

2Corinthians 4:13-18
Pastor Paul Horn

“Do not look at what you can see, but what you cannot see.”

13 It is written: “I believed; therefore I have spoken.” (Psalm 116:10) With that same spirit of faith we also believe and therefore speak, 14 because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence. 15 All this is for your benefit, so that the grace that is reaching more and more people may cause thanksgiving to overflow to the glory of God.

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.

I know a man who in one year, lost his job, his savings, all of his investments, his retirement fund, and in that same year was also diagnosed with a very painful disease. In that year he also had to bury his children, all ten of them, seven sons and three daughters. And yet he said, “The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.” (Job 1:21)

I know of a man whose 18month-old son was struck with an incurable illness. For seven days the child suffered intensely, and at the same the father was very intense in his dialogue with his God through prayer, so much so that he would not eat with his family, he would not sleep, sometimes his wife would come into their bedroom in the morning and find that he had spent the night on the floor. After seven days the child died. When the father heard the news, he got up, bathed, put on clean clothes, and went to the house of God and worshiped. Then he came home and ate with his family and friends. When questioned by his family regarding his behavior he replied, “While our son was alive I prayed and fasted and thought, ‘Maybe the LORD will have compassion.’ But now that he is dead, what can I do? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me.” (2Samuel 12)

I know a man who was imprisoned for two years at a time because he preached about Jesus Christ. And every time he was released from prison he was told not to preach about Jesus anymore and was threatened with imprisonment or death. This caused the man to preach more and more about Jesus and it got him arrested and put back in prison. This man I know had also been exposed to death again and again, five times been whipped, three times beaten with rods, once stoned, three times shipwrecked, spent a night and a day in the open sea, was constantly on the run; in danger from rivers, bandits, his own countrymen, in the city, in the country, at sea, had gone without sleep, food or clothing.

(2Cor 11) This is the same man who said, “We do not lose heart. Our troubles are light and momentary. (2Cor 4:16,17)

Our troubles are ‘light and momentary?’ ‘We do not lose heart?’ I don’t know about you, but I know folks who share the same life circumstances as the three men I know: Job, King David and the Apostle Paul. I know people whose problems are heavy and seem to last forever, and they have lost heart at times.

I know a woman who is so frustrated, because week after week, her husband refuses to come to church with her. I know a man who is so frustrated because his wife doesn’t believe the same as he does. I know a young girl who doesn’t believe in God anymore and the parents are beside themselves with grief. I know parents whose children will no longer come to church and it breaks their heart. I know men and women, teenagers even children, who try so hard, week after week, month after month, year after year to share the hope of heaven that they have with their friends, their family members, their coworkers, people whom they have established a relationship with, and these people refuse, week after week, month after month, and it breaks their hearts, that these people don’t know Jesus as their Savior. Do you know anyone like that?

We all have spiritual hardships. Not only did the Apostle Paul speak about these spiritual trials, but also physical hardships. He said in our lesson, “Outwardly we are wasting away.” Isn’t it true that the mortal body is making steady progress toward physical death? The dawn of every new day means one day less until the inevitable end. Do you feel that the outward shell of your body is wasting away, slowing marching to your grave, wide-eyed and waiting? I know women who had to battle with cancer. I know a man whose body is wasting away to nothing. I know a man who has so much pain in his feet that the doctors cannot prescribe strong enough medication to take away his suffering. I know a man who had both of his knees replaced. I know a woman who had her hip replaced. Do you anyone like that? Do you know anyone who has died? I know a man who lost his wife to death, and he still wonders after all this time, “Why didn’t I go with her?”

We all struggle both physically and spiritually... and how do we respond? Honestly, it’s very difficult because Satan is right there in our ear, whispering the whole while, “So, how are going to deal with this, dear child of God, if that is in fact what you are? It doesn’t appear that God loves you at this moment and are you sure he isn’t punishing you for something you did wrong?” We examine our lives and how we handle all these troubles and see that our attitude is not always that of the Apostle Paul and we wonder, “My dear Apostle Paul, why can you be so confident and joyful? I don’t always feel that my trials are light and momentary! Look at all the troubles I have!”

Paul redirects our attention and says, “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.” (vs18) “But Paul, how can we focus on something that is invisible? Right now I need to see something

visible, something solid, to get me through this mess of my life!” Paul points us to what is unseen, in vs14 he says, “Because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus.” (vs14)

Throughout their trials and tribulations, Job, King David and the Apostle Paul all fixed their eyes on what was unseen. Job said, “I know that my Redeemer lives and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see him with my own eyes; I and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:25-27) King David said, “My heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay!” (Ps 16:9,10) And Paul said, “Christ died for our sins, he was buried, he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures and he appeared to Peter and to the Twelve.” (1Cor 15:3-5) Job and King David had to look ahead to all that the Messiah would accomplish – something they could not see with their physical eyes. But Paul could look back and see that these events had already transpired. You and I also look back, and look at what is unseen with these physical eyes. We, with these men, see through the eyes of faith. By faith we trust God’s Holy Word, which tells us that Jesus did rise from the grave. By faith we trust his promise that he will come again for us on the Last Day and raise our dusty, lifeless corpses from their tombs, and transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like our Savior’s body: holy and sinless, immortal. (Phil 3:20,21) By faith we see ourselves in heaven, where Jesus promised the Apostle John in Revelation, “The Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd, he will lead them to springs of living water, and God will wipe every tear from their eyes.” (Rev 7:17) We fix our eyes on what is unseen.

Speaking of the Lamb at the center of the throne... Paul also mentions, “Because we know that the one who raised the Lord Jesus from the dead will also raise us with Jesus and present us with you in his presence.” (vs14) Can you imagine, standing before the King, the throne of the Father in heaven, the Creator and Judge of all, the one demands punishment for sins, for your sins of worry, of focusing on your many problems, of despair? And then Jesus walks up beside you, takes you by the hand and presents you to his Father and says, “Father, this is insert your name here. I took the punishment that you demanded for their sins.” And the Father replies, “Welcome to my kingdom!” And the Son escorts you by the hand to the rest of the saints waiting for you in heaven. That hasn’t happened yet, it is unseen. And yet, through the eyes of faith, we see it happening. The eyes of faith continue to gaze at that scene, because it is God’s promise to you. These are the unseen things, the eternal things, which your faith continues to look at.

The great thing about our God is that he understands we need to see and touch things to know they are real. And that is why he has given us his Scriptures, to page through and to read and study and take to heart his promises about the resurrection. That is why God has given us the waters of Holy Baptism, so that we might return to the font daily, and remember that the Holy Spirit first planted the seed of faith in our hearts through this miracle of water and his Word. That is why Jesus has given us his real body and blood, truly present with this bread and wine, so that we might touch it, smell it, see it and taste it, and eat it, and through it know that Christ forgives us our many sins, and gives us

heaven eternally. God gave us things we can see to help us stay focused on that which is unseen and eternal.

My dear friends, continue to fix your eyes on what is unseen, because it is so easy to focus on our problems, to look at our bodies and how we are wasting away. But Paul says that we continue to look at those things which are unseen, we grow inwardly and are strengthened day by day (vs16). We are renewed day by day when we look at those things which are unseen, Christ Jesus, his cross, his empty tomb, and heaven itself. Renew your soul everyday through God's Means of Grace...because...

...because I know men, women, children, and young adults, whose lives are like Job, and King David and the Apostle Paul. But they are constantly gazing at what they cannot see. These people regard their troubles as light and momentary. They say, "We do not lose heart!" My dear friends, I am looking at those people. Those people are you and me. I pray that the Holy Spirit will keep your eyes of faith fixed on Christ and his resurrection and your home in heaven. Amen.