

An eternal weight

For what are we being prepared? Our question, of course, assumes we recognise something lies ahead? Or, to put it another way, this life is not everything.

There are people who see this life as all there is. We come into existence by chance. We get out of life what we strive to get out of it. And then we die. And when we die we cease to exist. For such people the only thing that matters is how they use their time now. It is spent with the focus on themselves, their aims, their efforts and their hopes for this life.

Sadly, they soon discover many of their hopes turn out to be wishful

thinking, many of their efforts prove fruitless and their aims mere aspirations. It is for these reasons that some become bitter and cynical, others grow angry, frustrated and jealous, and yet others slump into depression. Life, it seems, is both unfair and meaningless.

Two ways

We can approach life in one of two ways. We can focus on what we can do. It is our capacity to think, to experiment and to invent that comes first. Our preoccupation is with ourselves. The solutions to our problems lie with us.

Or we can start with God, to whom we owe our existence. And it is not just we who have been created by him. Everything about us in the natural world has been brought into existence by him. Moreover he preserves and sustains all things. That includes the planets and the stars, as well as life on earth.

It is no doubt clear to us that the first of these two approaches is the one that predominates in our culture. That is not to say you will not find

religious people. There are many of them. But so many who regularly gather in churches and similar meeting places allow a man-centred way of approaching life to dominate. To illustrate the point one just needs to see how many have proved unable to expose the falseness of the arguments put forward for so-called same-sex marriage that are based upon notions of equality or love.

What is more, you can also think about how slow many in the churches have been to recognise that, if you legitimise same-sex relationships on the basis of those arguments, what is there to stop the same being done for those who want to marry more than one person or even children?

Some people have called this way of thinking humanistic, others call it scientific and yet others secular. The title is not the most important thing. The mistake it makes is to omit a reference to God.

Tragedy

The tragedy of mankind is that he believes he does not need God and that he explain all things without

him. Yet the reality is our happiness and well-being in this life is ultimately directly related to the fact that our abilities, our achievements, our attainments, our learning and our understanding are useless when it comes to being in a right relationship with God.

Dependence

We are not saying that we should belittle or despise these things. On the contrary we should recognise them as God-given. What we are saying is that even though they are given by God our standing with God is not dependent upon them. It is dependent upon God alone.

It is dependent upon his love for us. It is dependent upon his Son, Jesus Christ, who became a man to rescue us from the eternal misery we deserve. And it is dependent upon the power of his Spirit. Without the Spirit of the living God working within us we would never understand who God is. Nor would we perceive what he has provided for us. We would not even see what he has in store for us. Spiritual truth is spiritually discerned (*1 Corinthians 2.14*).

Purpose

We often ask: Why? When we or a loved one is taken ill we wonder why. When relationships break down or things go wrong we ask the same question. We do the same when we are bullied, despised or treated unfairly. Frustratingly we invariably find ourselves unable to answer the question.

The apostle Paul did not have that problem. He knew how weak and frail we are. He faced trials and troubles. And he knew that, try as we may, we cannot stop the aging process or the fact that our bodies are subject to decay. Yet he also knew that there is a purpose to them.

We find it neatly summarised in a letter to the Christians in Corinth. There he reminds them (and us) of what God is doing. He is preparing his people for glory (*2 Corinthians 4.17*). Let us savour what he says. Having spoken of affliction, perplexity and persecution (*2 Corinthians 4.8*), he then writes:

So we do not lose heart.
Though our outer self is wasting

away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. For this momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison (*2 Corinthians 4.16f*)

Glory

What is this 'eternal weight of glory' of which the apostle speaks? Some see it as a 'pie in the sky' type of hope. They claim it is an illusion upon which Paul and Christians vainly build their hopes. In other words they think it is something imagined. A mere prop mankind has devised to give him some hope in an otherwise hopeless situation.

Such notions are wrong. They are very wrong. Why? Because they fail to do justice to who God is, what God has done, and what God promises.

Who is God? He is the glorious eternal Creator and sustainer of all who dwell in glory.

What has he done? He has revealed to mankind something of his glorious being. Moses and Isaiah, to name but two individuals of ancient times, saw something of it during their lives.

But he has especially revealed his glory to mankind in Jesus Christ. God gave him to this world to the end that all who have faith in him might know that Christ is the way to God, and that in Christ alone life in full abundance is to be enjoyed.

What does God promise? It is that all his people shall share and dwell in his glory on the last day. There are two parts to the hope of glory. First, when a believer dies his soul departs from his body to live with Christ in glory. But that is not the final state. Thus secondly, when Christ comes again to judge the living and the dead, our bodies will be raised from the dust of the ground. Our souls and bodies shall be re-united. And we shall be led in triumph into the new heavens and new earth and dwell forever in glory with our altogether glorious God.

The natural man does not perceive these things. Intellectually he may know of them but unless he is renewed by the Spirit of God he shall not know them in his experience. Paul was transformed by God. So is every true believer. That is why they

can identify with what Paul says about glory and being prepared for it. They know that words just cannot express how wonderful the glory is that they shall enjoy with God for ever. Nothing compares with it. It is so weighty - a term that indicates it is not just real but also lasting and exceeds all expectation - that all things pale into insignificance in the light of it.

Those who have begun to taste something of this glory now are those whose lives are transformed by it. How does it change them? As Paul implies, it enables them to see things from the perspective of eternity. Our present troubles will not last. They serve to prepare us for what is yet to be experienced. Secondly, it stirs them up to care for others and to share with others the glory and greatness of God. And thirdly, it teaches them to focus on the things that matter most. They learn to prize more the things that are eternal rather than to crave for the things that are here today and gone tomorrow.