

Possessing a 20/20 Perspective

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[0 : 00] Well if we could, for a short while, and with the Lord's enabling, we could turn back to that portion of scripture that we read, Paul's second letter to the Corinthians and chapter 4.

2 Corinthians chapter 4, and if we read again at verse 16. 2 Corinthians 4, and verse 16, where Paul writes, So we do not lose heart, though our outer man is wasting away, our inner man is being renewed day by day.

For this light and momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, as we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.

For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are unseen are eternal. Friends, as we stand on the threshold of a new year in our lives, there always comes with it an element of apprehension.

As the door of 2019 closes behind us, and we step out into the unknown of 2020, we leave behind all that took place in 2019, whether locally, nationally, internationally, and even personally.

[1 : 33] And we move forward into the coming year. And at the beginning of a new year, we're often very nostalgic or sentimental. We're thoughtful and reflective of the year that has just passed, and the year that's now coming before us.

And of course, some approach a new year with enthusiasm and excitement, because as they look at 2020, they're thinking about maybe the prospect of living in a new house, or the blessing of a newborn baby, or beginning a new job, or whatever it may be.

That they're looking forward to 2020. But for others, as they contemplate 2020, they know that what's before them is the continued reality of old age and infirmity, or the progression and deterioration of an illness, or another year missing a loved one.

Friends, needless to say, bringing in the new year is happy for some, but heartbreaking for others. And so what do we do? What do we do?

Where do we go? Who do we turn to? But to Jesus. Because to whom else can we go but to Jesus? He alone has the words of eternal life.

[2 : 49] And you know, despite the passing of the years and the changes in our circumstances, we're to come to this Jesus who never changes. Because regardless of all the ebbing and flowing that takes place in our life, he remains the same.

And he remains the same yesterday, today, and forever. And so who better for us to come to? Who better for us to commit ourselves into the hands of, at the beginning of another year, than this Jesus?

Because my friend, what we need more than anything else, as we go into a new year, what we need is a greater perspective. We need a greater perspective. In fact, we need what you could say is a 2020 perspective.

We need that perfect vision. A 2020 vision that looks at life and loves life and lives life with a 2020 perspective. We need to go into 2020 with a 2020 perspective.

But what is a 2020 perspective? It's an eternal perspective. A 2020 perspective looks at life and loves life and lives life with an eternal perspective.

[4 : 03] And that's what Paul is encouraging us to do here in these verses. He says, We're to have a 2020 perspective.

But in order to emphasize the importance of possessing an eternal perspective, a 2020 perspective, Paul describes in this chapter, he describes three perspectives.

He speaks about a problematic perspective, then a providential perspective, and then a promising perspective. So there are three headings today.

A problematic perspective, a providential perspective, and a promising perspective. Look first of all at a problematic perspective. A problematic perspective.

Paul says in verse 3, he says, If our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing. In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel, of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

[5 : 29] Now the church in Corinth was a church that Paul loved. And that's evident from the fact that Paul wrote to the church in Corinth more than once. He wrote two letters, or some suggest more than two letters.

But in his first letter that we have in the New Testament, Paul lovingly taught the Corinthian Christians how to live Christ-centered lives. And Paul taught them because they weren't living Christ-centered lives.

They weren't looking at life, and loving life, and living life with an eternal perspective. Rather, the Corinthian Christians had a carnal perspective. They had a worldly perspective.

They had this worldly focus because they were being led astray by worldly distractions and obsessed with worldly desires. And it all resulted in divisions within the church.

There was immorality. There was pride. There was idolatry. There was the mishandling of spiritual gifts. And they were even abusing the Lord's Supper. They were turning up drunk at the Lord's Supper. And so, sad to say, the Corinthian Christians, they weren't living Christ-centered lives.

[6 : 37] They weren't looking at life, and loving life, and living life with an eternal perspective. And yet, Paul, he lovingly addressed the Corinthians and taught them in his first letter how to live a Christ-centered life.

But what was wrong was that they would never achieve this Christ-centered life because the underlying problem in Corinth was that they were false teachers. And despite Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, where he explains and expounds God's word faithfully, the Corinthians had been subjected to false teaching.

And these false teachers, they not only brought into the church this false gospel, they also claimed that Paul was a heretic. They claimed that Paul was misleading and misguiding the people.

And they derided Paul's teaching. They ridiculed his message. They undermined his authority as a servant of God. But, you know, Paul, he loved the Christians in Corinth so much that when he heard that they had been led astray by false teaching, Paul took it so personally, and he became so low in himself that he confesses in chapter one of this letter that he despaired even of life.

When Paul's faithful ministry was undermined by ignorant men, he despaired of his own life. And it should be a reminder to us that even Paul, the best of men, are only men at best.

[8 : 11] But, you know, in order to address the corruption of the false teachers, Paul used the second letter to remind the Corinthian Christians that they need to have this eternal perspective. Because a problematic perspective only looks to the things that are seen and not to the things that are unseen.

And as Paul reminded the Corinthians, and he reminds us, the things which are seen are temporal. The things that are unseen are eternal.

My friend, a problematic perspective is one that looks at life and loves life and lives life with a temporal perspective, a worldly perspective. It's a carnal perspective, a self-centred perspective that focuses upon just the here and now and just living for the moment and enjoying self and gratifying self and pleasuring self and praising self and promoting self.

But my friend, so many people, even Christians, live their life with this problematic perspective. But what is a problematic perspective? Paul says, if our gospel is veiled or hidden, it's veiled only to those who are perishing.

In their case, the God of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God.

[9 : 37] Paul says that a problematic perspective is from the devil in which the God of this world blinds our minds. The devil blinds our minds and the minds of those who do not believe so that, as he says there, they're walking in darkness.

They're walking in darkness away from the light of the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. And because of their blindness to the light of Christ and to spiritual things, they're only focused upon what they can see.

They look to the things that are seen and they look at them, these things, for their safety and their security and their satisfaction. They look to their family, they look to their children, their grandchildren, their home, their job, their pension, their health, their entertainment, their friends. They look to all these temporal things that are going to pass away one day. They look to these things that are seen and they find in them safety, security and satisfaction.

And to be honest, that doesn't really surprise us. It doesn't surprise us that those who have been blinded by the God of this world, who are still walking in darkness, that they're chasing after all these things that are seen and temporal.

[10:57] But you know what's frightening? And this is what really challenges me. Is that this letter was written to Christians. Christians who needed to make sure that they possessed a 20-20 perspective.

It was written to Christians to make sure that they had an eternal perspective on life. And Paul is saying to us that if you're a Christian, those around you are spending their lives chasing after these things.

Things that are seen and temporal. And they're chasing after them not only because the God of this world has blinded their minds from seeing the light of the gospel but also because the Christian has veiled the light of the gospel from them.

That's why Paul warned the church in verse 3 if our gospel is veiled, if it's veiled, it's only veiled to those who are lost. And you know, as Christians, our blindness has been removed.

We're walking in the light. We've been made alive to spiritual things. We've seen the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's what Paul says in verse 6.

[12:07] He says, God who said, let light shine out of darkness has shone into our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. But you know, sadly, what can often happen in the Christian life is that even though we have seen and know and possess the light of the gospel, we hide it.

And we hide it from those who are lost. That's what Paul says. If our gospel is hid, it's hid to those who are lost. But the thing is, we can often hide the light of the gospel not because we don't want anyone else to have it.

Not because we don't want people to be saved. Not because we don't want the church to grow. No, we hide the light of the gospel because we're not looking at life and living life and loving life with an eternal perspective.

No, instead, we're looking at life and living life and loving life with only a temporal perspective. And sadly, what can often happen to the Christian, to myself, is that we act just like the person who's blinded by the God of this world because we look to what is seen and temporal rather than to what is unseen and eternal.

And Paul says that for a Christian, that's a problematic perspective. It's definitely problematic for the unconverted because they're blind and in darkness but even more so for the Christian.

[13:34] It's a problematic perspective. And a problematic perspective is when we try to find safety, security, and satisfaction in all the things that are seen and temporal rather than what is unseen and eternal.

And this is why Paul emphasises the importance of possessing an eternal perspective, a 20/20 perspective. Because as we go into a new year, we need to look at life and love life and live life with this Christ-centred focus, an eternal perspective.

But how do we have that? How do we have this eternal perspective? Well, we need a providential perspective. A providential perspective.

That's what I want us to see secondly. There's a problematic perspective that Paul addresses but then secondly, he highlights a providential perspective. He says in verse 7, we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.

We are afflicted in every way but not crushed, perplexed but not driven to despair, persecuted but not forsaken, struck down but not destroyed, always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.

[15:03] Now in these verses Paul reminds us that it's because the Christian has seen and knows and possesses the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, he says that should be our treasure.

Above everything else in life, that should be our treasure and it shouldn't be a treasure as he said in verse 3, that we veil and hide but it's a treasure that we should make known, that we should reveal

and tell people about.

But Paul also says that the light of the gospel of Jesus is a treasure that we should cherish and we should cherish that treasure of Jesus, especially when we're faced with the darkest of circumstances.

And Paul says this because, you know, it's against the backdrop of darkness and the most difficult of circumstances that we see the light of the gospel of Jesus shining through.

Because it's in those dark and difficult moments, when providence comes our way, it's then that we're made to see, as the Bible reminds us and as life affirms to us so often, that what is seen is only temporal, but what is unseen is eternal.

[16:19] You know, my friend, when we face the darkness and difficulties of this life, we're made to realise that we will find no safety and security and satisfaction by looking to the things around us that are seen and temporal.

When we face sins and sicknesses and sufferings and sorrows that come upon us in this life, we're quickly made to realise that we can only look to the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

But as you know, the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, it's unseen. We don't see a physical light. This light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, it's unseen and it's eternal.

So how do we see this light? How do we see this light that is unseen and eternal? Well, we need a providential perspective. We need to look at life and love life and live life knowing that what's unseen is in the hands of the eternal.

We need to look at life and love life and live life knowing that what is unseen is in the hands of the eternal. Things that we don't know anything about or understand, it's all in his hands, the hands of the eternal.

[17:35] We need a providential perspective. And Paul knew this from his own experience because he knew what it was to be troubled on every side. He knew what it was to be perplexed and persecuted and cast down.

But Paul discovered that looking to what is unseen and resting in the hands of the eternal. That's how you possess a providential perspective. Because someone who looks at life and loves life and lives life with a providential perspective, they know that even though God is unseen, he makes himself known in his eternal works of providence.

As you know, the word providence means God saw it beforehand. God saw it all before it happened. Therefore, nothing in this world happens by chance.

Every little detail in our lives, every meeting, every parting, it's all ordered by the Lord. And in his providence, he's working all things together for good.

And you know, sometimes it's easier to say that than to believe it. Because when we consider the sins and sicknesses and sufferings and sorrows that we encounter in this life, it's hard to understand why these things are there at all.

[19:00] And yet, when we look to the darkness and the difficulties that we face, when we look at these dark and difficult providences that we face, and we look at them in the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ, we're always reminded that the unseen God is still there.

He's still there. And He's still working. And He's still weaving all our paths together. Because, you know, He's like this divine weaver and His works of providence, they're wonderful.

He has no mistakes. There are no stitches missing as He weaves His pattern. There's no loose threads because He knows exactly what He's doing. He's seen it all beforehand.

And my friend, with a providential perspective, when we have a providential perspective, we know that what is unseen is all in His hands. It's in the hands of the eternal. And when we know that it's in His hands, we have the assurance that there are no safer hands to be in than the hands of the divine weaver.

And even as you begin a new year, you're still in His hands. It's the wonderful thing. He's still weaving all these threads into every providence and every experience in your life.

[20:18] And I'm sure you know that well-known poem, The Divine Weaver, that how it was written, sometimes He weaves sorrow. And I in foolish pride forget that He sees the upper and I the underside.

And not till the loom is silent and the shuttle cease to fly, shall God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why. The dark threads are as needful in the weaver's skilful hand as the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned.

My friend, there may be dark and difficult threads in your life that you may never find the answer to. And there may be threads of providence that have been woven into your experience that you'll never know why.

Maybe not until you leave this world. But you know, your greatest comfort is that with a providential perspective you know that what is unseen is safe and secure in the hands of the eternal.

And you know, what better hands to be in than the hands of the eternal God who is our refuge and that underneath are His everlasting arms. My friend, when you have a providential perspective, you'll be unable to say with Paul, we are afflicted in every way, but not crushed.

[21 : 42] Perplexed, but not driven to despair. Persecuted, but not forsaken. Struck down, but not destroyed. You know, Paulie doesn't leave it there though.

Because having emphasized a problematic perspective that is looking to what is seen and temporal, and having encouraged us to possess this providential perspective that where we know that what is unseen is safe and secure in the hands of the eternal, Paul says that a 20-20 perspective not only looks at life and loves life and lives life with a providential perspective, but also a promising perspective.

That's what Paul draws our attention to in the closing words of this chapter. A promising perspective. A problematic perspective, a providential perspective, and then he gives to us a promising perspective.

He says in verse 16, so we do not lose heart. Though our outward man is wasting away, our inward man is being renewed day by day.

For this slight affliction is but for a moment, and it's working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. while we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen.

[23 : 03] For the things that are seen are temporal, but the things that are unseen are eternal. You know, in these closing verses, Paul says that when we look at the realities of life, with all its sins and sicknesses and sufferings and sorrows, he says we do not lose heart.

We do not lose heart. If you have a problematic perspective, you'll only look at life and see what is seen and temporal. You'll find security and satisfaction in what is seen and temporal, but if you have a providential perspective, Paul says, you will know that what is unseen is safe and secure in the hands of the eternal.

And it's with that Paul gives to the Christian, the one who's trusting in Jesus, casting everything into his hands, he gives to the Christian a promising perspective perspective.

And he says, though our outward man perish, yet the inward man has been renewed day by day.

And you know literally that verse, verse 16, Paul is saying though the outward Adam is dying day by day, the inward Adam is being renewed and made alive day by day.

Though the outward Adam is dying day by day, the inward Adam is being made alive day by day.

And you know what Paul is giving to us in that statement in verse 16, he's giving to us the contrast between a problematic perspective and a providential perspective.

[24 : 34] Because for someone with a problematic perspective who's walking in darkness, following the God of this world, they're finding their safety and security and satisfaction in what is seen and temporal.

They're being, and even in these things, they're being reminded day by day that they're dying. If you're only looking to what is seen and temporal, you're being reminded day by day that what is dying, the outward Adam, this seen and temporal flesh that has been infected and affected by the sin of the first Adam, when you look at it, when we look at ourselves, it's only getting older day by day.

and it's only getting weaker as every year passes. And it'll continue to waste away until one day this seen and temporal flesh will breathe its last and pass away and perish.

And all that once looked safe and secure and satisfied will be destroyed. That's why we can't look to what is seen and temporal.

because one day it'll be destroyed. And you know, that's why Jesus even said in the Sermon on the Mount, do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and thieves break in and steal.

[25 : 58] But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

And Paul has reminded us that as Christians trusting in Jesus Christ, the treasure for the Christian is the light of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And Paul says, we have it.

If you are trusting in Jesus, you have the light of the gospel stored safely and securely inside these brittle and broken jars of clay.

Because the promising perspective for the Christian is that even though we are certainly aware that our outward Adam is perishing day by day and year by year, we have the promise and we have the assurance that the inward Adam, that second Adam, who's working in us by his Holy Spirit, he's renewing us and restoring us day by day, year by year.

He has begun that good work and he promises to bring it on to completion. You know, is that not why the Apostle John could say to the church, beloved, we are the children of God and what we shall be has not yet appeared.

[27 : 23] But we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him and see him even as he is. You know, that's a promising perspective.

That's a promising perspective. And when you have that promising perspective on life and everything around you, you'll be enabled to say with Paul, for this light, momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison.

And even in that verse, Paul makes this beautiful contrast between the afflictions of this life and the assurances of the next. He regards the afflictions in life when we have an eternal perspective.

He says that they are light and momentary. Of course, if we have a problematic perspective that only sees the temporal and the things that are seen, well, we think these things are burdensome and heavy.

But with a providential perspective, with a promising perspective, with an eternal perspective, a 2020 perspective, we're made to see that in comparison to the weightiness of the glory that is to come, our afflictions in this life, in this present life, they're only temporal.

[28 : 46] Our sins, sicknesses, sufferings and sorrows, they're light and momentary in comparison to the assurance that you have this eternal weight of glory being prepared for you as a child of God.

And my friend, even though the afflictions of this life are seen and temporal and they're painful, the assurance is that what is unseen, what is to come, is safe and secure in the hands of the eternal.

Do you know, that's why Peter could encourage the Christians and remind them that you have an inheritance that is incorruptible undefiled, that fadeth not away and where is it?

It's reserved in heaven for you. But now, he says, the trial of your faith, much more precious than gold that perishes, though it's even tried with fire, might be found unto praise, honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

And why do you have this assurance? whom having not yet seen, you love. In whom, though now you see him not yet believing, you rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.

[30 : 09] That's your assurance. Whom having not seen, you love. That's our perspective now. We haven't seen him. But with a promising perspective, Paul affirms to us that one day, one day when all this is said and done, when this life is over and time will be no more, one day what is unseen will be seen.

And for the Christian, as the book of Revelation reminds us so beautifully, we shall see his face.

And in that place, we're told there will be no night there.

We will need no candle, neither light of the sun, for the Lord God will be our light. He is our light in here today, but he will be our light face to face in glory.

And then with that full and unhindered eternal perspective, we are reminded that God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. There will be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain for the former things of this life that are seen and temporal.

They will have all passed away. They will have all passed away. But you know my friend, until that day, we ought to make sure that we begin this new year with a 2020 perspective.

[31 : 44] we ought to make sure that we look at life and love life and live life in 2020 with this eternal perspective. Because a problematic perspective will only cause us to find safety and security and satisfaction in what is seen and temporal.

But it's all going to pass away. The providential and promising perspective will allow us to know that what is unseen is safe and secure in the hands of the eternal.

While we look not to the things that are seen, but to the things that are unseen, for the things that are seen are temporal. But the things that are unseen are eternal.

Oh my friend, lift your eyes beyond this life. Focus them upon Jesus because he is the author and he will remain the finisher. of our faith.

May the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. Oh Lord, what shall we say to these things that have God before us?

[32 : 56] Who can be against us? And Lord, we thank thee and we praise thee that the Lord, a God who is for us, a God who has provided for us a new and living way in and through thy Son, Jesus, and that in him we have great and precious promises.

We have the wonderful assurance that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor powers nor things present nor even things to come, neither height nor depth nor any other creature is able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Help us then, we pray, to all to rest in his love, to lean upon him day by day, to walk with him more closely, to serve him more faithfully, to keep our eyes fixed upon him more earnestly.

And Lord, that thou wouldst bless us in the year that lies ahead, that whatever is before us, that we would be assured of the promise that the Lord is the one who keeps our going out and our coming in from this time forth and even forevermore.

Oh, do us good and we pray, take away our iniquity, receive us graciously, for Jesus' sake. Amen. We're going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of Psalm 73.

[34 : 20] Psalm 73 in the Scottish Psalter, singing from verse 23, down to the end of the psalm.

Psalm 73, it's on page 316, Psalm 73 is a psalm that was written by Asaph. He wrote a few psalms in the Psalter and Asaph, when you read through Psalm 73, Asaph is wondering, why does the world prosper?

Why is everybody able to just get on with their life without God? God? But then he says in verse 17, or verse 16, when I thought, when I this thought to know it was too hard a thing for me till to God's sanctuary I went and I there end did see.

Asaph began Psalm 73 looking to what is temporal and seen, but it's only when he came into God's house he was reminded that he must look to what is unseen and eternal.

And that's what he confesses in the closing verses of the psalm. Nevertheless continually, O Lord, I am with thee. Thou dost me hold by my right hand and still upholdest me.

[35 : 35] Thou with thy counsel while I live, wilt me conduct and guide and to thy glory afterward receive me to abide. So we'll sing Psalm 73 from verse 23 down to the end of the psalm.

To God's praise. Ever ever ever ever come to your thee.

O Lord, I am with thee. Thou trust me you have whole United I will thy counsel while I live, wilt me conduct and guide, unto thy glory afterward receive me to abide.

To abide in the heavens high, but thee, O Lord, alone.

And in the earth, whom I desire, besides thee there is none.

[37 : 41] My flesh and heart doth faint and fail, but God doth fail me never.

For of my heart, what is the strength and portion forever?

For no way that are far from thee, forever perish thou.

And like thou hoarding from thee, O thou hast destroyed it all.

But surely it is good for me that I've drawn near to God.

[39 : 14] Lord, I trust that all thy words I may declare upon.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all, now and forevermore. Amen. Amen.