

THE BAPTIST HOUR

August 5, 1962

The Eternal Reality

By Herschel H. Hobbs

Pastor, First Baptist Church
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma

Produced by

The Radio and Television
Commission of the
Southern Baptist Convention

Box 12157

Fort Worth 16, Texas

THE ETERNAL REALITY

TEXT—“*. . . the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*”—II Corinthians 4:18

During recent weeks the stock markets of the world have been in a state of jitters. This has puzzled the greatest minds in the field of economics. To them it is unthinkable that in times of unprecedented prosperity investors should be wringing their hands over the economic prospect of the future. The only reason given for this condition is that of the attitude expressed by government toward business in its action with respect to the proposed increase of steel prices.

Here we have a contrast between the seen and the unseen. An intangible attitude set over against the tangible things of vast economic empires. Let your imagination roam about the world of economics. See the steel mills, factories, farms, and mercantile houses with their stockpiles of goods.

As you look at them you may say, “Here is reality. Here are things that I can see and touch.” But are they real? In fact, they are subject to something which you cannot see or touch—an attitude.

Does this not pose a lesson for us? Our society is largely built upon things. It may be said of the United States that never have so few people had so much. Yet it may just as truly be said that never have so few people with so much had so little. In things that are temporary we have so much. But in the things which abide we have so little.

The apostle Paul had so little of earthly goods. Yet he had so much which the world can neither give nor take away. In a time of material prosperity and spiritual poverty we would do well to learn the meaning of his words, “*. . . we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*” (II Cor. 4:18)

In a time of uncertainty men long for reality. More than anything else you want something to which you can anchor your life. It is timely, therefore, that we consider "The Eternal Reality." And as we do so let us note, first, the unreal; second, the real; third, the reality.

Paul says that "the things which are seen are temporal . . ." This is his way of saying that what appears to be real is unreal.

Modern man is wedded to things. The gadgets which were intended to serve us have made slaves of us instead. If you do not believe it just note the crisis produced in your household if the television set goes on the blink, or some other gadget fails to function.

Someone has figured that in 1840, six thousand articles were manufactured in the United States. In 1940 the number reached three hundred sixty-five thousand. In 1840, the average American had seventy-two wants and sixteen needs. In 1940 the figures were four hundred eighty-four wants and ninety-four needs.

Thus we reckon the abundant life by the things which a man possesses. Talk to the average person about spiritual matters, and he regards you as being visionary or other-worldly. His heart is set on the things which he claims as his own. Says he, "Now here is something real, something I can see and handle. Stocks and bonds, cattle, land, timber, merchandise. Now there are things that really matter."

But are they real? Fluctuation in the stock market, a blizzard, a drouth, a forest fire, an economic depression—and where are these things? No, the things that are seen are temporary.

In fact they are not even what they seem to be. Take, for example, a table. It seems real and solid enough. But is it? The science of physics tells us that what appears to be a solid is really a liquid. It is billions of atoms swirling about in space. The concept of a table is not in the matter but in your mind. Strange words, but true. They but serve to tell us how

delusive things can be.

And because you build your life upon such a delusion you are caught up in the storm of this age with no anchor to hold you fast and secure. For many the words of Jesus about the rich man are so true. "*This night these things are requiring thy soul of thee.*" (Luke 12:20, author's translation)

Now, note the real. Paul continues ". . . *but the things which are not seen are eternal.*" Literally, they are "age abiding." The immediate occasion of these words is the apostle's discussion of his suffering endured as he preached the Gospel. "*We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed.*" (4:8-9) How vivid these words are as we read them from the original text!

"In all things being pressed in [as grapes in a wine press], but not being in a narrow or tight place [so as to find no escape]; being in doubt or perplexity, but not exasperated; persecuted [or pursued], but not forsaken [or left in the lurch]; knocked down, but not destroyed [by Satan]."

Had Paul measured his life by material things he would have been in dire straits indeed. But he looked beyond the unreal to the real. He saw the real things of life as spiritual, not material. And doing so, he reckoned his experience not in terms of what men did to him but of what God could do for him.

In this light examine your own experience. Reckoned in terms of the physical alone, life for you may be rough indeed. But when you see God within the shadows keeping watch above His own, life takes on a brighter hue. Are you hemmed in by trouble on every side? God can show you the way out. Is your mind plagued by doubt or perplexity? God can resolve them for you. Are you pursued by difficulties of body and soul? God will not leave you in the lurch. Have you been knocked to your knees by

sickness or distress? God can save you from destruction. Someone has said that when life knocks you to your knees you are in a perfect position to pray.

In effect Paul is saying that the burdens of life, the things that you can discern with your physical senses, are but temporary. The resources of God are eternal. A man was asked as to his favorite verse of scripture. He replied, "My favorite words are those where it says, 'It came to pass.'" When asked why these particular words, he replied, "Well, when any kind of trouble comes to me, I just say, 'It came to pass.' Then my heart is at rest in the Lord."

Now you may not believe in his method of scriptural interpretation. But you could profit by his philosophy of life. Hilys Jasper once said, "It is not what happens to you, but the way you take it that counts."

In your distress you would do well to read a page in the Old Testament (II Kings 6:1-23). The king of Syria besieged Samaria. When the servant of the prophet Elisha saw the mighty army about the city, he cried, "*Alas, my master! How shall we do?*" Elisha replied, "*Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them.*" Then the prophet prayed that God would open the young man's eyes. When the servant looked through the eyes of faith "*behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.*" Looking down, the young man saw his adversaries. Looking up he saw the Lord of hosts mighty to deliver.

In our present world we are like this young man. We see only our problems, troubles, and foes. But if we open our eyes of faith we shall see that the Lord encamps about those who trust in Him to deliver them either by removing the problem or by giving them grace within it. Three times Paul prayed for God to remove his thorn in the flesh. God did not choose to do so. Rather, He said, "*My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in [thy] weakness.*" (II Cor. 12:9)

It is better to be with God in the midst of trouble than to be alone in the midst of pleasure. For pleasure is temporal. It may soon give way to pain. But God is eternal. And in Him "*our light affliction, which is but for the moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.*" (II Cor. 4:17)

Paul looks beyond the moment to the "eternal weight of glory." His eyes are not on the things which are seen, but on those which the natural vision cannot perceive. Looking beyond the temporal he sees the eternal.

He recognizes that God is sustaining him in his trials (4:16). But suppose that by God's all-wise grace he should perish through them. What then? Here is his answer.

"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (5:1)

Look at three words in this verse. "Know" means soul knowledge. "Tabernacle" means a tent which may be taken down and removed in a moment. "Building" means a permanent abiding place.

Now, what is Paul saying? Though those things which are evident to his natural senses be removed, in his soul he knows that ultimate reality which cannot be removed. Even his physical body is but a tent in which he lives temporarily. Suppose that this tent is torn down. "Never mind," says Paul, "I shall but go to live in the permanent house which God has already provided for me." It is not made out of material things nor by men's hands. It has been built by God as an eternal abode for the soul, that part of you which is real and eternal.

This is the same thought expressed by the author of Hebrews (11:9-10). Abraham, in this world, lived in tents, but he looked for a permanent city which has foundations which cannot be removed. Jesus said this when He said, "*In my Father's house are many mansions [abiding places] I go*

to prepare a place for you"
(John 14:2)

What a comfort to the Christian! Yes, and what a comfort to bereaved loved ones. When you take a last look at a loved one's earthly tent, just know that the real person whom you loved is not there. He is already living in his house of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Oh! What a blessed thought in a world gone mad. Weeping is but for the night. Joy comes in the morning. Let trouble, let sorrow come. They are but for the moment. And in them you are not alone. God's grace is sufficient. His strength is made complete in your weakness. Let the silent grim reaper do his worst. He but strikes the tent of our temporary abode pitched in the parched, stormy desert, that we might move into our mansion above, built in the beautiful valley of God's abiding presence, where there is neither sorrow nor crying, pain nor death.

Sometime ago I visited the cradle of our nation in Philadelphia. A plaque on one of the walls carried this word from Carl Schurz: "*Ideals are like stars, you will not succeed in touching them with your hands, but, like the seafaring man on a desert of water, you choose them as your guides, and following them, you reach your destiny.*"

And what are the ideals of the Christian? "*And now abideth faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love.*" (I Cor. 13:13) Faith in God through Christ. Hope for the here and the hereafter. Love, Christian love. God's love for us. Our love for Him. And in Him our love for others.

These are real. They are abiding. They are the stars in the firmament of God's grace. And following them, you will reach your destiny.

This sermon leaflet is free. However, if you wish to share in the cost of printing and distribution our address is: THE BAPTIST HOUR, P. O. Box 12157, Fort Worth 16, Texas.

**Radio and Television Commission of
The Southern Baptist Convention**

**P. O. Box 12157
Fort Worth 16, Texas
REV. PAUL M. STEVENS, Director**