

## **20/20 Vision for 2020**

Trinity CRC, January 1, 2020 AM  
New Year's Morning

## **2 Corinthians 4 (v.18)**

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Dear friends in Christ,

After suffering a near fatal brain-bleed, our daughter Rachel had a steep climb to recovery. By God's amazing grace, his miraculous power along with the blessings of modern medicine, Rachel has made a nearly full recovery. The few smaller things that are still healing include her eyesight. After her AVM, her brain decided that her one eye, which was always near-sighted, wasn't working right and—from what doctors tell us—the brain stop registering the data from that eye.

A specialized eye doctor saw Rachel and prescribed prism lenses. The prism lenses are amazing. The glass is made up entirely of little prisms or pyramids. And no matter where the vision in Rachel's bad eye goes, the prism lens will bring it back to centre where the good eye is looking. I have no idea how that works exactly but it does work. Upon putting the glasses on, Rachel could instantly see better. Where before she could not tell when driving with someone whether they were in the right, left or middle lane of a road, the glasses corrected her vision so she could see exactly which lane she was in. And slowly the prism glasses are helping her bad eye become stronger and fully engaged once again. That's a miracle of modern medicine.

As we start a new year, you and I need to think about having 20/20 vision for the year 2020. When else am I going to be able to have such a theme and title? There will never be another year 2020! The point is that when we have 20/20 vision we are said to have perfect eyesight. We can see things up close perfectly and we can see things far away perfectly—as good as is humanly possible. 20/20 vision is a blessing for anyone.

On a spiritual level, 20/20 vision ought to be our aim in 2020. So this morning we consider God's thoughts about the focus of our life. In this letter. The Apostle Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, reminds the church of the comfort we have in Christ in the face of anything, whether life is going smoothly or we are called to suffer. In chapters 2 and 3 he dwells on the wonderful comfort of being members of the new covenant—the people bound together with God through faith in Jesus Christ. He talks about being confident to face anything because Christ lives in us and makes us able to face the future. He makes us bold by the power of the Holy Spirit and calls us to live out of that comfort. That's our ministry.

That gets us to chapter 4 where Paul says,

*<sup>2 Cor 4:1</sup> "Therefore, since through God's mercy we have this ministry, we do not lose heart."*

He goes on from there to say how we are like jars of clay. And clay jars are pretty fragile. But with God's power we stand strong. So Paul writes this:

*<sup>2 Cor 4:7</sup> But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. <sup>8</sup> We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; <sup>9</sup> persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.*

You get the picture? With God's grace, His help, His power, we make it through whatever comes our way today, throughout the new year and all of our life. We are fragile jars of clay made strong by God's power in us.

Paul says that life can be hard. He doesn't make light of that. But he writes confidently the last paragraph of chapter 4, and the last verse, which is our text:

*<sup>2 Cor 4:16</sup> Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. <sup>18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

That gets us to the question, "Where are your eyes fixed for the year 2020 so that we can see with God's 20/20 vision in this life?"

## **I. Misdirected Eyes**

Paul shows us, first of all, the problem with misdirected or mis-focused eyes. Until I went to college at age 21, I had perfect eyesight. Just one semester in college—after months of staring in books—my distance vision got weaker. By the end of the semester, I was having trouble reading the chalkboard in the classroom. In a similar way, when we get too focussed on the here and now, our big picture vision gets off track. Paul calls this a focus on earthly things. When we focus on the things that are seen, we go astray. Listen:

*<sup>2 Cor 4:18</sup> So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

Focussing on the things that are seen refers to the problems he was just talking about. The up close or immediate needs we feel: being *hard pressed on every side; perplexed, persecuted and struck down*. Our life-focus is misdirected when we dwell on these "seen" things—the here and now. He's not denying that suffering is real. In fact, he goes on to talk about his own personal struggles later in this letter, a struggle that he calls "a thorn in the flesh" and "a messenger of Satan." But here he's trying to help his dearly loved friends in Corinth recognize that we're not going to live in the fullness of Christ if we just focus on the here and now, whether it's bad or even good. This life is not all there is. What we see is not all that God has in store for us. This life might be the near-sighted stuff. But God has the bigger picture in view.

Maybe you remember this from another time, but let me illustrate. Here's a rope. I think it's about 50 feet. Now notice here at the end, that I've wrapped it in black tape. This black piece, my friends, that's your life here on earth. That's the here and now. The rest is eternity. Young people, this black piece is your time here on earth. Grandparents, this is the time that Paul refers to as "what is seen." That's it. This is the period of time when you can be hard pressed and persecuted. This is the part where you and I have times when we feel perplexed, *hard pressed, struck down*, and even *persecuted* in some ways. Life can be tough. Those words describe the struggle of the here and now.

God's direction, though, is not to focus on this little span of time that is seen. Deal with it. Pray to the Lord through it. Help one another through it. But don't become narrowly focused on it because it's just a bleep in the span of eternity. You've got 60 years, 70, 80, sometimes 90 and, very occasionally, 100 years on this earth. That's not even the equivalent of this little black piece on the long rope. In the really big picture, it's almost nothing.

Again, God doesn't minimize our struggles and hardships in the here and now. But He's calling us to fix our eyes on a bigger picture.

The issue is that we often have our focus on the wrong place. We're way too focused on what is seen. And that leads us into trouble. The old church father Chrysostom pointed to the problem: In today's English he said, we don't focus solely on the things seen, whether they are bad or good because good things will seduce us from God and bad things will discourage us in our walk with God.

Think about that. When life is good, we tend to neglect the Lord more easily. Who needs God when everything in your life is going smoothly? Why bother to pray, why go to church, why give your tithes and offerings to the Lord, why do devotions, why treat your neighbour better and share with those in need? Life is good so we tend to get caught up in the moment. We forget that this little black piece of life is going to end one day. And then what?

Similarly, when your life is bad, people have a tendency to become self-absorbed as well. We just came through a difficult year economically. People have lost jobs and possessions. There's a sense of uncertainty about the future in many people's hearts. In economically hard times, people can become very greedy and focussed on self. They put all their effort into self-preservation. They worry about digging themselves out of their financial pit and don't think about others.

Paul's point about misdirected eyes is that when we are only focused on the temporal things it's not going to serve us well. Misdirected eyes reflect a misdirection of our heart.

## **II. Redirected Eyes**

What we need, says the Lord, is redirected or refocused eyes. If you just live for the short end of this rope, that's a big mistake. God reminds us to keep the big picture in mind. This little piece of life on earth will pass away and then we have a million times more life to live. We have eternity. That's spiritual 20/20 vision. That takes faith because we can't see all of it with our physical eyes. Hence Paul's encouragement to the church,

*2 Cor 4:18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

Our life here will be done before too long. Some of us will not make it through 2020, just as some passed away last year. These loved ones in Christ have gone ahead of us to everlasting life. They have gone to what is unseen by us here. But don't think that means it's not real. It's very real. These things that are not

seen now are not invisible. They are see-able but not until later, although already now we see them by faith and have a foretaste from time to time. Elsewhere Paul says that we now see as through a glass dimly. That's like me when I take off my glasses. I can see you all but you're all blurry. I can see into the distance but it's not clear. It's not 20/20.

My friends, we know based on what God says in His word, and what He confirms in our hearts, that what awaits us in eternity is real and true. It's based on Jesus and all the miracles surrounding His birth, life and resurrection. The Apostle Peter breaks out in praise as he reflects on it. He writes,

*<sup>1</sup> Pet 1:3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, <sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, <sup>5</sup> who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time. <sup>6</sup> In all this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials. <sup>7</sup> These have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. <sup>8</sup> Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, <sup>9</sup> for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.*

It's about seeing by faith now what later we know we will see with our eyes. That's the redirected vision we need for today. When we face death, we know that Jesus rose from the dead and that we shall too. We love Him even though we do not see Him but we know that glory awaits us as children of God. So even though we pass through death in this life, we know that we will at that same moment be more alive than ever before. Eternally alive. So by faith in Jesus we fix our eyes on what is unseen and eternal, and we know that death does not have the last word. We know that we will live eternally a far richer life than can be found on this earth. We're not focussing only on the black part of the rope; we're looking to eternity.

Similarly, we may struggle to pay some bills, we might be dealing with difficult people, strained relationship, uncertainty at work and a whole lot more in 2020. But we see by faith that what is coming is eternal. So we take out our wallet and give our tithes and offerings to the Lord first because investing in the kingdom of God is what's going to last. We see by faith that it pays eternal dividend while hoarding money for ourselves here on earth only satisfies for a while at best. People may say, "You're crazy! You need that money." But you'll say, "You don't see what I see, my friend. I have my eyes fixed on eternity. My God has saved me and has a place for me with Him forever. I'll sacrifice some earthly comforts here because I have eternal comfort awaiting me. I'm putting my trust in Jesus while on this earth too, just like I'll do when I'm in heaven. He will be first in my life for eternity and I'm saying here on earth—with my offerings—that He's first in my life now too. I'm not focussing only on the black part of the rope; I'm looking to eternity."

We sit down each day and read God's Word and pray because we know that He helps us to see beyond the here and now. Plus, He gives us grace to deal with the struggles in the here and now. Maybe you've had some stress within the family through the holidays. That's part of life. But we don't walk away from each other. We go back to one another and love one another because that's the love God has shown to us in Christ. We have an eternal perspective that the strains of this life will end and our Lord Jesus holds us together, gives us grace to forgive and to keep an eternal perspective. To have a 20/20 vision for the future where all things are new and perfected. So where some people just cast relationships away when things get tough, we reflect on Jesus who came to us in our misery and lifted us up. He did not abandon us. So when people think we're nuts for going the extra mile with someone who has wronged us, we aim for the eternal perspective where we are united in Christ forever.

When it comes to our leisure activities too, we can ask about an eternal perspective. We all need vacations. We need time to refresh. But sometimes we can use our time off to serve others and come home more refreshed and alive than ever before. When we give, we always get more in return and God refreshes us. That's how it works in God's kingdom. We do things that have an eternal blessing associated with them. We are living from God's direction in His word which gives us 20/20 vision.

Friends, we must look with redirected/refocused eyes at our whole life in the year ahead. At work, at school, at sports, at home and at church, we must see beyond the temporal to the eternal. We must ask God to help us see the bigger picture that He sees and to not get lost in the here and now. When the Apostle Paul got that straight, it gave him courage in the face of difficulties. He writes,  
*2 Cor 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. <sup>17</sup> For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.*

He knew that his Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ had bought him body and soul to be His own. And he knew, as we confessed earlier in Lord's Day 9, that our Father in heaven has our eternal well-being in mind even while we are on this earth. He's at work in our lives in good times as well as in hard times. So we must look to Him and allow His eternal 20/20 vision for us to become our vision as well. May we always be able to say, "I'm not focussing only on the black part of the rope; I'm looking to eternity." And so, dear people of God, let us live in this world of seen and temporal things with our eyes of faith fixed on God's unseen, eternal and glorious life for us.

You may not need prism glasses like my daughter Rachel needed to correct her physical eyesight. But we all need faith in 2020 to trust that our Lord's 20/20 vision for our life is perfect. And we need to keep in mind that He will work out all things perfectly. And when we see Him face to face, even things that now appear dim to us will be 20/20.