

We live in a world of visible things. And it is a grand world at that, with mountain vistas and ocean panoramas, pastoral scenes green trees and grass and gardens with dazzling floral arrays.

Even the buildings people build are sometimes beautiful enough that when their usefulness has passed we keep them around for aesthetic and historical reasons.

Setting beauty aside, much in the world of visible things is known for its practical uses. When it comes to buildings, schools and hospitals and box buildings that serve as warehouses and retail outlets. They are not too much to look at but needed nonetheless.

And there are other things, cars and roads that lead everywhere and airplanes and airports, tennis rackets and baseball bats and musical instruments and necklaces, not to mention radios and televisions and remote controls. And there are all these devices that we no longer call telephones, but because they are several things at once, just “devices.”

Regardless of their attractiveness or usefulness what these things all have in common is that they can be seen, one way or another, or experienced through one of the other senses; touch, taste, smell, or hearing.

And beyond what our senses can tell us there are many things that are too far away or too small to be seen without instruments but are real enough nonetheless; cells that make up our bodies and everything else, electrons that flow through circuits to do all kinds of amazing things.

Much of what is most important in our lives comes from this world of things that can be seen.

The World of Unseen Things

As important as the visible things are, there is another set of unseen realities not visible either through human sense capabilities or even with the aid of modern technology. And this other class of unseen things make up the most important of all life's realities.

People have discovered these unseen things in relationships. And so we use relational words to discuss them. Perhaps the most well-known words are “love” and “hate,” but there are many others both positive and negative, too many to name; honor, dishonor, responsibility, irresponsibility, friendship, compassion, kindness, lust, selfishness, courage, cowardice, one can go on but I am sure you get the idea. There are no physical properties, chemical formulas, or molecular structure. Some may discern their affect on the physical world, but the things themselves are not visible.

And, of course, there is the unseen reality of God, which people all over the world and in every age have discerned, not so much from their experience of things in life as from their experience of life itself. These invisible things comprise the richest and fullest aspects of life and confront us at the deepest level of our being. Without them, life is a sad going through the motions of things without meaning.

Paul

In 2 Corinthians 4 Paul addresses the spiritual life in a most astonishing way. Having already confessed that “we have this treasure in earthen vessels,” which means that he acknowledges the base, smelly part of our existence, he goes on to reflect upon life’s fundamental contradiction; that though our bodies are dying, our spirits are coming to life.

He even goes so far as to say that the negative things in this contradiction are no more than light, momentary troubles that are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.

He says that he is not discouraged by the troubles that come along with this physical life. I am sure that Paul would also say that he did not place much hope and was not particularly inspired by the glorious upside of material existence.

What has captured his attention are the unseen things. “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 implied way of life is easier said than done.

Samuel and the Israelites

One harkens back into the time in Israel’s history when there was no monarchy and Israel was a loose association of tribes that trusted God to raise up leaders for them on an as-needed basis. These leaders were called Judges and there is a whole book in the Old Testament devoted to them and to that time. We get names such as Samson and Jephthah, Gideon and Deborah from the stories told about them in the book of Judges.

But it did not last, because Israel begged God to give them a king like all the other nations around them. Though they were warned about all of the distortions and corruptions that would come to their harm if they established a monarchy, they paid the warnings no heed and begged for a king anyway. *They wanted a leader they could see.*

So God gave them what they asked for because it is hard for anyone to live by the unseen things. The reality of the world around us and our own bodies forces us to live out this bodily existence.

How to Live the Unseen Things

And so the challenge is laid. I believe that all of us have accepted the realness of the invisible, the immortal. We believe in God, and Jesus, and love and kindness and all the rest. We are confronted by a life in which the most essential qualities are spiritual.

But we are otherwise of the scientific era and lead our lives according to the flesh. How does one look at invisible things? How does one listen to an inaudible voice? How does one live in the world of things as if the unseen is more important?

First of all there are all the spiritual practices; prayer, scripture study, worship with other believers, service, giving. These things can sometime seem a grind, though not always, nevertheless either way they are suggested by the scriptures and they are taken very seriously by ministers and laypersons alike because they help us “fix our eyes on the unseen things.

And there are plenty of relationships in which to practice the rule of love and to forgive and be forgiven, to serve and be served.

But here in this text Paul does not refer to any of that. He rather makes a statement out of his own earthbound circumstances that we can extrapolate into ours. He makes a series of extraordinary statements

that taken together produce hope, and as he says, to the glory of God:

It begins with faith; we believe therefore we speak

“The one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us.”

“Though outwardly we are wasting away . . . inwardly we are being renewed.”

That our troubles are not meaningless but achieving for us an eternal glory that makes it all worthwhile.

Because we have an eternal home in heaven not built by humans hands, to the overflow of God’s glory.

Sometimes it comes down to planting these truths in our minds and hearts and believing in them.

Do something every day to remind yourself about what you believe regarding these unseen things. Like the peace that passes understanding; all the anxiety is chased away, and the threats are made to seem small, and gratitude and joy are established and strengthened, leading to a stronger hope, and a fulfilling life, as we wait for heaven.

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