DEEP SIX STUDY

November 8th, 2026

The Walk Away and the Walk Back – "The Limits of Being Good"

MESSAGE HIGHLIGHTS *(You can view the full message online at capecodchurch.com/watch)*

Opening: Despite his departure from the Christian faith and his embrace of Unitarianism, it turns out that Barnabas Bates remained a "good man" for the rest of his life, devoting much of his time and effort to the movement to abolish slavery. So, as we wrap up his story, what do we do with a "good" man who did some great things, yet denied the Christian faith that he had preached so well? Did his good works even matter?

1. Does God See My Good Deeds? (Acts 10:1-5)

- In a curious story in the book of Acts, the Roman officer Cornelius is described as "a devout, God-fearing man" who "gave generously to the poor and prayed regularly to God." His good works, we learn, were "received by God as an offering" – but he wasn't a Jew or a follower of Jesus.
- Clearly, the story leads us to conclude that yes, God sees and appreciates the good works of those who aren't yet followers of Jesus. But… good works that *reflect* the way of Jesus (generosity, self-sacrifice, etc.) can't be seen as a substitute for *faith* in Jesus – they're just a reflection of his goodness.
- The way of Jesus makes us better and has made our <u>world</u> better for the last 2000 years – but is it enough? In the story from Acts, the angel tells Cornelius that his prayers and good works have been seen and "received" by God, but he needs *more* – so "go get Peter."

2. Is "Good" Good Enough? (Acts 10:34-36,39-43)

- Meanwhile, Peter is in Joppa and receives a vision from God – one that makes it clear to him that, through Jesus' sacrifice, *anyone* can have peace with God. Peter goes on to tell Cornelius and his family that "everyone who believes in [Jesus] will have their sins forgiven through his name."
- This forgiveness, this salvation, this grace – this relationship with God through Jesus Christ – isn't about being good, or doing good, or being "better" – it's about <u>believing</u>. This truth is counter-intuitive because we've been led to believe that being "good" is the key to earning God's favor – but it's not. Acceptance by God can only come through our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ.
- That truth can be difficult for us to receive because it requires us to *surrender* – to surrender myself, my life, and any belief that I can earn God's favor through my own efforts (good works). While difficult to accept, this reality is truly "Good News" because it takes away any pressure to perform.
- Being "good" matters, but it's not *good enough.* You can spend your whole life living out the way of Jesus – doing good works, caring for others, being generous, even going to church. But a *relationship* with God – acceptance by God as a righteous person – can only come by our faith and trust in Jesus.

3. Does Barnabas Bates Come Back? (John 6:37-39)

- As we wrap up this series and the story of Barnabas Bates, the big question that still hangs is, "Did he eventually come back to the Christian faith?" The evidence that we have is unclear, as his available biography ("Volume I") stops when he was around 33. But there is some reason for optimism…
- In John chapter 6, Jesus speaks to the certainty of our salvation for those who surrender and believe in him – even if we wander or struggle with our faith after believing. In his words, "I will never reject…those the Father has given me."

- We can know two things to be true. First, *true belief always returns* – that is, the person who truly trusts and surrenders to Jesus will continue to follow him until the end. A person who later denies the lordship of Jesus could not have truly believed in him to begin with. Second, the passage gives us assurance that God's grace – through Jesus – is enduring and patient. Jesus doesn't give up on us.

ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURE

These passages may provide additional insights related to the subject of this week's message. All verses are NLT unless otherwise noted.

Matthew 7:21-23; Mark 10:17-18; John 10:27-30; Ephesians 1:12-14; Ephesians 2:8-10; Colossians 3:23-24

Video of the Week: Tree of Life by Bible Project

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. As we wrap up "The Walk Away and the Walk Back" series, what's been one truth or revelation that has become clear to you from our discussion about the "walk away" of the Reverend Barnabas Bates?

2. As you consider all the evidence that has been presented about Bates, do you think he "walked back" to the Christian faith later in his life (perhaps in "Volume II" of his biography)? Why or why not?

3. Read Acts 10:1-5 again. Did the good works of Cornelius (his prayers for others, his generosity, etc.) ultimately *matter* to God? In other words, did they change anything about Cornelius' relationship with God? If not, why not? If so, in what way did they matter?

4. Peter has a recurring dream earlier in Acts 10 that leads him to the realization that Jesus' work of salvation wasn't just for the Jews, but for everyone on earth. Why do you think this was such a shocking revelation for Peter (and for other Jews)?

5. Our salvation comes when we "surrender" ourselves to Jesus. In your own words, what exactly does that mean – i.e., how do we do it, what does it look like, and how do we know when we've done it?

6. The message ended by reminding us that "true faith always returns" – or, as some would put it, "once saved, always saved." Does that truth give you comfort, or does it give you more questions? Explain your answer.