***“Believing is Seeing”***

***Genesis 12:1-5; Mark 9:14-27*** April 25, 2021

 Good news, y’all. Turns out, I’m a genius. Yeah, I know, surprised me, too but, well, facts can’t be denied. So, you see, this week I was just minding my own business when, bam, onto my screen came a test through social media. Now, imagine if you will a 40 x 20 grid of the number 5. Ah, but see somewhere in there is the letter. S. Well, turns out, I saw it pretty fast which, at least according to the meme, makes me a genius.

 Which is good. Because I was starting to think otherwise. I mean, I’ve done some fairly stupid things, believed some fairly foolish things, things far from a genius’ perspective, I imagine.

 Take, for instance, when I first heard about wi-fi. Now, I had knuckle-dragged my way into the internet, and I was used to it being only available to me at my anchor-sized desktop computer. When I first heard that internet access could be delivered wirelessly, I doubted it. Until I saw it for myself, that is.

 Seeing is believing, after all.

 But I began to wonder the inverse this week. Can believing be, in a manner of speaking, seeing?

 Take for example something that happened to me years ago. Now, I really should’ve made a copy of this but have y’all every seen that picture of a duck that, when viewed another way, looks like a rabbit? I hope you have. Well, the first time I saw it, I could ONLY see the duck. People were telling me that there is a rabbit, too, but I just didn’t see it. That is, until my friend John said to me something to the effect of “believe me, there’s a duck there Jason.” Trusting him, I turned and looked and, well, lo and behold, there was the duck. Like I said, I’m smarter than your average bear I am.

 But yes, I do believe that seeing can create sight as sure as I’m standing here.

 Take, for example, something that happens in the 9th chapter of the Gospel

 of Mark. I read to you now from **Mark 9:14-27** – “*And when they came to the disciples, they saw a great crowd around them, and scribes arguing with them.**And immediately all the crowd, when they saw him, were greatly amazed and ran up to him and greeted him.**And he asked them, “What are you arguing about with them?”**And someone from the crowd answered him, “Teacher, I brought my son to you, for he has a spirit that makes him mute.**And whenever it seizes him, it throws him down, and he foams and grinds his teeth and becomes rigid. So, I asked your disciples to cast it out, and they were not able.”**And he answered them, “O faithless generation, how long am I to be with you? How long am I to bear with you? Bring him to me.”**And they brought the boy to him. And when the spirit saw him, immediately it convulsed the boy, and he fell on the ground and rolled about, foaming at the mouth.**And Jesus asked his father, “How long has this been happening to him?” And he said, “From childhood.**And it has often cast him into fire and into water, to destroy him. But if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us.”**And Jesus said to him, “‘If you can’! All things are possible for one who believes.”****24****Immediately the father of the child cried outand said, “I believe; help my unbelief!” And when Jesus saw that a crowd came running together, he rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, “You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and never enter him again.”**And after crying out and convulsing him terribly, it came out, and the boy was like a corpse, so that most of them said, “He is dead.”**But Jesus took him by the hand and lifted him up, and he arose.”*

 Here we have a great example of a man, made desperate by his son’s illness. He searches out and finds the group of Jesus’ followers and he begs them to heal his son. Alas, all the disciples fail, they cannot remove the spirit from this young boy. But the man, the father, doesn’t give up. In fact, he won’t until he’s exhausted every avenue of help. So, if the apostles can’t do it, it’s time to take the child to the Great Physician, Jesus.

 But you know how it is with disappointment – it too has a way of coloring our beliefs. So, the man whose seen others fails, approaches Jesus tentatively. “If you can, Jesus, help my son.”

 Jesus, I think, takes amusement. “IF I CAN,” Jesus replies. Like, he, the Son of God, can’t make this happen? But then he shares with the man the key to this healing – “*All things are possible for one who believes.”*

 The man, cries out what I have to be the most emotionally honest words in all the Scriptures – “I believe! Help my unbelief!”

 The man confesses his belief, but it is an unstable, tenuous thing, here today, gone tomorrow. So, he at the same time begs the one he believes in to help him with his unbelief.

 Keep in mind, this man is desperate.

 That’s what we talked about last week in our series on Authentic Christianity. That the end of self is the beginning of faith. That end of self, part, well, chances are that it isn’t the most comfortable thing in the world.

 Take, for example, something that happens to the Israelites in Exodus. After the Lord spares His people from life under Pharoah, he leads them away from Egypt. Exodus 13:21 informs us – *“And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night.”*

 But, you see, at a certain point, God wants to share with Moses the Commandments so He and Moses head up to the top of Mt. Sinai. There, removed from His people, God’s people start to panic. No longer being able to see Him, they demand something to worship, something they CAN see. So, they convince Moses’ brother Aaron that what they need is, you guessed it, a golden calf.

 Like, God’s led you out of Egypt in the most dramatic way, like, ever and boom, your next step is to…worship an idol?

 But it does show us something. Removed from God, our hearts gravitate towards some pretty dark directions. Here, the Israelites forge an idol. What happens when we deny the God. When we choose simply not to believe in Him, whether that last for a second or a season the outcome is quite similar. Not good.

Paul, in **Romans 1:18-23** puts it this way, *“For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.**For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So, they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.**Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.”*

What Paul is getting at here is good news, believe it or not. First, that BELIEF IN GOD IS NATURAL. Simply put, it’s part of your design. You and I were created in the image of God which, is cool, of course. But it also means that we are designed for communication with Him and that, in Him, is the only place we’ll find real and lasting contentment.

The opening lines of Psalm 42 catch this thirst for the almighty. “As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.”

And that’s everyone. Everyone who is alive, or has lived, has lived created by God in such a way to be in relationship with Him. Belief in God isn’t something we’ve got to manufacture on our own, it’s a part of us. Full stop. Nothing required to believe in God. You’re equipped for it.

**Galatians 4:6** – “*And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!”*

**Ephesians 2:8-9** – *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

So, if you’re wondering if you have enough faith to be authentically Christian, if you’ve got a belly button, then the answer is unequivocally “YES!”

But, it’s fair to wonder, why should I believe?

There are so many positive benefits to having faith. You know, as a pastor, one of my roles is to walk with families in the difficult spaces of life’s journey. Never before was that as clear to me as the time I worked as a chaplain at CMC-Main. That was back in the day of beepers and, let me tell you, when that beeper went off, someone’s life was in abject disarray. Once, one time, I got paged to the maternity ward to help pray for an expectant mother.

No, when a pastor is needed when life takes darker turns. Often, in the midst of those difficult times, a person will wonder, “how to people without belief, without faith, make it through this stuff?”

It’s a good question. And I don’t know. Ultimately, I don’t know why you’d want to, to be honest about it. Because belief gives you so many things.

First of all, it supplies a life-time supply of vision. Like I was saying, when difficult times arise, belief in God can provide the very real hope of relief. Now, whether that’s relief from scarcity or sickness or even the loss of a loved one, believing in Jesus allows us to “See” brighter days ahead.

I was so fortunate, y’all as a new pastor. I was called to a church where the 50-year pastor still lived in town. Now, I learned more from this man about being a pastor than 3 years at Duke could ever have supplied. One of the great things about him was that, no matter what was going on, he would say, “Better days head” and, you just believed the guy.

Belief in God creates a vision for the future. One that’s governed by our ultimate hope, the return of Jesus Christ. **Revelation 2:1-4** – *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.**And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.**And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling placeof God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.****4****He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”*

 See, by believing that Day will come, provide Christians with a vision not only for the far future, but for now, as well.

 See, the warrant is right there in Mark 9. “All things are possible for he who believes.”

 And, I must say, ALL MEANS ALL. What is it that you want to do? Because if what you want to do, to accomplish is ultimately about giving glory to God then I’ve got some very good news. It is POSSIBLE. So, dream away.

 You know, when I look out right now, what I see is a world being subsumed by self-centered fears. There is ONE antidote to that. Belief that God can and will do amazing things in and through US. We are, after all, the body of Christ on Earth and to His tasks, God provides all the necessary gifts and attributes.

 I’m reminded here of one of my heroes from when I was growing up. Tyrone “Muggsy” Bogues is a retired NBA basketball player. Now, just getting to play in the NBA is a huge honor reserved only for the top 200 or so basketball players per year. But, for Muggsy, it was an even bigger deal, pun intended.

 You see, Muggsy Bogues is 5’3”. That’s right, 5 feet three inches. A pipsqueak played in a league of giants. He believed he could. Muggsy believed in God and it just happened.

 Muggsy believed he could play basketball despite his small stature. And because he placed his belief not on himself but upon God, it came to pass. I believe the same can happen for us, likewise.

 To believe is to “see” a future so bright we gotta wear shades.

 But it’s more than just a vision. When you believe in God, He also supplies the gifts and the grit to get it done. God desires that all His children know and love Him and as Christians, authentic Christians, apply themselves to that they’ll find every necessary gift to be present.

 Help my unbelief:

* Set a prayer reminder;
* Begin a Bible study plan, with another person (accountability);
* Be vulnerable/.

 **Christian Historian Justo Gonzales** puts it this way – “What the Creed means when we affirm that “I believe in God” is not merely that we believe that God exists, that we are of the opinion that God exists, or that, after due consideration we have decided that God exists, or EVEN THAT we are absolutely convinced that God exists. What the Creed means is that we TRUST GOD. That we are WILLING TO STAKE OUR LIVES ON GOD, just as a child jumping off a ledge stakes his on his father.”

 **AA Big Book page 68** – “The verdict of the ages is that faith means courage. All men of faith have courage. They trust their God. We never apologize for God. Instead, we let Him demonstrate, through us, what He can do. We ask Him to remove our fear and direct our attention to what He would have us be.

 Believing:

 **John 12:44-46** – *“And Jesus cried out and said, “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.**I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.”*