

# FAITH: Getting the Vision

Session Two

Called to Holiness

Spring 2005

# Review

- Holiness is God's transcendent attribute
- Holiness characterizes a human as he or she relates with the Triune God
- Character seen through the lens of decision making is the result of conditioned responses
- God has given us graces to put into practice that brings us into holiness and transforms our character
- The healthy position of awe and practice, and the attitude of surrender

## Starts with Faith

- Melody line
- First gift seen
- What Jesus sought from his people.

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Mary, Simeon, Anna...

For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel."

### **Luke 18:8**

However, when the Son of Man comes will he find faith on the earth?

### **John 8**

Even as he spoke, many put their **faith** in him.

### **Luke 18:42**

Jesus said to the blind man, "Receive your sight; your **faith** has healed you."

### **Luke 7:9**

When Jesus heard the centurion's confidence in Jesus' ability to heal without being present, Jesus was amazed and said, "I tell you, I have not found such great **faith** even in Israel."

### **Luke 22:32**

But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your **faith** may not fail. And when you have turned back, strengthen your brothers."

### **Mark 16:14**

He rebuked the eleven disciples for their lack of **faith** and their stubborn refusal to believe other disciples who had seen him after he had risen.

# A Living Faith

- “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

- Hebrews 11:1

- “This is what the ancients were commended for.”

- Hebrews 11:2

- “yet none of them received what had been promised.”

- Hebrews 11:39

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## Faith Definition from Hebrews

Believing the unseen... example... sins forgiven, then healing; centurion accepted Jesus' word, John Baptist as Elijah

Not an inactive faith, it is a living faith... a key concept is that we “live by faith”

The ancients took action on their faith, “by faith Abel, ...”

Became everlasting witness (Abel)

pleased God (Enoch)... trust in his existence and that God rewarded those who sought him (he was good not capricious)

condemned and separated themselves from the world and its corruption (Noah)

and Moses) lived for the eternal future, for something better, and did not settle for earthly power and wisdom (Abraham

kept practicing what they were taught to keep them in God's truths (Moses)

All commended for their faith, yet none of them received the salvation that was promised, the world to come, the Sabbath rest. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would those ancient prophets be made perfect.

## 1 Peter 1

Concerning this salvation, the prophets who prophesied about the grace that was to be yours searched and inquired carefully, it was revealed to them that they were serving not themselves but us, in the things that have now been announced to us through those who preached the good news by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven, things into which angels long to look

Hebrews draws a fantastic picture of the salvation that has now occurred... God himself lowered himself to our level and came into the world and became our salvation, now we are called to be dwell in Christ and to share in this heavenly calling. The gift of the Holy Spirit has given us all the graces we need to live holy lives even in this present age.

In chapter 2, it is said that God left nothing that is not subject to Jesus, yet at present we do not see everything subject to him. But we do see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.

What we do see is God taking the lead

sending his own son to do his will and please him, and paying off our debt

putting his own will in our hearts through his Holy Spirit

our living out his will and following after Jesus, confirming his presence within us

Jesus said we can accomplish greater things than he, that mountains will move with a mustard seed of faith

The faith described in Hebrews is certainly not only an intellectual exercise and mental assent, it is something that is alive and at work making the vision true.

# A Character Changing Vision

- “To be a Christian means to learn to see the world in a certain way until, day by day, I become as I see”

- William Willimon, *The Service of God*

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A community of people who interpret things (vision) and are passionate about what they see, are compelled to behave and live in corresponding manner; thereby giving a powerful glimpse of an alternative view to those whose have found their vision wanting.

# Rising above Vanity

- Ecclesiastes raises the big questions that a true faith must answer
  - Using only the available light “Under the Sun” there is no lasting meaning (all toil is vanity)
  - The haunting reason given for vanity is the very nature of time is cyclic
- What vanity (or non-illuminated reason) misses about God
- Fear of the Lord is the beginning, not the end

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---- Questions:----

why do we exist? What is meaningful?

-Pascal said “Anyone who does not see the vanity of life must be very vain indeed”

Modern philosophy tends to avoid the big question for the little ones instead

----- available light -----

There is no faith flashbulb attached to the book of Ecclesiastes as the other books of the bible have, it provides the truest picture of the surface life in brutal honesty, and poverty of spiritual meaning. It is a closed system, there is no Other, no outside interpretation, life is interpreted only from within this closed system

but with faith we realize our toil does have purpose because we see beyond the Sun or beyond the surface and know the deeper truths

----- time is cyclic ---

Christianity brings in cosmic changing events into our closed world: incarnation, resurrection, and the last judgment.... They are there to break through the vanity cycle that will only end to ending life even the life of this universe in a whimper. They come from beyond the light of the Sun, and to see and understand them requires the eye of faith.

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With Ecclesiastes which uses unaided reason, we can possibly deduce some meaning about God:

- God exists -- God is powerful enough to make the world --- God is intelligent enough to design the complex world

- perhaps that there is some kind of aesthetic in God in order to create beauty in the world

- BUT NOT, any way to reason that God is good and loves us, and cares for us... the very thing we long for a relationship, we want a personal God, not just a cosmic force that is an “it”, but one who says “I AM”

It takes intervention and faith to obtain what we truly need from God

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The rest of the bible and the last few verses of Ecclesiastes directs us on to the right path that leads us out of despair, faith may start out in fear (awe/terrified), but we allow the aid of the revealed truth to our reason then we are raised out of our despair of the vanity of living.

but as Chesterton says “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and belongs to the beginnings, and is felt in the first cold hours before the dawn of civilization: the power that comes out of the wilderness and rides on the whirlwind and breaks the gods of stone; dashing all the pagan idols... this fear that is rightly rooted at the beginning of every religion, true or false; the fear of the Lord, that is the beginning of wisdom; but not the end”

# The Real Question

- What ought I to do?
- Who ought I to be?
- With whom am I in love?

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To do: this question addresses virtues and is simply pragmatic and utilitarian without asking the more visionary question

To be: who am I? what am I all about? Existential question...

in love: Augustine and Edwards brings in the passionate perspective to this question...

isn't passion the gauge as to whether we are truly alive, where is your passion...

"We do not worship God in order to become better people. Christians worship God simply because we are God's beloved ones. Christian worship is an intrinsic activity, but as we worship, something happens to us. The love we return in worship is in turn lovingly forming us for the better" - Willimon

## Passion and Vision

“Store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal; for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

The eye is the lamp of the body; so then if your eye is clear, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light that is in you is darkness, how great is the darkness!”

- Matthew 6:20-23

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What we believe or see as meaningful and what we are passionate or hungry for affects what we seek/treasure and how we use our body.

# Seeing beyond the Sun

- “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.”

- Hebrews 12:1

- Going to the window
- Biblical examples of being led to the window

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A. Harkin

Thomas Howard “One way of putting what Lewis saw as his literary task would be his wanting to lead his readers to a window, to look out from the dark, stuffy room of modernity (ma dur ni tee), and to burst open the shutters and point us all to an enormous vista, stretching away from the room in which we were shut. He despaired of finding any furniture or pictures or objects in that small room which would suggest what he wanted to say to us, so we must come to the window and look out.”

## Examples:

### - Jesus seeing Satan fall from the sky when the disciples were doing their work.– Luke 10

The seventy-two returned with joy and said, "Lord, even the demons submit to us in your name." He replied, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. I have given you authority to trample on snakes and scorpions and to overcome all the power of the enemy; nothing will harm you.

### - Jesus seeing fields ripe for harvest – John 4

"My food is to do the will of him who sent me and to accomplish his work. 35Do you not say, 'There are yet four months, then comes the harvest'? Look, I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see that the fields are white for harvest. 36Already the one who reaps is receiving wages and gathering fruit for eternal life, so that sower and reaper may rejoice together. 37For here the saying holds true, 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you did not labor. Others have labored, and you have entered into their labor."

### - Jesus saying he was greater than Solomon or Jonah – Luke 11

When people wanted a sign or a confirmation... Jesus said now one[ greater than Solomon is here. now one greater than Jonah is here.

### - Coming of Elijah (fulfilling the prophecy of Malachi... for those who will believe)

"I tell you, Elijah has already come, and they did not recognize him, but have done to him everything they wished. In the same way the Son of Man is going to suffer at their hands" The disciples then understood that Jesus was talking to them about John the Baptist.

For as Jesus says "From the days of John the Baptist till now the kingdom of heaven is has been forcefully advancing, and forceful men lay hold of it." For those who do not respond, Jesus only says:

"To what can I compare this generation? They are like children sitting in the marketplaces and calling out to others: 'we played the flute for you, and you did not dance; we sang a dirge, and you did not mourn.' For John came neither eating nor drinking and they say 'He has a demon'. The Son of Man came eating and drinking and they say 'Here is a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and 'sinners'. But wisdom is proved right by her actions."

### - The big vision of the sermon on the mount: beatitudes

# Imperfect Visions

- Bottom Line (or the Cause)
- Make Merry (or the Now)
- Two Worlds
- Self-Contained
- Absurd

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Imperfect Visions: **the lack completeness, perfection or in other terms “holiness”**

the bottom line... the ends justifies the means; benevolent form: disciplined, effective and in the rawest form: pride, self-deluded destruction often taking others with them... the mini or demi-gods of nationalism, liberalism, democracy, conservatism, socialism, children,

Make Merry: sloth, no purpose... the means justifies the ends (or the lack of one), benevolent form: easy-going and in the rawest form: survival of self; if something is not worth dying for, you will die for nothing

Two Worlds: what we do now doesn't significantly change any outcome, we can do whatever we please. Our faith is so external to us that we do not see Jesus through the Holy Spirit at work in us.

Wendell Barry in an essay laments that the concern of the body has been separated from the concern of the soul... in a form of gnostized Christianity. "at best, the world is no more than an embarrassment and a trial to the spirit which is otherwise radically separated from it. The true lover of God must not be burdened with any care for or respect for his works, while the body goes about its business of destroying the earth, the soul is supposed to lie back and wait for Sunday, keeping itself free of earthly containments, while the body exploits other bodies, the soul stands aloof far from sin, crying to the gawking bystanders "I am not enjoying it".

As far this sort of religion is concerned The body is no more than the luster-less container of the soul, a mere package, that will never less light up in eternity forever cool and shiny as a neon cross."

Sub Christian view: Las Vegas view of the world

Absurb, we are flying upside down, we really can't live out what we say we believe... everything I needed to know I learned in Kindergarten, Practice random acts of kindness.

# Faith

- Belief
- Transformation
- Calling
- Means and Ends
- Illumination
- Resources

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## **What Visions require**

Faith to see what you should be, how things should be

Willard says regarding moving toward that faith based on the rock, is that we must never forget that our “doing” comes – or fails to come—from what our beliefs actually are. Hence, if one is to be trained to do ‘all things’ then that person’s beliefs must be changed.

Transformation – the changes that need to be made

Calling - its' for me

Covers means, as well as ends

How we are to do it, as well as we are to do

Illumination, Resources/Funding --- full of truth and grace

# Vision Check

- Willard Test
- Augustine Test

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## **Doing a Vision check... are we seeing 20/20?**

Willard's Acid test... do we have the right theology.. can this God you believe in be loved with heart, mind, body and soul? If the thoughtful answer is "not really", we should look deeper.

is this a God worth dying for, giving our all to Him?

Theologians who do not love their God, can do great harm

Peter Kreeft shares Augustine's test

Do we see a God that we do not want to know more? Is He a pearl of great price? Is he a perfect God, not finicky or begrudging, but rather a just and beautiful God?

Holiness serves well of our vision for we focus on God and our place within His being. He is holy, and we too are holy, anything less is not in the vision of who God is and who are to be.