

Bethel Community Church *Sermon Series*

How Can I Be 100% Sure I'm
Going to Heaven?

Pastor Steve Jones

Sunday 25th January 2004

Prayer [PP1]

The Banana Test. [3 bananas presented – one green, one yellow (ripe), one black] [PP2]

I want you to use your powers of analysis on these three bananas. I want you to tell me which of these bananas would be the best to eat?

[The yellow one] Why?

You can tell from the outside, what's on the inside.

The external betrays the internal.

In the same way, what we do betrays what we think or believe. [PP3]

Sam and Charlotte had been married for just over 9 months. Almost immediately after the wedding Sam started being really controlling in the relationship and regularly lost his temper if Charlotte held to her guns on anything that Sam didn't agree with. On the evening of their 3 month anniversary they had a blazing row, which ended with Sam smacking his new wife around the head with his open hand and calling her "stupid". That next day Charlotte moved out to her parent's home. The following day Sam was on the doorstep with roses and a dramatic apology for his appalling behaviour. He promised never to do anything like it again. Charlotte moved back home, agreeing to give their marriage another try. It was less than a month later when Sam didn't show up to pick-up Charlotte after she had finished work. She tried his office number, but the answer phone was on. She rang his mobile, but that wasn't on either. Annoyed, particularly because it was raining, Charlotte made the 10 minute walk to Sam's office. On her arrival the side door was open, so she went in. As she entered Sam's office she found him hugging an attractive young female employee from the firm. The both looked very embarrassed, and the office girl left. Sam told Charlotte that the girl had some personal problems and that he was lending her support. Over the next few days Charlotte noted that a number of phone callers were not leaving messages when no one picked up. On her caller ID she repeatedly saw the name Tamara Wills. Discreet checks revealed that this was the girl caught in the embrace with Sam. Recently matters came to a head and Charlotte plucked up the courage to challenge Sam about his coming home late from work every day after

going to the local wine bar with people from work. Charlotte suspected that Sam was seeing Tamara. Sam exploded and said that Charlotte was trying to control him. Charlotte stood her ground and said that as they had been married less than a year he should be coming straight home after work to spend time with her. In a rage Sam lashed out and punched Charlotte in the face, knocking her down. Charlotte, in a state of shock, grabbed her car keys, ran from the house and drove to her mothers. Over the course of the next few days Sam made many, many phone calls to Charlotte's parent's house, leaving messages that he was sorry and that he loved Charlotte so much and wanted her back. He wrote to her promising never to hit her again and to come home right after work. His letter said that she was the love of his life.

Do you think that he loved her? I don't think that he did. He might want her, might have affection and desire for her, but I don't think he loved her. [PP4]

Agapē love, which is the love that marriage is based upon, is the love of service and sacrifice.

You can tell what is going on in Sam's mind by what he DOES. His actions betray him.

Words are cheap. Actions reveal truth.

Does your mouth write cheques that you don't cash?

When we look at what being a Christian means, for some it is a simple mathematical equation. [PP5]

Say "A + B" = C

Say "Repentance + Faith" = Salvation

Many, many people across the world are alive today thinking that they have received salvation and are going to heaven, when in fact, they have not.

They might say, well I prayed a prayer, I said the words that the preacher told me to, so I'm going to heaven, right?

The answer is; not necessarily.

There are many who prayed a prayer, maybe years ago, but their life did not change one jot following their profession of faith.

I am here today on the Authority of God Himself to tell you that if you have genuinely become a Christian your life will change; you can't help but change.

We are going to look at what Jesus Himself said would happen to us, if we become His followers.

Let's get over to John 15:1-17 [ESV Church 1087 Compact 901]

Explanation [PP6]

Jesus uses the illustration of the vine for 2 reasons. (1) His illustrations always used subjects that were common in the everyday life of His hearers (seeds, harvest, cloaks, coinage). Grapevines were everywhere in the area in which Jesus ministered. (2) The vine was a recognized symbol of the Messiah and Israel itself. Jesus was saying that Israel was the vine of God that should have borne fruit, but He has come in its place to be the "True Vine" and bear fruit. In the Maccabean period before Jesus' birth the vine was a symbol on local coinage to represent Israel.

Jesus is saying I am the real McCoy. This is the 7th and last of His "I AM" statements in the Gospel of John.

"Every branch of mine.." Jesus is talking to His followers and to us in the Church.

The Father is the vinedresser, or farmer or husbandman. His job is to care for and tend the vines to ensure the best crop.

Vine –branches [Latter keyed into the former]

Branches not producing. Vinedresser cuts them away and they go off to the fire.

Branches bearing fruit? They get pruned!

In vineyards the most skilled people are the pruners. They train for 2 or 3 years to know where to cut, what angle to cut at and importantly, when.

Good pruning produces higher yields of better grapes. Sometimes the pruner will cut away what look to be good grapes in order that even better ones will grow.

Vines are cleaned (stripped down) to make them effective for bearing fruit.

Jesus says that His followers are clean because of His Word.

We are washed in the Word at the point of salvation, and we are also daily washed in the Word as we are sanctified (made more holy). [PP7]

Abide [Gr. Menō] Menō is a primary verb meaning to "dwell, remain or stay put" with a definite purpose. Whilst you remain where you are, as an active verb, you do it with focus and energy.

[Remain in your seats with energy] – Illustration

Jesus says, “Abide in Me, and I in you”. How do you do that?

We abide in Him, when we pray and read His Word and then do what He tells us.

He abides in us when we remain broken and surrendered to His plan for our life

Verses 5 and 6

If you are in Christ, you will bear much fruit.

If you are not in Christ, you will bear nothing.

Therefore, like the bananas, you can tell your inward state, by your outward presentation.

If you bear much fruit, you are a Christian.

If you bear no fruit, you are not.

Consequences if you are His:

1. You get pruned (15:2). (Hebrews 12:6)
2. Your prayers are answered (15:7,16)
3. You have a deepening love for Christ and other Christians (15:9,12-13)
4. You have joy (15:11)

The Acid Test

What then is the fruit that demonstrates that you abide with Christ and are His?

1. You seek to draw others to Christ (Romans 1:13; John 4:35-38)

When you are His you think about who you know that might want to hear about what has happened to you, read a Christian book that you have, or who might come to Church if you ask them. You have an undercurrent desire in your life to bring others to the foot of the Cross.

2. You seek to live a life of increasing holiness (Romans 6:22)

You increasingly seek to conform yourself to the image of Christ. You try to live like He did. You find out how by reading the Bible and asking God in prayer to make what you are studying clear to you. You may make slow progress, but you progress none-the-less. You might increasingly make better choices about what you say, what you watch and how you use the money that God has given into your care. You develop real moral fibre.

3. You seek to live a life of increasing sacrifice (Romans 12:1) [ESV Church 1141 Compact 947]

Because you now realize that you exist for God and not God for you, you develop a desire to serve Him more. You manifest a servant-hood towards your family and friends, and you feel drawn to serve God in some humble manner in the Church.

4. You seek to live a life of increasing discernment (Romans 12:2)

As your relationship with God grows you find that you are more able to discern what is right and what is wrong, what is good and what is bad. Your mind does literally get renewed, and through that you are transformed.

5. You seek to increasingly praise God for who He is (Hebrews 13:15)

As you grow in Christ, you will increasingly want to sing praises to God and worship Him. You will find yourself singing praise and worship songs in the kitchen at home and feel an increasing joy in singing to God.

6. You seek to increasingly develop Christian character (Galatians 5:22) [ESV Church 1173 Compact 975]

You notice that you are becoming more loving, joyful, peaceful, patient, kind, good, faithful, gentle and self-controlled. You are able to pass the 6 month test. Can you look back to a point in time 6 months ago and say, “Today I am more loving than I was then? I am more joyful than I was then. I am more peaceful than I was then..”. You progress may be slow, but it should be evident. This process (called progressive sanctification) will go on your whole Christian life.

If you think that you have been a Christian 20 years and can see no evident fruit in your life, you probably have never surrendered to Christ. **[PP8]**

Don't leave today without doing business with God, if you need to.

If today is your appointed day to come into the Kingdom of God, then just confess the life that you have lived and give your surrendered life to Christ without reservation.

[Prayer time]

Home Assignments

For non-Christians

1. If you accept that there is a God, and accept that Jesus really is the Son of God, write down one sentence that summarizes what it is that is preventing you from giving your life to Christ (fear, embarrassment, anger). Be honest.
2. Write down what you see about the Christian life that you find unattractive.
3. Imagine that you could sit down with God and ask Him to answer any question about life, the universe and everything.
4. Think about calling Pastor Steve (864338) and talking through your answers to the above questions with him. He won't bite!

For Christians

1. Make a list of 3 people whom you could invite to Church in the next month. Think about what their objections to coming might be and consider ways to deal with those objections. Consider taking some of the Church's literature with you or perhaps a sermon tape for them to hear. Perhaps if they have the internet you could direct them to the Church website at www.bethelife.org.
2. Make use of the resources available to help you grow in your Christian walk. Consider joining the Discipleship Group on Thursday evenings (111 Kingsdown Crescent at 7.30 pm), or buy a **study Bible** to help you understand what you are reading (New American Standard Bible, New International Version, New King James Version). Buy a book by one of the following Christian authors and READ IT: John Stott, John MacArthur, John Piper, Lee Strobel, Josh McDowell, Philip Yancey, A.W. Tozer, Gary Chapman, Ravi Zacharias, RC Sproul, and Charles Swindoll. When we run classes on how to read and understand the Bible, make sure that you are there.
3. Demonstrate your humility to someone at least once every day for the rest of your life. Let someone into the queue in front of you. Take the small piece of cake and leave the larger for another. Make it a pattern of your life.
4. What is the major thing that you habitually say or do or watch that would cause you embarrassment if Christ was stood next to you as you did it? Don't do that thing any more.
5. By a Christian worship tape or CD. This week learn the words of one hymn or song off by heart so that you can sing it anywhere, word perfect.

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