

The Certainty of Our Faith

by Cornelius Van Til

Cornelius Van Til's sermon emphasizes the unwavering certainty of our faith in Christ amidst challenges and skepticism.

Duration: 34:20

Scripture: Genesis 6:8, John 1:3, Acts 17:31, 1 Corinthians 1:18, 1 Corinthians 15:58, Hebrews 11:38, Hebrews 12:2

Topics: "Faith"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the contrast between the wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. He highlights how the world's wisdom is considered foolishness by God. The preacher also discusses the importance of proclaiming Jesus and his crucifixion, resurrection, and imminent return. He mentions the doubt and fear that modern man faces and how they are unable to truly know themselves or their world. The sermon concludes with a focus on the institution of the Lord's Supper and the belief in the existence of Satan and his deceit on the cross.

Transcript

Members of the Board of Trustees, my colleagues of the faculty and friends, when on this occasion I speak to you of the certainty of our faith, I have in mind the faith of our fathers, the faith of Martin Luther, the faith of John Calvin, the faith of Gerardus Vos, and the faith, particularly, of Jake Rathomachen, the chief founder of this institution whom I would honor in a special sense today. I believe today, and I undertake to say that all of you with me believe today what these men believed in their day, and it can all be summed up in one single sentence, that Jesus Christ is the only name given under heaven by which man must be saved. Secondly, when I speak to you of the certainty of our faith, I am speaking of the faith that we as the redeemed by the blood of Jesus on the cross of Calvary possess.

We have found grace in the sight of God. We believe that Jesus died for our sins according to the scriptures, that he was raised again according to the scriptures. Paul speaks to us as he did to the Corinthians, as beloved brethren, as fellow believers in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead and of our justification through it.

Paul says to us that we are sanctified in Christ Jesus. And we believe these things to be true for ourselves because by the Holy Spirit of God we have been born again, born from the blood, born of God. We have received the heritage, moreover, of the reformed faith which must lead all others in the service of Christ, the Redeemer of men.

Thirdly, when I speak of the certainty of our faith, more particularly, I think of the fact that we must speak to the world about us, of our faith in Christ. And I am thinking now particularly of the graduating class and of their task to go out and to proclaim to the world and to an apostate church Christ Jesus and the resurrection, Jesus the victor over sin and death, Jesus establishing his kingdom, and that against the powers of hell so that they cannot prevail against it. I am thinking, too, of the temptation that will beset them in the nature of the case of will to accommodate this gospel of the cross of Christ and of his resurrection to the taste of the natural man, to be an effective minister, an able minister of the new covenant of salvation.

One must be certain that this gospel is not some cunningly devised fable, but is true and that all truth anywhere springs from this gospel. Think for a moment of Martin Luther standing at the Diet of Worms, standing before Charles V, the emperor, refusing to recant what he had written. Think of John Calvin writing his institute and sending it to Francis, the king of the French, in order to make plain to them that this was the faith that is subject to or persecuted to thee.

And think of John Rogers, who went to the stake as though he were walking to his wedding. Think of John Hooper, who was burned to death because he believed in the once for all atonement of Christ upon the cross for sinners and therefore declared the pulpit's mass to be an invention of men. The Church of Rome, he has told the people, was keeping from the people the merits of the blood of Jesus Christ.

Or think with me of Nicholas Ridley and Hugh Latimer, being tied back to back with Ridley, Latimer said to him, Be of good comfort, Master Ridley, and play the man. We shall this day by God's grace light a candle in England, such as I trust shall never be put out. As this graduating class goes out from this place, they will be confronted with a world that is more definitely committed to man's self-sufficiency than it has ever been before in the past and to a Church that is more deeply and more widely apostate than it was in the days of the Reformers.

The Confession of 1967, largely constructed under the leadership of members of the faculty of Princeton Theological Seminary and officially adopted by the United Presbyterian Church, is calculated to erase from the hearts of men the merit and the blood of Jesus Christ as surely as was the Church of Rome trying in the time of the English Reformers to stifle the gospel of the sovereign grace of God. And now go back with me as we reverse, go over these three points again, to the institution of the supper of our Lord. Jesus, during his days of service on earth, during his ministry, had said that he was the bread of life, who shall eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood hath eternal life and I will raise him up at the last day.

And just before he was to give his life a ransom for many, he met in the upper chamber with the twelve disciples whom he had chosen to proclaim the gospel of his salvation through his cross to all men everywhere in order to prepare them further for this service. Come with me for a moment, if you will, and watch what was going on in that upper room. Some time before this, Jesus had already sent out his twelve to raise the dead and to heal the sick, to cleanse the lepers.

Go to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, he told them, and tell them that the kingdom of heaven is at hand, freely you have received, freely give, but do not expect that because you come to men to do them good and to offer them salvation in my name, as promised the promised Messiah of Moses and the prophets, that they will gladly receive you. I am come as the light of the world, but the men of the world love darkness rather than light. Men hate me, the master, and they will hate you, my servant, too.

When Jesus saw the sake of men hating him and of hating his servants, he was thinking, of course, especially of Satan and his work behind all those who were hating him. He was thinking of Satan instigating this hatred. In the case of Jesus' ministry, he sought to destroy the work of salvation that he had come to perform.

He tried in particular to make Jesus himself believe that he did not need to suffer on the cross in the place of men to bear the wrath of God for them. Satan proposed that he and Christ himself could cooperate in a program of building the kingdom of man. And now toward the end of Jesus' ministry, Satan was redoubling his efforts to defeat Jesus and his work because he knew his time was short.

And now more clearly than ever, he realized that Jesus had all the while been out, even from the beginning, to destroy his kingdom, the kingdom of hell. But Jesus had been quick always to detect the Satanic spirit, even in the words of his apostle Peter. And when he said, Get thee behind me, Satan, for thou savest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

And now, at the supper, Jesus forces the issue, Will you, all twelve of you, be my true servants and proclaim my name as the one who shed his blood at the time of the exodus of Egypt? Take, eat, this is my body. Take, drink, this is the new covenant in my blood. But one of you will betray me.

One of you will show himself to have been a tool of Satan all the while. One of you will soon openly choose the side of the Pharisees who from the beginning have been seeking to destroy me. Choose you now for me or against me.

Am I really for you the Lamb of God that takes away your sins? Do you now see that I must be wounded for your transgression and bruised for your inequities? The atmosphere in the upper room was getting much too hot for Judas. The others, too, were depressed. They did not fully understand what Jesus had come to do for them.

But in their hearts was true love for their Lord, wrought by the Spirit of God, in Judas, on the contrary, to have been smoldering all the while the hatred for what Jesus had wrought. Judas goes out into the dark of night. When Peter later in the courtyard denied that he had known Jesus, he went out afterwards and wept bitterly for this denial when Jesus had prayed for them that he might not be taken by Satan after Jesus looked at him and the cockroach thrice the third time Peter went out and he remembered his sad betrayal.

But when Jesus at the supper handed the morsel of bread and the cup of wine to Judas, Satan entered into him and took full possession of him. Judas never found true repentance for his betrayal of Jesus. He merely threw his thirty pieces of silver at the Pharisees as useless to him now.

He followed Satan and lost himself and all that he had. Now the faith of Dr. Mason was the faith of Peter, not the faith of Judas. And by the grace of God, the faith of Peter, not the faith of Judas, is also our faith today.

Our faith, like that of Dr. Mason, is the faith of the old principal man, not of the new. The faith of the Hodges and of B.B. Warfield, the faith of the founders of this institution, of the first president of the board of this institution, Frank H. Stevenson, of Samuel G. Craig, of Robert Dick Wilson, and of Oswald T. Ellis. In short, the faith of all those who once again, in recent times or in our present day, are ready to stand up for the merit of the blood of Jesus against those who are with the men of modern science and of modern philosophy and of modern theology are seeking to construct the kingdom of man.

All of us must, even across the ecclesiastical borders, speak oft with one another of our common heritage, our common past, and our common hope. And it is the faith of all of us who believe in the merit of the blood of Jesus to do this thing constantly. Wholly committed to the reformed faith, Dr. Mason was constantly rejoicing in the fellowship of those not reformed but yet believing in the blood and merit of Jesus Christ.

When Jesus had been crucified, it seemed as though Satan had been victorious. The Jews, led by their high priest, had found him guilty of blasphemy. Being a mere man, the high priest said he had made himself God, equal with God.

Thus the leaders of the covenant people called on him to be a light to the Gentiles, sought to envelop that light in the darkness of the nation. The Pharisees said that Jesus could not be the Messiah spoken of by Moses and the prophets, so they handed him over to Pontius Pilate. And Pilate said, what is truth? Do you claim to be the kingdom of truth? What nonsense is this? The great philosophers Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle and others have told us that truth is utterly beyond the reach and power of man.

No one knows the truth. Truth is at best an idea that men may set for themselves in order to accomplish something as they row their rowboat on a shoreless and a bottomless ocean. Thus the Jews, the covenant people so called, the people to whom the oracles of God had been revealed, joined with the Gentiles in saying that Jesus was not, because he could not be, the promised prophet, priest, and king through whom salvation should be accomplished for men.

All of them were instruments of Satan. Through them the powers of hell were seeking to establish the kingdom of men instead of the kingdom of God. But notice now the certainty with which after Christ's resurrection the apostles and their followers proclaimed the name of Jesus as that only name which is given under heaven by which they must be saved.

Listen to the words of the early church. Believers, the kings of the earth stood up and all the rulers were gathered together against the Lord and against his anointed, his Christ. For of the truth against thy holy child Jesus whom thou hast anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate with the Gentiles and the people of Israel were gathered together for to do whatever thy counsel, thy hand and counsel before is determined to be done.

The certainty of our faith should be the certainty of fearlessness in the face of opposition such as these early churchmen had. We ask then for the third time about the substance, the nature, the content, the object of our faith. Where is your God and where is your Christ in this scornful world? And an apostate church says to us today, our answer is that the object of our faith is the self-attesting Christ of the scriptures as the Lord of history, as the victory over Satan and all his hope.

The whole course of history we contend and tell the world in true humility we trust but also with utter fearlessness is an all-out war between Christ and Satan for the souls of men with Christ the victor and Satan the vanquished. In short, when we assert that all things are from Christ and through Christ and unto Christ, we give in word our total philosophy of history. With respect to the past we say all things are created by God as John tells us in the prologue of his gospel.

As for the present, listen to the apostle, all things were created in him by him and by him all things consist. And finally as to the future, listen again to Paul because he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained wherein he hath given assurance and that he

hath raised him from the dead. We realize that none but those who accept the scriptures as unproblematic authority in terms of which they understand the world will believe with us in this way.

But we do believe in the existence of Satan, the world does not, and we believe in his deceit on the cross. At no stage of the whole course of history was Satan able to win more than a sham victory. Now this victory of Christ over Satan also spells our victory with him.

For history is now for me and for all those who in partaking of the supper as he instituted it really to eat his flesh and to drink his blood. We are now in a staircase that leads upward to our Savior's presence. Did he not tell his disciples, and through them tell us, Let not your heart be troubled.

Ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you.

I go to prepare a place for you. Seated at the right hand of the Father, my Savior now intercedes for me, appealing to the Father on the basis of his finished work that he wrought for me on Calvary's cross, and the Spirit, too, makes intercession for me and prays within me and for me with groaning unutterable. The Heidelberg Catechism expresses my conviction marvelously well.

What is your only comfort in life and in death? The answer is that I, with body and soul, for time and for eternity, in life and in death, am not my own but belong to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ who with his precious blood has fully satisfied for all my sins and redeemed me from all the powers of the devil and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head. Yea, that all things work together for my salvation. Wherefore, by his Holy Spirit, he also assures me of eternal life and makes me heartily willing and ready henceforth to live unto him.

It is our faith as believers in the merit and the blood of Jesus that we confess today before the world and before an apostate church. We are now more conscious, deeply conscious than ever before that we must hold to this faith in the opposition to the combined forces that are against us. Now when I think again at last upon my faith in the self-attesting Christ of Scripture as the Lord of history to whom all power on heaven and on earth is given and who will soon return in the clouds of heaven to judge the quick and the dead, then I ask thee finally again of the certainty of this my faith.

Do I, do we, do we dare, does this class graduating dare fearlessly to set our philosophy of history, our view of Christ and of the scriptures and the scriptures of the Christ over against that of the unbeliever and challenge him to forsake the wisdom of this world? Does not the prevailing philosophy of our day assure us that no one knows our truth? Is not this prevailing philosophy more skeptical than Pontius Pilate possibly could have been in his day? Are we not told that science cannot operate except in an open universe? Does not the prevailing thought of our day tell me that my body together with the life of plants and of animals has come into this world by a process of evolution from the world of chance and do not the leading theologians of our day, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, inform me that when we cry out O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? That we are fooling ourselves, deluding ourselves and setting our hopes on nothing but fairytales which no mature person can take as representing the fact of our world. And I think now again especially of our graduating class. At least a number of them will soon be called upon to preach Christ and crucify Christ in the resurrection.

They will soon be called upon not to set forth cunningly devised fables but to speak the truth as it is in Jesus. They will be called upon to say to those to whom all things are relative and who assume with pride

that no one knows and no one can know the truth who especially assure us that what we believe cannot be true, that the Christ of the scriptures is the way, the truth and the life, and that without him life is worse than vain. Will they dare to say with full assurance of its truth that Christ is risen from the dead and has become the firstfruits of them that slept as servants of Christ as those who will on the final day give an account of what they have sent to men and what they have proclaimed to men.

They will continue to hear the solemn words of Paul. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, unmovable, always discerning in the work of the Lord for as much not as you guess or think but for as much as you know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord. Will they dare to be able to say I know whom I have believed and that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

Well, after Easter and after Pentecost, how can any servant of Christ be anything but servant of this faith. It is in this way that our graduates, this seminary and we all with them, each in his own way and in his own station and place, must speak today to those who are green as where the Pharisees when Peter spoke to them of Jesus. When they hear of the Christ and of him crucified for the sins of his people and raised from the dead for their justification.

And it will be the responsibility of this institution in days to have come and of all of us who have in the providence and grace of God found in the reformed faith the fullest expression of this faith to lead all other believers in the service of this sovereign God of Scripture. And finally if fear should at any time threaten to keep us from being steadfast and immovable abounding in the work of the Lord then let us look at that cloud of witnesses some of whom were stoned and thorn of thunder were tempted were slain with a sword who wandered about in sheep skins and goat skins being destitute, tormented, afflicted of whom the world was not worthy but who received not the promise God having provided some better thing for us that they without us should not be made perfect. Think for a moment with me of Noah the man of God.

Noah differed from the men of his time because he had received grace in the sight of God. That was the source of the difference and alone the source of the difference. With grace in his heart he lived among his fellow covenant breakers as the only covenant keeper.

He preached and practiced righteousness among those who preached and practiced lawlessness. Obeying the vision that God had given him to build an ark for the saving of his house and for the warning to those that forsaken their creator redeemer he labored and labored on witnessing to his generation fearlessly. The faith of Noah involved the whole philosophy of history the philosophy of origin, of the past the philosophy of the present and the philosophy of the future.

But Noah's contemporaries ridiculed him. What did he mean by building an ark on top of a mountain and thinking that he could actually float it in the water. There had been no such flood there had been bad floods to be sure but empirical evidence did not indicate even the possibility of such a flood as Noah spoke of.

And what on earth did anything that pertains to my internal moral life have to do with rain and with sunshine. Noah you are ridiculous beyond words. Said Jesus as were the days of Noah so shall the days of the son of man be for as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking marrying and giving and marriage until the day that Noah entered the ark and knew not until the flood came and took them all away so shall also the coming of the son of man be.

The men of Noah's days paid no attention to the warning that Noah gave them. They simply assumed that the claims of Noah about the coming judgment were the product of an overheated imagination. Today too men simply assume that the word of Jesus about this second coming as being like the time of the first flood is all delusion at best.

In Noah's days the line of separation between the church and the world had worn out. There was no more evidence there was intermarriage between the children and the descendants of Cain and the descendants of Seth. As the Jews and the Gentiles were united in their common effort to destroy Jesus and his claim to be the son of God and son of man coming as judge of men so a false church as did the men of Noah's time and an apostate world are singing in chorus that nobody knows anything about anything but all know that the faith of such men as Lutheran of Calvin and of Machen cannot possibly be true and that their own faith therefore must be true.

It is the task of our graduating class and of this seminary and of all of us in days ahead to dare to stand alone as Noah stood alone against those who believed his words to be followed. They who hold to the faith and to Christ of the scriptures must do so in the faith of well-nigh universal doubt indifference and unbelief. Surely they must hold on to the promise fear not little flock it is the will of the Father to give unto you the kingdom.

And when we are afraid and when we doubt let us look at one more of the heroes of the faith namely at Abraham the father of the believers in obedience to the heavenly vision. He left his home without knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise with Isaac and Jacob the heirs with him of the promise for he looked for the city that hath foundation.

Our Lord says of Abraham that he longed to see his dame and that he saw him. To Abraham and to his seed were the promises made. He said not as to seeds as of many but as of one and that seed is Christ.

Through Christ the promised seed of Abraham will the nations of the world be blessed. But who believes this today? The world says that nobody can predict the future. Those who believe that Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law being made a curse for us so that the blessings of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ that we might receive the promise of the spirit of faith must do so in the face of the opposition of the God of this age.

Listen for one moment as I read to you and indicate to you some of these modern prophets. Think of Soren Kierkegaard. By church men he is said to have brought men back from vain worldly philosophies to the Christ of the scriptures.

Nothing less is true than that that is simply not in accordance with the facts. Arnold Coyne, the Abbot of Churchmen speaks as a Christian historian nevertheless says that the traditions, the Greek traditions in their view of the suffering had the same idea as Jesus that all suffering not just Christ's suffering but all suffering sanctified and purified. Seeker von Hofer who is today one of the saints as it were of modern Jesus so are all orthodox Churchmen different essentially from Kierkegaard and Karl Barth to the effect that all men are in here in Christ and Christ is the act of salvation of all men everywhere whether they have heard of Jesus or have not heard of Jesus.

And Jacques Maritain the Roman Catholic counselor of the Pope who is by church men said to be leading or having led the Pope in the right direction toward appreciation of the gospel actually gives us Aristotle not pure and simple but modified by Thomas Aquinas but nothing better than that. Thus the modern

Protestants and the modern Roman Catholic theologians today do what the Pharisees did in Jesus' day. They deny the efficacy the need and the efficacy of the merit of the blood of Jesus.

The task now facing this seminary and facing all of us is obviously to be obedient as were Noah and Abraham obedient and as were all the heroes of the faith obedient to the heavenly vision pertaining to the Christ him crucified the Christ of the scriptures the Christ risen from the dead. To be obedient to that heavenly vision means for us to proclaim Jesus and him crucified Jesus in the resurrection Jesus ascended to glory to heaven Jesus as again about to return on the clouds of heaven. Modern man is paralyzed in doubt and in fear.

His wisdom has been made foolishness with God. Taking for granted he must start all his efforts to know himself and his world from himself he cannot even find himself. He is as a drop of water or a white cap on an ocean produced by a storm that comes from the blue above.

He's not different in substance from the water that surrounds him. Soon he will disappear in the blue that surrounds him. That's all that man can say about himself.

He's come by chance. He's oozing out of ooze as fast as and he's oozing back into ooze. And that's the wisdom of the world.

It has been made foolishness with God. It is to the world and that lies in darkness and to an apostate church that has reduced the gospel of the one who once for all became a curse for men and their slaves to an event in darkness that we can especially sense by the grace of God we have the vision of the sovereign grace of God must bring the message of hope and of gladness. Let us then run with patience the race that is set before us looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross despising the shame and is set down at the right hand of God.

My friends, my friends of the Board of Trustees, my friends of the faculty, my friends here one and all, lift up your hearts with me as John the Baptist imprisoned and set aside by the world on lonely Patmos Isles lifted up his face to heaven and there he saw the one on the throne of glory and the twenty-four elders and the four living creatures surrounding him about to sing Moses and the Lamb the song of Moses and the Lamb worthy art thou our Lord and our God to receive the glory and the honor and the power for by thy will they are and were created. Amen.

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