

“The Genuine Article”

Part 2

I Peter 1:8-9

⁸Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, ⁹obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls. (ESV)

HOPE

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Mr. Thomas Powell

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I remember my dad standing over the kitchen table of the house on Vinalhaven, his parallel rulers, pencil, and chart spread out as he planned out all the headings we would need to make a trip to wherever it was he had in mind for a coming day's adventure safely. He would do this on any trip outside what he knew from memory (for he knew each heading from buoy to buoy that would get us home), he would do this even if the route was familiar enough and he knew all the navigational aids would be visible (Lighthouses, Daymarkers, nuns, cans, blinkers), the courses were all plotted ahead of time (although there was always charts on the boat if the need came up to change things, or a sudden desire came on dad to see something new). In those days before GPS, you had to do this. Plus, as a child this fascinated me: the various purple arcs for the LORAN system, the dots for the buried cables warning that you could not anchor in some cove, or what really excited a 10 or 12 year old boy, the place where there was a WWII munitions disposal sight, just beyond the White Islands, a place where you didn't really want to fish or anchor, and even the various depths, where the cracks and fissures of granite might cause the surface to jut up or down hundreds of feet – God help the lobsterman who lost a trap down some of those more sudden drops in the Easter Penobscot Bay). This work beforehand was greatly important. It showed just what we could expect as long as the charts were up to date.

On of the motivations behind this preparation, often taking place on a foggy day or stormy day when we were not on the water, was that the fickle weather, a sometimes a mystery even to NOAA, could change quickly. It was possible that weather could make our trip much more difficult, with fog or seas blocking our view of the buoys and land. On more than one occasion it was those headings, done beforehand, that kept us safe on the way back from a trip.

As Christians we live our lives of faith in much the same way. We have been given a sure guide to the world in which we find ourselves. The Bible. We also have a fixed guide to set our course by. Jesus Christ.

Much like sailing in the fog with the course headings written down, we squint and stare wondering if we are on the right course. Did you make a mistake, is that a smudge. Is that 159° or 169°? However, unlike a mariner we can know that the heading is correct, guaranteed 100%, if it is the heading that focuses on Christ. He has promised that to believe in him is to have eternal life. (John 3:16, ¹⁶“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.) Our reward does not diminish, just a few verses ago we read, 1 Peter 1:3b-4, “According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you” – for the Christian, our heading is promised to be secure in Christ.

It is to those who, despite the decreased physical visibility of Jesus Christ, have still set him as their destination and held to it faithfully, that Peter is rejoicing in our verses for today. Those who believe though Christ is not apparently visible, are those demonstrate that they are the genuine article. Believing though not seeing marks the genuine article, a believer from a non-believer.

I said last week that there was a logical relationship between vv 6-7 and vv 8-9. Your Bible translation likely helps make my point for me. Many insert three “though’s” in these verses. In reality they aren't there in the Greek original text, but were added for clarity's sake.

Our passage literally reads:

You have not seen him, you love him

You do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with great that is inexpressible and filled with glory

They decided to make it easier to understand. Drawing out the parallel with the various trials mentioned in v 6. Peter now addresses one thing common to all those who come to faith following Christ's ascension into heaven recorded in Acts:

⁶ So when they had come together, they asked him, "Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" ⁷ He said to them, "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority. ⁸ But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." ⁹ And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. ¹⁰ And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, ¹¹ and said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven." Acts 1:6-11

One thing, common to all believers, is that Jesus Christ, until he returns, is out of sight. That brings us to the first of three things that we find out about the genuine article in this passage:

- A Common Test
- A Common Joy
- A Common Salvation

Our Common Test

This not-seeing has two attributes shared by believers, by the genuine article. They do not see Christ, but they love him. Romantics might say that "absence makes the heart grow fonder," but the reality may be quite different. One of the most difficult things for a marriage is when two people do not see one another; many servicemen and women find that long deployments cause a distance to grow in their relationship. The fires seem to dampen a bit. The statistics for divorce following deployment in the armed forces is heart-wrenching reality. Followers of Jesus Christ are amidst great struggle and strife in a spiritual battleground, enemies both earthly and spiritual assail us. YET, we love Christ. That is the mark of genuine believer. Though our beloved is far away, in the highest heavens. How do we know that we can do this? That is, how do we know that the genuine article loves and believes in Jesus Christ in spite of his lack of visibility? We know this because Christ himself has prepared his bride, which is his church, to handle his departure.

Firstly, Christ knew that we would not see him, and he blesses us! We can find this in a passage that is near and dear to me, because it involves my ancient name-sake, the apostle Thomas, sometimes popularly referred to as *Doubting Thomas*. I have always loved the passage found in chapter 20 of the Gospel of John where the previously absent Thomas joins the apostles who, while he was away, had seen the risen Christ. Thomas, a bit of an empiricist wants to see the risen Lord (if I'm honest, I'd likely be doing exactly the same thing). Here we have recorded the words of our Lord:

²⁶ Eight days later, his disciples were inside again, and Thomas was with them. Although the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace

be with you.”²⁷ Then he said to Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see my hands; and put out your hand, and place it in my side. Do not disbelieve, but believe.”²⁸ Thomas answered him, “My Lord and my God!”²⁹ Jesus said to him, “Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Much like blessed are the meek, blessed are the poor in spirit, Christ here gives another blessing, blessed are those who have not seen and have believed. Just as much as when the psalmist wrote in what is recorded in psalm 84:

⁴ Blessed are those who dwell in your house,
ever singing your praise! Selah

⁵ Blessed are those whose strength is in you,
in whose heart are the highways to Zion.

Much like the analogy of a nautical chart, here we find highways to Zion mentioned. Courses headed to Zion. One who believes in Christ and trusts in him, even though not seeing him has his course plotted to Zion, and who will be the focus of the Eternal Zion? Christ. Those who direct their ways to Christ are blessed, that is the demonstration of believing in Christ. That belief is always a loving belief. We love our savior. We believe in our savior. You can't have one without the other. You can't believe in what you don't love and can't love what you don't believe. So when I say believe, just as our verse parallels belief and love, I want you to know that the two go together. We love Christ though we do not see him. We believe in Christ although we do not see him.

Secondly, the substance of faith is our not-seeing and believing. In the words of the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews we read:

11 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.² For by it the people of old received their commendation.³ By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

Faith is knowing that what we see isn't all there is. In our Sunday School classes this concept has been surfacing again and again. In our present era many limit reality to that which can be sensed and tested, probed and examined. Faith, by its very nature is not perceptible in the those manners. Though we cannot see gravity, or x-ray radiation or any of a number of different things, we can perceive them with instruments. To answer the modern criticisms against the perceptibility of faith we must acknowledge that by its very essence faith is something imperceptible. That is the very definition of faith. To probe it in with tools may see its effect on lives, but that is not proof in the modern sense.

So, the very nature of faith is to not be seen. To see is not necessarily faith to believe is faith. Hence it is a universal characteristic of the genuine article, the real deal Christian. They believe though they do not see.

Thirdly, the strength of faith is not our own, but the Spirit within us. Paul wrote to the Philippians: (Phil 1:6): ⁶ “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.” Why could he make a statement like this? Because we have the Spirit. The Spirit is given by Christ to those who do not see him, and it is a life-giving source that insures that believers don't just have life, but rivers of living water flowing out of their hearts:

John 7

37 On the last day of the feast, the great day, Jesus stood up and cried out, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.'" 39 Now this he said about the Spirit, whom those who believed in him were to receive, for as yet the Spirit had not been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

What good news. We aren't stuck white-knuckling our faith until we die, but rather we are strengthened and preserved by God himself. He loves us. He died for us. He preserves us. Good News! Hallelujah. Thank you Jesus. It's not me who keeps me, though I do not see the risen Christ, but Christ who keeps me safe and secure by means of the Holy Spirit producing Christ in us, our hope of Glory! (Col 1:27) Oh, please get this. Cling to this. Christ saves sinners. He doesn't mostly save them. He saves them. Even though those who are saved do not see him, they love and believe in him who saved them.

Sometimes though even the saints seem to be stuck in fog. Their doubts creeping in, or their convictions being confused... I can think of three fogs that I commonly struggle with, in no particular order.

Fog of Culture – There are many things about a culture that can confuse and cause struggle within a believer. America is often described as a nation of individualism, consumerism, commercialism and all of these things can cause a fog of confusion to seep in. Just to think about one, and I invite you to take some time this week to think about others, we can often walk down the street or turn on the TV and be assailed with a thousand different unneeded things that we are told we ought to want. These aren't needs, and while some of these wants are not inherently evil, it is the intention of those advertisers that their product be the receiver of the results of your hard work and labor. The single, solitary goal of advertisers is to be the end and goal of your money. For the Christian, however, the end and goal of everything that we have and possess whether our minds, our will, or our money is to glorify God. This leads us to a second fog:

Fog of Earthly Comforts – How tempting is it to be satisfied with the world we have around us. Those moments of great contentment when life seems good. How far from heaven is your mind when life is good. When you are sitting back in the spa? Is that a tiny little foretaste of heaven, or an occurrence that causes you to briefly live like an atheist and forget heaven? Though life may not be full of struggles, it can be full of foggy happiness that keeps you from keeping your course on Christ. There is nothing wrong with enjoying the things of this world so long as they do not confound the importance of the next. Let the things of this world that are enjoyable point you to the greater enjoyment we have in the next.

Fog of Ourselves – Oh how tempting it is to find satisfaction in ourselves. To look to ourselves for answers. To say: "I am the master of my fate; I am the captain of my soul." (Wm. Henley, *Invictus*). To live in a temporary atheism where we become the goal of our journey. If that is the case our compass will surely spin, we will be confused. Perilous dangers of rocks and ledges await us if we set the course on ourselves. Seek Christ, for the dangers of seeking ourselves is without calculation.

But, our time is drawing short, we must hasten through the remainder of our text. Another common item amongst the genuine article is a common joy.

Our Common Joy

Christ and all his faithful promises are the common joy of the believer. The world holds to a thousand different joys. A million different clubs that claim the allegiance of every

little niche of society. The internet is a garden of variegated joy, every little bit of fleeting satisfaction held high as an ultimate. However, in the church there is one joy. There is one reason to rejoice. Christ. That is also to say that Christ's people are a joyful people. We are not to be dour at ourselves, that would simply be making ourselves the goal of our heading! Hardly, we rejoice and celebrate in Christ. We lament that we are prone to wreck ourselves upon the jagged rocks if we were to set the course, but we rejoice that Christ has promised that he will bring his people safely home.

Our Common Salvation

Related to the common joy is our common salvation, for the outcome of faith is the salvation of souls. The rest of the world has a thousand joys, a thousand false saviors, uncountable false bearings for life – but we have one joy and one salvation. The result of faith, of love and belief, despite not seeing, is salvation. We don't receive tiers of salvation, some of us don't just get in. The worker at the first hour earns the same wage as the worker at the last. We have eternal life in Christ. There is no other salvation to be had apart from Christ. He is the common salvation of all who have eternal life. This is great news. If someone asks you how to have salvation we start with the name of Christ. We aren't left stammering and suggesting a myriad of options, but quickly to our lips comes the one option: Christ. How can they have that salvation? Believe in Him. Be baptized. Though you do not see him, love him and believe in him and you will be saved.

Conclusion

We've once again been talking about the genuine article, that is what does a Christian, as described in the Bible look like. We've been given a pretty good picture in just these few short verses. The genuine article, though they do not see, love and believe in Jesus Christ. No GPS is more accurate than this, for what GPS can tell you how to get to eternal life? We can celebrate that our God saves, for he equips his people to handle life's circumstances. God foreknew and planned that you would not see him, he has prepared the most glorious way possible for you to live out your life. Though we do not see, we love and believe in him. Dearest Jesus, give us confidence more and more in you, set firm our course, to the glory of God. Amen.