

13 – Think On This

May 31, 2020

Living By Faith and Not By Sight

Paul reminds us in 2 Corinthians 5:7 that we live by faith and not by sight. Although Paul is speaking of trusting God for a new body and for eternal life this passage has often been used when we find ourselves having to weather difficult life circumstances. When we are not sure about our fiscal futures we can console ourselves with the truth that believers do indeed live by faith and not by sight. When we harbor fears about our economy and think about a global recession or perhaps depression we can remind ourselves that we live by faith and not by sight. When we consider the possibility of having to do school online both teachers and students and parents can encourage each other that we live by faith and not by sight. While we wonder about the futures of restaurants, fitness centers, theatres, concert halls, fair grounds, local rinks and of course church, the advice to live by faith and not by sight is not as easy to do as it is to say. It is one thing to cite the words of Jesus from Matthew 6 “*do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear ...*” and quite another thing to do. Jesus’ admonition that we ought not worry and that we should rather, “*seek first his kingdom and his righteousness*”, is especially appropriate now. Yes, we are to trust in God of course but we do have to do things as well. This is a lot of new territory to navigate and navigate we must. **What** we do and **how** we do it are important questions whose answers must be our concern. Living by faith does not mean we do nothing.

In Ecclesiastes 11 Solomon wrote

*Ship your grain across the sea;
after many days you may receive a return.
Invest in seven ventures, yes, in eight;
you do not know what disaster may come upon the land.
Sow your seed in the morning,
and at evening let your hands not be idle,
for you do not know which will succeed,
whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well.*

Jesus himself taught that we are to use the talents he has given for His Kingdom. So we are to be busy with doing things, things we see, things we know need to be done, things we can exercise some control over and yet we are to trust. We are to believe that God has things well in hand. Some might say, not worrying means leaving everything to God and not trying to do it ourselves. An analogy that may help here is driving. Say you are going on a road trip. You tank up of course. You may take your vehicle in for regular maintenance before you leave for vacation. You may take some tools with just in case. You may even take out a CAA membership. You have planned and prepared and now you are ready to leave. You begin to drive.

When you drive you cannot focus on the stuff right in front of you and ignore the rest. You see the side of the road and what's in your mirrors and you feel the car and how it responds and you can feel the road. But you **are** looking farther down the road. You can try focusing on the things that are immediately in front of you but they will be behind you in a matter of seconds. You do not have much control over the things that are immediately in front of you and you cannot spend time trying to pay attention to the things that are past you are behind you in seconds. Most people do not even see the deer until it's too late. You can try to be aware of absolutely everything and every possible problem that may come up in your immediate 0-5 second future but you will not enjoy the drive and you will miss signs and signal lights and other parts of your vacation that you may otherwise enjoy. Our focus needs to be somewhere in the distance.

The divine providence that we profess is real and all things are truly in God's control but we are still driving the car. We trust the road will not disappear. We trust there will be a place to stop and gas up or rest or eat. We planned, we prepared and we trust.

Liz and I planted veggies in the garden and trust it will grow even if we do not get to eat from it. I packed up the books in the church office hoping we can begin at another church this summer. We plan, we prepare and we trust. In the mean time we wait. We are grateful that we may wait here and have the use of the parsonage. So thank you for that. Liz is continuing her work for para-med as a personal support care worker and I am doing a lot of reading and some writing. I am talking with a couple churches but they too are moving at a covid pace (slowly) but I cannot spend too much time focusing on the stuff in my immediate future. Yes I need to keep my eyes focused on the author and perfecter of my salvation but that focus must be in the distance and I must trust that he has those things that are in my most immediate future.

We too need to adjust our focus including how we get to do church in the future. I may have to learn to put stuff online and churches may have to meet in smaller numbers and more often than just Sunday mornings. We may have to utilize zoom meetings or do things together in our homes or outdoors. What does seem fairly certain is that getting back to a "pre-covid normal" is not something that will happen quickly. We do not know how things will pan out or how covid will change things for a long time to come, but what we do know is that God is in control and that the Holy Spirit will give us the words and the means when the time comes.

William Cowper was an English poet and hymnodist. Coleridge and Wordsworth called him, 'one of the best modern poets' of their time. He wrote extensively in support of the abolitionist movement and wrote the famed poem, '*A Negro's Complaint*' often quoted by Martin Luther King Jr. After being institutionalized for insanity, Cowper found refuge in the Christian faith. Although he continued to suffer severe doubts and fears of even damnation, he recovered and wrote many religious hymns. It was one of his more famed religious poems,

'A Light Shining Out of the Darkness' that gave birth to the English saying, 'God moves in mysterious ways' and eventually to the hymn of that same saying.

God Moves In a Mysterious Way

1. God moves in a mysterious way
his wonders to perform.
He plants his footsteps in the sea
and rides upon the storm.
2. Deep in unfathomable mines
of never failing skill,
he treasures up his bright designs
and works his sovereign will.
3. You fearful saints, fresh courage take;
the clouds you so much dread
are big with mercy and shall break
in blessings on your head.
4. His purposes will ripen fast,
unfolding every hour.
The bud may have a bitter taste,
but sweet will be the flower.
5. Blind unbelief is sure to err
and scan his work in vain.
God is his own interpreter,
and he will make it plain.

Remember that the outcome is in the hands of God. The immediate question in our daily lives, has to do with focus. When we worry we are more like the young new drivers. We focus on things around us. When we worry about the future, it's really only about a car-length ahead of us. That is the sort of focus that leaves us surprised by rumble strips, the gravel shoulder and sometimes the ditch. In the section on 'God the Father' the Heidelberg Catechism has some great words for us to help us focus on living by faith and not by sight.

Lord's Day 9 - Q & A 26

Q. What do you believe when you say,
"I believe in God, the Father almighty,
creator of heaven and earth"?

A. That the eternal Father of our Lord
Jesus Christ, who out of nothing
created heaven and earth
and everything in them,¹

who still upholds and rules them
by his eternal counsel and providence,²

is my God and Father
because of Christ the Son.³

I trust God so much that I do not doubt
he will provide whatever I need
for body and soul,⁴
and will turn to my good
whatever adversity
he sends upon me in this sad world.⁵

God is able to do this because
he is almighty God⁶
and desires to do this because
he is a faithful Father.⁷

¹ Gen. 1-2; Ex. 20:11; Ps. 33:6; Isa. 44:24;
Acts 4:24; 14:15

² Ps. 104; Matt. 6:30; 10:29; Eph. 1:11

³ John 1:12-13; Rom. 8:15-16; Gal. 4:4-7;
Eph. 1:5

⁴ Ps. 55:22; Matt. 6:25-26; Luke 12:22-31

⁵ Rom. 8:28

⁶ Gen. 18:14; Rom. 8:31-39

⁷ Matt. 7:9-11

Lord's Day 10 - Q & A 27

Q. What do you understand
by the providence of God?

A. The almighty and ever present
power of God¹
by which God upholds, as with his hand,
heaven and earth and all creatures,²
and so rules them that
leaf and blade,
rain and drought,
fruitful and lean years,
food and drink,
health and sickness,
prosperity and poverty—³
all things, in fact,
come to us
not by chance⁴
but by his fatherly hand.⁵

¹ Jer. 23:23-24; Acts 17:24-28

² Heb. 1:3

³ Jer. 5:24; Acts 14:15-17; John 9:3;
Prov. 22:2

⁴ Prov. 16:33

⁵ Matt. 10:29

Lord's Day 10 - Q & A 28

Q. How does the knowledge
of God's creation and providence help us?

A. We can be patient when things go against
us,¹ thankful when things go well,² and for
the future we can have good confidence in
our faithful God and Father ...
that nothing in creation will separate us
from his love.³

For all creatures are so completely in God's
Hand that without his will they can neither
move nor be moved.⁴

¹ Job 1:21-22; James 1:3

² Deut. 8:10; 1 Thess. 5:18

³ Ps. 55:22; Rom. 5:3-5; 8:38-39

⁴ Job 1:12; 2:6; Prov. 21:1; Acts 17:24-28