

“The Conviction of Things Not Seen”
(Hebrews 11:1-3, 6)

Introduction: If you read and study your Bible, you will soon find that it contains a number of different things. It contains very positive things, such as the wonderful truths about God and what He has done to save sinners, as we saw this morning. It also contains wonderful promises of salvation for those who will trust in the Lord and obey Him. But it also contains things which we usually consider to be a bit more on the negative side. God reveals to us what our duty is: what He wants us to do, and what He wants us to avoid. He reveals to us that our lives are not our own, but have been bought and paid for by the blood of Christ, so that we are now to give ourselves to His service unreservedly. But it also contains threatenings, like the one we saw last week, warnings not to fall away from Christ or to dishonor Him. But why does the Lord give these warnings to His people? Can a true Christian ever fall away from Jesus? No, he can't. God is the One who holds him up, who won't let him fall. But one of the ways He does this is by putting these kinds of warnings in His Word, so we will watch where we step. And, of course, realizing that the church will always be a mixed congregation of the truly converted and the unconverted in every age, He places those warnings there to help each person examine their own hearts, so that they will know whether or not they are approved by God.

Last week we saw one of the most serious warnings in Scripture. The author reminded us that if we continue to sin willfully after receiving the knowledge of Christ, that there is nothing left for us except damnation. He also warned us that such a sin would be far worse than anything the people could commit under the Old Covenant. With greater light comes greater responsibility. If an Israelite set aside the law, he would be put to death without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. But if we were to reject Christ, we would suffer a far worse punishment. Now this is meant to make us tremble. It is meant to make us fear. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. If you fear Him, then you will turn from evil and do what is right. This will help you stay close to Jesus. It will help you to hold on tighter to Him, knowing that to let go would be to suffer greater punishment. There are only two directions which a person can go, forward *by faith*, or backward to destruction. We must go forward.

But now the author is going to explain what he means to go forward *by faith*. Remember that these Jewish believers were tempted to go back to the Jewish system because it was much more visible. You could see the temple, the priests and the sacrifices. The New Covenant, which is far better and which has much more glory, is also less visible. It is, in fact, invisible. This means that to receive its blessings, you must have faith. Now this is nothing new. The heroes of the Old Testament needed faith to receive the blessings in the Old Covenant as well. And this is what he is about to show us. But tonight, he is simply giving us the principle that,

Faith helps you to see the things which can't be seen.

I. First of all, what is faith?

A. The author tells us, “Faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of

things not seen.”

1. Usually we think of faith as trusting and resting in the Lord Jesus Christ alone for salvation. This is what we call “saving faith.”
 - a. As we saw this morning, to have saving faith you must have three things: you must know what it is that you are to believe, you must believe what you know, and in the case of saving faith in Jesus, you must trust in the One in whom you believe.
 - b. These three things must be true of you if you are a Christian.

2. But if you have this kind of faith, you will certainly have what the author speaks of here this evening.
 - a. He is talking about believing the facts of Christianity enough to act upon them, to live your life according to them.
 - b. It is very possible that these people never saw the Lord Jesus Christ or heard His words. They only heard about Him from others.
 - c. The author says in 2:3 that after the gospel was “first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard.” In other words, they were not first hand witnesses, but they received this truth from those who were.
 - d. They were in a position quite like ours. We have not seen Jesus. We have not seen His miracles, nor have we heard Him teach. Instead, we received the same message they did: a written eye-witness account from those who did see these things.
 - (i) Remember what Luke said at the beginning of his Gospel. He wrote, “Inasmuch as many have undertaken to compile an account of the things accomplished among us, just as those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word have handed them down to us, it seemed fitting for me as well, having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, to write *it* out for you in consecutive order, most excellent Theophilus; so that you might know the exact truth about the things you have been taught” (Luke 1:1-4). Luke himself did not witness these things. But he investigated them from those who were eye-witnesses, so that he could send them to Theophilus.
 - (ii) John tells us the same thing in his first letter. He writes, “What was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we beheld and our hands handled, concerning the Word of Life--and the life was manifested, and we have seen and bear witness and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was manifested to us--what we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. And these things we write, so that our joy may be made complete” (1 John 1:1-4).
 - (iii) This is the way things need to be. Not everyone can see the things which God does. Even if the whole world could see a miracle which would convince them that the Christian religion is true, the next generation which didn’t see it would need to accept it by believing their testimony. And still further generations would need a written account.

- e. We did not see these things. Therefore, if we are to receive them we must accept the testimony of others. We must believe that what they said about these things are true. We must believe that they wrote down the things which the Lord wanted them to write. But how can we know for sure that this is the case?
- f. For one thing, we can look at what is taught in the different parts of the Bible and see if it speaks with one voice. If it says one thing in one place, and then something completely opposite in another, then we know that it can't be true. When we do this, we find that it is consistent. And this is something considering that it was written by over forty authors, from all different walks of life and over a time span of some 1500 years.
- g. For another thing, we can look at what it says about the places and people it claims to speak about. When we do this, we find that the Bible is accurate. No one has ever been able to prove that anything the Bible says is wrong.
- h. There are other things, as well. There is fulfilled prophecy. The Lord gave us many predictions about certain events, long before they ever took place. And He was right every time. And in the Bible, the same God is revealed which we see revealed in the Creation, just as Paul tells us in Romans 1:18-20.
- i. But really our full assurance that the things the Bible says are true comes from within, from the Holy Spirit. He not only helps us to see that these things are true, He also makes them more real to us.
- j. Remember what Jesus said to Thomas, when Thomas refused to believe that He had risen until he saw Jesus and put his finger into His hands and sides. He said, "Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed" (John 20:29). Why did Jesus say this? He said it because it was a greater act of faith to believe something you haven't seen, than something which you have.
- k. Which would give greater glory to God, to believe that Jesus was real, that He saved you, that He is now in heaven praying for you, because you have seen these things with your own eyes? Or to believe it because God told it to you? Certainly, it gives God greater glory when we believe it because He said it. But this is exactly what the Spirit of God does: He gives us the ability to believe by faith the things we haven't seen, simply because God said it.
- l. *This kind of faith gives you a certain confidence that the things you are hoping for, but have not yet seen are real and are yours. It gives you a settled conviction that because God says that they are real, they are real, and you will have them, even though you have not and cannot see them.*
- m. In a world in which Christianity has been set aside as a useless old superstition, in a world which is full of scientists who claim to have disproven God's claim of Creation, this kind of faith is necessary. You have it, if you are a Christian here this evening.

B. Think about what this faith can do.

- 1. It can help us to see through the false ideas of the unbelievers.
 - a. Paul tells us that the wickedness of men's hearts is so great that they will do

all in their power to destroy the knowledge of God. God says that He has revealed Himself to all men in the Creation, but they will not accept it. And so they “suppress the truth in unrighteousness” (Rom. 1:18).

- b. One of the ways they do this is through science. It’s not that science itself is bad. Many good things have been discovered through science which are very helpful to man. The problem is when science is used to try and prove things which are beyond its ability, such as how the world was made. This is something science cannot do. Science can only work with the things it can observe and repeat. But Creation is something which cannot be repeated.
 - c. Evolution, which is called a scientific theory, is really only a faith. If you look at it long enough, you will see that it is really a belief against the facts, for everything that we can see tells us that evolution did not take place. What we see instead in our world is what we would expect to see if God’s Word is true. The fossil record, for instance, shows an explosion of life suddenly appearing. But it also reveals, because everything in it is dead, and fossils are made very suddenly, by a quick burial, a great catastrophe, such as the flood of Noah’s day.
 - d. Why does it matter whether we believe in evolution or not? First of all, the truth of God is on the line. But secondly, what we believe will determine how we live. The theory of evolution says that all that we see is a cosmic accident. It was not made, it only happened. And if this is true, then there is no God, and there is no heaven and hell, and there is no salvation. If this is true, how should you live? You should grab for all the gusto you can, for after you die, you will sink into nothingness.
 - e. But if what God says is true, what should you do? You should trust in His Son to save you. And you should trust in His word to guide you through this life and to bring you safely to heaven.
 - f. But many people will believe the lie of the devil instead, and will end up in hell, because they would not receive the knowledge of the truth so as to be saved.
2. But the faith which God gives by His Spirit can overcome these things.
 - a. Sin and unbelief cover the knowledge of God, but faith reveals it. Faith makes the thing of the Lord real to us.
 - b. The author writes, “By faith we understand that the worlds were prepared by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things which are visible” (v. 3).
 - (i) Virtually all evolutionists believe that what we see now was made out of things which could have been seen before. They believe that the universe is eternal. That the stuff that the planets and stars are made of has always been here.
 - (ii) Others believe that once there was nothing, and then there was a ripple in that nothingness, and suddenly everything appeared.
 - (iii) Still others believe that everything we see now was once a piece of matter the size of an electron. Somehow this electron became unstable, exploded, and became the well organized world we see now. But again, these are just guesses that leave God out. They are expressions of

unbelief.

- (iv) But the author writes that this faith which the Hebrews needed to persevere in the Lord, the same faith which we need, is able to understand and believe what God said about the Creation in Genesis One: He spoke it into existence with a word, with a series of commands, over a time period of six days.
 - (v) He did not make all things from something which was there before. God made everything entirely new. If He didn't, then something else is eternal besides God. But if it is, then God is not infinite, and therefore not God. But God is the only thing which has always existed. Everything we see is His creation, not only the things He made at the very beginning, but everything which has come since. The "worlds," or the "ages," every epoch of history, everything in them, and everything which has happened in them, was made and directed by the spoken Word of God. God is working all things according to His sovereign will.
 - (vi) We did not see God create the world. We do not see Him now personally upholding all things and directing them through His Son. But by faith we understand and believe that this is true.
 - (vii) And this should give you great hope and confidence, in the same way it did the patriarchs of old. Whatever you will face in this life, whatever difficulties or struggles, God has ordained them all, and He is in control of them. Y2K will be upon us shortly, but God is in control of this too. Therefore, we do not need to fear.
 - (viii) Now I'm not saying that we should not do things to get ready for it. We are not to live by the secret will of God. God has kept it a secret so that we can't. We must always live by the things He has revealed. But when we have done everything that we can, according to His will, we need to trust and believe that God will work all things together for His glory and for our good as He promised, even if we can't see how.
3. God is not asking us to do anything which He didn't ask of those who have gone before us. The author writes in verse 2, "For by it the men of old gained approval."
- a. They didn't see the things God had promised either. But yet they believed God, and because of this, they eventually received the blessings. The author will show us many examples of this in this chapter as an encouragement to his audience and to us as well.
 - b. The main point is this, "Without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him" (v. 6).
 - c. God is pleased with those who trust Him, who believe His Word. He is pleased with those who believe that He is and who diligently seek Him. Let us do so then this evening. Let us put our trust in Him and seek His face. Let us believe His Word enough to act upon it. We will find in the end, as did the saints of old, that it was well worth it. Amen.