

Where to Look

by RT Nusbaum

This little booklet was written in 1976 by R.T. Nusbaum as an article for Contrast magazine. Over the years it has proven time and again to minister with clarity and simplicity the profound reality of “where we should look.”

Where To Look Part 1 - Looking Back

There is much written concerning this subject. Here are a few Scriptural references to looking or turning back:

“And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.” (Hebrews 11:15)

“In that day, he that shall be upon the housetop, and his stuff in the house, let him not come down to take it away: and he that is in the field, let him likewise not return back. Remember Lot’s wife.” (Luke 17:31, 32)

“And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, no man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9: 61, 62)

“Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:13, 14)

All of the Scriptures speak of a possibility of turning back. While in the wilderness, Israel continually threatened to go back to Egypt. The possibility of turning back to our old life is ever before us though deliverance is a past, completed fact: *“And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins: wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience. Among whom also we all had our conversation (manner of life) in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others” (Ephesians 2:1-3).*

If we become mindful of the life we had before, we might possibly return to it. It all depends on what our mind is full of. If we continually feed on the Word of God and the fellowship of the saints, we will press toward the mark of ever learning Christ, our life. But if our mind begins to be taken up with the cares of this life, then we walk on thin ice. We are to *“be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2).*

But there are more ways of turning back than just turning to sin. You can look back to religious things also. You can turn back to old experiences, trying to recapture them. Just as we leave sin, so we blame these things. We must lay aside our old conceptions and experiences. We must find

that “*old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things are of God*” (11 Corinthians 5:17, 18).

Our old, experienced, religious self is just as harmful as a sinful self. Both have limited God from doing a “new thing” (Isaiah 43:19). It is like pulling teeth to get us to forget those things which are behind. We have charted, diagrammed, and categorized our Lord and left the providence of God and the freshness of walking in the light anew and afresh every day. I love the song, Give Me That Old Time Religion, but all it speaks of is going back.

I have heard people say, “Things sure are not like they used to be. God really did great things back then.” In reality, it is not the experiences they want to recapture but the Christ who was so real at the time. But the fresh Christ is not found in turning back but by pressing toward the mark.

You should not measure yourself and your spiritual state based on past experiences. Nor should you measure the church you are in now to one you may have previously been in to find out how far you are or how short you have fallen. Do not be as those who measure themselves by themselves or by others. Christ is the measure, not the Christ of our past but He who now is. We can find a jawbone of an ass and say, “Bless God, it worked for Samson, and it will work today.” It is not the instrument or the method we use that is important. If we pick up a jawbone against the enemy because we have seen it work before but the Spirit of the Lord does not come upon us, then it would be better if we threw it down and ran instead of standing our ground and being destroyed.

God told Moses to make a brass serpent and put it on a pole when in the wilderness. The people were being bitten by snakes so the Lord said that whoever would look on the brass serpent would recover. This foreshadowed the cross. It meant nothing in itself. God honored it because it represented what Christ would do at Calvary (John 3:14, 15). Speaking of King Hezekiah, many hundreds of years after Moses made the brass serpent, we read: “*He removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the groves, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made: for unto those days the children of Israel did burn incense to it: and he called it Nehushtan*” (11 Kings 18:4-6).

The brass serpent worked once; it was given of God; and the greatest man of Israel’s history made it with his own hands. Why not continue to use it? The people were looking back. Because of this, the things that had been life for those in Numbers 21 had become idolatry for the next generations. Hezekiah was not looking at what had been but what was not. He took his place among the greatest of kings because he found the very real and present God who used very different things to accomplish his purpose. Hezekiah was not trying to conform Israel to the Israel of Moses’ day no matter what great things God had done for them. He broke up the idol of looking back and called it Nehushtan. He called it what it was. Nehushtan means “a piece of brass.”

Just because God used something before does not mean that He will use it now. Do not lay the old things before Him expecting Him to bless them now. They may have been good then and may well be good now, but He may have an altogether new direction for now. The old things that we keep shoving before Him may be the very things that stand in the way of progress and new direction for today. We cannot see what is before us, for we are too busy looking back trying to bring the old things forward.

Jesus himself told us plainly, *“Neither do men put new wine into old bottles: else the bottles break, and the wine runneth out, and the bottles perish: but they put new wine into new bottles, and both are preserved”* (Matthew 9:17). The old wineskins of past knowledge, past experiences or past ministries cannot contain the freshness of the new wine. God is not pouring old wine right now. If we are not able to expand, then we are old wineskins. He will not fit into the wineskins of what once was. We must be prepared to be enlarged. If the old ministries we are trying to retain are not expanding, then we must discard them and pray that new vessels and vehicles of the new wine will be given. But to stubbornly hold with the old will result in the loss of the old wineskins and the new wine, and God will seek elsewhere.

There is a difference between living in the confidence of what God has shown us and done through us and living by the faith of the Son of God. We can be very confident in our own abilities and achievements, but it is like putting money in a bag that has a hole in it. It is the reason for our lack of fruitfulness.

It is not good to have a preconceived mold in the form of facilities, goals, etc. that we try to pour Christ into. He formed Bible schools from hungry hearts. He forms homes and halfway houses from growth and people who are already laying down their lives in that way. They must be a natural outgrowth of the growth of the Word in the heart of people who are constrained by life to do it, not constrained by past truth or constrained by leadership.

Growth comes while we look not at the things which are seen, but things which are not seen with the natural eye (II Corinthians 4:18). We must not look at what has been done before and try to simulate it. Our faith is not in what we have seen or in what has been, but in Jesus now. The road is not always marked beforehand. The barriers and narrowness are usually of our own making. We usually walk by sight and not by faith. He is able to reach far beyond our capacities into the magnitude of His own expanse and greatness, but only to the degree that we allow that to work in us. Do you believe that? Read that statement again. Now read Ephesians 3:20 – *“Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.”*

Where to Look Part 2 - Looking Up

The Scriptures speak much of not going or looking back. While searching the ministry of Christ in the Gospels, I notice the alternative. We must look forward or more specifically look up. All that is before us in the future should be a manifestation of that which is true in the Spirit.

Just looking forward with our natural understanding can be deceitful. Take for example Brother Lot in Genesis 13:10, 11 – *“And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan; that it was well watered everywhere, before the Lord destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah, even as the garden of the Lord, like the land of Egypt, as thou comest unto Zoar. Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and Lot journeyed east: and they separated themselves the one from the other.”*

Lot looked up but got no higher than the best of what could be seen in the natural. The part of the Land that he chose was the best to be seen but was in and among the worst inhabitants of the land.

In Genesis 18:2 it is said that Abraham lifted up his eyes but the thing he saw was the Lord represented by three men. He saw past the exterior into the Spirit. This trend of turning the eyes from the earthly to the heavenly was to continue for in his deepest crisis of having to offer up the son that he loved, he utilized this principle. He looked beyond the outward and lifted up his eyes and saw a ram caught in a thicket (Genesis 22:13). This was the answer to his dilemma.

This son who was saved from death by his father's obedience also utilized this principle. While meditating in a field wondering if a bride would even be brought for him, he simply lifted up his eyes (Genesis 24:63) and there she was. Rebekah, in order to find and know her husband, also lifted up her eyes (verse 64) and they beheld each other for the first time and would continue to behold each other until death parted them. Isaac's son Jacob in Genesis 31 was caught in a hard place and the answer came in not viewing the circumstances but in seeing from above.

David also found it so. When in trouble he would lift up his eyes unto the hills, from whence cometh his help. His help was not in seeing hills but as the next verse states: *"My help cometh from the Lord"* (Psalms 121:1, 2). He says in Psalms 123: *"Unto thee lift I up mine eyes, O thou that dwellest in the heavens. Behold, as the eyes of servants look unto the hand of their masters, and as the eyes of a maiden unto the hand of her mistress; so our eyes wait upon the Lord our God, until that he have mercy upon us."*

Jesus would meet the greatest crisis by simply looking past the natural into the heavenly realm. When in the realm of the natural there were five thousand to be fed. He did not seek a natural means to overcome the problem. He could have taken an offering as donations of food but instead He took what was before Him in the natural realm and looked toward the spiritual realm: *"And when he had taken the five loaves and the two fishes, he looked up to heaven, and blessed, and brake the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before them, and the two fishes divided he among them all. And they did all eat, and were filled"* (Mark 6:41, 42).

At Lazarus' death, everyone was resigned to the natural circumstances. Jesus looked beyond them. He stated spiritual facts to those gathered; and to bring them about, it is stated: *"Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead was laid. And Jesus lifted up his eyes, and said, Father, I thank thee that thou hast heard me. And I knew that thou hearest me always: but because of the people who stand by I said it (in the natural), that they may believe that thou hast sent me. And when he thus had spoken, he cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth"* (John 11:41-43).

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, the church continued to not look back or to examine the natural but to look in Christ. Of Stephen who was in a most dire circumstance it is said, *"When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God"* (Acts 7:54, 55).

There is the Jerusalem which now is that corresponds to the earthly realm and our natural viewpoint and there is Jerusalem which is above speaking of what is true in Christ (Galatians 4:25, 26). In the book of Revelation, we see the two contrasted. The earthly Jerusalem is full of confusion and the abomination of desolation, but the New Jerusalem is at peace with no chance of being desecrated. Our confusion comes (I speak from experience) when we have our hearts set on the earthly and tangible.

There are many who will fall because they cannot discern the heavenly from the earthly. Their affections are set on the things below and all decisions are based on what they see or even envision to see in the earth. Automatics are just that. The day you have to start forcing things and people is the day your heart is separated from things above. The Christ we see and are seated with in heavenly places needs not the arm of flesh. What can we add to His stature? “The flesh profiteth nothing” (John 6:63).

Our hidden ambitions to make a name for ourselves at the expense of the Body of Christ will bring it all down. Our tapes, our books, and our vision may all be Christ-centered, but our way is not hidden from the Lord and God who trieth the hearts and sees where no man can see – where we have deceived ourselves that what we do is Christ. Yet God is not mocked, we will reap what we sow. If we sow to the flesh under the banner of Jesus but so that we will be seen and known, we will of the flesh reap corruption (Galatians 6:8). We may have true mortar with which to build, but if it is weakened by our secret hopes and inordinate affections, then the walls though built with good brick, will succumb to the storms that assail it. *“If ye then be risen with Christ, see those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth”* (Colossians 3:1, 2). If our minds are consumed with even the automatic manifestation of things above, then our affection is on things on the earth, (for that is where it will surely be manifested). Glory to God for the things He will do on the earth, but let us glory rather in what is real now and forever in Christ in whom our affection is set.

A final note in relation to the end time. We have many who are not lifting up their eyes but are looking in heaven and the earth to see when the end should come. Look at what the Scriptures say: *“And there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men’s hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken”* (Luke 21:25, 26).

Did you notice where the people were looking whose hearts were failing them? They were looking at what God was doing in the natural. Oh yes, it was God doing it, but we are not told to look in the natural (even if God is doing it). Then what is our admonition when these things happen? *“And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up (not at these things), and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh”* (verse 28). The difference between those in perplexity, fear, and whose hearts were failing, compared to the other group, is where their eyes were fixed. ***