

READ TEXT

There are some things we CAN see, and some things we CANNOT.

Knowing about both – the seen and the unseen – can make a big difference in how we feel, and how we act.

Let me show you what I mean.

(display brown bag)

Here is something you can see – a brown paper bag.

To tell the truth, it’s an old, wrinkled, rather unattractive bag...

If I told you, “You can have this bag for \$1,” you might answer,

“No way! A bag isn’t worth a dollar, especially not that old wrinkled thing.”

But suppose that I told you there is something inside the bag you cannot see, would you at least be **CURIOUS**?

Suppose further that I say it is something very **VALUABLE** -- worth far more than a dollar – and that I plan to take it out and give it to you tonight,

maybe you would even get **EXCITED**.

You might run and tell someone else.

It could make you a different person all day long!

Do you see what I mean?

It makes a real difference to know about both – the **SEEN** and the **UNSEEN** things.

This Paper Bag – once crisp and new, now old and wrinkly - is a picture of the world.

At the Creation it was clean and new. Even now, after the Fall, there are still things incredibly beautiful – reminders of the world’s original glory:

Mt Hood and Multnomah Falls,
Canada geese honking in their V-formation,
a symphony orchestra playing Beethoven’s Fifth,
a school class at a pumpkin patch squealing with delight!

But the world's beauty is long since a SPOILED beauty...
like last week's flowers, now withered,
like an exquisite painting sloshed with mud.

When Paul wrote his letter to the Romans, he described what he saw as
“the whole creation...in bondage to decay”

as if the world were wrapped in an ugly brown bag of aging and death.

We know what he means. We see it with our eyes:
a strange sort of toxic foam killing sea birds on Oregon's beaches
acid rain killing fish in our lakes
cancerous brown smog over many American cities – a sight
reported years ago by the Apollo astronauts flying overhead

Sue and I went to Israel in 1986, and I still recall the shock I felt when
visiting Nazareth, Jesus' hometown – the once lovely countryside
just outside town was littered with garbage and junk cars.

The whole creation groans! Especially is that true of human beings...

You can hear it – literally – in many a nursing care facility...
a man who was once a sculpted athlete in his youth
a woman whose beauty and charm were envied by many

now are weak and nearly helpless, sitting in wheelchairs before a droning
TV set, needing someone to feed them, bathe them, and change their
soiled garments.

**Not only the creation, says Paul, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits
of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait...**

He means us Christians -- the people of God. We suffer too.

This isn't news to you who have had your share of personal heartache and tragedy:
the death of your child from cancer
the intense pain of a family breakup
the numbness and panic of a bankruptcy in your business.

SAINTS IN BROWN WRAPPERS! That's what we are.

We see in our own bodies the soiled, wrinkled wrapping of aging and weakness
and death.

It is no ACCIDENT that things are this way, says Paul:

For the creation itself was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but by the will of Him who subjected it...

That ugly wrapping that covers us, and our world,
is not FATE,
not some mindless biological CHANCE...

It is JUDGMENT – God’s Judgment.

The judgment first spoken to Eve when God said,
I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing.

It was extended to Adam as God told him,
Cursed is the ground because of you. in toil shall you eat of it all the days of your life. You are DUST, and to DUST you shall return.

Mankind sinned.

God wrapped the world in decay and death as His JUDGMENT.

But that is not Paul’s last word on the subject.

In spite of all the ugliness and suffering we see,
Paul tells us that there is reason to hope, reason to laugh,
reason to live with joy!

If that sounds slightly crazy, remember what I told you about the brown bag –
we need to remember not only what is SEEN
but also what is UNSEEN....

Paul knows about something UNSEEN which can make all the difference
for us...

the whole creation waits, he says, with eager longing for the revealing of the SONS OF GOD.

REVEALING means ‘UNWRAPPING’ –
taking off the old brown bag to have a look at what’s hidden inside.

So....what IS inside?

WE ARE!

On the day of the great “unwrapping,” we shall have something that is now hidden:
glorious liberty
adoption as sons
the redemption of our bodies.

In other words, we won't always be SAINTS IN BROWN WRAPPERS.

God has promised that one day He'll remove the old, decaying BAG OF DEATH
and unveil a NEW CREATURE that will live eternally with Him.

Paul's language here suggests another picture – the BIRTH of a baby.

What we are going through just now is “travail” –
the “labor pains” that come before delivery.

Life now is like being in the darkness of the womb.
But soon we shall be BORN INTO A COMPLETELY NEW LIFE!

A teenager named Debbie learned about the hope in this passage several weeks after her father died.

Here is what she wrote about her experience:

Read FOR MATURE ADULTS ONLY pages 33-34

Debbie discovered that Jesus is the great “Unwrapper”.

He came to do that in a most surprising way....by letting Himself be wrapped up!
Wrapped in flesh,
wrapped in swaddling clothes,
and at the end, wrapped in a burial cloth.

But on the third day, God the Father unwrapped Him
and brought him out for the disciples to see.

And now God makes this offer:

If you want it...if you will believe it...IT CAN HAPPEN TO YOU
and to ANYONE who is joined to Him by faith.

The believer can say, “When he appears, I shall be like Him” –
unwrapped from death,
raised in a glorious body,
set free!

Some people, of course, will not believe it, because they cannot SEE it.

I saw a book in a bookstore with this odd title:

I AIN'T MUCH, BABY, BUT I'M ALL I'VE GOT

I'm guessing that the person who wrote that book
can't see beyond his little brown bag.

He believes that's all there is, so he hangs on tight,
like a baby that wants to stay in the womb.

This hopeful passage in Romans 8
invites you to go further,
to trust in Jesus Christ to unwrap THINGS YET UNSEEN for you!

You say you trust in Him?

Then JOY is yours, and you have only ONE GREAT TASK remaining between now
and that day of the unwrapping... your task is to WAIT!

“We WAIT WITH PATIENCE” says Paul.

No simple task, this patient waiting, especially if we are wrapped up inside
an unhappy home
or a body wracked with illness.

It's not easy to stay patient, waiting for the Social Security check to arrive,
waiting for the kids to come visit
waiting for spring after a hard winter.

What makes it possible for us to wait patiently, hopefully?

An expectant mother carries her increasing weight and discomfort for
nine months.

What makes it possible, even joyful for her,
is that she is SURE of what's on the way, though she cannot see it yet.

One mother told me how helpful it was when, finally, she got an ultrasound
that gave her a glimpse of her baby...

We are joyfully expectant because God gives us an “ultrasound glimpse” here in
Romans 8. Now we know! Now we're sure!

Because we are sure, we do not sit around IDLE all day.

Our waiting has become USEFUL WAITING:

We spend our days meeting the needs of people
feeding them
standing with them in lonely times.

If we get dirty,
if we get hurt in the process, it doesn't matter.

We have nothing to lose but our WRAPPERS!

And speaking of that WRAPPER, that body of yours, we may also say that
Christian waiting is PRAYERFUL WAITING...

God's love starts now,
and there is nothing wrong with asking Him to attend to your wrapper!

Tell Him your hungers,
your physical ills
your emotional needs.

And if He does not always fix us up as we had hoped,
we need not go to pieces.
The wrappers will come off soon enough.

A woman named Doris Lund wrote a book about her son Eric,
who suffered and eventually died from leukemia.

During one of her frequent visits to his hospital room,
she and he could both hear, from the adjoining room,
the steady groaning of a woman stricken with the same disease.

There was nothing she could do to prevent the noise,
and she asked her son if the sound bothered him.

"It'll bother me more if she stops," he said. Then he shouted
toward the wall, "HANG IN THERE, LADY!"

All of us have some suffering to do together here on earth.
Meanwhile, God's Spirit shouts to us,
"HANG IN THERE!"

“I’m with you. I’ll sustain you.

Soon, very soon, the groaning will stop and the new life will begin.”

What the Spirit says, I say:

Hang in there, all you saints in brown wrappers!

Because of Jesus, we have hope in something yet unseen.

It is coming.

And we shall not be disappointed.