

## LOOK AWAY

- A. Introduction: We are working on a series about the importance of becoming a regular Bible reader. The Bible is a supernatural book because every word is God breathed or inspired by God. It is a book from God. God's Word imparts peace, strength, faith, and joy to those who read it. II Tim 3:16; I Thess 2:13; Matt 4:4
1. For a number of weeks we've been making the point that the Bible changes your perspective or the way you see things, which then changes the way you live your life.
    - a. The Bible gives you an eternal perspective because it reveals that there is more to life than just this life and that the greater and better part of life is ahead of us—after this life. Knowing that the best is yet to come lightens the load of this difficult life. II Cor 4:17-18
    - b. God's Word helps you put this life and its troubles in perspective. In comparison to eternity even a lifetime of trouble is miniscule. The Bible helps you know how to look at your present troubles in a way that further lightens the emotional and mental load as it increases your trust in God. Rom 8:18
    - c. The Bible gives us historical accounts of real people who lived on earth many centuries ago. They faced real problems and got real help from God. Rom 15:4
      1. Their stories give us hope and encouragement because we can see the end of their story. We see and how God uses the harsh realities of life in a fallen world for good as He furthers His plan for a family. In the hands of God, even impossible circumstances have solutions.
      2. Their stories show us that there is always more to our circumstances than what we see with our eyes. Almighty God is at work behind the scenes, causing every situation to serve His ultimate purpose for a family. It shows us that He is able to bring genuine good out of genuine bad and that He will get us through until He gets us out. Rom 8:28
  2. Last week examined a spectacular example of how God uses the harsh realities of life in a sin damaged world and brings good out of bad as He works out His plan to have a family. Eph 1:4-5; Eph 1:11
    - a. We looked at a man named Jacob who lost his favorite son (Joseph), was on the verge of losing two more sons (Simeon and Benjamin), and his family faced starvation due to a severe famine.
    - b. Gen 42:36—Overwhelmed by his circumstances, Jacob exclaimed “everything is against me”. And, according to what he could see, everything was against him. But in reality, everything was going his way.
      1. Jacob was about to be reunited with his long lost son Joseph. He wouldn't lose Simeon or Benjamin, his family would be invited to Egypt to as guests to ride out the rest of the famine, and the people group through which Jesus came into this world was preserved.
      2. This incident shows us the importance of putting God's Word above what we see and feel in the midst of life's challenges. We don't deny what we see and feel. We recognize that we don't have all the facts in our situation. Only God has all the facts.
    - c. If we can learn to look past what we see to the way things really are according to the Word of God, it will lighten the load of this difficult life. We have more to say about this in tonight's lesson.
- B. Jacob and his family stayed in Egypt for four generations, and they grew rapidly. Eventually a king rose to power who viewed this growing people group as a potential threat, so he enslaved them. Ex 1:8-11
1. God ultimately delivered these people from Egyptian slavery under the leadership of a man named Moses. Although we could devote many lessons to what happened to the Israelites, we're only going to cover a few main points that show us how God works with the realities of life in a fallen world.
    - a. Why did this happen? Why were the Israelites enslaved in Egypt? That's life in a sin cursed earth. Wicked men, motivated by fear, enslaved them. It's the nature of fallen men to rule over others.
      1. This circumstance didn't take God by surprise and He saw a way to use it for good. He told Abraham (the father of these people) 400 years before it happened that his descendants would

be enslaved in a foreign land, but that they would come out better than when they went in—with clothing, silver, and gold. Gen 15:13-14; Ex 12:35-36

2. It was God’s plan that Jesus be born in the land of Canaan (modern day Israel). When Jacob’s family went to Egypt they were only 75 in number—too small to survive in Canaan. In Egypt they grew large enough to conquer hostile tribes and settle in Canaan. When they left Egypt they numbered at least two million people. Micah 5:2; Gen 46:26; Ex 12:37
- b. God preserved His people in Egypt. The more the Egyptians oppressed the Israelites, the more they multiplied. Around the time Moses was born Pharaoh ordered midwives to kill Hebrew baby boys. They refused, saying that Hebrew babies were born before they could get to the births. Ex 1:12-22
  1. Moses was born to a Hebrew couple who hid him for three months and then placed their trust in God (Heb 11:23). They put him in a waterproof basket on the Nile River, where Pharaoh’s daughter found him and adopted him as her son.
  2. Moses’ sister Miriam watched from a distance, approached the princess, and offered to find a wet nurse for the baby. Miriam took Moses to their mother who raised him until he was weaned. She got her baby back and Moses had his mother’s godly influence in his early years.
  3. The Lord used the thing that was working to destroy the Hebrew boys (Egypt) and made it the vehicle He used to save Moses. Moses became a protected prince of Egypt and received training he would not have gotten as a slave; he became mighty in speech and action. Acts 7:22
- c. God delivered Israel from Egypt through a series of power demonstrations that convinced Pharaoh to let the people go. Through it all, many Egyptians came to realize that the God of the Hebrews is the true God. Ex 8:19; Ex 8:22; Ex 9:20; Ex 12:38; etc.
2. When the Israelites set out on their journey back to Canaan, the Lord went before them, manifesting as a pillar (or column) of cloud by day and of fire by night. Ex 13:21-22
  - a. There were two possible routes back to Canaan. The first was populated by a warlike tribe of idol worshippers, the Philistines. The second, the wilderness route through the Sinai Peninsula, was mountainous and dry (peaks up to 7,400 feet and less than 8 inches of rainfall per year). Ex 13:17-18
    1. Both routes were difficult due to the effects of Adam’s sin. His rebellion produced a sin nature in man that resulted in aggressive tribes who conquer other men. Desert places developed because of the curse of corruption and death that came on the earth when Adam sinned.
    2. Despite how it looked, God led His people on the best route. He knew they weren’t ready to fight the Philistines, and He knew that Pharaoh would change his mind and come after His people, thinking that they were bogged down in the wilderness at the edge of a great sea. Ex 14
  - b. When the Israelites saw the Egyptian army approaching, they were terrified. The Lord told Moses to lift his rod, stretch out his hand over the sea, and it would part. The Israelites crossed over on dry ground. When the Egyptians tried to follow, the waters closed. Consider several points.
    1. God was just as much with and for Israel on this side of the Red sea as He was on the other side. It just didn’t look like it. God actually used the problem to solve the problem. In the hands of Almighty God, an impossible situation had a solution.
    2. The Egyptian army was destroyed. Canaan was not that far from Egypt (11 days journey), and the Egyptians would have been a constant threat to Israel once they reached their home land.
    3. The Egyptians recognized that “the Lord is fighting for Israel against us” (Ex 14:25, NLT). God’s purposes are always redemptive. Not only were His own people impacted, how many deathbed confessions among the Egyptians were there?
3. Back to the pillar of cloud and fire. The Lord with His people in this visible way is called the Angel of the Lord (Ex 14:19-22). He is the One who will lead them all the way to Canaan (Ex 40:38).
  - a. I Cor 10:1-4—The New Testament informs us that this Angel of the Lord is Jesus. Paul was writing Christians who were involved in serious sins (v7-10) and he urged them to stop. As part of

his exhortation he reminded them that the generation that came out of Egyptian slavery committed some of the same kinds of sin and paid dearly for it (lessons for another day).

- b. As Paul exhorted his readers, he gave an important detail about the identity of the Angel of the Lord or the rock that followed, or literally, went with them. The rock (the Angel) was Christ. I Cor 10:4
  1. Jesus isn't a created being, He is the Creator God. He is the Word made flesh. Jesus is God's message or His clearest revelation of Himself to mankind. Jesus is the visible manifestation of the invisible God in both the Old and New Testament. John 1:1; John 1:3; John 1:14
  2. Jesus was very interactive with His people before He took on a human nature in the womb of the Virgin Mary. In the Old Testament He is most often referred to as the (as opposed to an) Angel of the Lord. The Hebrew word translated Angel of the Lord means messenger. He did not take the name Jesus until He was born into this world. Matt 1:21; Luke 1:31
- c. Last week we talked about Abraham, a man whose trust in God grew to the point where he had hope in a hopeless situation, and his faith didn't waver in the face of what he saw and felt. Rom 4:18-19
  1. We learned that it was the Word (Preincarnate Jesus) who made promises to Abraham in seemingly impossible circumstances (Gen 15:1; John 8:56). Abraham went through a process of persuasion to get to the point of unwavering faith, as Jesus (before He took on flesh) made a number of appearances over a period of time (Gen 17:1-8; Gen 18:1-33; Gen 22:1-19).
  2. The Angel of the Lord (Jesus) was visibly present with the generation that came out of Egypt for several reasons. Among other things, He was there to inspire faith in them that Almighty God was their guide, protector, and provider—just as He did for Abraham.
4. When we read the record of Israel's journey from Egypt to Canaan we find that the visible presence of God with them did not automatically produce faith in them. They had to choose to keep their focus on Him, and put the fact that God was with them above what they could see and feel in their circumstances.
  - a. Human beings have a natural tendency to let sight and emotions dominate us. And then we speculate about what is going on and how it's going to turn out. That's what Israel did.
    1. Ex 14:10-12—When they were trapped at the Red Sea and saw Pharaoh's army in the distance, they felt real fear and experienced real, but inaccurate thoughts: Moses (and God) you led us out here to die in the wilderness. Egyptian slavery was great compared to this.
    2. But God (Preincarnate Jesus) told them from the beginning that He was going to bring them out of Egypt and bring them into Canaan (Ex 3:8; Ex 6:6-8). He fulfilled the first part of His promise. Now, He was visible as a reminder that He was with them to keep the rest of His promise. They had to choose to look away from their circumstances to the Word of God.
  - b. God brought them through the sea anyway. And, on the other side, they had a wonderful victory celebration. But it was based on how they felt because of what they have seen. Ex 15:1-21.
    1. There's nothing wrong with feeling good when things are going well. But we can't let our emotions determine our view of ultimate reality. Emotions and sight don't have all the facts, both are subject to change, and they often give us incorrect information.
    2. Ex 15:22-24—Three days into their desert journey, the Israelites were out of water. The water they found was bitter (salty). The Nile River in Egypt was known in the ancient world for its delicious water. The people immediately expressed their anxiety and discontent to Moses.
      - A. Why was the water bitter? Because that's life in a sin cursed earth. Why didn't God make the water sweet before they got there? He saw a way to use it for good. It was an opportunity for them to exercise their faith in God and choose to look to Him for help.
      - B. They could have recalled God's promise to bring them into Canaan (which meant He wasn't going to let them die of thirst in the desert) or how He had control over water at the Red Sea. They could have simply looked away from the bitter water to the cloud.
      - C. God helped them anyway but their reaction based only on what they could see, feel, and

reason added to their emotional distress in the face of challenge.

- C. Conclusion: These historical accounts of real people were written in part to shape our view of reality and help us by showing us how God worked in these various circumstances. There's more going on than we see.
1. Because the accounts report how these stories ended, we can see clearly that all these people could have trusted in God in the middle of their stories by focusing their attention on God with them and for them. Then they would have had hope and peace of mind instead of fear and anxiety.
    - a. Hebrews chapter 11 lists a number of Old Testament men and women who won God's approval because of their faith (v3). When we read each of their stories we find that the one thing they had in common was that they put God's Word above what they could see and feel and acted accordingly.
    - b. The chapter opens with a statement about faith. Heb 11:1—(Faith)...is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot yet see (NLT).
    - c. Not seen doesn't mean not real. It simply means that we can't see it with our eyes, but we will one day see. God's Word gives us information about unseen realities.
  2. II Cor 5:7—Christians are instructed to live or order our lives according faith and not sight. Faith is persuasion of the reality of things we can't yet see. This persuasion comes to us through God's Word.
    - a. Jesus revealed Himself to His people in the Old Testament before He took on flesh through various appearances known as theophanies. Theophany is the theological term for an appearance of God, usually in visible or bodily form. Theophany comes from two Greek words (*theos*, or God, and *phaino*, to appear).
    - b. Two thousand years ago God revealed Himself to His people when He took on a human nature and was born into this world—God become man without ceasing to be God. His disciples saw Him, walked and talked with Him for three and a half years. I John 1:1-3; II Pet 1:16-17; John 20:31-32
      1. The night before Jesus was crucified He told His disciples that even though He was soon going to leave them, He would continue to reveal Himself to His followers through His Word.
      2. John 14:21—Those who obey my commandments are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them, and I will love them. And I will reveal myself to each one of them (NLT).
        - A. First, here's what Jesus is not saying. He isn't saying that God doesn't love those who don't keep His commandments. God loved us while we were His enemies so much so that He sent His Son to die for us. Rom 5:8-10; John 3:16
        - B. Here's what He is saying: Those who walk in willful, persistent disobedience will not have the assurance or experience of His love (lessons for another day).
  3. Here's the point for our present topic: Jesus promised His followers that even after He left this world He would (and will) continue to reveal Himself to His followers through His written Word—the Bible.
    - a. The Angel of the Lord appeared in the Old Testament to people who did not yet have the complete written record of God. We do have it and we must read it. As we do, it will persuade us of things we cannot yet see to the point where our response to life changes.
    - b. It will also help us recognize the importance of choosing to turn away from sight and emotions in the midst of our circumstances. We don't deny them. We recognize that there is more to reality, more information available than what we see and feel in the moment.
    - c. The Bible persuades us that God is with us and for us, causing all of it to serve His purposes as He brings good out of bad. It assures us that He will get us through until He gets us out.
  4. It's not what you see. It's how you see what you see. Although what you see and feel is real, there's always more to your situation than what you see and feel. It takes time and effort to learn to put what God says above what you see and feel, but it's worth it. Much more next week!