

“The Disciple’s Assurance and Conviction”

Genesis 15:1-6

Psalm 33:12-22

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16

Luke 12:32-40

Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. Scott Sabin, the Executive Director of Plant With Purpose, relates the story of an Episcopal priest who partnered with his organization to love and work with the people in the mountains of Haiti. Sabin writes,

As we sat in the dark, he [the Episcopal priest] told us how happy he was that God had given him a task. “God gives each of us something to do for him. It’s as if he gathered us together and said to each of us, ‘I have a very important job for you.’ It makes me happy that God has something for me to do. I feel excited!” But after a pause he said, “Can you imagine how it would feel if he [God] said to you ‘I have nothing for you to do?’ So many of the people in these mountains think they have nothing to give.”¹

The people in the mountains of Haiti had no assurance that they had anything to give. Assurance that God has called us with a purpose for our lives and to be laborers in God’s mission is developed through our faith in Jesus. That my friends is a significant part of the ministry of Plant With Purpose. Conviction that God will do as God has said is sustained even when we do not see God at work. Faith in Jesus is the vehicle for hope to flourish in assurance and conviction. This is the key for the people in the mountains of Haiti and millions of people around the world.

However, fear depletes hope, hope that faith in Jesus Christ makes a difference. Hope is the expectation that God’s promises are real and always at work. Luke 12:32 reads, “Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the

¹Scott Sabin in *The Sower* (Summer 2016), 4.

kingdom.” The human predicament is profound. Fear and hope both exist. But when fear grips us, it usually has the upper hand until we exercise faith, which in turn empowers hope. Hope displaces fear. Karl Barth writes,

God is the hope of man-the God who took such interest in him that He Himself became man in Jesus Christ, that in Jesus Christ He died with us and for us, and that in the resurrection of this man Jesus Christ, He then revealed Himself to be the hope of man, to be the manifest hope of all those who look to Jesus Christ and are ready to live by faith in Him. From the standpoint of this hope fear is defeated. Jesus says, “Fear not!”²

Genesis 15:1-6, Psalm 33:12-22, Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16, and Luke 12:32-40 address the theme of assurance and conviction. Hope undergirds one’s ability to rest in assurance and experience conviction that God is at work all the time in our lives and in the world.

Genesis 15:1-6 communicates God’s promise that Abraham and Sarah would have a family as numerous as the stars and be a great nation. It is this promise that motivated Abraham to fully trust that God would give he and Sarah a child. It is Genesis 15:1-11 that became the people’s assurance that when in exile in the Babylonian Empire, they would once again be united as a people. The exile caused them to stray from the Abrahamic Covenant but then empowered them to return to the Covenant and choose the path of healing, hope, restoration, and blessing.

Psalm 33:12-22 articulates to the people of God that God is God and more importantly their God. Psalm 33:12 reads, “Happy is the nation whose God is the LORD, the people whom he has chosen as his heritage.” God’s steadfast love fills all creation. The people of God are to remember and recount their experiences of God’s steadfast love. Remembrance of God’s steadfast love builds and ignites assurance and conviction.

²Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 3.4, 594.

Hebrews 11:1-3, 8-16 lays the groundwork for assurance that God is always at work and the conviction that what is not yet seen will become visible over time. This has been the case since the foundation of the world. Faith in God through Jesus Christ is the access point. Hebrews 11:8-12 reads,

By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to set out for a place that he was to receive as an inheritance; and he set out, not knowing where he was going...By faith he stayed for a time in the land he had been promised...By faith he received power of procreation, even though he was too old—and Sarah herself was barren...Therefore from one person, and this one as good as dead, descendants were born, “as many as the stars of heaven and as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.”

It is true that the universe we know exists was prepared and created by the words of God. What is seen was made from the void and darkness.... from things that were not visible. Yes, this is God at work from the foundation of what is now seen.

Luke 12:32-40 sets forth how the people of God are to be always prepared for the consummation of the new heaven and earth. Three steps: First, be generous so lay up your treasures in heaven. Second, get ready now not tomorrow. And third, the Son of Man will come like a thief in the night. Luke 12: 37 reads, “Blessed are those...whom the master finds alert when he comes; truly I tell you, he will fasten his belt and have them sit down to eat, and he will come and serve them.” Promise and warning teach us this truth in the Luke text. The purpose of this parable is not to give us detailed guidance, but to spur us on to action. Yes, the action of being ready.³

³In the paragraphs of biblical interpretation above, I am grateful for the thinking and writing of Ronald J. Allen, Emrys Tyler, Angela Dienhart Hancock, Scott McKnight, Joshua W. Jipp, R. Alan Culpepper, and Stephen Farris in Joel B. Green, Thomas G. Long, Luke A. Powery and Cynthia L. Rigby, editors, *Connections, Year C, Volume 3* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2019), 216-219, 219-221, 222-224, 225-227, 227-228, 229-231, and 231-232.

It is the responsibility of each of us to heed the call of living our life with the purpose God has placed in each one of us. And we are to live that life by faith, having a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for and the conviction of things not seen. As Plant With Purpose tells the people in the mountains of Haiti that God has given them something to do, the same is true for each one of you. God has something for each you to do no matter your age. Heed the call. Amen.

*This sermon was preached (for the In-Person, Online, and Village TV 6 congregations)
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