Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

On Thursday evening we began a membership class here at the church. And this past week I read about another minister who always began his membership classes by making two lists. For the first list, he would show them a jar full of jelly beans. He then asked each attendee to guess how many jelly beans were in the jar, and he recorded all their answers. For the second list, he would ask them for their favourite song, and record all their answers. Well, after the lists were complete, he told them how many jelly beans there were in the jar. And then he read out the name of the person who was closest to being right. And then he turned to the favourite song list and he would ask the attendees which of them was closest to being right? And as you can imagine, they protested and said there is no ‘right’ answer with songs because a person’s favourite song is about personal taste. So then the minister would ask the attendees – when it comes to what to believe in order to be saved, is it more like guessing the correct number of jelly beans or choosing your favourite song? In other words, is faith about what is correct and true, or about what a person likes?

Well, our sermon, this afternoon, is about true faith. And in 1 Corinthians 2 **Paul Explains the Nature of True Faith**. And as we walk through this chapter our three main headings will be – first, **what it is that a person must believe in order to be saved**, second, **what believing is**, and third, **not everyone will believe**. And brothers and sisters, young people, and boys and girls, there really is no more important subject than true faith. It is the very heart of salvation. Get this wrong, and you will not be saved.

1. So we begin with **what it is that a person must believe in order to be saved**.
   1. Paul wrote this letter to the church in Corinth. And ch. 1 explains that the congregation was divided into groups who followed different ministers who had served there or different apostles or Christ. And this had a lot to do with perceived differences of style and content in preaching and pastoral ministry. And this absolutely horrified Paul. He couldn’t believe that style was viewed as more important than the gospel. So he wanted to return the focus not to the *messenger* but to the *message*. What they needed to understand, and what we need to understand, is that conversion power is not about a certain preaching *style* but about the preaching *of the gospel*.
      1. Back in **Romans 1**, for example, Paul said that he was eager to preach the gospel in Rome. And then he said, “*For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes*.” So Paul wasn’t saying, I am better at this than anyone else who has been there before; he was simply saying that whenever someone preaches the gospel, the Spirit delights to work. So the power of preaching is *the gospel message* and the *Holy Spirit*.
   2. And we see that here in 1 Cor. 2 in the opening verses. Look at v1. How does Paul describe what he preached when he was first in Corinth? “*The testimony of God*.” And what does that mean? Well, he makes this crystal clear in v3. How does he describe what he preached in v3? “*Jesus Christ and Him crucified*.” The testimony of God is Jesus Christ, crucified.
      1. The same thing is said, most beautifully, in **1 John 1**. There we read John, an Apostle, say, “*That which … we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning [Jesus] … we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life … so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ*.” So wherever they were, what the Apostles did was to testify, or bear witness to, or preach, over and over and over again, who Jesus is and what He came to earth to do.
      2. And they did this because this was the command of Jesus - **Mark 16:15-16**, “*Go into all the world and proclaim the gospel to the whole creation. Whoever believes … will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned*.” **Romans 10:9** says the same thing: “*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved*.” And to confess and believe this about Jesus you have to hear about Jesus!
      3. So what the Apostles preached was Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and His obedient life, His crucifixion, His resurrection, and ascension.
   3. And what that adds up to, people of God, is **the content of the Apostles’ Creed**, which is what is written out in Q/A 23. The Apostles’ Creed was not written by the Apostles; it is a summary of what they taught in the NT. As far back as around AD 150, so just 50 odd years after the last Apostle died, this creed is what someone joining the church would state as their profession of faith. And it soon became used by the whole church at that time and has been used ever since. Still today, you will hear it recited in many, many denominations.

It declares that God is Trinity – One God in three persons; Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It declares that Jesus is the Son of God, and that He took to Himself a human nature, when He was born of Mary, by the Holy Spirit. And He suffered, was crucified, died, was buried, descended into hell, rose on the third day, ascended into heaven, lives and reigns there, and will come again to judge the world.

* + 1. And in line with what we heard a moment ago from Romans 10: “*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*,” Q/A 22 explains that a person must believe what is contained in the Creed in order to be saved.
    2. And I hope you can see that this is a jar full of jelly-beans thing and not a What is your favourite song? thing. What we must believe is not about personal taste but about what is correct and true. So in the same way that if there are 342 jelly beans in a jar and you guess 343, you are wrong!, if you deny that Jesus is truly God or truly human, or say that He sinned, or that He did not really die, or that He did not really rise, or that He is not now in heaven, or that He is not coming back, you are wrong; you do not believe in the “*testimony of God*” – “*Jesus Christ, crucified*,” and you will not be saved.

1. Now, thus far we have only looked at the *content*; what we must believe in order to be saved. But we also need to consider the act of believing itself. What does that involve? Q/A 21 asks, what is *true* faith? And the obvious implication of that question is that there is false faith. So how do we know if we have true faith? So we turn our attention, secondly, to **what believing is**.
   1. Now, true faith is one of those things that is difficult to describe. I once heard a story about faith that goes like this. One man was teaching intellectually handicapped youth how to repair electrical appliances. And after they had been at it for several weeks, he told the students to bring something broken from home so that they could fix it. And at the next class, a young man with Down’s syndrome turned up with a broken toaster and half a loaf of bread ☺ And that’s faith, isn’t it! He was convinced that they would fix the toaster and he could make some toast! **Hebrews 11:1** says, “*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen*.” So faith has to do with things that we can’t see with our eyes. And that is 100% the case with the Lord Jesus Christ, isn’t it. We did not see any of the things written about in the Bible. We cannot see Jesus now. And we only have God’s promise that Jesus will come again and take us to be with Himself in heaven. And it was the same for the Christians in Corinth. So let’s look at the faith words and concepts that Paul uses in this chapter.
      1. In vv1-7, Paul says that he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ, crucified. And if you look at v8, he says there that “*none of the rulers of this age understood this*.” So what is the faith word in that phrase? “*Understood*.” Faith understands Jesus Christ, crucified. We see the same word in v12, “*Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God*.” Other English Bible versions use the word “*know*” in place of understand. So in order to believe something you have to know/understand it.
      2. But look next at14; what is the faith word in v14? “*Accept*.” And then v15; what is the faith word in v15? “*Judges*.” So it is not enough just to know something and understand it, you have to accept it and judge it to be true. In other words, you have to be **convinced** that what you have heard about Jesus Christ, crucified, is true.
      3. So that’s the first part of Q/A 21 – True faith is knowledge and conviction. But congregation, knowing and being convinced that Jesus Christ was crucified is still not true faith!
         1. **James 2:19** says, “*You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe- and shudder*!” The devil and the demons know and are convinced that Jesus was crucified and rose from the dead. But they do not have true faith.
         2. And all around the world, there are men and women who are Bible experts. They study the languages and the archeology and the content of the Bible in Universities, all day long. They know what the Bible teaches. They understand what the Bible teaches. They believe that Jesus was real and that He was crucified but they do not have true faith.
         3. And sadly, there can be people like this *in churches also*. And I am not just talking about other churches, but our church too. You see, it is possible to grow up in the church and attend Sunday school and catechism and to hear sermons for many years, and to believe that Jesus is real and that He died on the cross and rose again, but still not have true faith.
      4. So let’s look at v9, which gets us to the very heart of true faith: “*But, as it is written, "What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love Him*."” And what this verse is talking about is eternal life, with Jesus, in heaven; that is what God has prepared for those who love Jesus. And although we can’t see it, and we can’t hear it, and it is impossible for us to even imagine, we are certain that not only is Jesus real and that He was crucified and rose again, but that He died and rose for the forgiveness of my sins, and I will spend eternity in heaven with Him. And I love Him!
         1. Do you see the difference between that and just believing that someone called Jesus was crucified? The demons and the Bible experts I told you about and some even in churches believe that someone called Jesus was crucified, but they do not *love* Jesus and they are not certain that their sins are forgiven and they will go spend eternity in heaven with Jesus. True faith knows and is convinced of and assured that Jesus died for me!
2. And the fact that there are believers and non-believers is what our third and final point is about, **not everyone will believe**.
   1. Verse 6 mentions the rulers of that age who did not have true faith and were “*doomed to pass away*.” And we all know people who do not believe in Jesus. And we ought to sad about that. But some do believe. Praise God! And I certainly hope that all of us here today are among those who do have true faith. So why does one believe and not another? How does a person begin to believe?
      1. Well, there are two parts to the answer to that question. What does **John 3:16** say? “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*.” And what did we hear earlier from **Romans 10:9**? “*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*.” So if you choose to believe in Jesus today, you will be saved. Make that decision. Make that choice.
      2. But the other part to the answer to this question is something Paul also explores in this chapter. Look at v14, “*The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned*.” And the context of that verse explains that what creates faith in a person is the word *and the Spirit*. Just hearing the words of the gospel is not enough; the words must be accompanied by the Holy Spirit who opens the mind and heart and emotions and will to believe the gospel.
         1. And the best way for me to illustrate this today is with **dynamite**. Boys and girls, I am sure you know how dynamite works. You set it up and connect it by a wire to a circuit plunger. And when you press that plunger, electricity flows through the line to the dynamite and it explodes!
         2. Well, v14 says the natural person is “*not able*” to understand, which means believe the gospel. And the Greek word for able is dunamis, from which we get dynamite. So think of it this way: The preaching of the gospel is like pressing the plunger. And each person has dynamite inside them; he or she has all of the things that faith acts from – heart, soul, mind, and strength. But the Holy Spirit is like the electricity that flows from the plunger to the dynamite. But if the Holy Spirit does not choose to act inside a person, then it does not matter how often the preacher ‘presses the plunger.’ The words might be heard, but nothing will happen – there will be no faith explosion. But if the Spirit does attach Himself to the words, then when the plunger is pressed, and the words are heard, kaboom! Faith explodes into life!

And that’s Paul’s message here. True faith is not about a certain preaching style; it is about preaching the gospel and the inward work of the Holy Spirit. So preach Jesus Christ, crucified, and pray that the Holy Spirit would use it to create faith.

And do you see what this means for you and me? If you are sitting here today and you have decided to believe in Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins, or you decide to believe in Him today, it is not ultimately about what you did, but about what the Holy Spirit did within you. It is the Holy Spirit who brings us to true faith. It is not we that save ourselves; it is God who saves us.

And as our concluding note, brothers and sisters, young people, and boys and girls, this is why we read that **Song of Solomon** passage earlier. Yes, it is a love poem between a man and a woman. But underneath that it is also a description of the love of Christ and His church. So true faith is the believer who says about Jesus, “*My beloved is mine, and I am His*.” Do you believe what the Apostles’ Creed says and that Jesus died for the forgiveness of your sins? Do you love Jesus and know for sure that you are His? If you do, then you may be certain that you will spend eternity in heaven with Him. And all God’s people said, Amen.