Own the Vision – Part 1

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Playing It Safe (Hebrews 11:1-8)

Welcome to Christ’s Community Church. Today we are starting a brand-new, four-part message series entitled “Own the Vision.” And over the next few weeks, we’re going to look at what God is calling us to be here at Christ’s Community Church and I’m believing that God is going to take you deeper in your walk with him and inspire you to “Own the Vision”. In fact, this week, I’ve been praying very specifically that God would build your faith, and as he builds your faith, that he would build our faith.

You see, as important as our personal relationship with Jesus is, as we look at the Scriptures there’s something greater, something more powerful that happens when we come together as the church. It’s like, when we come together in worship, when the whole church is lifting their hands to God, it’s as if we’re literally touching the heart of God. And so, over the next four weeks, I’m praying that God would build faith in your life, faith in our church, so that we stop playing it safe, but each of you using your spiritual gifts, excelling in the grace of giving, would reaching people at any cost.

I’m believing that January 2018 is going to be a mile marker in your life, where months and even years from now that you’ll look back at what God has done in your life. You’ll look back at your family, at your church, and you’ll trace it back to this very moment when God inspired you to get started and stop playing it safe!

Today we’re going to talk about living a life of faith and I believe this is close to the heart of God, because of the emphasis in the Bible on faith. And so, if you and I are going to be radical, world changing, Bible believing followers of Jesus, we want to be faith filled, we want to seek God for the impossible, we want to believe God for miracles, because he is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine according to his power that is at work within us. We want to “Own the Vision” as God does exceedingly and abundantly more in our lives, through our church, and for his glory, so that generations to come would know who he is. And this is so important today, because I believe from the very depths of my heart that the days are short, that Jesus is coming back soon, and we don’t have time to play it safe anymore.

And this is more important than you ever might have thought, because if you’ve been redeemed by the blood of Jesus, if you’ve been saved by his grace, you haven’t just been forgiven, you’ve been called to live a brand-new radically different life of faith. And yet, faith isn’t natural to us; doubt is natural, worry is natural, fear is natural, discouragement is natural, anxiety is natural, waking up in the middle of the night with of an endless list of “what if’s” is natural, questioning God’s goodness and grace is natural, but faith isn’t natural for us.

And so, you can be amazed by God’s redemptive story in Scripture and not be living by faith. You can be amazed by the preaching that you hear week after week and not be living by faith. You can be amazed by the times of worship you participate in and not be living by faith. You can be amazed by the love of your church and not be living by faith. You can be amazed by the opportunities for discipleship so that you grow closer to God and not be living by faith. And so, this morning I’m going to show you two different stories recorded in the Gospels, where Jesus was amazed, but what’s really amazing is that he was amazed for two different reasons.

In the first story, we find that Jesus had gone to his hometown with his disciples. Mark chapter 6 tells us that he was teaching in the synagogue and many who heard him were amazed. In verse two they said,

"Where did this man get these things? What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn't this the carpenter? Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him” (Mark 6:2-3).

First we see that the people of his hometown were amazed, because they knew who he was, and therefore they took offense at him. They refused to believe that he was who he said he was, that he could do what he said he could do, and so Jesus said to them in verse four,

"Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor." He could not do any miracles there, except lay his hands on a few sick people and heal them. And he was amazed at their lack of faith…” (Mark 6:4-6).

And so, in this first illustration Jesus was amazed at their lack of faith. Now the second story comes from Luke’s gospel and we find Jesus amazed once again, but this time he’s amazed on the other end of the spectrum. In Luke chapter 7, it tells us that Jesus entered Capernaum and…

“There a centurion's servant, whom his master valued highly, was sick and about to die. The centurion heard of Jesus and sent some elders of the Jews to him, asking him to come and heal his servant. When they came to Jesus, they pleaded earnestly with him, "This man deserves to have you do this, because he loves our nation and has built our synagogue." So, Jesus went with them…” (Luke 7:2-6).

“He was not far from the house when the centurion sent friends to say to him: "Lord, don't trouble yourself, for I do not deserve to have you come under my roof. That is why I did not even consider myself worthy to come to you. But say the word, and my servant will be healed. For I myself am a man under authority, with soldiers under me. I tell this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and that one, 'Come,' and he comes. I say to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it." (Luke 7:6-8).

Now look at Jesus response in verse nine, this is amazing,

“When Jesus heard this, he was amazed at him, and turning to the crowd following him, he said, "I tell you, I have not found such great faith even in Israel" (Luke 7:9).

Two different times Jesus was amazed. First, he was amazed at a lack of faith and then he was amazed at the centurion’s great faith. And so, the question I want to ask you to consider this morning is simply, “If Jesus were to look at you today, looking at what you were attempting to do for his glory, looking at those things you were believing that he would do, would he be amazed by your great faith? Or would he be amazed by your lack of faith?

For some of you, you’re praying bold faith-filled prayers, but others of you, you didn’t pray, you didn’t attempt to do anything for the glory of God. And so, would Jesus be amazed by your great faith or would he be amazed by your lack of faith? Today, God is calling us as a church to stop playing it safe and, number one, to simply believe.

1. BELIEVE

What I want to do in the remainder of our time together is to consider three verses of Scripture that will inspire us, that will help build our faith, and will encourage us to follow God’s plan for our lives. The first one, is something that’s very important to understand, and it’s recorded in the 11th chapter of Hebrews, where the author said this in verse 6,

“Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must BELIEVE that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Absolutely nothing that we do can please God apart from faith and he describes this faith as believing two things. Number one, believing that God is, that he exists. And then number two, believing that he rewards those who earnestly seek him. In other words, if you can do it without help, without prayer, and you never need the power of God, then you’re living without faith. And without faith it’s impossible to please God.

However, on the other hand, I think that sometimes people almost glorify faith, worship faith, and idolize faith. Because for some people, it’s as if when you’ve got great faith you’re never going to doubt, you’re never going to have a bad day, you’re just going to be floating in this little happy bubble of faith. And so, it’s a faith in their own faith, it’s not a Christ-centered faith. But the reality is that there may be some moments where you’ve got great faith and then suddenly you’re overwhelmed with doubt. You might feel like God just spoke to you, you know it, but then you’re not quite so sure. But that’s why it’s called faith, because it’s not proven, it’s not by sight, and you’re going to have to take a risk.

One of my favorite examples of this is Peter in Matthew chapter 14. Jesus had just finished a day of teaching and miraculously fed 5,000 men plus women and children. Verse 22 tells us, that immediately following this miracle,

“Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go ahead of him to the other side…” (Matthew 14:22).

After he had dismissed the crowd, Jesus went up on the mountainside to pray by himself. As evening came he was there alone and verse 24 tells us,

“But the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it” (Matthew 14:23-24).

“During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear” (Matthew 14:25-26).

But in verse 27, Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." "Come," Jesus said” (Matthew 14:27-29).

Verse 29 tells us, “Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus. But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!" (Matthew 14:29-30).

Now, many people criticize Peter for failing, but we should applaud him, recognizing that Peter refused to play it safe. He wanted to please God, he stepped out of the boat, and he successfully walked on water before he took his eyes off Jesus, saw the wind and waves, and failed. Meanwhile, there were 11 guys that didn’t even get out of the boat and just like them so many times we find that our fear of failure keeps us from taking a step of faith because we’ve come to believe that failing means missing God.

But what if what God did in Peter he desires to do in each one of us? What if we would believe? You see, I believe that if we have the faith to step out of the boat, that God will take us where we probably wouldn’t have chosen to go, in order to produce in us what we couldn’t achieve on our own. And so, I want to encourage you today not to let the fear of failure stop you from taking a step of faith. Some of you, if you’re not failing every now and then you’re playing it way too safe, and without faith it’s impossible to please God. And so, number one, we need to believe, and number two, we need to have confidence to stop playing it safe.

2. CONFIDENCE

The Scripture I want to share with you that will inspire you, that will help build your faith, and will encourage you to follow God’s plan for your life, comes from Hebrews chapter eleven, verse one,

“Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (Hebrews 11:1).

Notice that it says, “Being sure of what we hope for” and the problem is that for many of us we want a guarantee. And yet, faith is being certain of what we do not see. Faith is living in a hope that is so real that it gives us confidence. Faith isn’t a longing that something may come to pass, it’s a confidence, a certainty of things that the world considers unreal and impossible.

Today, if you and I follow a God whose audible voice we’ve never heard and believe in Jesus whose face we’ve never seen, we do so because our faith has a reality, a substance, and a confidence that’s unshakable. This is the faith that Jesus spoke of in John chapter 20, Jesus said in verse 29,

"Because you’ve seen me, you’ve believed; blessed are those who haven’t seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29).

And last week we talked about Moses in verse 26 and how…

“He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward” (Hebrews 11:26).

Moses took a stand being sure of what he hoped for, forsaking all the material things he could touch and see, for a Savior who wouldn’t come to earth for more than 1,400 years. And yet today, the reality is that sometimes when you’re dealing with God, when you’re dealing with things of faith, you just have to say, “I believe” or “I’m confident that God wants me to do this.”

For example, I have a vision of this church bursting out of the building and I believe it’s possible, because I believe that God’s Word changes lives, and I believe God has entrusted our church with the privilege to get the word of God out into this community and into the surrounding areas. I have a vision for hundreds of people experiencing the power of the word of God. And you know, it would be nice for God to show me his plans, to reveal to me his timing, but God’s not going to show me step number three or four until I take steps one and two, because sometimes failing is the first step to succeeding.

And so, today as we’re following God, as we’re believing God, the only guarantee is that God will prove himself faithful. Some of you’ve been praying about something, but you’ve been playing it safe. You’ve got to take some faith risks. You’re going to have to get out of the boat. If you want to move toward the promise, if you want to step toward your destiny, you’ve got to be sure of what you hope for, you’ve got to step away from your security and get out of the boat. That’s exactly what Abraham did as we’ll see in our third point; number three is obedience.

3. OBEDIENCE

The Bible tells us in Genesis chapter 12, that God appeared to Abram and told him, “Leave your country, your people, and your family, and go to the land I will show you, for I will make you into a great nation.” So Abram left as the Lord had told him, in obedience he took the first step, and Hebrews chapter 11 tells us in,

“By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8).

Abraham trusted the Lord, he wasn’t afraid of failure, he didn’t always get it right, but he continued to press on by faith. When he was driven by famine to Egypt, in fear he passed off his wife as his sister to the Pharaoh (Genesis 12:10-16). Some time later, the Lord spoke to Abram and said, “Don’t be afraid Abram, for I will protect you, and your reward will be great.” Abram replied, “What good are all your blessings when I don’t even have a son?” The Lord replied, “You will have a son of your own. Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That’s how many descendants you will have.”

Now, wouldn’t you agree that promises don’t do us any good unless we believe them and act on them? Abraham had already proved that he trusted God’s promise by leaving his home and going to Canaan, but the first reference to Abraham’s faith is recorded in Genesis chapter 15, at verse 6. This verse is the classic John 3:16 of the Old Testament and it’s even quoted three different times in the New Testament. Verse six tells us,

“Abram believed the Lord, (He believed God, which literally means, “Abraham said, “Amen, God!” This Hebrew word translated “believed” means “to lean your whole weight upon.” And so, Abraham leaned completely, absolutely, and fully on the promise of God but also the God of the promise) and God credited it to him as righteousness” (Genesis 15:6).

Abraham received this righteousness because he believed the Lord and righteousness was credited, righteousness was put in his spiritual account. And so, we learn from Abraham that we’re not saved by making promises to God, but by believing the promises of God. The salvation of the Lord is a gracious gift and it’s received by faith. Abraham wasn’t saved by obeying God or even promising to obey God; but it was his obedience that proved his faith. However, his obedience was still less-than-perfect.

Later, while still waiting for the promised son, Abraham’s wife Sarah became impatient and said to him in chapter 16,

"The Lord has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her." Abram agreed to what Sarai said... He slept with Hagar and she conceived” (Genesis 16:2-4).

She bore him a son, but Ishmael wasn’t the son of the promise, and this little detour from the will of God brought conflict not only into their home but also into the world beginning what we know as the “Arab-Israeli conflict”. This account is more than ancient history with modern consequences, it’s a good lesson for us today about walking by faith and waiting for God to fulfill his promises in his way and in his time. God has a perfect timetable for all that he wants to do and therefore, as the Scripture says in Hebrews chapter 6,

We should “imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised” (Hebrews 6:12).

Eventually, Sarah did become pregnant and she bore to Abraham a son when the Bible says “he was as good as dead” (Hebrews 11:12). But it had to be according to God’s timetable so that God alone would get the glory, because whatever is truly done by faith is done for the glory of God and not the praise of men.

Time and time again Abraham faltered, he questioned, and the promise was renewed. He didn’t always get it right, but he kept going, he kept following God, and he acknowledged God’s power to fulfill the promise. It’s just as the prophet Isaiah said in chapter 28,

“The one who trusts will never be dismayed” (Isaiah 28:16).

And today in the same way, when you take that step of faith and you keep your eyes focused on the One who is “the author and perfecter of our faith” suddenly by his power, you’re not walking by sight anymore, but you’re believing and walking by faith (Hebrews 12:2).

However, the question remains, would God be amazed by your great faith? If you’re a follower of Jesus, if you’ve been born again, if the Holy Spirit dwells within you, that same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead; would God be amazed by your faith? Or would he be amazed by your lack of faith even though you have access to God and you’ve been invited to approach the throne of grace with confidence? Would he then be amazed at your lack of faith?

Some of you today are going to take a baby step of faith. There’s a call, there’s a burden, there’s a ministry, there’s something that’s been burning deep inside of you for a long time. And when you take that step of faith, your faith isn’t in the outcome, your faith is in the faithfulness of God. And as you grow in your faith, as we grow in our faith together, all of the sudden we begin to see that our faith can touch the heart of God.

Suddenly, as the church, we’re no longer going to play it safe, we’re not going to sit back, but we’re going to step out of the boat, we’re going to “Own the Vision”. Together as Christ’s church, it’s Jesus who is building the church, and together, both individually and corporately, when God looks at us we want him to be amazed at our faith. When God looks at our church we want him to be amazed at our faith, because I believe with all of my heart that God wants to do more through us. Ephesians chapter 3 says that he “is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Ephesians 3:20).

And so today, as in every generation, it’s important that we step out in faith being mindful of the example in Scripture to be strong in faith, always on guard against anything which would weaken or destroy faith and always praying for its increase (Romans 4:20-24). Since then, we live by faith and not by sight, let us rejoice in our high position, knowing that "Since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God" (Romans 5:1-2). Who is, and alone who is, to be the object and focus of our faith.

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