

Seeing with the Eyes of God

"The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are good, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!" Matt. 6:22-23

In speaking this weekend, when I have this one opportunity to get in the last word before the New Year, I wanted to talk about our eyesight. No, not the kind of eyesight that we can fix with trendy little glasses. I want to talk to you about spiritual eyesight. Because Jesus said in the passage above that if our eyes are good, our whole body will be full of light. I don't know about you, but that sounds inviting—my whole being, full of light. So, I want to talk about how we look at life.

As I sat back and thought about the turning of the New Year, the state of our world and the challenges we face and how those challenges will affect many, if not most of us in this room, I thought that it's perhaps more important than ever that we be able to see with the eyes of God. What will you and I face in 2009? Only God knows. But here's one thing I do know—I do know that if you rise and fall on the wings of all the stuff happening around us, we will slowly lose our spiritual eyesight—our ability to see life the way God sees it.

1. We won't be able to see and relish the daily blessings of God, because we can only see economic forecasts and stock markets.
2. We won't be able to see people as vitally important to God, because we're so preoccupied with our own future.
3. We won't be able to see how God might possibly like to challenge us and change us, because we're so caught up with life as we want to live it.

The only way to safely navigate through times like these is by seeing life through God's eyes. How do we view the people who cross our path each day?

A. Seeing other people- through compassion

On Christmas Day, we watched one of our favorite Christmas movies, A Christmas Carol, with George C. Scott. I like that version the best. I love Scrooge's keen business sense, how he manages his employees and regulates the heat in the office...inspiring. Just kidding. As I watched it, I was struck by the contrast between Scrooge and some of the things I wanted to talk about today. It reminded me that there are two very real dangers that we face in seeing other people:

1. To see people as faceless. I don't know them. Why should I care? They mean nothing to me.
2. To see people as obstacles. What do they want? Why are they bothering me? How can I avoid them?

If we're really honest with ourselves, we'll admit that we often see people as either faceless, or as obstacles. God sees every person as someone with real concerns and a real life—and God's heart beats for every single one of them. So how do I get to the place where I see people the way God sees them? One way is to develop the ability to see other people through compassion. Compassion is the ability to see people with empathy, with sympathy, with understanding and with concern. Compassion recognizes the divine value that God has placed within each person he has created.

How do we develop compassion for the people who are all around us? Let me give you a few things to try:

1. Realize that every person has a story. That's what's so powerful about the video vignettes we've seen all month as part of Advent. We've heard the real stories of people we might otherwise just pass in the hallway without a single thought. Every one of us has hurts, fears, successes and failures. We have a story. But as long as we allow people to remain faceless, we'll never be able to develop compassion for them.
2. Understand that people are not obstacles for us to try to avoid. I know that's hard to do. People drive slow, talk slow, talk too long, interrupt you, make mistakes, shirk responsibilities, and do a thousand other things that become problems for our agenda. But in the end, at the end of our lives, nothing we do will outweigh the compassion, the empathy we've shown for those people in our path.

3. Realize that God will hold us responsible for the measure of compassion we have given to others, because of the amazing compassion we have been given. I know that's not an altruistic reason, but it's true nonetheless. Again and again in the Gospels, we read that Jesus had compassion on those around him. God is compassionate with us, and he commands us to show the same compassion to others.

B. Seeing our world – through hope

It's easy to want to give up when it comes to our view of the world. People are whacked! The economy is whacked! And we think, "What a mess." Yet with all that's going on in our world, I don't believe that God wants us to just give up and become spiritual monks. In Jesus' great sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, he said this: "You are the salt of the earth...You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven." And so it's obvious that God doesn't want us to pack it in and give up. God wants us to see the world around us through hope.

1. The hope that comes through knowing that God's will and purpose will be done in this world... In spite of the doomsayer's, God is firmly in control of what's happening in our world. It doesn't matter whether it's a recession or a depression, God is still in control. It doesn't matter whether nations are at war, or nations are at peace, God is still in control. Jesus taught us to pray, "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." That prayer is both a petition and an affirmation of what is ultimately true: God is in control. We see the world with Hope, because we know God is in control and God has a plan.

2. The hope that comes through knowing I have a part in God's plan... Jer. 29:11 "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Romans 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." As we look at the world around us we have to know that God has a special and unique plan for our lives that is not forfeited because of any of the crazy events happening around us.

3. The hope that comes through knowing that while I'm here on this earth, I can make a difference... God wants to use you; in spite of all the craziness, he wants to use me to make a difference in this world... Salt of the earth, light of the world... a city set on a hill that cannot be hidden. That's your role in this world. Eph. 2:10 "For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago."

4. The hope that comes through knowing this world is not my home... The Bible tells us to live our lives as strangers in this world, because ultimately, this world is not our home. We were created for eternity with God, and when we view the world through that lens, the problems, the trials, take on new meaning. The writer of Hebrews says it this way in Hebrews 11, "All these people [people of faith like you and I] were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own... they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them."

C. Seeing ourselves – through prayer

Well how about the way we see ourselves? Why is it important that we see ourselves with the eyes of God?

I read about a hotel manager who became so weary at being yelled at for every little discomfort or inconvenience that his guests experienced, because they wanted Ritz Carlton fancies at Motel 6 prices. During one especially uncomfortable exchange, he noticed that the woman who was blasting him looked oddly enough like a monkey. He couldn't help but wonder if she knew how funny she looked as she contorted her face in anger. So he got a brilliant idea—he hung a large mirror directly behind the front desk, so that guests could see themselves as they interacted with the hotel clerks. Soon the anger and the temper-tantrums all but stopped. When people could see how rude and hateful they looked while they were yelling and screaming about something that was usually so inconsequential, they stopped yelling and screaming.

What is true physically is also true spiritually. If we can see what we look like on the inside, our attitudes, our motives, our behaviors, then we can get hold of the grace of God to change. The problem is how to see ourselves as we really are. Jeremiah (17:9) said that our hearts are desperately deceitful—and I have a hard time seeing the real me. Let me suggest that through prayer we can come to honestly see ourselves the way God sees us. You see, prayer is among other things, a self-revealing experience.

Think about these five qualities of genuine prayer, and how these qualities become self-revealing to us as we pray:

1. Prayer is an exercise in humility. Consequently, prayer forces us to deal with our own stubbornness. In prayer, we end up wrestling with our unwillingness to submit to God's will in our lives.
2. Prayer requires sincerity. Consequently, when we sit down to pray, we're gonna sense in our heart if we are faking it.
3. Prayer helps to anchor our soul. Consequently, when we pray, we'll know if we are allowing the winds of life to toss us around. The gap between inner peace and inner turmoil will become apparent as we get alone with God.
4. Prayer exercises our faith. Consequently, when we find ourselves in the midst of prayer begging God, or accusing God, or questioning God, we will know that our faith needs strengthening, it needs building up. It's weak.
5. Prayer leads to confession. Consequently, when we spend time in prayer, we're likely going to travel down the road to confession and repentance for the things that God brings to our mind as we pray. It's almost impossible to pray, and not come to grips with the sin or the disobedience that's in our lives. Prayer is self-revealing experience. That's why when we're running from God, or hiding from God, one of the first things to go is prayer.

According to Romans 8:26-27, as we pray, the Holy Spirit joins us in that experience, interceding for us according to the will of God. The Spirit of God connects with our spirit. And God's Spirit has a chance to help us to see ourselves as we really should. If you really want to see yourself with the eyes of God, pray. Become a person of prayer. And self-delusion will become less and less of a problem. Well the last and most important window on life that we need to be able to see through, is seeing God.

D. Seeing God – through Scripture

This is the most important sight of all. Without seeing God through the window of Scripture, we're gonna blunder through this next year, not understanding how things work, or why they work, or the purpose and meaning of it all. The 66 books of the Bible are given to us so that we can see God: to know him, to understand him, to cooperate with him, to trust him, to run to him, and to love him.

Jeremiah 9:23-24, "This is what the LORD says: Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD."

The greatest measure of a man or a woman is their knowledge and understanding of God.

"Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. " Jn. 17:3

So as we enter the New Year, I hope you'll step back and adjust your vision—particularly the way you see other people, yourself, the world we live in, and most importantly, God. Life is all about perspective... as Ebenezer Scrooge learned.

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