

Eyes of Faith

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- [0 : 0 0] You're listening to the sermon podcast of Grace Reformed Church in Spring Hill, Tennessee. To learn more about us, visit our website at gracereformed.org.
- And now, today's sermon. Being that we are entering into what feels like the season of sickness, it seems that it's been hitting us and our culture lately.
- I can remember when air purifiers, to my knowledge, first became a thing. This was back when I was in elementary school.
- The one that my parents had purchased was, from what I remember my dad explaining to people, was about \$700, like \$500 to \$700 for this little machine.
- It looks like a wooden box. And on the front of it was this metal grate. It literally looked like someone took the HVAC vent out of the floor and just put it on a wooden box and said, it purifies the air.
- [1 : 0 3] I remember listening to my dad explain the benefits of the machine to those who would visit our home. It would remove, the promises of it would remove the dust and impurities of the air.
- And, of course, the results should be, you know, less allergies and sickness. So, you plug it in and I guess you just have to wait and see.
- Does it work? But there was a question that people would always ask, though. How do you actually know that it works?
- Like, how do you know that it's working right now? That it's not broken. I guess you just wait until you're sick. Then you determine if it's not working. And I remember my dad pointing out to people the unique smell that would come from the air being purified.
- And to me, it smelled like bleached potpourri. That's what it smelled like. And so you would say, can you smell it? It smells like fresh air. And I'm like, dude, it just sounds like someone put a fan behind an air freshener, a car air freshener, and turned it on.
- [2 : 1 0] I don't know how much we're purifying the air as we are covering the stench. I can still smell.
- My home smelled like this. This is why this is so prevalent for me. My home smelled like this for years. And then our church caught on fire. So we had them all over the church building to try and kill off the smoke. So that smell is burned into my brain.
- And the other day, my son brought home some air fresheners that he didn't like for his car. And so he gave them to me. And I popped it open. And I was like, oh, it's that smell of bleached potpourri. I think that whether or not that air freshener did anything, I don't know.
- I know there's more modern ones. We have them in our home. I think they're beneficial. I'm not downplaying that at all. But when they first came out, I don't know if it was a placebo thing or not. I can't remember if I got sick or if it helped allergies or not.
- You know, I grew up in the desert. So it's like, who knows what was going on back then. But this is often when we think about investing into something that improves our life.

[3 : 20] The moment we invest into it, we want to see if the results are there. Like, I don't know if I want to continue to invest. I mean, purchasing the filters for this thing was outrageous.

Did anybody ever have one of these? I forgot what they were called. But they were like a wooden box. This is what, right, it looked like a speaker. Like an old 1980s speaker is what it looked like. But we all have this human notion within us to want to, if we invest in something for our better, our betterment for our health, we want to see the results of this.

And this is also true of Christianity. We carry this over into our faith without realizing it. Modern Christianity is about the positive results that come from really the spirit-driven efforts.

Everyone in this room would reject the notion that they believe in what's called the prosperity gospel. Because it really has been adequately dismantled by many.

We think that we've, like, we wouldn't fall prey to that in our church. There's no way we would be a prosperity gospel church. But the lies of the prosperity gospel run deeper into the American and Christian culture than we might be able to see at first glance.

[4 : 35] I mean, there's the obvious characters that I don't even need to name. But without realizing it, we can be a results-driven type of Christian.

We move from one fad to another attempting to find whatever the desired results might be. We don't like our current circumstances and situation. We want them to be different. What can we do about it?

And I have seen Christians excited about the bleached potpourri types of results we might get that really hide reality.

There's an immediate positive results that we see. Therefore, we must have the blessings of God. Because, well, look it. You can see the good results that we're receiving.

God's favor is upon us. Look how large our church is or our building or our budgets or social media impact. And the list could go on.

[5 : 37] Now, from the outside, it does look good. You can see the methods, the wooden box. And you can measure the effects, the smell of the room.

But when you dive deeper into the results, are they truly fruits of the Spirit? Do we see people who express love and joy and patience and peace and long-suffering?

Are these people willing to lay their life down for Christ? Is that the fruits that we're seeing? Or are these the results of the preaching of the gospel, the power of God upon our lives, the seeing of Christ in all of Scripture?

Or are we seeing the works from morality based on reward or fear? If we were all to get in our cars and go down the street that way, my sense of direction is horrible.

All I know is I think I'm going this way when I die. This way where the Mormon church is. And we were to go in there, you'd meet a lot of people who are happy, peaceful, joyful.

[6 : 50] Anybody know any Mormons? You can raise your hand. It's okay. We're not. We're Baptist somewhat. Yeah. Most people don't have negative things to say about them.

They're good. What do we call them? They're good people. But what drives their morality is not the gospel. What drives their morality is not the love of Christ, but it is fear and reward.

So just because we might see a certain kind of result doesn't mean that the substance is truly of Christ. How and why we do something really does matter.

Many of you are here today and you've been burned out by this type of Christianity, this prosperity gospel driven ministry in the past. This isn't theory for you. You have the scars and struggles to prove it.

And how do you move forward from such long bouts of fear? Like I don't know if I have the energy to reinvest in something again because I've been so easily lured away by the advertisements of the past.

[8 : 06] Well, this is why we at our church really do want to focus in on preaching all of scripture.

Because it's all of scripture that opens our minds and it begins to give us the true source of cleansing and hope and transformation in our world, which is only the power of the gospel.

When people first look at the gospel, those who do not have eyes to see, many, as the Bible warns us, will mock the gospel.

They will say that it's foolish and will even use it to make fun of your intelligence. How foolish must you be to believe in such a ridiculous story?

To the world, we come across as weak. Some of you may have even heard, I don't need the crutch of Jesus or religion making excuses for your pathetic life of powerless influence.

[9 : 08] Of course, you're going to need Jesus to help you. When the gospel is distributed out into our world filled with sinful contamination, the immediate results is not going to be the fresh sense of change and transformation.

We want that to be the result so we can fabricate it at times. We want to think that the moment we turn on the gospel, that we're going to see immediate results of change.

But this is just not the case. Turn with me to James chapter 1. I think it's very healthy that we understand that it's not the prosperity gospel message that we read or preach, but it's the reality of the gospel in the midst of an evil and cursed world.

The moment that we implement God's truth in our heart and we say we believe, we trust Jesus, we want him to be our Lord and Savior.

We want to be only carried and comforted by him. James tells you when you flip that switch and you turn that on, here's your expectation of the results you should see.

[10 : 38] He says this, James 2, James chapter 1 verse 2, Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds. For you know that the testing of your faith, this is the results of what we've turned on, produces steadfastness and let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

Somewhere along the way, it has crept into our hearts and our minds, that to be in Christ means that we are to be increasing in happiness and decreasing in struggle.

That should be the experience. We should struggle less with sin and see more progress in the effects of our life. Of course, we're never going to be perfect.

No one's going to fall prey to that heresy. But there should be this sure increase in the level of holiness that it also affects the experience of our life.

Also, why would God punish those who are faithfully doing his work for the kingdom? Why would he let mishap happen to them? Why would he let them struggle?

[11 : 54] Doesn't he want to help his faithful soldiers who are actively doing good work and punish those who are evil and disobedient? If we struggle, if we battle sickness, or live in an evil society, the thought process is, it's the lack of obedience and the discipline of Christians.

But these are the lies of the prosperity gospel that only come from the pit of Satan's evil mind. He has corrupted this world and then blamed the disaster in our mind on God's incompetence to prevent it or to do good or to reverse it.

I want you to see how James walks us through this matrix of the spiritual mind where what you see is not reality. We see the world not through the eyes of the world, but we see the world through the eyes of faith.

How do we know our faith is working? When the Holy Spirit comes and he turns on our faith, how do we know it's working, it's alive? How do we know it's real? How do we know that we have a future hope that's beyond the current circumstances?

He says, when you taste and smell trials, then you know. The trials become the evidence that you are seeing the world through the eyes of faith.

[13 : 35] The blind cannot see with eyes of faith. Therefore, trials are something to avoid, which is impossible. Or they turn to figure out how the results to remove them, or they must be the punishment of God or another God or the results of karma.

But James is saying, when we see trials, we know that faith is working. That's absurd if you think about it.

Unless, unless you're looking at the world through the eyes of faith. But when we see trials, we know at that moment, the light of the gospel has been turned on for us, and we see through this darkness, and we see the light, and we understand that because we are showing light, and because we believe in light, and because we embrace it and live by it, we're going to face opposition.

Not only from those who hate the light, but also because we live in a world that has fallen and cursed, and affects our bodies. This is why he says in verse 3, for you know that the testing of your faith, now we've misunderstood what James says here, let me help you understand.

He is not testing the genuine of your faith. You say that you believe, we'll see. We'll see. Let's put you through some trials.

[15 : 04] You guys, Christianity is not like the military, where they go in, and they see your fitness to see if you're going to make it to the team or not. No, no, no. This is the exact opposite.

He takes us who are weak and frail, and it's impossible to save ourselves. He implants faith in us. To help us see the strength of God, and to give us a steady foundation, the trials come, and he goes, in those trials, I continue to sustain you.

Therefore, the test is for you to see my strength, not yours. Because steadfastness does not come from us. That would mean, Paul would say, when you face Satan, stand in the strength of yourself.

No, what does he say? Stand in the strength of the Lord. So as we stand in the strength of the Lord, and we face the trial, James says it creates a foundation of steadiness in your heart, in your mind.

And then what does it lead to? At the end of it, God's faithfulness, through these trials, and the evidence of our steadfastness, is the proof that we will make it to the end, which is what?

[16 : 12] Our perfection. Look at verse four. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing. When will be the finally place where we have perfection and completion?

Well, it's at the return of Jesus Christ. And what's the guarantee that we're gonna get there? It's our faith in the power of Jesus, and how do we know that we have that faith? Because we remain steadfast in the midst of trial, and that steadfastness is not our own.

This is important to understand. The trials are what make our faith strong. We see them differently, and they build us up while the world sees them as weakness, because, oh, well, if you were really strong, first of all, you wouldn't go through that.

Secondly, it wouldn't have happened to you. Or number three, if you were wise and smart enough, you would never let it happen. You see, we see the world for what it is now. Under the power of the evil satanic regime.

Also under the power of a curse, death, and destruction. And violence plagues the world. And we have the only source, not just a weak source, the most powerful source that has ever known to man, which is the gospel.

[17 : 31] So we don't find our hope in strength, or in institutions, or anything else in this world. Trials remind us that we don't have to find hope here.

We don't have to find the future of our eternity here. Our hope and faith are beyond the fallenness of this world.

So turn back to me, turn back with me to 2 Corinthians chapter 5, so we can make this connection to what Paul is saying. Recently I have realized how blind I have been at times to the evil that is present in our country and even in our politics.

I can say that many of my days were spent in much more peace and comfort not knowing what really is happening within the borders of our nation, and I would even say simply around the world as well.

I went from being aware and alert to very disturbed.

[18 : 50] You know, I had a whole lot less sorrow, and I found it easier to be distracted by this world and by entertainment and by what potentially could please me because I didn't understand the urgency of what is actually happening.

Ignorance isn't bliss once you realize people are being enslaved and hurt and even killed by the enemy of our world. Now that I see and I never want to be blind or ignorant again, sight brings clarity and focus and purpose.

I can see what has to be done now. I don't feel like a fool who is driving his car toward a cliff not knowing what's there.

I want to be the one standing in front of the cliff waving my hands at my own expense saying, you do not want to go this way. This is what he means to walk by faith and not by sight.

Satan wants to blind us to our world. The eyes of the flesh. How many times do you guys remember in 1 Peter where he kept warning us not to go back to the flesh, not to go back to the flesh?

[20 : 18] But it's so powerful to be distracted by pleasure and gratification and security. Paul opens our eyes by means of the gospel to see that the matrix, this fake world that we live in is what we're trusting, which is the eyes of the flesh.

And he opens our eyes to the kingdom and says, now that's reality. Real joy and satisfaction will never be found here in this world.

It's so hard to hear that. We want it to be real because we want to believe in the illusion. But he breaks the illusion apart here in 2 Corinthians chapter 5.

Look with me at verse 1. For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, it's just interesting how he compares your current body to a tent.

I hate camping. This illustration works great for me. For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building, you could even say a mansion, a kingdom from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

[21 : 42] For as much as we love to protect and improve these homes, we call tents or bodies, they are rentals. They are rentals located in the worst part of town, in the slums.

So when you put on the eyes to see, you realize, wow, this is not good. And this is not where we want to be. Verse 2. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed putting it on, we may not be found naked.

So the eyes of faith can see our reality for what it is, a temporary disposable housing disguised to do something, to finish the work that the king has started.

It's mobile. It's transportable. But don't miss the point where he says, you groan.

There is no positive spin for here. He says, what you have, it's normal to groan. Ugh.

[22 : 54] Verse 5, verse 4. For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened. Not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.

He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. Church, James tells us to rejoice because we have trial underway.

And Paul tells us we groan. Trials, I don't know of anybody who doesn't first groan in a trial. If you don't, you're more spiritual than me, and God be praised.

But I don't like trials. I know of a brother and sister who had a trial last night dealing with water. And I read the text, and it was a groaning text, and it was worthy of groaning.

No one likes water damage. We groan. Man, this isn't right. This is frustrating. But the groaning leads to something.

[24 : 06] See, James begins by pointing to joy, and Paul ends with joy. And then James then points to the trial, and Paul then points to our guarantee.

Read verse 6 again with me. 2 Corinthians 5, verse 6. So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord. For we walk by faith, not by sight.

Read this again. Underline it. Highlight it. Copy it and put it in your notes. Do something to remind yourself of this verse. I say this because I spent 45 minutes this week trying to find a verse I couldn't remember, and I was like, I should have marked it down in my Bible.

I was so upset. And then I found it. And yes, I marked it down. So we are always of good courage. While we carry a tent we're groaning in, when you use eyes of faith, you are encouraged.

Did you see this? For we are always of good courage. We know that while we're away in the body, sorry, while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord.

[25 : 25] This is encouraging to remember, this is not God's intentions as the end result. Man, this is good to hear. It's good to be remembered.

Hey, this isn't it. And there are moments where we get to taste heaven. That's this morning. Well, there are moments we get to taste the goodness, where he comes to us and he says, hey, let me refresh you of my love.

Let me refresh you of what it looks like to gather. Father, you know what's great about this building right now? And all of you that are in here, I feel safe and comforted and encouraged and strengthened because you love the same God I love.

And because you love him, you love me in a way that the world doesn't know how to love me. I don't have to feel judged, but yet you pick me up. I don't want to come and judge you.

I want to come and pick you up. God, this is what we're tasting and seeing, these moments, C.S. Lewis used to talk about it, where these are the drippings of heaven. He uses it to keep our hearts and our minds focused.

[26 : 31] So faith is to look at a source and reality outside of its actual content. That's the hard part. To see it for what it is.

Now, when a child sees an egg crack on the ground, they have no problems going and putting their hands on it and then putting it in their mouth. And we're all going, because they can't see what we know.

Germes and salmonella and all kinds of, no, we don't want that in our bodies. This is exactly what the gospel does to us. It opens our eyes to see what is truly good and holy and right.

And to see the world for what it really is. Therefore, trials strengthen this. So when we face them, church, we don't walk by looking at the results of what the world looks like.

We don't see success and blessings from God based upon the advancement of our world and life here. But we see the blessings of God in his sustaining us in the midst of our weakness and continuing to give us grace and mercy in the midst of our sin and to fulfill the work that he began in spite of our failure.

[27 : 46] You see, that's eyes to see with faith. As a church, these are the realities we have to be teaching our children and teaching each other to walk by faith.

I know that your flesh wants this, dear child, but let me show you the lie behind it. I know that you think this is going to be the pleasure and gratification and satisfaction and security that you need, but let me show you the lie behind it.

No matter what happens in this year's election process, no matter how much groaning we may endure, we don't walk discouraged, according to Paul, but we walk in good courage in the midst of a groaning body.

This is what allows us to keep faithful to the work set before us, to draw others into our faith because of our good courage.

He isn't finished with his work, because if he was, judgment day would be here, and all those who rebelled and all those who mock him and all of the enemy in the spiritual evil realm will be brought under judgment.

[29 : 08] But he's not there yet. The verse I was trying to find was Hebrews chapter two and verse eight. There's these words that are often used that can confuse our minds, where Jesus is the victor, and he's put the enemy into open shame, and now he sits as the conquering king up in heaven, and we're like, yeah, we follow the most powerful God.

And then you're like, but what's happening down here? Like something, there's a disconnect. If you're the most powerful king, and you conquer death, and you can give life, what's going on?

Hebrews helps us with this. Hebrews chapter two and verse eight is describing the conquering king as it flows out in a timeline.

In reality. Hebrews two, eight says, putting everything in subjection under his feet, quoting the prophecy of the Old Testament, that all humans, and all created beings, and all spiritual beings are under him.

But then the writer of Hebrews says, just a minute, hold on. Now, in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside of his control.

[30 : 26] At present, we do not see everything in subjection to him. Now, that makes a lot more sense to me. Because I'm like, hey man, you said everything's under him.

And yet, not everything at its current is in subjection. Why? Because we have a rebellion that's fighting to destroy the world that we live in. This is healthy.

When God's final day of judgment comes, he will judge the living and the dead. He will judge all of those who are in creation, in heaven and earth. And in that day, all will be made subject to him.

Well, this is a good thing that he hasn't done this yet. You know why? Because there are many who have not been saved. There are many who have not been set free. There are many who have not have eyes to see.

And so we groan in our tents, and we look not to our successes of how we are progressing in this world. We see the digress.

[31 : 26] We can see the constant state of decay. I think this is what's interesting about gray hair. It's the constant reminder that you are not getting younger.

The longer my hair gets, the more gray I see. I'm determining, I think I might cut it again. We look at it, and we go, this isn't right.

We can see the glimpses of the drippings of heaven. We can see the glimpses of the new heavens and the new earth. We can taste and know that it's almost there. So, to wrap this all up, church, many, if not all of us, are in some kind of trial, some kind of struggle.

There is something that is not right. May we use this to be of good courage, that God is faithful. There's nothing wrong with us.

There's nothing wrong with God. God, this is the result of sin. This is the result of evil. He has and will make all things right.

[32 : 34] For those of us that can see, we actually go through trials, and we can have a hope beyond the trial. But we see a lot of people panicking right now, don't we?

We see a lot of people trying to fix what's just unfixable. Unfixable. We are trying to avoid death. And we look at death as a mere shedding of the tent and embracing of the glory.

Now, that kind of encouragement, how is it we share? This is what we talked about at the men's retreat this week. So, I'm not going to re-preach that sermon. But we are described as salt and light.

That we do these good works, not because we're trying to gain God's favor, but we're doing the good works. Literally, Jesus says that you do these good works that the world may see your good works and glorify the Father in the results of seeing them.

Our good courage in the midst of our groaning. You know, we can be very sympathetic to the world. We can say, we understand. We don't have to be fake. You ever been around somebody and they're never sad?

[33 : 37] I don't like those people. I'm like, how are you never sad? There's plenty of things to be sad about. Let me punch you. You'll be sad. I'm serious, right?

And I'm a pretty happy guy. I'm not sad very often. If you see me sad, that means I'm pretty tired. Typically, when I get tired, I get sad. I'm a pretty happy guy.

But there are moments where Paul says, look, you need to weep with those who are weeping. We have reasons to be sympathetic with the world because we are of them, of the flesh and blood. We are of them.

We are under the same curse they are. So we have sympathy towards them, right? What does Paul say? Such were some of you. So we have a sympathy towards them. But we have a hope that they don't. So we don't need to pursue what they're pursuing.

We can actually say, no, we're going to be mocked for it. We're going to be persecuted for righteousness sake. But what I was hoping for us this morning is that in the midst of whatever struggle you're in, you flip it and go, God's exposing the reality of my faith because I can see I live in a world that's in a toilet spin down.

[34 : 44] And on the way down, we are rejecting to believe that this is the end. And what do we do instead? We point to the king of kings.

We point to the gospel. We don't point to our righteousness. This is why I'm not impressed when people get up here and talk to me about how they've overcome certain things or how they've developed and this and that.

I'm like, listen, I can't tell you how many times Paul tells us, if you're going to boast, boast in Christ. I don't care what you've done because you're one step away from destroying your life again.

I care about who is faithful to the end and that's Jesus in the midst of whatever trial we are in. By the way, this is really hard to believe because I'm up here hoping you believe this so you can help me believe it.

I don't want to go through trials being happy. I just don't want the trial. But what I'm learning is as I look to Christ and his goodness, the trial doesn't get easier but I have a newfound purpose and I want to help others have the same encouragement and joy and hope beyond our current circumstances.

[35 : 59] And all God's people said, Amen. Let's pray. Father, we are thankful that in a world that is very complicated, and feels disastrously out of control, your hope is simple.

Your hope is powerful. And yet, we often reject it. Lord, we believe. Help our unbelief.

On behalf of my brothers and sisters, Lord, on behalf of myself, we ask for your mercy and grace this morning that when we continue to either go through the trial we are in or the one we will face, that moment where we let out the groaning, we then turn it to encouragement knowing that through this trial, you are strengthening our faith.

The evidence of the life that is in us is real. And in doing so, we will endure well so that we might be salt and light for those around us. Our life is not worthless.

Our life has significant eternal meaning. And may we embrace that this week in Christ's name. Amen. Thanks for listening to the sermon podcast of Grace Reformed Church in Spring Hill, Tennessee, where everyone is in equal need of grace.

[37 : 18] To plan a visit or to learn more about us, visit our website at gracereformed.org.