

“What is Unseen” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)(6.26.22)

2 Corinthians 4:16–18 (NIV84)

¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

The word of God for the people of God.

LET US PRAY.

Title: **“What is Unseen”**

INTRODUCTION:

I read to you from Psalm 77 to open today’s service. It speaks of God leading The Chosen People through the wilderness. Now, we know from the scriptures that the LORD led them by a very circuitous route to prepare them for The Promised Land.

It was verse 19, that started me on a circuitous route leading to today’s scripture and the idea of fixing our eyes on what is NOT seen. Here is verse 19.

Psalm 77:19 (NIV84)

¹⁹ Your path led through the sea,
your way through the mighty waters,
though your footprints were not seen.

Have you ever felt in your life that you too were being taken on a long circuitous journey? Maybe you were just spinning your wheels. Maybe you were going in circles. That is the normal way for a person to walk when they are lost; they walk in circles. We tend to favor one leg or the other, so that step is consistently longer than the other. Gradually, we end up back where we started because we were relying on ourselves.

The Hebrew people had been freed from bondage in Egypt. The Red Sea was parted and the people walked through on dry land. The Almighty God had done it, but the Psalmist says “though your footprints were not seen.” Often we have trouble seeing the evidence of God’s miraculous work in the world and even in our own lives.

So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. This speaks of a special kind of vision. Almost immediately, I saw a connection to what Paul says in the next chapter – seven verses after today’s text: 2 Corinthians 5:7 (NIV84) We live by faith, not by sight.

- Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible, and receives the impossible.
- Faith is to accept the impossible, do without the indispensable, and bear the intolerable.
- Faith is idle when circumstances are right, only when they are adverse is one's faith in God exercised. Faith, like muscle, grows strong and supple with exercise.
- Don't be afraid to take a big step if one is indicated. You can't cross a chasm in two small jumps. — David Lloyd George
- **A little faith will bring your soul to heaven; a great faith will bring heaven to your soul. — Spurgeon**
- Faith is not believing that God *can*, but that God *will*!
- Faith is to believe what we do not see; and the reward of this faith is to see what we believe.
- Faith in God is indispensable to successful statesmanship. —Abraham Lincoln

BODY:

One of my favorite Bible stories that demonstrates spiritual vision comes from 2 Kings 6:11–18 (NIV84). The king of Aram's efforts were continuously being thwarted.

¹¹ This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, "Will you not tell me which of us is on the side of the king of Israel?"

¹² "None of us, my lord the king," said one of his officers, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom."

¹³ "Go, find out where he is," the king ordered, "so I can send men and capture him." The report came back: "He is in Dothan."¹⁴ Then he sent horses and chariots and a strong force there. They went by night and surrounded the city.

¹⁵ When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh, my lord, what shall we do?" the servant asked.

¹⁶ "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

¹⁷ And Elisha prayed, "O Lord, open his eyes so he may see." Then the Lord opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

¹⁸ As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the Lord, "Strike these people with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked.

Jesus himself makes it clear that there is another world besides this one. There is another realm, another reality.

John 16:33 (NIV84) "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."

John 8:23 (NIV84) But he continued, "You are from below; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world."

John 15:19 (NIV84) If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

A few weeks ago, we looked at Jacob's dream where he saw a stairway that connected heaven and earth whereupon angels ascended and descended. In John 1:51 (NIV84) [Jesus] then added, "I tell you the truth, you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man."

Yes my friends, there is an unseen world, an unseen realm, an unseen reality. It is as real as this time and place in which we live. You might argue that the unseen realm is even more real than our material world.

Think about the Children's Chat. We cannot see this unseen world without assistance. The Holy Spirit is our ViewMaster, illuminating what is hidden, what is unseen. We must position ourselves within the light.

A.W. Tozer addresses these issues in [*Evenings with Tozer: Daily Devotional Readings*](#). The May 19th entry is titled "The Great Unseen Reality Is God Himself."

"At the root of the Christian life lies belief in the invisible. The object of the Christian's faith is unseen reality.

In the world of sense around us, the visible becomes the enemy of the invisible; the temporal, of the eternal. That is the curse inherited by every member of Adam's race.

Our uncorrected thinking, influenced by the blindness of our natural hearts and the intrusive ubiquity of visible things, tends to draw a contrast between the spiritual and the real; but actually no such contrast exists. The antithesis lies elsewhere: between the real and the imaginary, between the spiritual and the material, between the temporal and the eternal; but between the spiritual and the real, never! The spiritual is real.

If we would rise into that region of light and power plainly beckoning us through the Scriptures of truth we must break the evil habit of ignoring the spiritual. We must shift our interest from the seen to the unseen.

For the great unseen Reality is God! "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him." This is basic in the life of faith. From there we can rise to unlimited heights.

“Ye believe in God,” said our Lord Jesus Christ, “believe also in me.” Without the first, there can be no second.

God and the spiritual world are real. We can reckon upon them with as much assurance as we reckon upon the familiar world around us!”

As Elisha prayed for his servant’s eyes to be opened to see the spiritual forces, so too we should pray for spiritual eyesight. Through time spent in God’s holy inspired scriptures, we learn the vocabulary with which the Holy Spirit can open our eyes. And, as we read last week, even when we are without words the Spirit can pray on our behalf. We have an awesome God.

But it cannot be denied that there are hindrances to our seeing the unseen things. The classic book *Pilgrim’s Progress* helps to explain. If you have not read it, I highly recommend it. It is by John Bunyan. After the Bible, it may be the most read piece of Christian literature. You can download it for free from the Internet. And, we may have it in our library here.

The central character is named Christian and he is on a journey to the Celestial City. He has a helper named Interpreter. Listen to this brief exchange between them:

Christian: “I see that it is not good to covet things that are in the here and now, but to wait for the things that are to come.”

Interpreter: “You speak truly. For the things that are seen are temporary, but the unseen things are eternal. But earthly things and our fleshly appetites are such close neighbors, and eternal things and our carnal senses are such strangers to each other, that it is easy for the first two to fall in love while the second two remain distant.”

Not only that but 2 Corinthians 4:4 (NIV84)

⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Satan hinders our heavenly vision. He doesn’t want us to focus on the eternal things of God. He doesn’t want us to believe in heaven. He doesn’t want us to seek the kingdom of God and Christ’s righteousness.

Do you remember doubting Thomas. He said that unless he touched the wounds of Jesus himself, he would not believe that Jesus was resurrected. So, Jesus did appear to him, along with the other disciples.

John 20:28–29 (NIV84)

²⁸ Thomas said to him, “My Lord and my God!”

²⁹ Then Jesus told him, “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Then in Hebrews 12:2 (NIV84)

² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

So, why is Paul calling on us to fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. It is the answer to a question that all human beings have asked. There are so many trials and tribulations in this world. How are we to cope? How are we to navigate through the stormy waves of life? Surely you have wrestled with these things, the obstacles and vagaries of life. I know that I have.

Yesterday was the first day that people from the community came to Emmaus to play pickleball. There was some discussion about the ravages of age. One man had had multiple knee surgeries. His wife had a knee replacement. My son, has had three knee surgeries and needs another one. Our bodies wear down and wear out. This is the external man.

No fountain of youth has ever been discovered. Most everyone of us has peaked physically and now are on the downward side of strength, stamina, and agility. We are outwardly wasting away. We can do many things to delay and prolong the decline, but it is inevitable.

Paul says our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. Does Paul know what he is talking about? I will demonstrate that he does. This chapter opens with Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart. Then again in verse 16, therefore we do not lose heart. He recognizes that the normal response would be to lose heart, but the faithful Christian will not.

If you study the life of Paul, you know it was quite arduous. Not only was he physically beaten, he faced all sorts of deprivation and threats on his life. Then he had the struggles of his ministry. Even when people received the gospel message with joy and followed Jesus, problems soon developed. False teachers and enemies would infiltrate the church. Then Paul had his chronic physical ailments. His vision was bad, and he had a thorn in his side, which was never identified, that though he prayed, he was told that God's grace was sufficient for him. He would not be cured.

There are many passages that outline Paul's sufferings. We will limit ourselves to those right here in the 4th chapter. 2 Corinthians 4:8–11 (NIV84)

⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. ¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. ¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body.

And yet he calls the situation, "our light and momentary troubles." Light and momentary. Bubbles illustration.

Then, however painful it might be, we must consider the benefits of our difficulties. They should push us closer to our loving Father. They should dispel the myth of self-sufficiency. If we see the truth of the situation, we begin to understand our total dependence on God Almighty. The troubles are opportunities to grow our faith muscles, to renew that inward man – the essence of who we are. For in fact, we are spiritual beings that need spiritual nurturing. We are being prepared for the next trial.

Are you wondering what is the “inner man” really? Preacher John MacArthur put it this way:

“The inner man, what is that? That’s the heart, that’s the soul, that’s the real self, that’s the eternal part of us that lives forever, that’s our real being. It is that part of us that is effected by regenerating grace. It is that highest part of our immaterial being, capable of being the temple of the Holy Spirit, capable of being the dwelling place of Jesus Christ. It is that part of us that is made into a new creation. It is what Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3 calls the new self. It is the new creation created after Christ Jesus. It is the life of God within us.”

CONCLUSION:

On previous occasions, I have shared with you that I am a serious chess player. I started playing chess tournaments when I was in high school. There have been some minor championships and tournaments that I have won. For several years, I helped coach the Oakcrest High School chess team, and later the Absegami team. Even today, I usually play daily online and a weekly online tournament.

Often, I have been asked how many moves do you normally look ahead on each turn. Well, it varies widely, depending on the number of pieces left on the board and the complexity of the game. What is the crux of that question? How far ahead can you picture the position in your mind?

Obviously, it is unseen; it doesn’t exist in the current reality. And yet I can see it in my mind’s eye. You could counterargue that I am only imagining the position. Here is the hook. Through this visualizing, I am able to bring about the position in my mind into a reality on the chessboard.

I suggest to you that there is a direct parallel to Paul’s call on us to fix our eyes on what is unseen. When we deliberately and intentionally focus on the spiritual realm, we are empowered to live out our Christian journey in a godly manner. We take an eternal view. We build up our treasure in heaven. Our perspective is on a higher plane. Our inward man will be renewed each day. We will achieve a blessed eternal glory.

Let us sing with John Berridge, —

“Too long, alas, I vainly sought

For happiness below,

But earthly comforts, dearly bought,

No solid good bestow.

“At length, through Jesu’s grace, I found,

The good and promised land

Where milk and honey much abound

And grapes in clusters stand.

“My soul has tasted of the grapes,
And now it longs to go
Where my dear Lord his vineyard keeps,
And all the clusters grow.

“Upon the true and living vine
My famish’d soul would feast,
And banquet on the fruit divine,
An everlasting guest.”

[pause]

Colossians 3:1–3(NIV84) *Rules for Holy Living*

3 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, **set your hearts on things above**, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ² **Set your minds on things above**, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

Amen and amen. Let us pray.