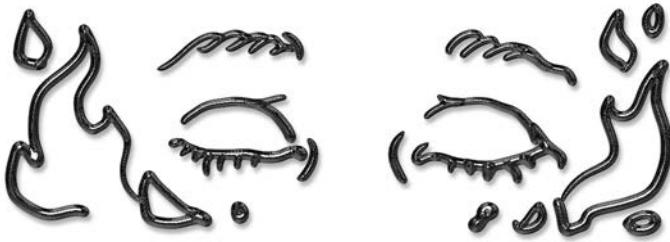


Seeing *the* Invisible



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Rom. 8:28–39, John 14:1–14, Eph. 1:18–23, Isa. 40:27–31.*

Memory Text: “By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible” (*Hebrews 11:27, NKJV*).

The definition of faith in the book of Hebrews is always challenging. “Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see” (*Heb. 11:1, NIV*). How can we be sure about what we do not see? Yet, this is exactly what Moses illustrates in our memory verse: “He persevered because he saw him who is invisible” (*Heb. 11:27, NIV*).

It is even more challenging to realize that we are called to see “him who is invisible” not simply when times are good but especially when everything is going wrong. For this we need faith, a Christlike faith that must be shaped by the truth about God and God’s kingdom. The truth about our Father’s goodness, the power in the name of Jesus, the power of the Resurrection, and the compassion of God are essential truths that will enable us to stand strong when we are in the crucible and may be tempted to doubt everything.

The Week at a Glance: What truths about God can help sustain us through even the worst situations?

* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, August 20.

Our Father's Extravagance

"If God really loved me, He would certainly do _____ for me!" I wonder how many times that thought has flickered through our minds. We look at our circumstances and then begin to wonder whether God really loves us, because if He really did, things would be different.

There are two rationales that often lead us to doubt God's goodness. First, when we have a burning desire in our hearts and minds for something that we believe is good, the idea that God might want something different for us may seem ridiculous. Second, we may doubt God's goodness because our experience clashes with what we believe. If something looks good or feels good or sounds good or tastes good, then it must be good. And so we get angry with God when we can't have it.

This is where faith comes into play. Faith comes into action precisely at those times we are tempted to doubt God and His goodness.

Romans 8:28–39 is a powerful passage that describes the goodness of God toward us. What reasons can you find in the text that can guard our minds against doubting God's goodness?

In Romans 8:32, there is an important piece of logic that is extremely helpful in guarding us from becoming overwhelmed by our circumstances. "If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us?" (*The Message*). How could we possibly think that God would send Jesus to die for us and then turn mean and stingy?

This means that the truth of God's generosity to us, seen in the death of Christ, must have a stronger impact in our thinking than all of the doubts that the crucible may generate inside us.

How is it possible for a truth (God's goodness) to have a more powerful effect on you than your doubts? Spend some time meditating on the truth that God has given Jesus to die in your place, and that this incredible generosity continues in a thousand different ways for you today. What does this do for your faith?

In the Name of Jesus

“**‘If you ask anything in My name, I will do it’**” (*John 14:14, NKJV*).

Jesus was not going to be with the disciples much longer. The One who had been their support and encouragement was going to heaven, and the disciples were beginning to feel confused and powerless. But though the disciples would not be able to see Him physically any longer, Jesus gave them a remarkable promise.

Read John 14:1–14. According to verses 13 and 14, Jesus promises to do for us “anything” that we ask in His name. Because of this, we almost always add on to the end of our prayers, “In Jesus’ name, amen.”

When we say this, what do we normally think it means? What does Jesus mean when He encourages us to pray like this? What clues are there in these verses that help us to understand the point He’s making?

When our request is “in the name of Jesus,” we can be certain that the whole machinery of heaven is at work on our behalf. We may not see the angels working all around us. But they are—sent from the throne of heaven in the name of Jesus, to fulfill our requests.

Sometimes when we pray in the name of Jesus, we open our eyes and expect everything to be different around us—but it all looks the same. However, while the power of God may come with dramatic effect, as when Jesus calmed the storm, it also may come in quietness, unnoticed, as when the power of God sustained Jesus in Gethsemane. Something dramatic may not suddenly happen, but that doesn’t mean that God is not at work for us.

Read John 14:1–14 again. As you read, imagine that Jesus is talking directly to you, face-to-face. What hope and encouragement can you draw from these promises? At the same time, ask yourself, “What things in my life could be standing in the way of having these promises fulfilled for me? What changes must I purpose in my heart to make?”

The Power of the Resurrection

The Resurrection addresses the problem of human powerlessness. When we think about the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus, we often think about how the death of Jesus was the event that made us legally right with God. And that, of course, is true.

However, the Resurrection adds a specific dimension to salvation. The resurrection of Jesus is meaningful not just because it shows us that one day we will be resurrected, as well. The Resurrection placed Jesus at the right hand of the Father in a position of power and authority. This Resurrection power is the same power that God makes available for us today!

In Ephesians 1:18–23, Paul talks about the power of God. What does this text teach us about the power of the Resurrection? What hope and promises for yourself can you find in these verses?

Paul is praying that the Ephesians understand a few things that can be understood properly only with divine help: (1) that there is the hope of transformation and an eternal future to which Jesus has called us and (2) that we understand the power that was manifested in our behalf.

Paul then tries to describe how astonishing this power is. The power that is available to us today is the same power that resurrected Jesus not just out of the ground and back to life, but to the place of power at the Father's right hand.

But Paul doesn't stop there. The Resurrection didn't simply give Jesus just any sort of power. It gave Him the power to rule and provide every possible thing His people could ever need—for all eternity!

Make a list of the areas in your life where you need the power of the resurrected Jesus. When you have finished, pray that this power will be applied to all these areas of need. At the same time, what can you do better? What choices can you make that can allow this power to work more freely in your life?

To Carry All Our Worry

There is a plaque that some people have in their homes that reads “Why pray when you can worry?” It makes us laugh because we know how often we worry rather than come to God and give Him our concerns.

Someone once said that when our life becomes all tied up, we should give it to God and let Him untie the knots. How God must long to do this for us. Yet, amazingly, we manage to hang on to our problems until we are about to snap. Why do we wait until we are desperate before we go to the Lord?

Read 1 Peter 5:7. Peter is quoting from Psalm 55:22. What’s the basic message here for us? (See also Matt. 6:25–33.)

It is a very simple text. There is no secret hidden in it, and it means exactly what it says. To cast means to do just that, to throw, to give away, so that what is causing the aching and the concern no longer has any connection to you. But, of course, our burdens are not thrown just anywhere. Our worry does not disappear into a void. It is given to our Father in heaven, who promises to sort it out. That’s what Jesus is telling us in the verses in Matthew. The problem in doing this is not that it’s hard; rather, it’s that it just seems too easy, too good to be true.

Anxiety is caused by all sorts of things. It could be due to pressure from work, unexpected criticism, feeling that we are unwanted or unloved, health or financial worries, feeling that we are not good enough for God, or believing that we are not forgiven.

Whatever the reasons are, one reason we hang on to our problems is that we think we can sort them out better than anyone else can. But Peter urges us to reconsider any such idea. The reason we don’t have to worry is that God cares. But does God still care enough to intervene when a divorce is looming or we feel totally useless? The Bible says that He cares enough to transform any situation.

What are things that cause you worry now? However legitimate they are, however troublesome they are, is there anything too hard for the Lord? Maybe our biggest problem is that even though we believe that God knows about it and can fix it, we don’t believe that He will resolve it the way we would like it resolved. Dwell on that last point and ask yourself how true it is in your own life.

Still Faithful When God Cannot Be Seen

To think that no one cares about what is happening to us is very unpleasant. But to think that God does not know or care about us can be most distressing.

To the Judaeans exiled in Babylon, God did not seem to care much about their situation. They were still exiled, still feeling abandoned by God because of their sin. But Isaiah speaks words of comfort to them. Isaiah 40 is a beautiful passage in which Isaiah speaks so tenderly to the people about their God: “He tends his flock like a shepherd: he gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young” (*Isa. 40:11, NIV*). But after so long, the exiles were thinking, *Where are You, O Lord? We can’t see any evidence that You are still there—or care!*

Read Isaiah 40:27–31. In what ways does Isaiah describe God? How is this description of God meant to answer their belief that “‘my way is hidden from the LORD; my cause is disregarded by my God’ ” (*Isa. 40:27, NIV*)?

Another group of people who might have considered that their way was hidden from God is found in the book of Esther. In this book, God is not mentioned even once. However, the whole story is an unfolding drama of God’s intervention to save His people from an irrevocable law to have them destroyed. Not only does this story describe events of the past, but it also symbolizes a time in the future when God’s people will again be persecuted and a law again will be introduced for their destruction (*Rev. 13:15*). Can you imagine how easy it would be to conclude that if such terrible circumstances existed, God must surely have deserted His people? But we are not to fear. The same God who saved His chosen ones in the story of Esther will save them again in the final crisis.

We have read how Isaiah described God to the exiles. How would you describe God to people who felt that God had disappeared and had abandoned them? How would you teach them to see through the eyes of faith and not be dependent on what they see around them with their human eyes?

Further Study: Read Ellen G. White, “In the Days of Queen Esther,” pp. 598–606, in *Prophets and Kings*.

“Has not God said He would give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him? And is not this Spirit a real, true actual guide? Some men seem afraid to take God at His word, as though it would be presumption in them. They pray for the Lord to teach us and yet are afraid to credit the pledged word of God and believe we have been taught of Him. So long as we come to our heavenly Father humbly and with a spirit to be taught, willing and anxious to learn, why should we doubt God’s fulfillment of His own promise? You must not for a moment doubt Him and dishonor Him thereby. When you have sought to know His will, your part in the operation with God is to believe that you will be led and guided and blessed in the doing of His will. We may mistrust ourselves lest we misinterpret His teachings, but make even this a subject of prayer, and trust Him, still trust Him to the uttermost, that His Holy Spirit will lead you to interpret aright His plans and the working of His providence.”—Ellen G. White, *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 6, p. 225.

“Faith grows strong by coming in conflict with doubts and opposing influences. The experience gained in these trials is of more value than the most costly jewels.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 555.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, talk about the kinds of things we believe in that we do not see, things that we know are real yet are beyond our sight. How can this help us understand what it means to see “Him who is invisible”?
- 2 Discuss the final question found at the end of Wednesday’s study. How often do we find ourselves in that situation? What can we do that will better enable us to trust that the Lord’s way is the best, even if it’s not what we want?
- 3 If “faith grows strong by coming in conflict with doubts and opposing influences” and this leads to something extremely valuable, “of more value than the most costly jewels,” how should this shape the way we look at such conflicts?
- 4 Most of us have seen people, even fellow Christians, in situations in which, at least from our perspective, the outcome was horrible. The worst thing we imagined happened, despite the prayers and best efforts. How do we understand this in light of what we have been studying?

Part 8: Married to Christ

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY

A week after giving his heart to Jesus, Father started to clear out the temple in Manaus, Brazil. He gathered the images and the stone altars where he had sacrificed animals and bowed to evil spirits. At the spirits' request, Father shipped the temple paraphernalia to two women in another town.

He finished the task on a Friday. As he got into his car, evil spirits growled that they were going to kill him. Suddenly, a dark shadow shaped like a man and comprised of three spirits entered the car. The spirits showed Father a distant light. Out of the light loomed a cross, filled with mud. The spirits sneered that it was the end for Father. "As a dead man, can I make a last statement?" Father asked. Without waiting for a reply, he said, "Jesus, please sit beside me in the car and take me home." The dark shadow vanished. It was the first time that Father had called on Jesus, and he felt protected.

The next morning, Father attended Sabbath worship services for the first time. It was a Communion Sabbath, and he sensed a supernatural energy similar to what he had experienced at Junior's baptism. As someone washed his feet, Father's sins passed before his eyes. Tears flowed as he asked God for forgiveness. He felt as though the Holy Spirit was washing him clean.

A short time later, Father proposed to Mother, and they officially got married. Mother was especially happy. Now she could be baptized.

The day before her baptism, Father and Junior went to Alpha Seventh-day Adventist Community Church to listen as Mother rehearsed with a choir. A ladder, which was being used to decorate the church, suddenly toppled over, and the man standing on it slammed into Father, knocking him to the floor.

Father offered assurances that he was fine but, a moment later, began to shriek. Two evil spirits had possessed him.

Junior ran to Father. He lay on the ground, his body quivering. A spirit snarled through his mouth that he had wanted to kill Father with the ladder.

Junior had heard about the great controversy between Christ and Satan, but he had never witnessed it in real life. He prayed. The choir spontaneously sang, "Jesus Christ, You are the Bridegroom, the Sower, my Father and my Shepherd, the Pearl of Great Price. Christ, You are everything."

Mother grabbed Father's twisted hands and tried to straighten them. They felt terribly cold. A spirit spewed hatred at her.

Then Father spoke in a small and distant voice. "It hurts," he said.

After about an hour of praying and singing, Father returned to normal.

Although in pain, Father joined Junior at church for Mother's baptism on Sabbath morning. With joy, Mother sank into the water.

Your Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will help open eight churches in the South American Division, including four in Brazil, where Father (EDUARDO FERREIRA DOS SANTOS) and his family live.