

## **WORLD VIEW SERMON SERIES**

**November 2017**



### **WORLD VIEW-BELIEVING IS SEEING.**

Hebrews 10:35-11:3

Leo Douma

05/11/2017

Here is a riddle for you. What does being forgiven by God, and knowing how everything came to be, have in common? Both are gained by faith. Look how in Hebrews 10:38 the writer quotes Habakkuk "...*the righteous will live by faith.*". And in Hebrews 11: 3 we read, "*By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command*". You might remember from Week 1 of the Reformation 500 series, we saw the apostle Paul quoted that text from Habakkuk in Romans 1:17. That was the text that got Luther excited about salvation by 'Faith Alone'. That, of course, was a key rediscovery of the Reformation. But what is not so well known is that the Reformation set up a whole new approach to every part of life. The Roman Catholic Church taught that the church consisted of the clergy only. Technically the ordinary people were not part of the church. They were known as the 'laity' who were ministered to by the church. The people were taught that to approach God, you needed the church and the saints to act as 'priests', as 'mediators' for you. The follow on from that, was the people were taught that life was split into two parts, the 'sacred' and the 'secular'. The church was the 'sacred' part of life, which sat over the rest of life that was 'secular'. In the secular realm, of work, politics, science, how you went about doing those things didn't really matter because it was all sinful any way. Only church life was holy. When Martin Luther hammered his 95 theses on the Wittenberg Church door he ended up turning the whole understanding of life on its head. Luther rediscovered the wonder of the gospel, that through faith in Jesus, we are declared by God as perfect in his sight. We have God's own righteousness. That's why, as Hebrew 4:16 puts it, "*we may boldly approach the throne of grace*". We do not need any mediators to speak to God for us. Heaven's door is wide open. Luther called this the 'priesthood of all believers'. That concept removed the idea of the church being over the people and over life. Luther and Calvin taught that all believers, as priests, had a vocation. So, whatever they did for work was a calling from God in which they were to be a "...*living sacrifice*" offering all they did for God. That meant work and politics and science were no longer just secular (even a necessary evil), but a sacred task to be done to God's glory.

Now, that raised an interesting question. How do we go about doing our job, or politics, or science, or education in such a way that it's done to God's glory? Does it mean that we are more moral than others when we are at work? Does it mean that we try to evangelize students at school or university? These are very important questions. Deuteronomy 6, reminds us we are to *"Love God with all our heart and all our soul and all our strength"*. That means all our thinking, all our work, even our very existence in every single moment of every day, is to be done out of love for God. As the Reformers said to God Alone be the Glory. How do we do that? Calvin gives us the clue when he wrote that '...the Bible is like a set of glasses through which we look at the rest of life'. Abraham Kuyper, the Dutch theologian and prime minister of the Netherlands said that our faith is a 'world view'. A world view is a set of beliefs or assumptions about the basic makeup of the world. A world view is what we assume about how everything came into existence, what it means to be human, how we decide what is right or wrong. A 'world view' is a mental framework from which we view reality and make sense of everything.

Imagine you have gone up to a famous tourist spot in the Blue Mountains in NSW. You are at Katoomba for the day, and are standing at the famous lookout viewing the panorama and looking the 'Three Sisters'. You admire that marvelous rock formation and your heart praises God for his wonderful creative work. Next to you is a tourist looking through his camera. He is thinking, 'What a wonderful rock formation. I wonder what forces of nature formed that, how many millions of years it took to erode to that shape?' Both of you are looking at the same rock formation. But your reasons for praise are very different. Why? Would we say it's because you look from the perspective of faith and he looks from the perspective of science? Well, it's true, that you are looking from a faith perspective. As Hebrews 11:3 says *"By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command"*. But the reality is that the other tourist is also looking from a faith perspective. Not the Christian faith, but nevertheless something he believes to be true. Now, the scientific method is about 'believing what you see'. It involves thinking about what you observe in life or from the results of experiments. But no one has been around millions of years to observe the forces of nature. Nor were we there to see God create. That's why it's *"By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command."* Both the theory of evolution and the understanding of creation are belief systems, assumptions about how it all began. All human thinking and activity is done from a belief system that greatly impacts what we do and why. So, when we as Christians say we act out of faith, we are not doing anything unusual. Everyone acts from their beliefs. But we are clearer about it, and we put our faith in God alone through Jesus Christ. We recognize that if you want to see the ultimate meaning to life, if you wish to see God, you must have faith. To get the big

picture, then 'believing is seeing'. As Hebrews 11:6 puts it "*Without faith it is impossible to please God, because any one who comes to him must believe he exists, and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him*".

Now by faith we do not mean 'positive thinking' or 'nice warm feelings'. Faith has to do with facts; spiritual facts, knowing them for certain. Note how Hebrews 11:1 defines it, "*Faith is being SURE of what we hope for and CERTAIN of what we do not see*". Another translation puts it "*Faith is the SUBSTANCE of things hoped for, the EVIDENCE of things not seen*." So, faith is the way we come in touch with the reality of God. Faith itself is the evidence or substance of knowing. It is how we come to know God. Now, often, young people will ask 'Why by faith? Why can't God just show himself and talk with us?' Well, God has revealed himself to the world. In theology we talk about 'general revelation' and 'special revelation'. By 'general revelation' we mean the creation, we ourselves and all we see around us, are expressions of God's wonder and majesty. By 'special revelation' we mean in salvation history God has done incredible miracles and spoken through the prophets. And in Jesus, God has come and lived with us. It has all been recorded in his Word, the Bible. But even when the miracles were done, when Jesus spoke to the crowds, there were still so many who did not accept him. So even in the presence of Jesus, with God living in our midst, faith was still needed to 'see' the spiritual reality of who Jesus is. We begin to understand then that you cannot just give faith to some one by presenting the 'logical facts'. Faith is a gift from God, given by the Spirit, to open our eyes to him and to receive Jesus Christ.

We can see how faith greatly affected the life styles of the Old Testament people. They had no visible evidence, no scientific proof that God's promises of a saviour would be fulfilled. Yet these promises meant so much to them that they worked out all they did based on their faith. Hebrews 11:13 makes it clear "*They did not receive the things promised*". Life was hard, even horrendous for many of them. How then could they go on? Well faith is "*SURE of what we hope for...*" That which is still in the future by our ordinary experience is already present by faith. Faith trusts God totally. So, what he promises is "*SURE*" to come – it is "*CERTAIN*". By faith these believers took the joy of the future into their present and lived from it. They believed God's promise of the "*heavenly city*" and lived as if they were there, while they lived as strangers on earth. That is why these men and women of faith could do the astounding heroic things they did. The people of their times thought they were fools. Those believers were often out of step with society. And they were often persecuted. But the people of the day could not 'see' what the faithful saw.

That is how faith works. It gives you the big picture, a way of looking at the world, a 'worldview'. That worldview, that big picture, determines your thoughts and actions, your lifestyle and attitudes. To use Calvin's example again, our Christian faith, based on the Bible, is like a set of glasses through which we look at the world. Imagine two people, one has glasses with blue lenses, the other with red lenses. Both look at a yellow sheet of paper. What colour does each person see? (Green, orange). They 'see' things differently because of the different glasses. So, faith effects how you see life and directs your thinking and doing. To work out a person's world view there are four basic questions: Where am I? Who am I? What is wrong? What is the answer?

By way of example, we will compare the beliefs of a Christian with that of an atheist and see how it affects their thinking and lifestyles. The atheist believes that we are chance products in a chaotic world. For him ultimate reality is what we can see and touch. The physical world is all there is. For him the reason we have so much strife in the world is that we lack control over the chaotic forces of nature around us. He concludes that life is meaningless. So, each person just tries to find as much meaning as he can for himself. Because the atheist believes we live in an evolved, chaotic world, there is no ultimate good, so morals and ethics are simply about what society will tolerate at a given time. Because the things we can see, and feel, are the ultimate reality he is a rampant materialist. He is always after bigger and better and more things. He loves the pleasures of the world. His view is 'You might as well grab it all while you can, because tomorrow you may be dead and gone anyway'. He is the sort the Bible means when it says "*Eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.*"

The Christian, by her faith in God, 'sees' things very differently. She sees this world as God's creation, and that she is God's image bearer. She too struggles with all the strife in the world, but sees it as the result of sin, the human rebellion against God. She is however, very positive about life. She knows that God is deeply loving, that he has given his Son to deal with sin and death. She believes deeply that life is not a chaos, but comes from God's Fatherly hand. She accepts that God is so powerful that he can turn even dreadful evil into good. She knows that ultimate reality is not what we see and touch, but is spiritual. Ultimate reality is God himself. And it is in knowing God and doing his will that we find true life. So, for her morals and ethics is not just following 'what everyone does'. It's about the unchanging laws of God and she will follow them even if she is out of step with everyone else. She feels no need to grab all she can, in terms of money and power and status. She is content with what God provides, knowing that the best is yet to come. History is rolling towards the coming of Jesus and the new heavens and the new earth. Everything she does is to move life towards that great day. That includes not just what she does in worship and evangelism, but also

her work as a scientist. In fact, it is in her work that she is really striving for God's glory. She recognizes that much of the field she works in as a scientist has been developed from another faith paradigm, from an evolutionary theory. She wants to develop it from her Christian perspective. She is encouraging her husband to do the same with his work as an accountant.

This Christian is a model for us. If we are children of the Reformation, then we will praise God for the rediscovery of the gospel of salvation by Faith Alone through Christ Alone. We will praise God for his grace in Jesus. But we will not just allow ourselves to enjoy God's grace and then go on and live like the rest of the world as it does from its different system of beliefs. We will strive to love God and glorify him "*...with all our heart and soul and strength*" in everything we think and say and do. In Martin Luther's time everyone accepted there was a God. The key question was how to be right with God. Today we start from a different place. Many assume there is no God. So, our approach today is a worldview one. Francis Schaeffer said we need to 'remove the roof' of a person's worldview. Let them get wet and get uncomfortable. In other words, we need to help people see where their belief system leads them. Often it leads to little hope in a world seen as chaotic and meaningless. It is when they see their worldview leads to despair that they are ready to look at another approach. It's then we need to be ready to share our beliefs and the hope we have in Jesus. That is our mission: to be a provider of Hope in the Hills.