Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The Reality of Supernatural Faith
Scripture: Hebrews 11
Code: 80-213

Oh, here we are on a very special evening for believers when we celebrate the death of Jesus Christ, which, to us, is such a monumental event. Over this last week, I finished reading a book by Bruce Lockerbie entitled Dismissing God. It's a study of famous authors...names you would know: Emily Dickenson, Herman Melville, all the way down to D.H. Lawrence, James Joyce, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Samuel Clemens or Mark Twain, down to more contemporary writers even writing today. The book title Dismissing Godchronicles the story of the elimination of God from our nation, from our thoughts, from our consideration. You can follow the path...of the elimination of God right on down to that monumental moment when Nietzsche said, "God is dead." You can follow it through the writers who have been the most influential. It has produced for us a secular culture. It has produced for us a kind of pragmatic atheism. And if there is any belief in God, it is the God of our own making.

In the midst of this overwhelming secularism that rules the thought patterns of our society, we are people of faith, aren't we? We reject all of the secularism, all of the humanism, all of the atheism...And we hold firmly to our faith. And that's why we're here tonight. We are here to worship a Christ we have never seen, who promised us a heaven...where we've never been. We are banking our entire life in time and eternity on things that we have never seen. We've never seen God. We've never seen Christ. We've never seen the Holy Spirit. We've never seen heaven. And no one has returned to tell us about it. We don't have any eyewitness accounts...in our contemporary day.

And, yet, we build our life...on these realities...This isn't natural, folks. This isn't natural. "Well," you say, "isn't faith natural?" Well...faith, to some degree, is natural. Certain kind of faith. When you turn on the faucet and drink the water, that is a certain kind of faith. You don't know what's playing in your pipes. You haven't got the slightest idea...

When you go to the pharmacist, and the pharmacist says, "Here, take these, so many every four hours," you don't know that that's not cyanide. But you take it as if you knew. You go to a restaurant. You order. You eat...No questions asked. You haven't checked out the kitchen or the people working there. Probably you're better off not to.

And most amazingly, as I did today, you get in an airplane, and you assume that somewhere behind the door up there is a person who knows how to take off and land. We understand the middle part can run on autopilot, but we'd like to think there's somebody up there who's a responsible human being. I never saw him. I never saw them. I heard voices, but those could've been recorded. And I

also assumed that, when it left London, it would land in Los Angeles. A pilot who attends our church some years ago told me he was flying a jumbo from Los Angeles to London, and they put in the wrong longitude and latitude for the destination, only to awaken four or five hours later and find themselves in a direct line for Brazil. But, generally speaking, if the plane says it's going to Los Angeles, you get on it, and there's a certain assumption that whoever's in the cockpit knows what he's doing.

I think perhaps even more amazingly, you go to the doctor. Generally a doctor that you don't know, because you go through some HMO or something like that, and somebody tells you you need multiple bypass surgery, which is getting very close to survival. It's a matter of life and death, and so you literally put your life in the hands of the doctor. You don't know him, generally speaking. You don't know anybody in the operating room. You have no idea what goes on in an operating room, because nobody's ever allowed in there for obvious reasons. And...and, yet, you go in there, and somebody you don't know makes you feel very comfortable by sedating you. And the next thing you know, you come out a few hours later, and you assume that somebody competent connected the right things.

This is an immense kind of faith in one sense. But if you define all of those things that I've basically described for you, those acts of faith are based upon experience...Now, we have experienced water long enough to know that we can trust it. Now, when you go to another country, you generally will get the bottled water until you go to the back of the building and see them filling the bottles out of the...out of the hose, which I've experienced on a number of occasions. You become...you become retroactively ill. Go through that experience.

But, I mean there's the general...there's the general sense in life that...that, you know, people don't...don't act irresponsibly at the pharmacy, and...and doctors have to go through some certification, and there's a great amount of care given in hospitals. And there's more than one person in there to make sure there's a certain level of accountability. And...and one and on it goes. I mean you know there are certain...certain things that go on to protect you from poisonous food. The FDA watches all of that. And so you've lived long enough to have experienced a certain measure of experience that tells you there's certain things you can put your faith in, and you really don't have to worry, generally. It's not that way everywhere in the world, but it is that way here.

And so when we say we...we exercise faith, it's a...it's a minor amount of faith, and it's based on experience. Now, that is very, very different than faith in God. Because the day you put your faith in Christ, the day you put your faith in God, you acted to entrust your time and eternity into the hands of God with absolutely no personal prior experience, right?...

Frankly, you were dead in trespasses and sins. You were alienated from the life of God. This is not a...a...a normal, rational act. It has reason involved in it, but it is more than that. Lemme help to

define for you our faith as we come to the Lord's table.

Open your Bible to Hebrews 11...Obviously, this is the great faith chapter, which we love. But it gives us just a couple of points that I'll make with regard to faith...Verse 1, "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of...those are good translations here in the New King James...Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." Now, let's just stop there. The kind of faith that we possess as believers is solid. That's what substance means. It's verified. That's what evidence means. In other words, it's not whimsy. It's not artificial. It's not fantasy. Substance in the Greek is hoopastasis, and it really means essence or reality as opposed to fantasy.

We could say, "Faith is the reality of things hoped for." They are real. It is the evidence, or it could be translated conviction or assurance. Now we are strong in our faith. It is, for us, substantial. It is the...it...it is the...the essence of truth for us. It is the reality for us of all realities. Our faith is a conviction. In fact, the Oxford English Dictionary says, "Faith is a conviction practically operative on the will and character." That is correct. We believe so strongly...in this reality...in...we have...we have this conviction with such strength that we literally have shaped our entire lives around this faith...

What he's talking about here is absolute certainty. Reality that is a conviction, absolute certainty. And isn't it amazing? We are certain about things hoped for. That is not realized. We're very certain about something we don't have. And we have tremendous convictions about things we've never seen. This is not normal. 'Cause normal human faith is the ability to trust based on experience...

We came to Christ one day with no experience of God. We were cut off from God, alienated from the life of God, and dead in trespasses and sins. And, yet, here you are on a Good Friday and, generally speaking, every Sunday of your life, you're worshiping the Lord, and you're reading your Bible during the week, and you're honoring Christ, and you're proclaiming the Gospel, and you're telling your children about heaven, and you've never been there, and you don't know anybody that's ever been there. And you're loving a Christ you've never seen...You're obeying a God whose voice you've never heard...This is not human faith...but it is substantial. And it is...strong so as to be defined as a conviction...

Now, where do we get this kind of faith? What is the source of it? Well, the source of it is the Holy Spirit. God. "For by grace are you saved through faith." You know that one? Ephesians 2:8. And that, what, not of yourself. See, that faith isn't natural - supernatural. And the wonder of wonders is that God in His grace granted you that faith, because that's more faith than the natural man can exercise...He can barely trust what he can experience.

You and I trust essentially what we have never experienced. That is a gift from God. Well, you say, "Is it just a gift from God without any kind of foundation?" No. Here's a great illustration. Look at verse 3. We can't consider everything in a brief time, but look at verse 3 of Hebrews 11. "By faith we

understand that the worlds were framed by the Word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible." This is just a perfect illustration.

Now, we've been having a great time in Genesis. We've been talking about creation. We believe what verse 3 says. "By faith we comprehend that the worlds, the universe, were framed by the Word of God." That is to say, "We believe that the entire universe came into existence because God spoke it into existence." Don't we believe that? Right, we believe that. It's what he's saying. We believe it...

Were we there? No. Did we see it? No. We're no better off than Job when God said to Job, "Where were you when I created the world? You weren't anywhere." Nobody was there. But we comprehend, we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, and, furthermore, we can even go deeper into the creation. We also know that the things which are seen, everything you see around you in the material universe, everything you see, whether you're looking at each other or whether you're looking at the floor or the wall or the ceiling or the sky or whatever else, everything that you see, everything that is in this universe, every element of creation...was not made out of something visible. It was made out of something then what? Invisible.

So we know then that everything that we see, everything that we perceive in the material universe, in the created universe, was made out of nothing. So we...we don't believe in evolution, 'cause evolution says the material universe as it exists now was made out of some other form of material. And before it was a different form, and before it was a different one and a different one. But the...but we believe this. And isn't it interesting that He just sorta says this, like we all believe this? Like this was just...just what we all believe. And, yet, most quote unquote evangelical Christians today don't believe this. But we do. See, we believe that the worlds were framed because God spoke the whole universe into existence, and that everything that exists in the created universe came from...from nothing. We believe that. Now, lemme ask you a simple question. Why do we believe that? Because we believe the...the Bible. That...see that's...that's the foundation of our faith.

So what can we say about Christian faith? First...it is the conviction that Scripture is true. Lemme tell you something. You show me somebody who claims to be a Christian but isn't sure the Bible is true, and I'll show you a desperate person...What is that? Because if you don't trust the Bible, you haven't got anything else. There isn't anything in the natural realm that's gonna give you the answer to the supernatural.

So our faith, different than, you know, drinking the water and taking the prescription, our faith...we believe...we actually believe that the universe was created ex nehelo, out of nothing in six days by the Word of God. We believe that. Why do we believe that? Because we believe the Scripture is...true...

These are the elements of saving faith, and if you believe Scripture is true, then you start there to build your foundation. If I didn't believe the Bible was true, I...I couldn't be a Christian. How could I be a Christian if I equivocated on whether the Bible was true? If it's not true in Genesis, when is it true and when isn't it true?...

So this is a perfect illustration of when you need to start believing the Bible. You need to start believing the Bible in Genesis 1 and 2, don't you?...Our faith, which is substantial, which is real, which is solid...which is a conviction, even though we've never seen it and...and we're hoping for it in the future, is nonetheless firm. And creation is a perfect illustration, and that's why he says that in verse 3. We actually stand up and, with an unequivocating confidence, say the world was created by the Word of God in six days out of nothing. Why do we believe that? Because that's exactly what the Bible says. That's the first element of our faith.

The second one comes in verse six. So he says in verse 6, "Without faith it's impossible to please Him...please God...for he who comes to God must believe that He is." Now, that, this is great. Now, this is more than just not being an atheist. What does he mean here? First of all, Christian faith, saving faith, is the conviction that the Bible is true. Listen carefully. Secondly, it is the conviction that God...is...who He really is. When it says in verse 6 you must believe that He is, it doesn't mean that you must believe somewhere there's some cosmic power. No. You must believe in the great I am, which is another form of He is in the verb to be. It is simply saying our faith not only believes the Bible is true, but believes that God is the God who is really God. We believe in the one true and living God...and we believe in the God who is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Great statement. That is, we believe in the God who is incarnate in Jesus Christ. For He alone is the true God, right? There is no other God...

So the first great reality that we believe in is the Scripture. The second great reality that we believe in is the God of the universe revealed in the Scripture, incarnated in Jesus Christ...And why do we believe that? Because that's what the Bible says. Once you've started out believing the Bible, then you're gonna come to know the true and living God who discloses Himself in the Scripture.

It's the third thing we believe. This is another element of saving faith. We also believe, in verse 6, "That He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."...That...that's really where it all comes together. I mean we could say, "Well, I believe God is the Creator. I believe that God revealed Himself in His Word. And I believe that God is the Trinity who is incarnate in Jesus Christ, manifest in Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. But incarnate in Jesus Christ, I believe that." But if it stopped short of the third one, wouldn't do us any good.

The third point is that we believe, "That God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." That is to say, we believe that a penitent sinner who seeks God will find Him, right? And he'll find Him a forgiving God. If you seek Me with all your heart, the prophet said, you'll what? You'll find Me. You'll

find Me...When you search for Me with all your heart, you'll find Me. And God is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. What that means is He gives salvation to the sinners who seek Him. Jesus put it this way: God incarnate, he said, "Him that that comes to me, I'll never cast out."

Now you could say those are the three things we believe. We believe the Scripture is true. We believe that God is the God who is revealed in Scripture. And we believe that God saves penitent sinners by rewarding their seeking Him with forgiveness. That's it. There's nothing...in our human experience that could give us that faith. We weren't there when the universe was created. Humanly, we can't know God. We're cut off from God. Alienated from the life of God as the natural man cannot understand the things of God. We are literally captive to our blindness and our ignorance and our condition of spiritual death. So we can't know the Scripture is true. We can't know the God of Scripture. And we certainly can't know the God who is Savior and the forgiver of penitent sinners...

What has to happen? There has to be literally a supernatural miracle that grants to us a faith that is supernatural. So that in the midst of your deadness, in the midst of your darkness, in the midst of your despair, in the midst of your blindness, all of a sudden, you come alive, and the Bible is true, and God is the God of Scripture, and God is your Savior, and you cry out to Him, and you receive His forgiveness. That's the reward He gives to those who diligently seek Him.

And here we are, folks, and this is our life, isn't it? Now, our faith is strong. Some of you have been believing this for a long time. You've taught it to your kids. Now you're teaching it to your grandkids. Some of you people have lost friendships over this through the years. Some of you have lost jobs over this faith. Some of you have alienated yourselves from your family. Some of you have had a divorce because of your faith...And Christians all over the world, even today, are being martyred for this faith. And, yet, they hang onto it. Some of you coulda had a career in the movies, or you coulda had a career in some other industry, but your faith in Jesus Christ, your commitment to Scripture, your desire to honor the Lord, to be pleasing to Him, made it impossible for you to pursue that because it went against the grain of what you knew would honor God. And you walked away from it. We've made some serious decisions. Some of you have taken your kids out of public school because of this faith, and you're paying a lotta money to have 'em educated in a private situation, which is a very expensive thing for you...

And many of you people come here on Sunday, and you put lots of money in the plate. This is your money. You could do a lotta things with this. Over your lifetime, you've probably given the Lord a lot. Why are you doing this? You see, this is what this...this is what the secularist can't get. They can't understand this. They can understand the kind of faith that operates off experience. They can't understand supernatural faith that is grounded firmly with convictions in things hoped for and things never seen. But we know they're true. We know they're true, because they're in the Scriptures. And the Scripture is not without evidence, but our faith in it is not the product of evidence. It's the work of God. The evidence just strengthens the miracle of faith.

And, you know, you wanna see how strong faith is? It is strong. I mean it hangs in there. It's amazing the real stuff...It...in the case of Abel, verse 4, "Offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain." Abel made the big sacrifice. I mean he...he offered animals. I mean fruit, there's plenty of that...Enoch operated by faith, and God took him to heaven. Can you imagine how much faith Noah had to build a boat for 120 years? A boat in the middle of a desert because it was gonna rain, and there never had been rain. He didn't know what it was...Abraham left, or the Caldastook off, go to a place he didn't even know about...by faith. Sarah was granted the grace to conceive, who had been barren all her life, at the age of 90...By faith, Abraham, down in verse 17, was willing to offer up his son. Boy, that's some strong faith. I don't know, and you...your...most people's religion, they would say, "You know, when you tell me to...to kill my son, that's where I bail."...

By faith, Isaac, by faith, Jacob, it goes on down, by faith, Moses. And come down to verse 32. "There was Gideon and Barak and Samson and Jephthah and David and Samuel and the prophets. And through their faith, they subdued kingdoms. I mean they literally get out there and...and made war against the kingdom of darkness. They worked righteousness. They obtained promises. They stopped the mouths of lions. They quenched the violence of fire. They escaped the edge of the sword. Out of weakness, they were made strong. They became valiant in battle. They turned to fight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured. Not accepting deliverance, so they might obtain a better resurrection. In other words, their faith was so strong, they accepted the torture. Others had a trial of mocking and scourging. Some chains and imprisonment. They were stoned. They were sawn in half. They were tempted. They were slain with the sword. Wandered in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, afflicted, and tormented...verse 38...the wandered in deserts and mountains, in dens and caves of the earth."

This is what faith will do. Isn't it amazing? Amazing. It endures. It endures everything. And I love what it says in verse 39. "And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise." They were functioning on...on the coming of a Savior who in their lifetime hadn't come. They were looking forward. We, at least, can look back historically and know there really was a Jesus, right?

These are the heroes of the faith. They show us that the faith that God gives endures everything, from being cut in half to being thrown to lions. So in chapter 12 verse 1, he says, "We're surrounded by this great cloud of witnesses, this great mass of people who have gone before us who give testimony to the validity of the enduring power of a life of faith." So let us run this same race. People of faith. That's who we are...

I know the world doesn't understand. You know, we come to the Lord's table. They don't get it...For many of them, it's just some kind of pie in the sky, isn't it? They think of us as feebleminded, leaning on a crutch, as Freud called it. Believing in something that's not there. As Hemingway put it, "Our

nada who art in nada, nada be thy name."...And looked at Christians and mocked their folly. Well, there is no human explanation for us. We are a supernatural people. We have been given a supernatural faith as a gift from God. But everything we know about the Bible affirms our confidence in it, right? Everything we know about the God of the Bible, it affirms His reality. And everything we know about our personal experience in His salvation affirms its reality, as well.

So we live by faith...and our faith, time like this, reaches back to an event we never saw, and that is the death of the Savior upon which all of this is built. Or if He doesn't die in our place, then God can't reward us when we seek Him, right?...Well, pray with me.

Father, as we think about the table...we know You have granted us the faith to believe it. To believe that Jesus died, that He rose again. And it isn't a blind faith. It isn't a faith without evidence...The death of Jesus Christ is historic fact. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a historic fact. The teaching of Jesus is a fact of history. But what history can't see is the supernatural application of His work. That is the wondrous spiritual work that is invisible. We thank You that You have wrought that in our lives, that You have brought us to the placed where we literally will live and die for what we hope for and what we haven't seen...because we believe the Scripture is true, and You are the God...Scripture reveals. The God...who came incarnate in Christ, and You will hear and reward the penitent's prayer of faith.

And so, Father, the cross is everything to us. It may be nothing to the world. It may be a stumbling block to the Jews. It may be foolishness to the Gentiles. But, to us, it is the wisdom and power of God...We come with grateful hearts to thank You for the work of our Savior in whose name we pray. Amen.

Available online at: http://www.gty.org
COPYRIGHT (C) 2015 Grace to You
You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (http://www.gty.org/connect/copyright).