

Assurance of Things Unseen

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Hebrews 11:1

“So we are always confident; even though 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.”

II Corinthians 5:6 - 7

My Dad was a life-long railroad fan, an avid watcher and rider of trains, and an active model railroader. When my parents chose to move to Rockford, Michigan to retire, my Dad joked that they were looking for a basement with a suitable house over it. He was seeking a home for his model railroad, which he hoped to expand. He did enlarge the HO scale layout over the years, creating a set-up that modeled the rural area around his hometown of Fulton, Illinois. I had observed his model railroading since I was a child, and then watched my son, Gabe, develop a love of railroads and run the trains with my Dad. It never occurred to me that I would find an object lesson on faith there.

Nine months after Mom passed away, Dad sold his house and moved to a two-room apartment in a retirement home. This move, of course, meant dismantling his railroad. Gabe inherited a portion of Dad's model railroad, which is now in our basement. Once my brother James got the table delivered and set up, Dad made a number of visits, each several days in length, in order to get the track laid and the trains running. He would spend the entire day down in the basement, taking breaks for coffee and meals, but otherwise working steadily while listening to marching band and bluegrass music. He was clearly delighting in every moment. On one of the visits, when he came upstairs for his morning coffee break, Dad told me he had explained to Gabe about using his imagination with regard to the interchange track. When I told Dad I wasn't familiar with the interchange track, he was surprised, but went on to explain it for me. I learned that it is fairly typical for model railroad layouts to include a track that ends somewhere on the table, as if continuing in the distance beyond the layout. It is common practice to leave a boxcar or two there, imagining that another unseen train will pick them up and transport them to points unknown. Some railroaders go so far as to remove the cars from the table and put them in a closet to simulate their travel, later replacing them on the table as if the unseen train has returned them. It had never occurred to me that such a fanciful notion would be part of model railroading. This information seemed significant to me, though I didn't know why at the time.

Now as I admire the model railroad Dad lovingly set up for Gabe, and I watch Gabe and Mark (who has become quite an avid model railroader himself) work on the layout and run the trains, I look at the interchange track in a new way. It is Dad who has traveled down the interchange track, passing beyond our sight, borne away by the mighty rush of the engine on the train bound for Glory. I rest secure in the knowledge that he has arrived safe in the arms of our Savior.

Prayer

Loving Savior, give us the wings of faith to trust in things no eye has seen nor ear has heard, and rest in the assurance of Your constant presence and our eternal home with You. Amen.

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