Giving Faith Something to See: For the Good Fight

Faith Become Sight (Class 6)

Dan Cruver

**This is a very lightly edited transcript*.

Faith become sight. One of my favorite authors, his name is Peter Kreeft. He is one of those authors that I aspire to be like, just a brilliant writer. The way he turns phrases and develops paragraphs is just fantastic. He has a book titled *Heaven: the Heart's Deepest Longings*. I'm going to read two brief paragraphs to set us up this morning. He writes, "Imagine God appeared to you and said, 'I'll make a deal with you if you wish. I'll give you anything and everything you ask: pleasure, power, honor, wealth, freedom, even peace of mind and a good conscience. Nothing will be a sin, nothing will be forbidden, and nothing will be impossible for you. You will never be bored, and you will never die. Only you shall never see my face.'"

Two comments before I read the second paragraph. Kreeft is talking about our experience when faith becomes sight in the eternal age. That's the topic: when our faith becomes sight in the eternal age. There are two ways this can happen in this imagined scene. He's not talking about our experience in the here and now, but our experience in the then and there. So, that's comment number one. Comment number two: I wanted to pause between these two paragraphs so we can sit with what Kreeft just said. You can have anything you want; it's not a sin. Nothing will be forbidden. You will never be bored, and you will never die. Only you shall never see my face. Now, don't answer out loud; this is just a thought experiment. When you heard that last sentence, how did it make you feel? Only you shall never see my face. Okay, now listen to what he says next. Did you notice the unspeakable chill in your deepest heart at those last words? Did your surface desires—your surface—so he has two categories of desires here—your surface desires leap after the first part of God's deal, and your deepest desire freeze in standstill shock at "you shall never see my face." So, you may be thinking, that's exactly how I felt. The first part, my surface desires. That sounds fantastic, not going to argue, sounds fantastic. I like where this is going. And then your deepest desire, when you heard God say, "only you shall not see my face," you recoiled with that standstill shock. Now, if that was you, wonderful, that's wonderful. But I know there's at least one person who thought, I'm not sure that's how I felt.

I didn't stand still with shock at those last words. I knew I should have, but I didn't; it didn't connect with me. They may say this: the emotion I did feel was I recoiled from my lack of shock. So I didn't have shock about the last statement, but I recoiled at the fact that I didn't have shock. I was grieved by the fact that I didn't feel that way. And then you may have thought, if that's true, what does that say about the genuineness of my faith? So I know at least one person thought that. I've had that book for about a decade, and there have been times when I've gone back to it. It's even come to my mind without picking that book up, just randomly. And my response to it on a few of those times was, I'm grieving over the fact that I'm not shocked by that last statement. There have been times when I have not been shocked by it, and there's a part of me that's terrified at the thought that I wasn't shocked by it. So you might try to counsel me. Well, you might respond to me, "Well, you should be encouraged that you were shocked by your lack of shock. And there were other times when you were shocked by it. That itself, you might say, speaks to the genuineness of your faith," and I would agree with you. But when it comes to the kind of confidence we need to withstand when our faith is being challenged, whether with what's going on with indwelling sin or the pressures from without, the confidence you need is not a confidence that comes from examining our faith or the fruit of genuine faith. That has its place.

But if you're looking for a confidence that enables you to stand when your faith is most tested, that's not it. So I want to put a pin in that and we'll come back. There's a tension there. It's a tension I think we only experience in the gap. In the gap between when we first believe and when that faith becomes sight. That's the kind of tension that only happens within the gap. And my guess is it doesn't only happen with me, but it happens with you as well. So we're going to resolve that at the end. That tension there, what do I do with that? How do I handle that? How have I handled that?

Before resolving, I want us to think about what life is like. These are two headings: before sight and after sight. So what is life like before sight, and what is it like after sight? We're concerned about sight here. So I want to set the stage by looking at Galatians 4:4-7. What I'm going to do, really hard, is try really hard here to restrain myself from saying too much. I could say a lot about what we're talking about here, but I'm going to really work hard. I'm saying that out loud so you can hold me accountable, you can go, "ah," and then I'll know to stay on task. Now, if any one of you are confident enough to go, "ah," props to you, props to you. But that's my goal. So Galatians 4:4-7: "But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God." This is what you are.

Two stage-setting thoughts: the experience that Paul talks about here, and I'm thinking of the Spirit coming into our hearts and the Spirit crying, "Abba! Father!" The Spirit himself gives us a very real, genuine experience and confirmation that the Father himself is my Father. He is our Father. So, is the experience that Paul talks about here as good as it gets? In other words, is our experience of the Spirit crying, "Abba! Father!" in our hearts now as good as our experience will be then, when our faith becomes sight? Obviously, that's a rhetorical question, and the answer is absolutely not.

Number one. Number two, Paul is the only writer in Scripture who uses the term for adoption. He's the only one. John doesn't use it. John refers to the new birth as the means by which we are brought and changed into children of the Father. But Paul's the only one who uses it, five times. That's it. In Paul's letters, when he does use it, the word adoption is freighted with meaning for our past, our present, and our future. It covers it all: the past, the distant eternal past, our present life right now, and our future. So that term adoption is freighted with everything that spans life, both on either side of the gap and inside the gap. I want to read one of the other texts that Paul uses here. I want to make a distinction here that I think will be helpful. Ephesians 1:3-5: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love, he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will." So here's the question: what is the distinction between the doctrine of election and the doctrine of predestination? Here's my answer: election focuses on God's act of choosing. Predestination, on the other hand, focuses on its outcome or its end game. So they are twin doctrines. The doctrine of election focuses on the act of the Father electing or choosing, and predestination is Paul's way of getting at God's, the Father's, end game for that choosing, the outcome. Election tells us that the Father chose us before the foundation of the world, and predestination tells us that the Father's end game for doing so was so that we would be his

children and the kind of children who have the very inheritance of the Son. That's why he refers to us as sons here. Let's pull those threads together. What Paul does with those two doctrines is he shows that the doctrines of election and predestination belong together because together they fill out the full story of redemption: what God did before the foundation of the world and his end game for doing that.

So, let's pull those threads together. The Greek behind the phrase "before the foundation of the world" in Ephesians 1:4 only occurs two other times in the New Testament, and they're on your sheet there. This is Jesus's high priestly prayer in John 17:24: "Father, I desire that they also, whom you have given me, may be with me where I am, to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world." So Jesus says, if you want to know what the Father and I were doing before anything was made, the Father was loving me. The source of love, the Father was loving me. That's what was happening. That's the only thing that we are told was happening before anything was created in all of Scripture: the Father was loving the Son. The other time it occurs is 1 Peter 1:20, referring to Jesus: "He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for your sake." So he was chosen by the Father before the foundation of the world to be manifested in these times for our benefit. In Romans 8:23, Paul says there's still yet another dimension of our experience of the Father's love that awaits us when our faith becomes sight. That's the last time Paul uses the word adoption. We're going to come to that now. So we're going to spend most of our time here, the remainder of our time, in Romans 8. I want to briefly highlight how Paul describes in Romans 8 the life of faith before sight. I'm going to highlight two words. Verse 18: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us." So this time in the gap is characterized by suffering, but there's a glory that will be revealed when faith becomes sight. There's a glory that will be revealed on the other side of the gap that if you put all the sufferings of this present time—all of them, not just mine but everybody's—you put that on one side of the scale, and you put that glory that will be revealed when faith becomes sight on the other scale, it's not worth comparing. There's just no comparison; the glory is going to, and that suffering's weight, lift it way up into the air. That's how heavy the weight of glory is.

Verse 19: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." So the first word I want you to mark is the word "subjected." Here's the second word, verse 22: "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning." So we have subjection characterizing life in the gap, and the way we find ourselves reacting, living, what creation finds itself living within this subjected creation, is groaning. That's our experience under this subjection. So notice what he says: "And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we eagerly await adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies." So there's the future reality dimension of our adoption: "For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." This groaning, as he personifies creation, is frustration with the limits from without. God subjected the universe, and so creation groans because they're subjected with particular limitations that can't be what they were meant to be. And then our groaning is due to frustrating limitations from without and from within—Romans 7, the previous chapter, the struggle with indwelling sin. So that's where our groaning

happens. This time in the gap of subjection is characterized largely by groaning across the board: the entire universe, both creation itself and us.

After sight: Now I'm going to read the same verses again on the back so you can mark it differently, and we're going to look at two other words. Verse 20: "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free." So there's the verb form of our word: "that creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom." So the freedom tells us not just any freedom, but a very particular kind of freedom. What is the kind of freedom that Paul's thinking of here? The freedom of the glory that outweighs all the suffering of this present time, the freedom of the glory of the children of God. So there's the work of adoption being set before us: "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now." So our first word is "freedom." Our second word is not actually in the text, but it's implied. Paul uses a metaphor to get at the second word. So we have "subjection" here, life after sight, freedom, what characterizes life in the realm of freedom and not subjection. He gets at it with this metaphor in verse 22: "For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now." There's the metaphor: Jesus says in John 16:21, "When a woman is giving birth, she has sorrow, pain because her hour has come." What's the hour there? It's giving birth: she has pain and sorrow because her hour has come. "But when she has delivered the baby, she no longer remembers the anguish, for joy that a human being has been born into the world." So what characterizes this freedom is joy. Life in the gap is groaning, largely eager groaning, groaning that makes us eagerly await when our faith becomes sight. But where joy is the thing, it's when that sight actually happens, when that faith actually becomes sight, then all that you have is joy, unmixed, unmitigated joy, all of it, as much as can be had by you at any given moment for as long as you can have it. And only you shall see his face. Paul uses the metaphor—he could have just said "joy," but he used the metaphor to show the weight of the joy. If you think about the metaphor first and it brings you to the conclusion "joy," then guess what is imprinted on your mind? Even in the midst of groaning, you're going, "ah, there's a joy that's coming," and "wow, it's a joy. If it makes the mother forget her anguish, then imagine when faith becomes sight. That joy, when that faith becomes sight, is going to make us forget the anguish, the groaning."

So what makes this freedom and joy so great? That's my question. What makes it so great? Two phrases in Romans 8:18-21. I'm going to look at the second one first and then the first one second. Is that confusing? So the second one is found in verse 21 that we'll look at first: "God subjected this in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God." Creation's waiting for that to happen. It's waiting for our freedom, the glory of the children of God. What is the glory of the children of God? The other phrase, which appears first, is found in verse 19: "For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing." The revealing. So something that's unseen suddenly becomes seen in creation. Right now, what Paul's saying here is that there's something that's here but it's not seen. And you know what it is? The revealing of the sons of God. We're here, but guess who doesn't see us? Nobody sees us. Big deal, you're a Christian. Yes, I know that the scriptures refer to you as the Son of God. Big deal, I see you, but I don't see you, I don't care. And even we ourselves, who are very children of God, do not really understand what kind of love that is, and we don't really see ourselves for who we are. That's why we doubt it. That's why we struggle. We groan in the midst of it and we doubt things. Our faith is hard because we don't even see ourselves as the children of God because it's unseen. And in that day of freedom,

when our faith becomes sight, what is unseen now in the gap is revealed. That's why he says, "For in this hope we were saved." Verse 24: "Now hope that is seen is not hope. We don't see it. I'm a child of God. Yes, but I don't see it. For who hopes for what he sees? But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience." So there's a much greater experience of the Father's love than we can possibly have now.

When I told you I was going to tell my son, "You're my beloved son," oh man, after the night that we just had, no sleep, we're at the front door, and it's time for me to do it. You know what I did? As the words started coming out and I was hugging him, I wept. My son. Children do not know how deeply, how profoundly their parents love them. They don't know it. You tell them, you tell them, you tell them, you tell them, "Yeah, I know, Dad." They don't know how much you love them. And I knew Isaiah, in that moment, he was like, "This is something different. This is something different. I'm seeing something in my dad's heart that I don't see very often. His arms are around me and he's trying to say words, but all I hear is 'sob sob sob.'" In the moment, I was kind of like, "Oh man, Father, why did you let me cry? Because it's a good illustration now you can use on Sunday." I didn't have that thought in that moment, not until this morning, that I decided to tell that part. The Father loves you. You really don't know how much. "Yes I do. Scripture says that the love of the Father is revealed in the cross." Okay, yes. You don't even know what that feels like. You do not. You do not know. You don't know what that love's going to feel like when that freedom happens. And the way Paul describes it is everything you're groaning over and anguished over now, when that joy of receiving the Father's love becomes tangible, it's revealed, it becomes visible. As my, I'm hugging my son and I'm shaking as I say the words, that love had a tangible feeling about it that he was experiencing firsthand. Paul says that's all it is. It's going to be joy. Joy. We don't even know what that is like.

A few reflections here. No, I don't have time for the reflections. We've got four minutes. I'll send you my notes so you can see my reflections. Okay? I don't want you to go. So I have one reflection. One reflection. We're finite. When our faith becomes sight, we're still finite, still the creature. God will always be the Creator. The gulf between God, the Creator, and we, the created, will always be infinite. We don't get any closer. Our finitude doesn't get any closer to his infinitude unless we want to redefine infinite. So there will always be more joy than we can imagine. The joy we experience when our faith first becomes sight—compare that to ages upon ages later and the joy we're experiencing then, we're going to be like, "I can't believe how much better this joy is now ages later than that joy when my faith first became sight."

Okay, so that's one reflection. Let's go to the tension I raised at the beginning with Peter Kreeft. So what do you do if you fear your surface desire is actually your deepest desire? What do you do? What's the resolution? There's a legal way to deal with it and there's an evangelical way to deal with it. The legal way to deal with it is to begin by examining your faith or fruit. It could be something like this: "Well, there were times when I have recoiled at my lack of shock. So that indicates faith, genuineness of faith, and that is true and encouraging, but it will never stand in the day of battle." It just won't.

So what's the evangelical way? How does Paul begin and end Romans 8? Romans 8:1: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus," period. None. "Yeah, but I didn't recoil like I wanted to recoil." There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. How does he end? Chapter 8, verse 31: "What shall we say to these things? If God the Father is

for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all, how shall he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies, who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died, not you; more than that, who was raised, who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.' In the time of the gap, no, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. Not your love, not the intensity of your love or your faith. That's a trap. You go there, that's a trap. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God, the Father, in Christ Jesus our Lord." That's the evangelical way to deal with it. And you deal with it that way and suddenly you go, "Huh, wow. I actually can't believe I get to see his face."

Close with this quotation from George MacDonald. He says, "The secret of the whole story of humanity is the love between the Father and the Son that is at the root of it all. Upon the love between the Son and the Father hangs the whole universe. The love of God is the creating and redeeming, the forming and satisfying power of the universe. It is the safety of the great whole. It is the home atmosphere of all of life. The whole of the universe was nothing to Jesus without his Father. The day will come, the day will come when the whole universe will be nothing to us without the Father, but with the Father, an endless glory of delight when faith becomes what? Sight. When faith becomes sight."

Let's pray. Father, all that we can say right now is thank you for your grace and mercy to us in Jesus Christ, for your grace and mercy to us by giving us your Spirit who cries, "Abba, Father," in our often groaning hearts, and your grace to us that will turn our faith into sight. We give thanks to you in the name of Jesus. Amen.