our faith in Christ, and remaining faithful until death, I believe the second (remaining faithful) is the more difficult.

After all, the line between disbelief and belief is usually crossed only one time.

Oh, it may require time and patience but once a person believes and is baptized, they rarely go back to all out disbelief.

Faithfulness, on the other hand, **is mostly about delayed gratification - the reward comes at the end.**

You need to finish your life faithfully in order to receive what the Scriptures calls the "crown of life".

Slide - James 1:12 "Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him."

Another reason why I think faithfulness is difficult is that it has so many enemies lying in wait to destroy it.

Jesus mentions a few of these in the parable of the seed planting in Matthew 13.

1. Slide - **Persecution for believing God's Word** - vs. 21.

Matthew 13:20 But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; 21 yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles.

For example: the pressure from non-believers to stop being faithful/ to stop holding to our principles/ to lower or compromise our Christian values, etc.

This is a constant attack, and some people don't last long. First or second attack and they are done.

2. **Slide - Cares of this world** - vs. 22.

22 Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.

For example: all those things that are not necessarily evil but get in the way of us being faithful to Christ and His church.

Sickness; bad weather; conflict with people; stress; failure; work; moving; STUFF.

Before you know it, you're drowning in the business of family and life and job and have no time for the Lord!

3. **Slide - Jesus also mentions the allure of wealth** - vs. 22.

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For example: the desire to be rich; not being rich, to be first; to succeed; to be valued; to find our place in the world.

The deceit is that this desire and the effort that goes into it takes our focus away from Christ and His will for us.

Someone once said if you find your place in the world you have lost your place in God's kingdom.

The desire for wealth and success dulls our spirit and interferes with our commitment to finishing - why?

We put aside spiritual things "just for a little while", we think to ourselves in order to pursue wealth and either lose our way or never come back to Christ.

Now in addition to these enemies that Jesus points out in His parable there are numerous other obstacles that make remaining faithful to the end difficult.

Let me just name a few more:

4. **Slide - Our own personal sins.**

Aside from persecution and the cares and pleasures of the world there is the matter of our own sinfulness that discourages us from finishing.

Seeing our weaknesses, failing to do or be what we want to be in Christ often kills our desire to continue on in the faith.

Which we will address later

5. **Slide - Unbelievers drawing us away.**

Slide - II Corinthians 6:14 "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship (in common) has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion (fellowship) has light with darkness?"

How many people have ignored this warning from Paul in not to be "yoked" or partnered with unbelievers, and lived to regret it?

Unbelievers influencing, discouraging believers to let go their faith in order to maintain a friendship, or some kind of business or family relationship.

Those not committed to Christ will never be a help to us in remaining faithful.

I'm not saying we shouldn't have relationships with non-Christians, that would be impossible –

I'm just reminding you that those who refuse to believe and honor Christ will always be a challenge to our own faithfulness so we have to be aware of this.

Those who has openly rejected Christ and are not interested in heaven are not interested in you going to heaven either.

They are not interested in their own soul, what makes you think they are interested in yours?

I could go on with the list of reasons why remaining faithful until the end in my opinion, is the most difficult command of the Lord to follow.

You know, the TV commentators talking about the teams in hockey playoffs, which I like to watch,

And they are always listing what it takes for the teams to reach the finals and win the Stanley Cup Championships...

they say:

It takes a team that stays healthy

It takes solid goal tending and defense

It takes an offense that takes the opportunities to score, which are few.

It takes stay focused on the prize, the trophy.

Well, in the same way, I'd like to share with you what I think "it takes" for Christians to remain faithful to the end and get to heaven.

Slide - What it takes to get to heaven?

Slide - 1. A firm decision

The first step in any successful enterprise is always the decision to go ahead and not quit until the end.

We need to make up our minds about Christ once and for all - we're in or we're out –

even if we don't know what the future holds.

Peter the Apostle is a good example of this.

In John 6 we see a situation where things were going badly as many disciples were deserting Jesus because it seemed that following Him was becoming too difficult.

Slide - John 6:66 "from that time many of His disciples went back (away) and walked with Him no more."

Slide - John 6:67 "Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?"

Slide - And in John 6:68 "But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Jesus said to His closest disciples - "Make up your minds! Decide! Are you in? Are you out?"

Now this was not for His benefit but for theirs.

And Peter confirms his original decision to follow Jesus and gives the reasons why.

He's not in, he's all the way in.

Slide - You can't be faithful until the end if you are continually questioning or renegotiating your decision to follow Christ.

Think of the ideal spouse:

Totally faithful without a single doubt

Completely devoted to your family

There for you through good or bad times, no matter what.

Would you like this idea of a spouse?

Well, decide that this is the kind of disciple you'll be to Jesus.

Jesus wants the same thing in a disciple as you would want in a spouse,

It wouldn't hurt if you decide that this is the kind of spouse and disciple you will be as well.

Being faithful to the end requires a firm decision once and for all that Jesus Christ is my Lord and I will be faithful to Him no matter what.

Slide - 2. A reality check

Ok, so you've made this firm decision.

You see, just because you make the decision doesn't automatically get you to the end faithfully.

You need to realize that once you've made the decision –

the "gloves come off" as far as the battle for your soul is concerned.

Once you decide that you will be faithful, everything to lead you away from that decision will come into your life.

Here are some fairly common things that I've seen in the last 30 years,

Things that have happened after deciding to follow Jesus.

Slide - Your old life shows up, whether it be your old sins, habits, activities, friends, etc.

These will reappear to draw you away from Christ.

Slide - Something or someone will come between you and the church.

The church is Christ's body and one of its functions is to help each member remain faithful to the Lord.

The best way to draw someone away from Christ, therefore, is to find a way to separate him/her from the church.

People who are separated from the body (for whatever reason) are usually separated from the head of the body (Jesus) without much effort and in little time.

I just slays me when people oh yes I'm a good Christians and you asked them do you go to church?

And they say I don't need to do that, me and the Lord have a thing, no you don't have a thing

Either you are part of the body, which is Christ's church or you are not.

My hand, which is attached to my arm, which is attached to my shoulder which part of my body, or it isn't.

Slide - Doubt because of personal failure.

Those who have decided to follow Christ take failure pretty hard.

Do you know how hard it is to forgive yourself?

Moral failure

Sickness

Financial trouble

Conflict at home or with other Christians etc.

Many believers mistakenly equate failure with loss of faith or doubt.

For example, they say to themselves if I really believe then I wouldn't fail would I?

I wouldn't fail so badly or I wouldn't fail so often or I wouldn't fail in this way.

The mistaken idea is that if God is good and my faith is true and the church is right - then all of these things wouldn't happen to me.

Why should I continue? What's the point?

You know, I've preached these types of sermons before - telling people in advance what to watch out for and they say, "Amen" and "Thank you" brother Mike for helping me stand firm - but many of them still fall away.

For example, I have a picture of the original congregation of Boca Raton church when we met in store front location dated 1980.

Now that they are in a new building, 50% have given up following Christ! Most have gone back to the world.

All because they didn't face reality.

Being faithful means facing opposition from every direction,

Slide - That's why Jesus said: Matthew 10:36 "and 'a man's enemies will be those of his own household.'

Jesus didn't mean that you had to be at war with your family in order to be a Christian.

He was simply warning those who had decided to follow Him that in the battle for your faithfulness – even your own family could become an obstacle - that's how rough it can get.

I remember when I first became a Christian and me evangelizing my mother and she shut me right down.

So, if you want to be faithful to the end it requires that you be aware of how nasty the fight will be and the price you may have to pay to get to the end.

Finally, aside from a firm decision and a serious reality check, in order to be faithful until the end - it takes:

Slide - 3. **Trust in the Lord**

Jesus has not asked us to do what is impossible.

The Hebrew writer says that Jesus is in Hebrews 12:2.

Slide - "looking unto Jesus, the author (originator) and finisher (perfecter) of our faith"

Slide - In other words, He's there at the beginning:

He's there Helping us to believe unto salvation

He's there Washing us clean of sin in baptism

He's there Blessing us with the Holy Spirit at the beginning of our walk.

Slide - He's there along the way

And, He's also there guiding and sustaining us each day in our walk of faith until the end - as He's promised.

Slide - Matthew 28:20 "I am with you always, even to the end of the age."

Slide - Hebrews 13:5 "For He Himself has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we may boldly say: "The Lord is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?"

He's there at the finish line!

It's not that He's just at the finish line waiting for us to arrive.

He's with us every step of the way, through every obstacle, discouragement, and temptation. He is always there.

When I win - I trust that He will receive my praise and thanksgiving.

When I lose - I trust in His continued grace and mercy - and I move on.

When I'm tempted, doubtful, discouraged or confused –

I trust that He can and will enable me to continue believing in Him and show me the way that I must go.

I trust Him enough to look forward to the promise of heaven and not backwards to my many, many failures,

The number one mistake we all make is we look backwards instead of forwards,

Listen to what does Paul says:

Slide - Philippians 3:13-14 "forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus."

I trust Him enough to know that what He has promised, He will indeed give me in the end - so I run the race with confidence.

Slide - You can't be faithful to the end without trusting in Jesus because that's what the journey is about - trust.

We enter - into the eternal heavenly realm by the power of the Son of God and who is the Good Shepard are carried there by the wings of trust which we develop though a lifetime of faithfulness to Him.

Summary

Slide - There's an old saying that goes, "Everybody wants to go to heaven but nobody wants to die."

That saying may be true for doubters and unbelievers because they don't know what to expect after death.

They'd like to go to a heavenly place but they're not sure it exists so they'd rather stay here on earth as long as they can, just in case.

For Christians this saying should be changed to: "Everybody wants to go to heaven but only a few:

Slide - Make the decision once and for all to go there.

...and only a few... are ready for the opposition that they will encounter along the way.

...and only a few are willing to completely trust Jesus to get them there safely.

Slide - Matthew 7:14 "Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.

He wasn't saying that God wanted the way to be narrow and difficult with only a few on it.

He just knew that not everybody (certainly not the majority) would be willing to give what it would take to find the road and then follow it all the way home.

Jesus says to you - "Make up your minds! Decide! Are you in? Are you out?"

While you still have time to serve Him.

I know that everyone here wants to go to heaven, I hope that after this morning you'll also know what it will take to get you there.

If anyone this morning needs the help to begin the journey thru repentance and baptism or the prayers to carry on in a difficult moment

Please we encourage you to come forward now as we stand and as we sing our song of encouragement.

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