

Sermon: "Perspective"

Psalm 139: 1-6;13-18

¹For the director of music. Of David. A psalm. O LORD, you have searched me and you know me.

²You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar.

³You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways.

⁴Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O LORD.

⁵You hem me in--behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me.

⁶Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain.

¹³For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.

¹⁴I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

¹⁵My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth,

¹⁶your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

¹⁷How precious to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them.

¹⁸Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand. When I awake, I am still with you.

The Cost of Being a Disciple - Luke 14:25-33

²⁵Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said:

²⁶If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters--yes, even his own life--he cannot be my disciple.

²⁷And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.

²⁸Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it?

²⁹For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him,

³⁰saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.'

³¹Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand?

³²If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace.

³³In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple.

Sermon:

The last time I was with you, I talked about the weeping prophet Jeremiah, who had to tell the Israelites about the destruction of Jerusalem and their deportation to Babylon! "Sword, Famine, & Pestilence," that was Jeremiah's cry to God's chosen people who had gone astray. The people hated that message, and they hated Jeremiah for bringing it.

Jesus, himself, in addition to being a priest and a king, was also a prophet – and so he came with a message as well. A message that each person who heard it had to struggle with. For some the message of Jesus brings belief, forgiveness, and eternal life. Others hear the message of Jesus and ignore or deny its truth. The kingdom of God is far from those people (Matt 13:18ff).

This passage in Luke is a hard passage to struggle with. It's one of those teachings of Jesus we'd like to ignore. It seems to ask too much from us, it requires us to change our way of thinking. Take Thomas Jefferson for example, he had a similar problem with the Bible. He liked all the moral ethics that Jesus taught, but wasn't so keen on all the supernatural material in the New Testament – so he cut it out! (aka the Jefferson Bible). Let us avoid this mistake and struggle with the passage as it is written.

This passage says that large crowds were following Jesus. Some had come to see him heal or to hear him teach. Others came to see miraculous signs or to watch Jesus interact with the Pharisees and Sadducees (the religious leaders of the day). At the time, Jesus was the “greatest show on earth” and since it was free everybody wanted to go. From our perspective, Jesus was a popular guy. But Jesus didn't care much about being popular. He had a different perspective. That perspective is what this passage is all about.

1) For example. Who's important?

From the world's perspective those people that are important have money, power, and popularity. Those with money are important because they provide and produce, lend and leverage. The more money you have the happier you can be – and the only way to get money, is from those who have some. Now, those people who have a power over our lives are important because if they aren't happy, neither are we. Popular TV and movie stars are important because they set the trends and the fads. If you're not hip, if you're not cool, if you're not phat, if you're not with it, then you're a zero, a nobody, a nothing. The world watches the rich, the powerful, and the beautiful – because they are the important people.

From our “more religious” perspective, we often think the only people who are important are those who get life right. Those who say no to drugs, those who break no law, those who are nice and caring and gentle. Often times, observers outside the church say that we act like in order to be important, you have to dress right, talk right, listen to the right music, act right, and be at the right place on Sunday morning.

But our God has a different perspective on the issue. God says that the least, the lowest, and the lost are the most important! God will reward the humble, the meek, and the hungry. Jesus allowed the children to come

unto him and said that “the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these.” (Matt 19:14) God calls us to serve the stranger, the widow, and the orphan. If we are to throw a banquet, we are not supposed to invite the wealthy, the powerful, or the popular – we are to invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, and the blind. We will be blessed, because they cannot repay us.(Luke 14:13)

2) Here's another example. What's Fair?

From the world's perspective, fair is giving what you get. Fair is getting something for nothing. The ability to sue in extravagant excess of current and future damages is a fair exercise of the law. Fair is getting out of jail for good behavior. Fair is often determined by what you can or can't afford. Fairness is contractual. Fair is getting there first. For the world, fairness is usually in the hands of the rich and powerful.

According to our "more religious" perspective, we often understand fairness by justice. We think fair in terms of good and evil. Fair is getting what you deserve. Fair is reaping the consequences of your deeds. We claim that God has determined what is fair and we try to enforce it.

Again, God's perspective is different. God gives us more grace than we deserve, and keeps us from some of the consequences that we deserve. While we were yet sinners, God sent his son Jesus to die for us and free us from our sins. God will reward each and every laborer of his with the reward of eternal life, no matter how many hours we have worked. God's understands fairness not in terms of law, not in terms of justice, but in terms of mercy.

3) Let me give you a third example. What does it take to be a good person?

The world answers from its perspective – give what you can, when you can. Anything you give counts for something.

From our "more religious" perspective we answer - Give as much as you can according to the limitations of your time, your money, and your expertise.

From God's perspective the answer is – give everything.

In this passage Jesus says “hate your mother, father, your children, and your brothers and sisters **in order to** be my disciple!” He’s not being mean or overly dramatic just for the effect. Jesus knows that the cost of following him is that high. He knows that in our lives we will often have to make a choice between our family and our God. We will often have to choose between the world’s perspective and God’s perspective. We will even have times where we must choose between the traditionally accepted “more religious” perspective and what we understand is God’s perspective. Just like when Jeremiah brought God’s message to the Israelites, and when Jesus brought God’s message to the world – when we share God’s perspective to our family members, to the places we work, and to the communities in which we live – we will often be misunderstood and mistreated. We can either submit to their perspective, or hold fast to God’s.

Why should we trust God’s perspective? Because we’re short-sighted. Our perspective is incomplete; we don’t have all the information. And sometimes we just can’t see what’s right in front of our eyes. Take those illusions I used in the children’s sermon.

God doesn’t have these types of limitations. God’s perspective is eternal. God knows how it all began and how it will all end. God set up the rules of the world when it was paradise and God set up the rules of the fallen world in which we now live.

According to Psalm 139, God sees all – he knows when you sit and when you rise; God perceive your thoughts from afar. God know when and why and where you go out and where you lie down; God is familiar with all your ways. God created your inmost being; He knit you together in your mother's womb.

God, doesn't just know us from third person, God knows us from being one of us. In Jesus, God, came to earth as a man and knows all the trials and temptations you go through. Jesus was fully human - born to human parents that checked up on him, wondering where he'd been. Jesus had to learn and grow and deal with bullies. Jesus got hungry and was bothered by the heat and the flies. Jesus became an adult and worked as a carpenter.

This same Jesus, having lived from our perspective, said "Whoever does not carry the cross and follow me cannot be my disciple." Jesus said this because he also had the eternal and all knowing perspective of his Heavenly Father. Jesus called those who would be his disciples to give up everything because that's what it takes to be salt and light in the world. That's what it takes to be salt and light in a world that is trying to dilute our potential potency, and shake up our fears rather than stir us to acts of radical love.

So, when we catch ourselves treating someone as unimportant
when we think something is unfair towards us, or more than fair towards others
when we notice that we regularly give only what's comfortable to give
and when we have to choose between trusting God and or satisfying our family & friends
Chose to see the world from God's perspective.

And now, since God has asked us to carry our crosses, giving every aspect of our lives unto him, let us join together in: (found on the inside of your bulletin)

An Act Of Commitment To Vocation In Daily Life

The Pastor: My Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus: we are all baptized by one Spirit into one Body, and given gifts for a variety of ministries for the common good. And so, in the ministry of your daily life and work, will you proclaim by word and example the Good News of God in Christ?

The People Answer: I will.

The Pastor: In your daily occupation, will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?

The People Answer: I will.

The Pastor: In the vocation to which God has called you, will you strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being?

The People Answer: I will.

The Pastor: Name the occupation for which you seek God's blessing.

The People Answer: (Name your occupation aloud.)

Pastor: Let us pray.

Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ in his earthly life shared our toil and hallowed our labor: be present with your people where they work. Deliver us from the service of self alone, and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; for the sake of him who came among us as one who serves, your Son our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the Name of God and of this congregation, I recognize and affirm your commitment to follow Christ in the vocation to which God has called you. May the Holy Spirit guide and strengthen you to bear faithful witness to Christ, and to carry on his work of reconciliation in the world.

Belmore: Are ye able – 261

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NHB: 102 – He Leadeth me

Benediction:

Go now into all the world, your schools and your jobs, your homes and your hang-outs, bringing with you the perfect perspective of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And may you live in the world by the grace of the Father, the peace of Jesus Christ, and by the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Cut Material

He did not say, unless you can do these things, stop following me. In the end there will be those who never make the decision of faith in Christ who think they have been following Jesus all the while.

Jesus is telling us how to approach our choice of faith. It is a life or death decision and it's not to be made lightly. If you have made that choice, realize that