Giving Faith Something to See: For the Good Fight
Faith in the Gap (Class 1)
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This elective is titled "Giving Faith Something to See," with a subtitle for “For the Good Fight." The "For the Good Fight" part will be developed as we move through these six weeks. So, I'm not going to focus on that this morning. But as we progress through each class, we'll flesh that out a bit more. Classes four and five will discuss faith in the fight, which is the primary context within the elective where we will incorporate the subtitle. But for now, I just want to set the stage for this course. Think of it in terms of the big picture: faith bridges the gap between who we were before Christ and who we will become in the future. We don't know when that day will come, but we are certain it will.

Faith exists in the gap between who we once were and who we will one day become. Ephesians 2 describes us as "sons of disobedience" and "children of wrath." In contrast, Philippians 3:21 states that our "bodies of lowliness" will be transformed into Christ's "body of glory." This highlights the contrast between our current, lowly bodies and the glorious body we will receive. Thus, faith not only fills the gap between what we once were—dead in sins and trespasses—and what we will be, but it also bridges the gap between our current state as believers, trusting and believing in Christ, and our future state. This gap between our current selves and what we shall become is wider than we can imagine.

This concept is echoed in C.S. Lewis's sermon "The Weight of Glory." In this context, Lewis aims to remind us that, within humanity, whether someone is a believer or not, we never encounter a "mere mortal." You might be familiar with this quotation. Here's what he says, advising not to apply this to oneself but to others. However, I'm going to use it on ourselves.

Lewis writes, “It is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one, be one day, be a creature, which if you saw it now, you, you would be strongly tempted to worship.” So drastic, so breathtaking, so awe-inspiring will the difference be between what you are in this moment and what you shall be. What is in the gap between what we are right now and what we shall be? The answer is faith.

So, this elective is going to take us from faith in the gap to faith becomes sight. The journey of faith is taking us from where we are right now across this massive gap to the day where our faith, which we have now, actually becomes sight. So how do we strengthen our faith in the gap? How is it, if faith is the means by which we go from what we are right now to what we shall become, do we actually strengthen our faith in the gap? Here's what not to do. So, I was right out of college and went straight into the Youth Pastorate at a church in Michigan. It was my first year. Our lead pastor was on vacation, going up into the upper peninsula of Michigan. There would be no way for me to contact him.

This was before cell phones. He was up camping in the UP and I'm gone. He's gone for two weeks, and I'm the guy, the only staff pastor there. I had to preach those few Sundays. The first week he's gone, I get a call. A woman in our church had just given birth to twins prematurely, and one of the two died. It was my responsibility to go to the hospital. So I'm right out of college, terrified, driving over there. What am I going to say? I kind of worked in my mind what I think I would say, what I think I should say. I walked into the room, her parents were in there with them, and I walked into a scene I did not expect. The mother is holding her child that had just died, and her parents were standing over her saying, "If you had enough faith, he would not have died."

So, it was quite intense. This new mother was weeping, her parents pressing this upon her, and I walked into that. What I had planned to say, I did not say. I was trying to think, "What did I say?" And I don't remember what I said. It was such a traumatic event to see this transpire. Beneath the landfill of toxic waste in their words lies another story, one that would expose what was happening in their minds and hearts theologically. That they would, pastorally and parentally, put such weight on their daughter is bewildering. One of the minor things, which is major in its error, was their focus on her faith rather than her savior.

They focused on her faith. At worst, focusing on your faith in devastating circumstances can lead to despair. At best, it will exhaust you. You cannot live by focusing on your faith. Faith lives, grows, and flourishes by having something to behold, not by scrutinizing its weakness but by seeing the strength of the savior, what he has accomplished, and who he is for you in every moment. Faith needs to see who the savior was when he died for your sins before you were even alive, and who he will be for you when he returns and you see him as he is, becoming like him.

To strengthen our faith, we do not scrutinize it. Instead, we give our faith something to behold. When faith sees what it should, the object of that faith does the work. Richard Sibbes, the great Puritan, wrote, “This is the wisdom of a Christian, to have sights of faith, that is, to present several things that faith may work upon to strengthen itself, as for faith to have a sight of God in Christ, a gracious Father” (*Works of Richard Sibbes*, II.239).

If you've taken one of my electives before, you know that I like to have what I call a base camp text. It's a text that we orient ourselves with as we summit a peak and try to find a fine point on particular doctrines. So we have this base camp text. We spend some time in that base camp text, and then we try to sum it up to find a clear understanding of a particular doctrine or aspect of a doctrine. Then, the next week we go back down to the base camp and try to sum it again. Well, this elective, I'm not doing a base camp text. I'm going to do a base camp book letter, and that's Galatians. So what I'm going to do is pull some thematic threads out of Galatians that will help us understand how faith works as it relates to its object in this part of life we call the gap.

We're going to look at Galatians 5:1-6 this morning. I'll just highlight one particular part of it, and then we'll look at Faith's gap number one, Faith's object, and Faith's confidence. A little background to Galatians: evidently, Paul was in Galatia, likely sick, and the Galatian church took care of him. During this stay in Galatia, many people, primarily Gentiles, were trusting in Christ, turning from their pagan beliefs and trusting in Christ as the one true God. They had come to know the Father. Paul leaves, and then a group of Jews, probably from Jerusalem, come to these churches in Galatia.

The gospel had spread, with all kinds of conversions taking place, leading to multiple churches within the region of Galatia. These Jews from Jerusalem said, "Okay, what Paul said is correct, you need to have faith in Christ, but you also have to obey the law, particularly the law of circumcision. Yes, believe in Christ, remember everything Paul said, but you also need to add into that something that you have to do, and that is the practice of circumcision." Paul writes in his letter that what they did was not give a different slant on the gospel or look at the diamond of the gospel from a different angle.

What they've done is actually give you another gospel, which is no gospel at all. If you add to faith, which has its object of Christ, something that requires you to do in order to have acceptance with the Father, you've actually lost the very thing that saves and rescues. So this letter is Paul being quite upset at what has transpired. Let's look at Galatians 5:1-6. Paul says, “For freedom Christ has set us free; stand firm therefore, and do not submit again to a yoke of

slavery. [2] Look: I, Paul, say to you that if you accept circumcision, Christ will be of no advantage to you. [3] I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision that he is obligated to keep the whole law. [4] You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen away from grace. (And here's the key verse:) [5] For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness. [6] For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love."

Faith's Gap

Let's examine Faith's gap in verse five, "For through the Spirit, by faith, we eagerly await the hope of righteousness." What does that mean, the hope of righteousness? Through faith in Christ, we are currently righteous in status. In other words, God views us and declares, regarding his full acceptance, that we are absolutely righteous in status. We have been declared righteous through our faith in Christ. However, this is not what is being addressed here. The "hope of righteousness" refers to the fact that, although our status before God is one of perfect righteousness, in practice, we fall short.

We lack righteousness in our daily experiences and actions. We sin, we seek forgiveness. Sometimes we sin and are slow to ask for forgiveness. Regardless of the speed with which we sin against someone and seek forgiveness, the issue is that, in practice, we lack righteousness. Paul states that it is through the Spirit, by faith, that we eagerly await the hope of righteousness for that future day when our practice aligns perfectly with our status.

Consider a quick analogy from the sport of football. You might have heard about a punter out kicking his coverage. Normally, a punter, on fourth down, needs to punt the ball not just as far as possible, because doing so might allow the returner to catch the ball with enough space to gain speed and exploit gaps before the defense can reach him. The ideal punt is both high and far, so the defense can tackle the returner immediately upon catching the ball.

However, sometimes a kicker will out kick his coverage. Similarly, our status of being declared righteous in Christ has far out kicked our coverage, leading to numerous problems in living within the gap. Despite being perfectly righteous in status before the Father, in practice, we fall short on the daily 24/7. Paul emphasizes that because of this status, and knowing how far we have to go in practice, we eagerly await the hope of righteousness, when our practice perfectly matches our status.

Trent mentioned Abraham, Sarah, and Hagar this morning, referring to Galatians 4:21-26. Paul uses them as examples of faith in the gap, illustrating what faith in the gap looks like and its potential dangers. We have this status, but our practice does not match it.

Our practice does not match our status. Who we are internally, how we think, how we process things—what's going on in our heart? What are we treasuring, and what are we not? There's a struggle that we have. What does that look like?

In Galatians 4:21, it is said, "Tell me, you who desire to be under the law of circumcision, do you not listen to the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by a slave woman and one by a free woman. But the son of the slave was born according to the flesh, while the son of the free woman was born through promise." It continues to explain that if you bring the law into your acceptance before God, you are a son of the slave woman. You are a slave. The only ones who are free are those who are sons through promise. To retain decorum, Hagar was young and fertile, and for Abraham to have a child with her was no miracle; it was basic biology. Sarah was barren and old; to have a child through Sarah was a miracle—it was promise.

What Abraham and Sarah did there reflects the gap between status and practice. They decided not to rely upon the miracle but to intervene themselves. God made a promise of a son, but it's not happening. "I'm old; Sarah, you're barren. We've got to take this into our own hands." So they turned to Hagar. This presents a contrast between walking by faith and walking by sight. To walk by sight is to rely upon ourselves; to walk by faith is to rely entirely on the work of another.

Paul is giving us an understanding of what makes faith. Faith isn't merely believing true things about God; faith is relying on those true things. It's not just hearing who Christ is and believing that what is said of him is true, but it's relying solely on who Christ is and what he has done. Faith, in the gap between practice and status, is the impulse to not rely upon the one who alone can fulfill what is promised, but to always bring something of ourselves into it so that we feel what God has promised will come true. That's the gap of faith.

Faith's Object

What about the object of faith? Numerous times in the Gospels, Jesus encounters someone with a great need, and he often says, "Your faith has saved you." Or Jesus will say, "Your faith has made you well."

So, in Luke 7:36-50, Jesus is at Simon the Pharisee's house, having a dinner party. A woman, known for her loose behavior, hears that Jesus is there and thinks, "I have to go see Jesus." She enters the house uninvited and begins kissing his feet and anointing them with perfume. Simon thinks to himself, "If Jesus knew who this woman was, he wouldn't let her do this." But Jesus hears his thoughts and tells Simon a parable. He then asks Simon, "Do you know why she has done this? When I came in, you, the host, didn't kiss me once, but she hasn't stopped kissing my feet. Do you know why? Because she was forgiven much, and because she was forgiven much, she loved much."

Then Jesus turns his back on Simon and those around the table, looks at the woman, and says, "Your faith has saved you." We have multiple examples of this kind of event. For instance, a blind beggar hears commotion and asks, "What's going on here?" When he learns that Jesus of Nazareth is coming, he starts yelling, "Son of David, have mercy on me!" Jesus approaches the blind beggar and asks, "What would you have me do for you?" The beggar responds, "I want to receive my sight."

And Jesus says, "Your faith has made you well." What's happening here? I remember being troubled by these statements. Your faith has done this. Is it Jesus who saves, or is it your faith that saves? Is Jesus saying, "You have enough faith, therefore you are being saved or healed"? What's the relationship between Jesus saving and Jesus saying, "Your faith has saved you" or "Your faith has made you well"? There's a tension there. What's happening? How should we understand whether Jesus saves or our faith saves, whether Jesus heals or our faith heals? What's the relationship between the object of our faith and the means by which Jesus accomplishes salvation or healing? This leads us to Galatians 3:23-26.

Notice the wording here that Paul uses: "Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith." So, Paul says before faith came, and then he says, Christ came. And now that faith has come, we are all sons of God through faith in Christ. So, what is Paul doing by using that kind of

language instead of saying, "when Christ came"? He says, "when faith came before Christ came", instead of saying that, he says, "before faith came". And then he says, "but now that faith has come", he says that instead of "but now that Christ has come". What?

What is the relationship? So, there's a unique relationship between Jesus himself and faith—a very close relationship so close that you cannot separate Christ from faith; they are so united in relationship. That to say that Christ came is to say that faith came. And to say that faith came is to say that Christ came.

Back when I was 15, we lived in Hollywood, Florida. My dad was teaching music in a Christian college. And we lived in what was called the Hollywood Beach Hotel, seventh floor. I think there were thirteen floors. We were on the seventh floor, overlooking the ocean. There was one particular day—I don't remember what day of the week it was—there was a fire alarm. So, I went out into the hall just to find out, "Is this legit? Do we need to get out of here?" And they said, "Yes, there's actually a fire. It's on the floor beneath us." So, I went back to where my mom was, and this is what made that particular experience so traumatic: my mom had ulcerative colitis. She's five foot ten and was so sick by this point. We moved to South Florida because there was one doctor in the country that could deal with the severity of her particular condition. So, she's 5’ 10”, at this point had lost all of her hair because of the poison in her colon, and she weighed 82 or 83 pounds. She could not walk. So she says, "You're going to have to carry me down." So I picked my mom up, 15 years old, and I walked down the hall, coming down the stairs. And you have to realize, I was really skinny, mostly bone, and I'm carrying my mom. I've got to go down seven flights of concrete stairs with people surrounding me, trying to get out quicker than I can with my mom. So, I'm carrying my mom. And you know, what she had to do? Rely on how much everything, her faith in me, was a faith of reliance.

She was counting on the fact that, as a 15-year-old boy, she believed I was strong enough to get her down those stairs. I think I got her down to the third floor when a man saw me carrying her. At that point, I must have looked tired. He remarked, "That poor boy's going to drop his mother," so he came over, took her from me, and we walked the rest of the way down together. But let's say I got her all the way down those seven flights of stairs and someone asks, "Where's Dan and his mom?" He points up, saying, "There they are," as we're coming down. When he says, "There they are," is he noting that there's his mom and there's Dan coming down separately? No, we were one thing in that descent. To say Dan is coming down was to also say his mom was coming down, and vice versa. The reason they are one and the same—that my mom descending and me descending were a singular event—is because my mom's reliance was upon me. She was resting in my arms.

So, to say Bonnie has come down is also to say Dan has come down, and to say Dan has come down is to say Bonnie has come down. There's a relationship where, when you have faith as scripture understands it, to have faith—which is to rest and rely on another person to do for you what you cannot do for yourself—is to have a bond between faith and the one being trusted so close, so united, that you cannot have one without the other. And what makes the faith so wonderful, so beautiful is that it is united to the only one who can accomplish what needs to be accomplished. So when we talk about giving faith something to see, what we're doing is looking at the one who alone can do what needs to be done and assessing whether our practice matches our status or whether our faith is weak or strong. I can imagine that my mom was not coming down absolutely certain that her son could pull it off, but guess what? I was her only option.

Faith’s Confidence

Sometimes our faith, when we look out into the future knowing that death is coming, or we're in a circumstance now that we cannot see our way through, tempts us not to trust, not to rely, not to give ourselves over entirely because we wonder if God can actually fulfill His promises given how dire our circumstances and emotions feel. What makes faith truly faith is not the strength of your belief but the object of your faith. It's about faith's confidence. So, looking at Galatians 5:5, "For through the Spirit, by faith, we ourselves eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness." You do not eagerly wait for something you're not confident about. Paul is addressing something that can be a bit counterintuitive because in our faith, we often struggle with doubt. I struggle with doubt. If I have doubt, can I really eagerly wait for the hope of righteousness?

Can I be eager about it? Can you be like, "I can't wait until that happens"? So sure that I will reach that destination or that God will do what, at this point, seems impossible. Think of it this way: this is counterintuitive. There's this particular sin. I think we all struggle with different sins, that we have one particular sin or a handful of sins that we find ourselves falling into more than other sins. And so here, there's this sin that you've confessed 800 times, saying, "Please forgive me, help me not to do that again." And then you do it again. And once you've done it again, you find yourself thinking, "I'm so tired of being like this. Why did I do it again? What is wrong with me? What is wrong with my faith? I do not want to be like this. I want to be in practice what I am in status, but I can't seem to do it. Over and over, I keep failing." How do you turn that? How can you turn that almost despairing outlook on your failure? And yes, you have failed, but how do you turn that into an eager waiting for the hope of righteousness when your practice will match perfectly your status?

Jesus says in Matthew 5:6, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." So what I've just described—did it again. What is wrong with me? I don't want to be like this. You know what's happening there? That is you hungering and thirsting for righteousness. And Jesus himself, not some preacher who made it up, the one who is your righteousness, the one who has already given you his status, that one says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." When that realization lands on you, do you know what begins to grow in the deepest part of you? Eager waiting for the hope of righteousness. So sufficient is the object of your faith. So absolutely sufficient is the object of your faith that even in your failure, as you bemoan the fact that you failed again and you do not want to be like this, so efficient and powerful and almighty is the very object of your faith, that he says you will be filled with the very righteousness that you are so very aware of, that you do not possess in practice. And that eagerness, that future hope of righteousness where your practice matches your status, that eagerness is a little flame that the Spirit, by ever showing you the glory and sufficiency of Jesus and what he's done for you, what he's accomplished for you in its entirety—not leaving one thing lacking but supplying everything that is necessary to get you through the gap—even though you will fail, even though you do fail, even though you do choose sin over Jesus. So sufficient, so powerful, so mighty is what he has done on your behalf, that it is certain that your practice will one day match your perfect status. And when that begins to land on us, when that penetrates into the very depths of our insides, eager waiting grows. Your faith is strengthened—our faith. This is Faith's confidence.

Our faith becomes more confident the more we find ourselves resting and relying on the only one who did it all. That's where confidence grows. Confidence only grows when our faith is given something to see: Jesus himself.