

By Faith, Not by Sight

Scripture Sermon – Dewey Church of Christ, June 13, 2021

(1) Some of the scribes and Pharisees once demanded of Jesus, “Teacher, we wish to see a sign from you.” But he answered them, “An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For just as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth. The men of Nineveh will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.”

(2) Jesus says in a different place, at the end of the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, the man in torment says: “‘Then I beg you, father, to send him to my father's house— for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.’ But Abraham said, ‘They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.’ And he said, ‘No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ He said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

(3) Paul sums up these two teaching of Jesus this way: The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God because they are stupid to him. The natural person is not able to understand the things of the Spirit of God because they are spiritually discerned. **(4)** Jesus says it another way: “Enter by the narrow gate. For the gate is wide and the way is easy that leads to destruction, and those who enter by it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard that leads to life, and those who find it are few.” **(5)** Let me repeat: The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God because they are stupid to him. The natural person is not able to understand the things of the Spirit of God because they are spiritually discerned.

(6) This is because those who organize their lives around the flesh (aka earthly things, things of this life) focus on and prioritize the flesh, but those who organize their lives around the Spirit focus on and prioritize things of the Spirit. To focus on the flesh is death, but to focus on the Spirit is life and peace. For the person that cares most about the flesh is and can only be hostile to God, for they do not submit to God's law; more than “does not”, the person who cares most about earthly things, the things of this life, literally cannot submit to God's law. Those who are focused on earthly things cannot please God.

(7) For the word of the cross is stupid foolishness to those who are lost and perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written in Isaiah 29:14, “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart.”

Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Hasn't God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the foolishness of what we preach to save those who believe. The Jews demanded signs and the Greeks sought earthly wisdom, and these are still the things people seek today. But we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to those who seek signs and foolishness to those who seek earthly wisdom, but to those who are called, of any nation or language or background, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

(8) Therefore, having been given a ministry seen as foolish by many, by God's mercy we will not lose heart. But we must renounce disgraceful, underhanded ways. We must refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we should live lives commendable in everyone's conscience and in the sight of God. And even if our gospel is seen as stupid and misunderstood by many, it is only seen so by those who are spiritually perishing. In their case the god of this world (the Devil) has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel and the glory of Christ, who is the exact representation of God. For what we proclaim must not be ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who

said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory, which we see in Jesus Christ.

(9) So the wrath of God is revealed and will be revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of people, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth. For what can be known about God is plain to all, because God has shown it to His creation. For his invisible attributes, things like his eternal power and divine nature, can be clearly seen in the things that are made. Since the creation of the world, anyone can see it. So those who suppress the truth are without excuse. For although they can know God, they do not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they become futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts are darkened. Claiming to be wise, they become fools, and exchange the glory of the immortal God for many different things. In some cultures, images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. In others, self-motivated wisdom and philosophy. In others still, the pursuit of pleasure. But in all cases, the truth of God is exchanged for a lie.

(10) Therefore (and may the Holy Spirit bear witness to my conscience in this) I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of those I love who are lost. **(11)** My heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for truth, but not according to Godly knowledge. For, being ignorant of the righteousness of God, and seeking to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.

(12) Now, though I am speaking in such a harsh way about the lost, yet in your case, beloved, I feel sure of better things—things that belong to salvation. For God will not unjustly overlook your work and the love that you have shown for his name in serving his people and his church, as you still do. And I desire that each one of you show the same earnestness to have the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you may not be sluggish or lazy in your Christianity. My earnest hope is that you will be imitators of those who through faith and patience have already inherited the promises.

(13) This faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. By this faith the people of old received their commendation. By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible. **(14)** And without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

(15) So consider the circumstances of your conversion to Christ: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame what the world considers wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame what the world considers strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, things the world considers false, to bring to nothing things that the world relies on, so that no human being would have the ability to boast in the presence of God.

(16) So do not lose heart! Though our body, our earthly shell, is wasting away and subject to the decay of all physical things, our inner self, our soul, is being renewed day by day. For the light momentary affliction of earthly existence is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen, the things that are physical, are transient, but the things that are unseen and spiritual are eternal. **(17)** So who could possibly permanently harm you if you are zealous for what is good? Even if you suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of those who would harm you and do not be troubled. Instead, in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy. We must always be prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks us for a reason for the hope we have; yet we must do it with gentleness and respect, having a good conscience, so that when we are slandered, those who revile our good behavior in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if that should be God's will, than for doing evil.

(18) So we can always be of good courage. We know that while we live in these bodies we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. Yes, I am of good courage, and would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we must make it our aim to please him. For we all will appear before

the judgment seat of Christ, and each one of us will receive what is due for what we have done in the body, whether good or evil.

(19) This is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham. **(20)** For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and we can only justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward to appease his wrath and judgment by the blood of the cross. This gift can only be received by faith.

(21) This is why Abraham is the father of all Christians, as Moses wrote in Genesis 17:5, “I have made you the father of many nations.” This promise comes from the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist (remember, we understand this by faith!). In hope Abraham believed that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old. He did not waver when he considered the barrenness of his wife’s womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised (remember, those who would draw near to him must believe that he rewards those who seek him!). That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. Those of us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord will be counted as righteous!

(22) Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through our faith in Jesus we have also obtained access to this grace in which we stand, so we can rejoice in our hope of the glory of God! Not only that, but we rejoice in our sufferings, knowing that suffering gives us endurance, and endurance grows our character, and character leads to more hope, and hope does not put us to shame because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit who has been given to us.

(23) This love will never end! Prophecies will pass away; miraculous gifts have ceased; knowledge will pass away. Right now we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known. So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

(24) And we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. And not only the creation, but even we who have received the Spirit groan in our souls as we eagerly wait for our true adoption as children of God and the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved. But 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.

(25) So among the spiritually mature we impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart the secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of the world have understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. But, as it is written in Isaiah 64:4, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. Who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person which is in him? In the same way no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. But we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given to us by God. So we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

(26) Let no one deceive you with empty words or philosophies, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon those who disobey God. Therefore do not become partners with those who do not know God. At one time you were darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light (for the fruit of light is found in all that is

good and right and true), and try to discern what is pleasing to the Lord. **(27)** And let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise as the way the world counts wisdom, let him become a fool that he may become wise in the way that God counts wisdom. For the wisdom of this world is stupid foolishness with God.

(28) Therefore the righteousness based on faith does not say things like “Who will ascend into heaven?” (that is, to bring Christ down) or “Who will descend into the abyss?” (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). Rather faith proclaims the words of Deuteronomy 30:14, “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart.” This word is the word of faith that we proclaim! If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. With the heart one believes and is made righteous, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved. Everyone who believes in him will not be put to shame. It doesn’t matter who you are or where you are from; the same Lord is Lord of all, bestowing his riches on all who call on him. As written by the prophet Joel, “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” **(29)** And now why do you wait? Rise and be baptized and wash away your sins, calling on his name.’

(1) Matthew 12:38-42

(2) Luke 16:27-31

(3) 1 Corinthians 2:14

(4) Matthew 7:13-14

(5) 1 Corinthians 2:14

(6) Romans 8:5-8

(7) 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

(8) 2 Corinthians 4:1-6

(9) Romans 1:18-23

(10) Romans 9:1-3

(11) Romans 10:1-4

(12) Hebrews 6:9-12

(13) Hebrews 11:1-3

(14) Hebrews 11:6

(15) 1 Corinthians 1:26-29

(16) 2 Corinthians 4:16-18

(17) 1 Peter 3:13-17

(18) 2 Corinthians 5:6-10

(19) Romans 4:16

(20) Romans 3:23-25

(21) Romans 4:16-25

(22) Romans 5:1-5

(23) 1 Corinthians 13:8-13

(24) Romans 8:22-25

(25) 1 Corinthians 2:6-13

(26) Ephesians 5:6-10

(27) 1 Corinthians 3:18-19

(28) Romans 10:6-13

(29) Acts 22:16