

Eyes of Faith

Seeing Reality:

John 12:44-46; 2 Corinthians 3:13-18

August 28, 2005

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This summer we devoted six Sundays to examining and expanding your perspective of reality. What you see and what you think about what you see determine your mood, attitude, priorities, relationships and actions. Your vision dominates your life.

As a young pastor, I passionately loved Jesus Christ and pledged to walk as his disciple. However, some of my perspective was more shaped by the environment in which I was raised and educated than by Jesus' words and life. I couldn't relate to or understand many things Jesus said and did. Jesus' teachings and actions were nice, but much seemed to hold little relevance. I relied on Christian writers to open my eyes, and some of that was helpful. However, at one point I may have had a closer relationship to the writers than to Jesus; and yet it was a relationship with Jesus I pursued. In the church I served, I saw few breakthroughs. There were some, but few became new Christians, and few Christians changed much at all. I did not see Jesus heal many bodies or souls, and the gospel seemed more and more optional.

In retrospect, God led me to serve a typical American church. Some might think I encountered the malaise of liberal Christianity. I disagree. In Christianity conservatives focus on conserving ancient truths; and liberals focus on relating Christian concepts to current needs. Neither of those are bad things, but it gets dicey when either becomes primary. Conservatives affirm with one voice that Jesus' once healed people as the Scriptures affirm, yet they splinter

about its relevance. Liberals, on the other hand, agree about its relevance, but they aren't that concerned with whether Jesus ever did heal. Some think it is allegory and are ready to let doctors and psychiatrists do the heavy lifting in healing; however, all emphasize the biblical truth of compassionate involvement. They are ready to police every entity of society (including doctors and psychiatrists) to assure that there is a compassionate response to every human need. As a result, most American churches focused both on preserving the past and compassionately serving others. Of course, that posture and environment converts few non-believers. Most don't see how a focus on biblical truth is relevant to their lives, and they don't see how compassionate involvement necessitates a relationship with Jesus. No wonder the average American church is declining in number and influence. In contrast, outside the west, Christianity is exploding. People are coming to Christ by the thousands and millions. Cities and nations are experiencing profound change. These multiplying believers have a very different view of reality than ours.

Twenty years ago, I ran into some of this perspective. I left the typical American church for a church that was... well... not typical. On my first Sunday I encountered people who believed we could lay hands on people in the name of Jesus and heal them. The funny thing was that a lot of people were healed. However, some were not healed and were even hurt by teaching that left them in guilt. One day I got an unusual call. A young couple asked me to come to their home and pray for it. They claimed that repeatedly when they awoke in the morning, they found their furniture had been moved. They had seen the movie *Poltergeist* and asked some pointed questions. I hadn't watched the movie, and I had no training to prepare me for their request. The alarm in their faces suggested that they weren't pulling my leg. I walked through their house and prayed, and they reported that the phenomenon stopped. I didn't know if I had calmed their imagination, if a prankster had stopped, or if I was encountering an unseen reality. However,

God did answer my prayer. Similar requests would later come from others including another pastor. I began to realize that much of my vision of reality was not taught or modeled by Jesus. Instead, it was shaped more by the culture I grew up in than by the life of Jesus. How would I know what is real and what is not? What would be the touchstone of reality?

In this series entitled *Seeing Reality*, we've noted that essential facts about reality are often missing. Truth is like an iceberg where four-fifths of it bulges beneath our field of vision. We've open the Scriptures to find that our problem seeing reality is not ignorance but deception. Our grasp on reality is actively opposed. Satan opposed Adam and Eve's trust in God's love and their confidence in God's word. Consequently, they acted on a false vision of reality. Indeed, Jesus claims:

I have come as a light to shine in this dark world, so that all who put their trust in me will no longer remain in the darkness. (John 12:46, NLT)

Jesus shouted to the crowd in Jerusalem before his arrest that the people were walking about in darkness. John noted in John 12 that most of the people who saw Jesus perform miracles didn't believe. They were unable to see reality or understand what they experienced because their hearts were hard. We stumble in darkness because we have difficulty trusting what God actually reveals. God said, or revealed, one thing to Adam and Eve, but under the influence of the Evil One they began to question, "Did God say?" "Did God say you will die if you eat that fruit? Wasn't God just afraid that you'll know things like he does? Wasn't God just trying to keep you dependent and ignorant? Since that doesn't seem likely, do you suppose God was pointing out the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil as truly an invitation, to see if you will show initiative?" There is a place for questioning. There is a place for asking questions of God's word that clarify. There is a place for questions as long as they arise in faith rather than doubt. If your vision of God is like that of a small child trusting a parent, then your questions

will lead to knowledge. However, if your questions carry even a hint of the idea that “you know better,” then it will cause struggle.

Jesus said:

Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these. I tell you the truth, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it. (Mark 10:14-15, NIV)

Jesus wasn't as concerned about us believing in the kingdom of God as receiving it. Since Jesus ministered to Jewish people, most of his hearers believed in the kingdom of God. His concern, however, was that they receive it. Would they welcome what God was doing or reject it? Would they welcome God's visitation to them, and do we realize that God is visiting us in Jesus and in his words? Do we like trusting children welcome Jesus and everything he says, or do we know better? Do we look upon Jesus with eyes of faith or eyes of doubt?

The Apostle Paul noted how in the 14th Century BC Israelites requested that Moses put a veil over his face to conceal the radiance it carried when he returned with the law from Mount Sinai. The Bible says that they could not bear to look upon him. Their hearts blocked them from receiving God's visitation in Moses. Paul wrote that the same veil was now shielding 1st Century Jews from the truth. It prevented them from understanding the Scriptures and receiving God's visitation in Jesus. Do we react to God's visitation today similarly? Are there things Jesus said that we don't want to hear today? Are there implications we don't want to consider? Do we suffer from a veil? Paul said that the veil is removed when we turn to the Lord. He wrote:

Whenever anyone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. (2 Corinthians 3:16-17, NIV)

Paul wrote that as the veil is lifted, we experience freedom through God's Spirit. He emphasized freedom rather than vision because the veil resulted from fear that paralyzes. Fear

stops us from becoming what we were created to be. Fear moves us to reject God and his word.

When we welcome Jesus' Spirit, we are free to see, free to learn and free to act. Paul writes:

We can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more. (2 Corinthians 3:18, NLT)

God's plan for you and me is to enjoy life to the fullest as we walk daily informed and counseled by the Spirit of Jesus as priests to our world. His plan is to prove his love and wisdom to all creation through his work with you and me.

One of my friends is an African missionary. One day he or some others tried to clear a grass runway for an airplane. Feeding on the turf were some sheep and goats. The sheep got off the runway, but the goats kicked, stomped and refused to be led. Apparently, they knew better.

The people who refused Jesus all knew better. They were more comfortable with a distant God. They were more comfortable with a veil covering reality. They did not want to see the hand of God in this man from Nazareth. No matter what he did, they wouldn't budge. Like Adam and Eve who thought they knew better, they rejected God's love and word.

Over the past weeks, we've explored the nature of truth, the nature of this world, the nature of the forces that affect your life. In every case, we consulted Jesus for his perspective on reality. What do you believe now that you didn't believe before? Have you budged at all? Do you think God was making his loving appeal to you? Does your heart move to search the Scriptures and seek Jesus' perspective? In what way are you different today because of what Jesus' Spirit has recently shown you? Are you suffering from a veil? Eyes of faith develop from a humble heart. There is no exception.

If you are not growing, if you are not excited about what Christ is unfolding, ask Jesus to soften your heart, to remove fear and pride from it and to fill you with forgiveness and himself.