

The Faith Effect

Introduction:

You all have heard I'm sure of mirages. Often, they occur when someone is in great need of something and out of pure desperation their minds conjure up images of the desired thing and they believe for a moment that they are saved. Only to find out at last with the cruel realization of reality that it was but a waking dream. I assume that the great majority of those sitting in this auditorium would claim faith in Christ. Let me ask you this. How do you know that your faith is not just a mirage? A false hope in a fleeting dream? Because here is an unpopular yet clearly taught truth of scripture. Some people have a faith which seems to be in Christ but in reality, is nothing more than a mirage. They have in their minds conjured up a pleasant view, a delicious dream of hope and security and they utterly depend on it for their salvation. They prop it up and keep it alive by dint of human activity and emotion. They do not possess the wedding garment and while they pass unnoticed on earth mingling with the blessed they will not go unnoticed on the day of judgment. How do you know that you are not one of their number? There will be those who on the day of judgment cry "Lord, Lord", to whom the Lord will reply "I never knew you, depart from me you workers of iniquity" Again I ask how do you know that you are not one of them? These all were convinced that Jesus was their Lord and were awfully mistaken. What reasons do you have for believing that you are not one of them? I hope you will not grow impatient with my probing. I hope you will with honesty seek to answer this question. For your eternal state depends on whether or not you are deceived in this matter. But you may ask how can one be certain? Well my friend I'm glad you asked. Let me ask you this. Is Jesus Christ your life? I am not asking are you living for Jesus? I am not asking do you like songs about Jesus? I am not even asking have you given your life to Jesus? What I am asking is, is Jesus your life? You see often when people are confronted with the possibility of their being deceived in the matter of their salvation the first place they look for comfort is within their own persons. What they have done, what they have felt, or what they have experienced. Even true believers can fall into this type of mistake. If you were to ask the apostle Paul how do you know that you will be saved at last, I believe he would say, because "I know in whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed to him against that day." The Greek word translated faith in our passage means persuasion. That's what I mean by asking, "Is Jesus Christ your life?" Paul's life abounded with evidence of his salvation because Paul's life abounded with faith. Do you have true faith or are you trusting in a self-made mirage? Let me bring this a little closer to home. Are you trusting in Christ or are you trusting in God's longsuffering? Are you trusting in Christ or are you trusting in God's grace? Are you trusting in Christ or are you trusting in God's love? What in the world are you talking about I can see some of you thinking? Just this, many say they love Jesus but when you look at their lives, their desires, and their passions, you soon find out that they only love parts of Christ. You see idols more than likely began by man taking various attributes of God which they liked and feared and making them individual deities which they could call upon to help them at their convenience. You see some only seem to be passionate about grace when they are under conviction for particular sin. Grace comes up as glorious when I am confronted with the fact that I care so little for my soul that I with impunity lay aside all spiritual discipline and indulge in the lukewarm

bath of self-indulgence and self-sufficiency. God is a God of grace but if you separate grace from the thrice holy God then grace can and does become an idol. Fearful is the position of the one who thus abuses the grace and mercy of God. But what does this have to do with these three verses. Just this, Faith makes evident the unseen and substantial the Christians hope. Thus, true faith, being as it is utter dependence on Christ produces patient endurance in those who possess it. I want to start by asking this question because I want you to consider it as I unfold the glorious hope of the saints and the staggering realities of the unseen. I ask it in the hope that by the end of this sermon you will answer it by either a “Hallelujah, I am redeemed”, or “either way I must have that kind of salvation”. You may disagree with me and think such questions to be unhelpful if so, explain to me why Christ included the man without a wedding garment in his parable or the man that hid his talent, or the virgins without oil. Were they all just artistic flourishes or were they there to warn against complacency and presumption asking in their very presence the questions which I have just propounded. Yes, certainly you can take it too far but you may also not take it far enough. Do not argue seek rather to understand and to discern what the will of the Lord is. With that in mind let us pass on to my first point.

1. What is that hope which is made substantial by faith.

I made it three quarters of the way through writing this sermon three separate times and had to stop and rewrite the whole thing. I simply felt that something was wrong with it but I couldn't put my finger on what the problem was until I listened to a couple of sermons by Charles Spurgeon. While listening to a sermon of his simply entitled “Faith” I became aware of what the problem was. In my descriptions of the hope of the saints I was making us the center, what we would have what God would give us what God would do for us. Certainly, Jesus Christ and our Father were the key components of our future blessedness but they were not what they should be. You see what I realized was the fact that to properly describe the hope of the saints I must do no more or less than to describe to them their Savior. For he is the hope of the believer. Do we look for a new body? It is like his glorious body. Do we desire ultimate purity? We shall be pure as he is pure. Do we look for a new heaven and a new earth? Then we must know the mind and power of their architect, the mind and power of Christ. Let us then first consider the exalted Jesus, and then how we shall see him, be with him and be like him.

Imagine, with me that you are standing on the deck of a cruise ship somewhere in the midst of the vast Pacific Ocean. Now pinch your index finger to your thumb and imagine you are holding between them a single grain of sand. Look at it, small and insignificant even in comparison to your hand. Now imagine you walk over to the rail of the ship. Wait did you imagine it or are you just listening? I want you to exert some effort and really imagine this, feel the rock of the ship, the breeze in your hair and above all the vast Ocean expanse stretching on in every direction. Now you are standing by the rail and you look over the side into the dark unfathomable depths and the very thought of them make you giddy and uneasy. Now reach out the hand in which you are holding that tiny grain of sand and drop the grain of sand into that vast ocean of unfathomable depths. Now in your mind's eye follow its descent. Down, down, down it sinks insignificant unnoticed by the vastness that completely engulfs

its miniscule existence. Now let me tell you if that Ocean represents the Universe that grain of sand represents our little solar system. Now friends consider this, Our Savior is the great power that holds all of this vastness in all of its intricacy together with no more effort than the effort a healthy man exerts in speaking a word. Is it any wonder that mountains melt and run down at his presence? It is this one Who took on himself flesh and descended to us. The one who was mocked and beaten in that flesh. It is this one who bled in that flesh and that died in that flesh. To ransom you. Oh, but friends he did not stop there. No he was not satisfied with making us slaves that would have still been unthinkable grace but he came to give divine grace. Grace only the architect and the sustaining pillar of the universe could give. For he calls us not only servant, but he goes yet further and calls us friends. Surely this is unthinkable, but remember this is divine grace it is infinite. He goes still further and calls us siblings. He claims the union of blood now surely this stretches the bounds of even divine grace, but glory be to his name! This still is not enough for infinite grace for it is not enough that we should be one in blood only he goes still further and calls us his bride. This is the hope of the saints that faith makes substantial. To be at last made one flesh with our savior. To be so united as to partake of his glory and likeness. To shine with his brilliance, and to be sharers in his holiness and to be coheirs of his inheritance! Can you imagine what an inheritance the Son of the Almighty God is the beneficiary of?! C.S. Lewis in his famous sermon "Weight of Glory" thus describes the saints hope," The promises of Scripture may very roughly be reduced to five heads. It is promised (1) that we shall be with Christ; (2) that we shall be like Him; (3) with an enormous wealth of imagery, that we shall have "glory"; (4) that we shall, in some sense, be fed or feasted or entertained; and (5) that we shall have some sort of official position in the universe— ruling cities, judging angels, being pillars of God's temple."

If the heavens who's size I have just described but who's beauty is equal to their size are the work of but a word or of just his fingers. What will that place be like which he has prepared for his bride with the care and detail of an ardent lover? This is the hope of the saints to see this Savior, to be with this Savior and to be like this Savior, all in the midst of a universe expressed in a song of passionately loving and almighty creativity. How many of you when I say you will have a glorious body like Christ's get a picture in your minds that resembles a stain glass depiction of Christ with maybe a little more glow? How many of you have a reaction to that mind-boggling news consistent with that visualization? It is no wonder it takes an act of God to give a faith capable of making such truths realities to men so used to this fallen and finite world. Do you have such a faith? John Owen says of the following concerning verse one, "This is that which faith supplies; it gives those things hoped for, and as they are hoped for, a real subsistence in the minds and souls of them that do believe" Brothers and sisters we will see our savior! We will sing before him with all of the hosts of heaven and he will in turn sing over us as he rests in his love. The sound of this rejoicing will be like the sound of mighty thunder answering mighty thunder. We will judge angels as those given authority under King Jesus. Angels, will commune with us as we commune with Christ. Can you see the awe struck and wondering look in their burning eyes as you tell them of what it's like to be so undeserving and yet so loved of God. We are promised a city where the Sun is no longer necessary, and pure gold of as little worth as the dust under your feet.

Imagine with me friends the most beautiful place on earth in the most perfect weather, and imagine the happiest mood you have ever experienced all at the same time. Then imagine that this beauty were ten thousand times more beautiful, this weather ten thousand times more pleasant, and this mood ten thousand times happier and then imagine it lasting forever. This is not heaven for heaven would exceed even this expectation because heaven is to be with God. The God who created all good things seen and unseen including the human experience of joy. The God who is far, far superior to all that he has created as far as the heavens are above the earth. In heaven God gives us himself. He is the boundless sky of heaven. He is the gentle breeze of heaven. He will surround us with his all-embracing love as he lavishes on us endless tokens of his infinite grace. All this is true yet, he too will be with us in a body like ours, to eat, to drink, and to celebrate with us, and over us. Rejoicing in us as a bridegroom over his bride, and all of this and much more for all of eternity! We will know to the highest degree then what it is to have God well pleased with us. The one great longing of the human soul, to be known of God will, at last be completely fulfilled. It is these and like things that faith has the power to make substantial. So, are you steadily becoming more and more aware of just how great this salvation is? Or do the alluring but insignificant and fleeting pleasures of this world still hold ultimate sway in your heart and mind? Imagine that grain of sand again sinking in that vast Pacific Ocean. The fleeting pleasures of this world are that grain of sand, hard, sharp, dry and dead. The pleasures of the loving God on the other hand, are that vast Ocean alive with a million, million, new and unheard of realities shimmering with the light of enduring, significant, and everlasting Joy. Is this reality gaining predominance in your thoughts, expectations, and dreams? Or are you still rubbing that worthless grain of sand hoping for a gem that will at once grant you all that you have ever desired? You see if you have saving faith it is the substance of the things hoped for. In other words, if you have true faith these realities of the inheritance of the saints will, I repeat will become more and more real to you, they will, begin to gain preeminence in your heart and mind. The degree to which this is true will vary from one Christian to another and from one season of life to another but it nonetheless will be true to some degree. But time flies and I find I must go on to my next point.

2. What is included in the unseen things for which faith gives evidence?

What is specifically being referred to when this author speaks of things unseen. Well I think verse three gives us the answer. A possible translation of the end of verse 1 could be “faith is the evidence of things having not been seen” In other words it is referring to events in the past of which we have not been ourselves witnesses. The Creation of the worlds or the universe by the word of God being one very important such event. We may add to this the incarnation, life, death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation of Christ. Our own Justification and the full pardon of our sins by the work of our high priest Jesus Christ are also invisible realities, yet our hope of future blessedness absolutely depends on all of these things being absolutely true! Therefore, one of faiths most important jobs is giving to the believer evidence of the reality of these and many other things. Or you might say where ever there is true faith there will also be evidence of the

realities of which that faith takes hold, which leads me to the second unseen reality to which this statement refers. This like the other comes to the forefront in verse three and that is the reality of God himself. "By faith we understand that God created" etc.... He is the invisible God. So, let us consider our God and his bringing about our salvation in acts and events unseen by our eyes.

Who can come close to defining the great Jehovah, the I Am, the thrice holy God? God is not big, take again the grain of sand in the Ocean, compared to the grain of sand the Ocean is seemingly endlessly large. But God is not like an Ocean for not only is he around all but he also is in all and all is in him "for in him we live and breathe and have our being" Yet we are told that he is nonetheless separate from sinners that they if remaining unrepentant are cast out of his presence, yet at the same time they are scorched in unending torrents of his personal vengeance. Big simply cannot cover such a being. God is not big, he simply is. God is not bound in time. We think of him acting in our day and having acted in the past and continuing to act in the future but this is not so. For we are told that he is and was and is to come all in the present tense. So not only does he permeate all things at the same time but he also permeates all times at the same time. You say I don't get that. Good because if you did you would be wrong. God does not have power as men have power. He is the ultimate source of power. That is he does not possess power but rather his being is the fountain head of all power. Combine all the power of the created spiritual and physical realms and it is still but a drop in the bucket compared to the ocean fullness of God's power. Tremble for you understand little of this almighty being. God is not good. Rather, God defines Good. In other words, he does not conform to a moral code his character is goodness itself. He would have to cease being himself in order to do evil or to even ultimately overlook it in others. I could go on but time forsakes me and I do not want to leave without getting into his activities in bringing about our salvation.

With the little I have told you above in mind consider this. This is the God that took on our weak and feeble flesh and lived in it under the full weight of the curse which our sin brought upon us. He that defines goodness was daily touched by the evil of men and harassed by the evil of devils. Then he that is the fountain head of all power in the body of a weak man experienced the ultimate form of human helplessness, the helplessness of death, even the death of the cross. He that touches all yet is separate by taking on himself flesh embraced and identified with finite man and made them like himself, sons of the highest! The timeless one was for a little space of time made lower than the angles that he might experience death. He laid aside his glory. How?! How?! How does a person of the trinity lay aside his glory how does he take on flesh? How can these things be? It is a paradox so farfetched that it boggles the mind that anyone ever believed it! To hold to as true, as true Christians of all ages have, both the view that God is unchangeable, all powerful, infinite, omnipresent, thrice holy, three yet one, eternal, omniscient, ever just, and ever living and that he took on a human form and by this means experienced all the weaknesses and sorrows of men and without sin condemned sin in the flesh thus bring about the absolute justification of completely depraved men and exulting them to the position of the sons of God, while all the while maintaining his own justice spotless and undiluted, to believe all this at the same time seems absurd beyond words! How can belief in such things be accounted for? Verse one and verse three give us the answer. Those who have true faith are made aware of the reality of these truths and while they fall far short of fully understanding how they can be, they

nonetheless hold fast to them with growing assurance because as they act on their faith evidence is given to them causing them to see and know that their faith is not in vain. Are you struggling with assurance? Then act on your faith and see if you are not soon relieved. Consider Christ and see if he does not grow daily more real to you. Lay down your life and take hold of his and see if you do not find it to be life indeed. Take up the cross and see if it is not light and easy because you are in company with him whom your soul loves. Speak to him daily and moment by moment and see if he does not answer with a voice so real that audible voices seem less real. Speak his truth and see if it does not uphold you and embolden your heart. Confess and forsake your sin as you run to him and see if he does not cleanse from guilt and forgive. We are told "that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus" this is unseen friends. Faith alone can take hold of this as reality. Without faith, these are but pleasant words yet if this is not true we are of all men most miserable! Oh, that we fully grasped this reality! By faith we may. We are told that Christ Jesus was tempted in all points as we are. Oh, what blessed comfort. How the faithful have found evidence for its truth in times of great and small trials of all kinds. We are told that we have a great high priest who intercedes day and night before the throne of God on our behalf. That we are never alone, that Christ is in us. That all power has been given to Jesus. Do you see evidence for this as you look at the world today? If you have faith you can because despite the immense power gathered against the truth, the truth still stands firm unmoved and unshaken. Indeed, one must have all power in order to withstand such an assault.

And now my friends I come to the close and I ask you do you have true faith? Or is it a mirage? If you answer I believe it is true, then I tell you make it sure. If you answer I am not sure it is true. I tell you wait not a moment, seek for assurance for soon you may say my soul takes no pleasure in it. If you answer I fear it is not real or I have never claimed it. Then flee to Christ do not hesitate but go directly. Go now to the Great Physician both for your diagnosis and your cure. But you may ask what do you mean when you say seek for assurance, or flee to Christ. I mean this. First, cast yourself on Christ verbalize to him your utter need of him and your dependence on him, do so whether you feel it to be so or not. Secondly, confess your sins first of all to God and secondly where restitution or reconciliation are needed or necessary, confess to those you have sinned against and where possible offer to make it right. If your sin is of a public nature confess it publicly. Thirdly, find someone to help you understand the gospel better. Humble yourself before God by admitting to men your practical and experiential ignorance if not mental, of the Gospel. Fourthly, pray that God would send his Spirit in power to you. For the Spirit of God is the one that convicts of sin and of righteousness and of judgment. The Spirit of God is the one who takes the things of Christ and shows them to us. Do not once you have begun, cease to pray for this and even when you receive the answer keep praying for more of the Spirit. Use your lunch breaks, time while you are driving, time after the children have gone to bed, time before the children have woken up, and any and all-time day or night to commune with your God. Trust to him alone, he will answer. Fifthly, Read the word of God seeking to truly understand it, praying for wisdom, as you do so. Memorize it, meditate on it and ask for help if you simply cannot understand. And lastly, assemble to hear the word preached, to confess sin, to seek for accountability, to encourage and to be encouraged, to edify and to be edified, to confront and be confronted. Seek if possible to daily be in contact with fellow believers with these purposes in mind.

Now if you confidently answered my faith is real, then what do I mean by make your faith sure. Well to begin with ask yourself if you are really growing in your faith. Are the realities of the inheritance of the saints becoming more real to you? Are the unseen realities of God and this great salvation becoming more evident to you? Are you growing in prayer and in love for the Word? In love for God's people and true fellowship with them. In sickness and in health. In depression and in joy. In sorrow and in happiness. In pain and in comfort. And far above all but nonetheless the inevitable impeller of all the afore said, are you seeing more of your utter dependence on God the three in one? If not, your confidence is nothing more than a sandy foundation. Beware, and take the above counsel given to the first group of people. If the answer however is yes, these things are true of me, then keep doing what you are already doing seeking all the while for ways to grow in your walk. Add, spiritual disciplines and increase those which already exist. There is always room to grow. Read biographies of those who have gone before. Be creative as you seek to work out your salvation. Ask God to reveal blind spots and weaknesses, undiscovered sin, and use the means already mentioned to purge them out. And continue to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory for your redemption is drawing nigh!