

Looking At The Unseen • 2 Corinthians. 4:17-18

I. INTRODUCTION

A. *Thomas Edison*

1. Thomas Edison was a man of amazing persistence
2. You've probably heard the stories of how many times he ran the experiment to make the light bulb –
 - a. it was some 700 times;
 - b. each one a failure until he got it right
3. Most people would have given up after the first dozen failures; but Edison was made of different stuff
4. And because of his persistence, today we have the microphone, the phonograph, the incandescent light, the storage battery, talking movies and more than a thousand other inventions.
5. His son wrote a short biography of his father's life
6. He tells the story of another period in Edison's career when he was trying to invent the battery
 - a. it was a freezing December night in 1914.
 - b. experiments on an alkaline storage battery, a 10-year project, had put Edison on a financial tightrope.
 - c. he was still solvent but only because of profits from movie and record production.
 - d. but that night, a fire started in the room that held the film
 - e. within minutes all the highly flammable chemicals of Edison's laboratory went up in flames
 - f. fire companies from 8 surrounding towns arrived,
 - g. but the heat was so intense and the water pressure so low that attempts to douse the flames were futile.
 - h. everything was destroyed!
 - i. during the fire, Edison ran to his son and said, "Where's Mom? Go get her, son! Tell her to hurry up and bring her friends! They'll never see a fire like this again!"
7. Early the next morning, long before dawn, with the fire barely under control, Edison called his employees together and made an incredible announcement. "We're rebuilding!"
 - a. he told one man to lease all the machine shops in the area.
 - b. he told another to obtain a wrecking crane from the Erie Railroad Company.
 - c. then, almost as an afterthought, he added, "Oh, by the way, anybody know where we can get some money?"
8. Later, he explained, "We can always make capital out of a disaster. We've just cleared out a bunch of old rubbish. We'll build bigger and better on the ruins."
9. Shortly after that, he yawned, rolled up his coat for a pillow, curled up on a table and immediately fell asleep.

B. His Secret

1. Failure and discouragement never seemed to daunt Thomas Edison
 2. No matter what happened, he just kept on a steady course
 3. The reason why he possessed such dogged persistence is because he never lost sight of his goal
 4. Long before the first light bulb, Edison saw it glowing
 5. Long before the first moving picture, Edison saw a movie
 6. He saw the end from the beginning – and in his mind and heart, it was as good as done!
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7. There is an important lesson to be learned from Edison which is spelled out for us in our passage today

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 17-18

{17} For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

{18} while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

1. These verses come in the middle of Paul's explanation of his motivation in ministry
 2. In verses 8-10 he tells the Corinthians about the difficulties and hardships he had endured
 3. But here he puts all of these difficulties and hardships in their proper perspective
 4. Like Edison, Paul kept his eyes on the prize
 - a. when tempted to become discouraged over the pressures of life
 - b. he lifted his eyes off his troubles and put them on his destiny
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5. Notice what he says . . .
 6. "Our light affliction, which lasts but for a moment, is working FOR us!
 - a. Paul had gotten his hands around the truth that if God is real
 - b. and if His love is perfect and He is all powerful
 - c. then ultimately, *everything* works together for good - even affliction
 - d. see what he says in v. 15?

All things are for your sakes, that grace, having spread through the many, may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God.

7. Now, I'll be the first to admit that when I'm being afflicted, it rarely seems light; and it never seems to be but for a moment – it always lasts longer than I like
8. Whatever the means of the affliction, whether it be illness, persecution, or just plain trouble, I want out – and now, not later!
9. The word Paul uses here for affliction is *thlipsis*; and it means *pressure*
10. In the NT it is a general word referring to any and all trouble we experience
11. Paul calls all affliction "light"

- a. this word light is an interesting one
 - b. it's a double diminutive
 - c. it means something small & a light breeze
12. What Paul says here presents us with the picture of someone who is rowing a boat against a very light breeze
13. Really, the wind does not *impede* forward progress, it merely cools the one who is rowing

14. Some people read these words and ask if Paul had lived a charmed life in which he never really experienced serious hardship

15. Well, take a look at verses 8-10

- a. yes he knew hardship!
- b. in fact, he endured more than most people will ever go through
- c. in ch. 11 he records some of what he had gone through . . .

{24} From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one.

{25} Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep;

{26} in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

{27} in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness;

16. So how can he call affliction, light?

17. Simple, the answer is in v. 18

{18} We do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

- a. he wasn't looking at the affliction
- b. he was looking at what the affliction was *producing*
- c. he wasn't looking at the moment in which he was suffering
- d. he was looking to the future when trouble would be behind him and all that would be left would be the precious strengths and virtues the difficulties were effecting in him

18. Bottom line – he knew that this moment of trouble would pass and be swallowed up in an eternity of glory

19. Notice the contrasts of v. 17

- a. our affliction – our glory
- b. light – far more exceeding
- c. this moment – eternal

B. Our Need

1. What Paul writes in these two verses is one of those truths that we need to constantly return to
2. For it's a critical measure of our spiritual maturity
3. When children are growing up, one of the things we look for as a mark of maturity is the ability to defer instant gratification to the future

- a. young children have a hard time putting off their desire for fun
- b. they want to play – and they want to play *now*
- c. one of the first words mommies and daddies have to teach their children is “later”
4. Being mature means, in part, being able to look past the present for a better future
5. When you give a young child an allowance, they can’t wait to spend it
 - a. as soon as the ice cream truck is heard down the street, they run in to their room, grab their few coins, and run out to buy some candy
 - b. the idea of saving their allowance and buying the ice cream truck is totally foreign when they're young
 - c. but being mature means deferring my present need for pleasure so that I can attain something more worthy later
 - d. what child hasn’t wanted a bike and said to themselves if they had only saved all those quarters they spent on candy for the last three years, they could buy one?
 - e. how many teenager boys have thought; “If I hadn’t bought so many video games, I could buy a car!”
 - f. and how many adults have regretted, “If we had only put more in savings instead of squandering our income on movies and eating out, we could buy a house!”
6. The difference between those who save and end up buying houses or starting businesses and those who are unable to is usually the difference of being able to SEE the future & live in the present with the future IN Mind
7. Paul’s point is that what is true of this kind of normal growth and maturity is also true of spiritual maturity
8. Growing in Christ, being spiritually mature, means among other things, to put the present into the context of eternity.
9. We must learn to live in the light of our glorious future
10. And the fact of the matter is, when looked at from the perspective of eternity, our present hardships, though they seem so monumental now, will seem inconsequential then

C. *But There’s More*

1. But there’s even more here
2. Paul says that our light affliction is actually working *for us*
3. And what it’s producing is a *far more exceeding* weight of glory
4. Just as the word *light* is a double diminutive, the words *far exceeding* are a double superlative
5. *Weight* means an abundant load
6. What a deal!
 - a. for the small price of a fleeting moment of light pressure
 - b. we get an eternity of glorious abundance
7. Let me use an illustration here if I may, and I think it’s one most of you can relate to
 - a. for years, Joe & Sandy wanted to buy a house - but they were simply

- unable to afford one
 - b. Joe was involved in profit sharing with his company, and when the company experienced a bonanza in profits, the owners decided to reward the employees who had invested in the company
 - c. Joe's investment of a mere \$2,000 resulted in earnings of \$250,000
 - d. now Joe and Sandy and their 3 children live in their own house – a nice 4 bedroom with a Jacuzzi and a pool.
8. Now, here's the point – every time Joe got his paycheck and saw that profit sharing deduction, it hurt
- a,. he thought about what he could do with that money *now*
 - b. but he kept putting it away, trusting that it would serve him in good stead later
 - c. indeed it did
9. As we live our lives in Christ, we are not promised that things will be smooth sailing
10. Storms will come
11. But we have this promise; that God is at work in us and our circumstances to conform us to the image of Christ – and He uses all things to that end – even troubles

(Rom 5:3-4) We also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; {4} and perseverance, character; and character, hope.

12. In Romans 8:18 Paul puts it thus . . .

(Rom 8:18) I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

13. Years ago, the farmers of southern Alabama were accustomed to planting one crop every year--cotton.
- a. they would plow as much ground as they could and plant their crop.
 - b. year after year they lived by cotton.
 - c. then one year the dreaded boll weevil devastated the whole area.
 - d. so the next year the farmers mortgaged their homes and planted cotton again, hoping for a good harvest.
 - e. but as the cotton began to grow, the insect came back and destroyed the crop, wiping out most of the farms.
 - f. the few who survived those two years of the boll weevil decided to experiment the third year, so they planted something they'd never planted before--peanuts.
 - g. and peanuts proved so hardy and the market proved so hungry for that product that the farmers who survived the first two years reaped profits that third year that enabled them to pay off all their debts.
 - h. they planted peanuts from then on and prospered greatly.
 - i. then you know what those farmers did?
 - j. they spent some of their new wealth to erect in the town square a monument--to the boll weevil.
 - k. if it hadn't been for the boll weevil, they never would have discovered peanuts.

1. they learned that even out of disaster there can be great reward

III. CONCLUSION

A. *Our Lot*

1. Job once said, "As surely as the sparks fly upward, so man is born to trouble."
2. No one is exempt from hardship – not one can live a carefree life – everyone will know affliction
3. The question is, what will our attitude toward trouble be?
4. Will we be as those who have no God and so live as though there is no purpose in suffering and nothing to be learned by it?
5. Or will we follow through on our belief in God as Sovereign Lord over Creation and History and see that there is a wonderful redemptive purpose in our affliction?
6. And that it is working for us to produce a glorious change?
7. Henri Matisse, the great French artist was a close friend of Renoir's
 - a. Matisse would watch while Renoir grasped a brush with arthritic bent fingers
 - b. Renoir continued to paint, even though each movement caused stabbing pain.
 - c. one day, Matisse asked Renoir why he persisted in painting at the expense of such torture.
 - d. Renoir replied, "The pain passes, but the beauty remains."

B. *Keep Your Eyes On The Prize*

1. Indeed friends, our light affliction, which lasts but a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding, and eternal abundance of glory!
2. Keep your eyes on the prize
3. Don't be distracted by this moment
4. But see this moment and this pressure in the light of eternity and the glory that shall be yours