

Priority of the Unseen

II Corinthians 4:16-18, 5:11-21

Story... *Ginger & Mark Whitacre*

II Corinthians 4:16-18, 5:11-21 “So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, ¹⁸as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

¹¹Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others. But what we are is known to God, and I hope it is known also to your conscience. ¹²We are not commending ourselves to you again but giving you cause to boast about us, so that you may be able to answer those who boast about outward appearance and not about what is in the heart. ¹³For if we are beside ourselves, it is for God; if we are in our right mind, it is for you. ¹⁴For the love of Christ controls us, because we have concluded this: that one has died for all, therefore all have died; ¹⁵and he died for all, that those who live might no longer live for themselves but for him who for their sake died and was raised.

¹⁶From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come. ¹⁸All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

We can't see oxygen in our air, but we can't live without it. If you replace the oxygen with carbon monoxide, you can't see the difference. But the carbon monoxide is deadly.

As followers of Jesus, we specialize in the unseen.

- “Though the eye of sinful man thy glory may not see” (Holy, Holy, Holy hymn)
- Another less well-known hymn says,
“Teach me Thy way, O Lord, teach me Thy way!
Thy guiding grace afford, teach me Thy way!
Help me to walk aright, more by faith, less by sight;
Lead me with heavenly light; teach me thy way!”
- In fact, that line comes from II Cor. 5:7, which we skipped over: “We walk by faith, not by sight,” in reference to living with a conscious knowledge that Jesus will return, though we haven't seen Him yet. Our certain hope in our future resurrection is emphasized by Paul, Peter, John, & Jesus.

I'm going to highlight 3 points from our text:

- I. Because we believe in the unseen by faith, we don't lose heart. So this gives us encouragement in a chaotic world.
- II. We are ambassadors representing the invisible King to our visible neighbors.
- III. Then we'll apply it: How can we be faithful ambassadors?

I. Encouragement in a chaotic world

- A. Two Kingdoms are not equal.
 - 1. Paul speaks of the hardships of this life as “light and momentary affliction,” relative to the heavy and holy joy of eternity with God. So our hardships don’t make us to “lose heart” because we know God promises something greater.
 - 2. Unlike ancient Persian Zoroastrianism and other religions, the war between good and evil is not pitting two equal enemies.
 - 3. Satan is more powerful than man. We see it visibly in lives that are torn up by addiction and abuse. The abuser seems to have total control. The alcohol or drugs seem to hold a grip that cannot be broken. But that is not true.
 - 4. God is more powerful. He defeated Satan through His Son Jesus on the Cross. It is finished, although Satan rages and strives to destroy all he can before his ultimate, assured demise.
 - 5. Only by the power of God can we defeat Satan. When the addicted person repents and hands over control of his life to God, the Holy Spirit enters his life. He is set free. The power of God is greater than the power of this world, its temptations, its addictions, its hopelessness.
- B. Knowing what is not seen gives us confidence. We don’t need to be terrified by what we see in the news.
- C. God uses evil as His instrument.
 - 1. Ultimately, God demonstrates this in the Cross. Those who betrayed, arrested, beat, and killed Jesus were committing unimaginable evil. But God used that to accomplish total victory over sin and death.
 - 2. Through disruptions in life, God is creating dissatisfaction that increases people’s receptivity to the Gospel. God uses painful circumstances to bring about repentance. Yet sometimes a person or a society clings tightly to godlessness, and life spirals downward as a consequence, until they repent or are destroyed. For example, **Rev 8:20-21** comes after God had sent terrible plagues in judgment for sin; “The rest of mankind that were not killed by these plagues still did not repent of the work of their hands; they did not stop worshiping demons, and idols of gold, silver, bronze, stone and wood—idols that cannot see or hear or walk. Nor did they repent of their murders, their magic arts, their sexual immorality or their thefts.”
 - 3. In China, the government gave the name “Three Self” to its approved patriotic branch of the church. Self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting were concepts verbalized by missions experts in the 19th Century to advance the Gospel. Although its intent was evil, the Chinese government unwittingly helped the church in China to be rid of foreign dependency and become mature standing on its own. This was an immensely painful transition but served to advance the Gospel.
 - 4. No one could have predicted that advances in oil drilling technology, leading to less dependence on Middle Eastern oil, would lead to political changes that would destabilize the entire region, leading to Arab Spring. No one knew this would lead to disillusionment with Islam, which was allowed to show its violent DNA, and more openness by many to Jesus. At the same time, thousands of people are having dreams of Jesus that open them further. Turn back the clock to the 80’s, when a new missions agency called Frontiers advertised with the slogan, “Missionaries to

Muslims, literally one in a million.” Believers began praying earnestly and a concerted effort was made to engage Muslims for the first time. By the late 90’s, missions experts began documenting best practices that lead to multiplying movements of disciples. And in the first 12 years of this century, according to David Garrison, more Muslims have been baptized than in all the 13 preceding centuries combined—coming from every region where Islam prevailsⁱⁱ. It began in the unseen world—prayer, then sending workers. God responded by moving mountains to answer those prayers. You have heard that one of the greatest movements is in Afghanistan (to protect them, the number of believers is not disclosed—but it has been growing rapidly). Those on the ground in Afghanistan have already reported that some believers are being murdered for their faith; pray that our God who is unseen will hear the cries of the slain beneath the altar and spare the many who remain (Rev 6:9).

- D. We must keep our eyes fixed on the Lord who is unseen. Peter looked at the waves and faltered.

II. Ambassadors of the Invisible

- A. Ambassadors are foreign emissaries.
 - 1. People around us are from a land too far from God to see Him.
 - 2. But God sent you to them.
 - 3. They see you. You are the window into the unseen world.
- B. Healing is a breaking into the seen world by our mighty unseen God.
 - 1. So is prophecy, tongues, and other supernatural gifts.
 - 2. Barbara Cummisky Snyder had severe Multiple Sclerosis for 15 years. Mayo Clinic diagnosed her, and she was sent home for hospice. She had a breathing tube, a paralyzed lung, and intestine diverted to a bag. She was legally blind, curled up in bed, feet locked pointing down, hands tightly closed. In 1981, someone called in to request prayer for her at Moody radio in Chicago. Over 400 people wrote letters. One Sunday her aunt and some friends visited to read some of the letters, when she heard a voice, “My child, get up and walk.” She motioned to have her breathing tube removed, and they plugged the hole so she could say, get my mom. She jumped out of bed to discover: 1) her feet were flat on the ground, 2) she could move her hands freely, and 3) she was seeing all of this. Her intestine had reconnected, her collapsed lung had been healed, her atrophied muscles had been restored.ⁱⁱⁱ And she lives today, a pastor’s wife, rejoicing in the Lord on Facebook.
- C. Response to visible need
 - We see with the eyes of love, compassion on the poor, sick and homeless.
 - 1. This is excellent!
 - 2. God commands it.
 - 3. Like healing, acts of service make the invisible Kingdom of God visible to the world who can’t see with spiritual eyes.
- D. Greater response to invisible need
 - 1. Yet do we also see our comfortable neighbors, who are lost, as dying from an unseen terminal illness? This invisible truth is just as real as visible needs.
 - 2. The unseen army of the Lord protected Elisha in Dothan.
II Kings 6:15-17 “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. ‘Don’t be afraid,’ the prophet answered. ‘Those who are with us are more than those who are with them.’ 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.”

3. Heaven’s Army (D.W. Le Lacheur in Tibet, 1898)... 7 tribes of robbers lived among the mountains. “As we descended one of the mountains, we were suddenly surprised by finding ourselves in a camp of robbers. When they saw us, they yelled with such a yell as I never heard before in order to frighten us.... Lifting our hats, we reverently bowed our heads and asked the dear Lord to protect His own simple ones who trusted in Him. When we bowed our heads in prayer, our God seemed to send terror into their hearts... They formed a guard around their chief as though they thought we had some design, and the rest stood as if they were stones. Oh, how God manifested His presence! We walked our horses deliberately through their midst, near enough for them to have thrust our hearts through with their spears; and yet not a man seemed to think he had a spear. Reverently in their presence, we thanked our God for delivering us from bloody men... We have the same God that Israel had. He thundered in the heavens to frighten the enemies of His people. Oh, how our souls did magnify God! All from Him, bless His name!... Later the townspeople inquired about the robbers. ‘Where are your soldiers?’ We told them we do not trust in soldiers, that our God delivered us. ‘Where is God?’ ‘Our God is not seen, although He is standing by your side now.’ They looked at their sides as if to behold Him. We stayed that night and nearly half the next day telling them of Jesus... It was simply an answer to prayer.”

4. Just like at that time, we are at war! We need to see with spiritual eyes to fight invisible enemies of sin and despair.

E. We often tend to believe only what we see.

1. The Bay Area is strongly influenced by an “outdated” (in most of the world’s view) philosophy of modernism, typified by David Hume.
2. Unless we see with our own eyes, we are told, it’s not there.
3. Modernism says we can only derive truth from experimental science.
4. This is a boldfaced lie.
5. Does this belief in a subtle way influence you? Pray about it, and if it does, repent.

III. Are You a Faithful Representative?

A. Weakness in the Western World

1. God’s Kingdom is winning worldwide. Over 80 million people are in multiplying movements of disciples, each of them a microcosm of the living Kingdom of God. Multiplying movements means new followers of Jesus are quickly (within a year or two, but sometimes within months) leading others to discover Jesus and making more disciples.
2. But on this front of the Western World, Europe and increasingly in America, His Kingdom is in retreat.

B. What can we do?

1. Pray for Him to break invisible strongholds and continue to unsettle people so they will turn to Him.
2. Our friend in Columbus, a great disciple-maker of international students, testified to us that he prays for his unbelieving friends to experience trials and difficulties in

- their lives. This shocked me. What? Yes, he understood what it takes to bring people to God.
3. Love and serve our neighbors, listen to understand them; obey and worship God. Share the Gospel.
 4. Example: Bill in Daly City, leading outreach for Gateway Christian Church there. 90-year-old praying Bill puts up a sign on his table at Starbucks: “How Can I Pray for You?” People open up their deepest needs, and he prays and shares the Good News.
- C. God is the highest priority.
1. Is God your number one priority, greater than anything in the seen world?
 2. In our culture, as diverse as we are here in Silicon Valley, we have this in common: How we spend our time reflects our values.
 3. Whose push is immediately before you?
 - a. Do you push back on the pressures of work?
 - b. If work is your number one priority, as most executives push for, it is an idol. If your work is your number one priority, repent. Work is not God!
 - c. Work falls under God’s authority. How you do your work should reflect the priority of God in your life. In that way, God becomes the Lord of your work.
 - d. How you serve others at work is a reflection of how you represent the unseen King as His ambassador.
 - e. Set aside time to pray and hear His small voice.
 - f. Let the voice of God rise above the noise of work pressure, and social media.
 4. The Gospel is the highest priority. **“Christ’s love compels us.”**
 - a. Mark 8:35 says, “For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.”
 - b. If we are not sharing the Gospel, in spite of all of the relational restrictions we face during the pandemic, we’re like ambassadors who never leave the foreign compound.
 - c. As we take the Lord of our entire lives into consideration, we find a way to represent the Lord, just as we find a way to get our work done.
 - d. Use your available time to serve the Lord. If you need down time to rest, invite someone into that time, so it will serve the Kingdom.
 - e. If we’re frustrated in our efforts to serve as ambassadors, we turn to the ultimate boss—our Lord God and Father of Jesus—for help in getting it done.
 5. Are you living consistently with your belief that the unseen God is number one?

If the seen world clutters your view of the invisible, pray together with me right now...

ⁱ <https://biblicalviewpoint.com/2020/09/18/god-and-ethics-a-forgivable-9-5m-sin/> (Mike Griego attended MHC until he moved away recently).

ⁱⁱ David Garrison, **A Wind in the House of Islam** (WIGTake Resources, 2014).

ⁱⁱⁱ Lee Strobel, **Case for Miracles**, p. 86 (interview with my brother).