

What Do You See?

Leading up to this Sunday I was asking God what he wanted say and I arrived at the title 'What do you see?' and I'm going to be talking to you for the next 20/25 mins or so unpacking what we tend to see when we look at our circumstances, when we look at other people and the church when we look at ourselves. What do you see.

I decided to bring it back to 'well, what is vision?'. Vision is no more than light reflecting off an object or person and that light being absorbed by our eyes and interpreted by our brains. And as I was recalling this process I realised that we can very often misinterpret what we see and do something called 'projection'. Now most of us know what projection is; it's where a machine places an image onto something else so we have our projector here 'placing' the image from the computer at the back. Our brains can do the same thing by taking the light it receives and uses our own understanding of the world to make sense of it. To illustrate this point I have some pictures for us to look at.

Picture of greyscale and grey tiles. They appear different shades, yet in fact are the same.

I feel like as humans, we do this all the time; we can misinterpret the circumstances we are in, we can misinterpret how we see our circumstances, other people and the Church but most damaging can be how we see ourselves. I'm hoping that I can begin to unpack how God sees each of those things and how we can begin to see how God does.

1. What do you see when you see your circumstances?

If you have your bibles with you feel free to turn with me to one of the passages I'm reading from this morning is from Hebrews chapter 12 vs 1-2 'Therefore since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders, and all sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, 2 fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith...

'Let us run the race' - Who here knows running is uncomfortable? I certainly do. Running: you're out of breath, you're sweaty, you're tired, you are generally uncomfortable. There's a reason we don't all run to work or run to our friend's house or run to Tesco's for a food shop. Just out of interest, does anyone run to work?.. But yeah running is uncomfortable. I kept thinking why would Paul encourage me to run? 1. Because running implies a sense of urgency. 2. Because growth occurs outside your comfort zone. There's a reason why Paul didn't say let us leisurely stroll down the path God has put before us, Paul is trying to instill a sense of urgency, a sense of mission. When you see someone running for the bus you can see the urgency. A sense that 'hey we actually don't have that much time but there's a whole world of people to love like Jesus loved and bring them into relationship with a heavenly father.' The stark reality is life is short so let's 'run'. And as I already mentioned, running is uncomfortable but you can hear it here, you can hear it in business or TED talks that growth only occurs outside your what? Your comfort zone. Lord knows waking up early on a Sunday is not comfortable but there is a mission, there is the town of New Malden, people ready to meet Jesus. Touch your neighbour and say 'Get uncomfortable'.

The passage then goes on to say '*run fixing our eyes on Jesus*'

I was thinking about this and it occurred to me that if you ask any 100m sprinter, any professional sprinter, they will tell you that when they are running they don't look at other sprinters, they can't afford to. It's a 10 second race, looking left or right would cause them to step out there lane, mix place their footing, waste time. They are solely fixed on their goal and the track set out before them. As Christians, as people well maybe it's just me but I can waste so much time comparing myself to other people asking God why did you bless them with that, why don't I have that. Why have you blessed them with that and not me? Instead of looking at my race, instead of fixing, my eyes on Jesus. Example of friend at uni...

On the flip side of that, take marathon runners. When a marathon runner is at the start line, they can't see the finish line, they can't see the end yet they have to believe it's there. They have to focus on the road in front of them, the next km, the next mile. They don't run with a picture of the finish line on their phone. Almost anytime you're going through something you don't get to see when it will end. When the anxiety will stop, when the depression will stop, when the whatever it is, financial struggles, difficulties at work. We can't know or see when it will end. In Matthew 6:34 it says *'Therefore, do not worry about tomorrow for tomorrow will worry about itself.'* An encouragement from Jesus in the sermon on the mount to change your perspective, fix our eyes on Him and to run the race set before us. *Psalm 69:30 says 'I will praise the name of God with a song. And will magnify him with with praise or thanksgiving.'*

I absolutely love this scripture mainly because it fits so well with my preach for today. David in this scripture I believe is acknowledging that God is the same yesterday, today and forever. That God was all powerful a thousand years ago, he is all powerful today and he always will be; he doesn't change. Sometimes we can see our circumstances and God like this, that when our problems are massive and overwhelming then we make God smaller. And when only when our problems are smaller than we think are great God is good, look how good God is but really God never changed. When you use a magnifying glass, the object you're inspecting doesn't get any bigger but our perception of it gets bigger, similarly God couldn't get any bigger however our perspective of God can change and the way in which we do this is through this praise, through reminding ourselves of who he is. We know that God is faithful and always will be, we know that God is good...

So that was what do we see when we see our circumstances

2. What do we see when we see other people and the Church?

I watched a preach recently by Steven Dixon. Pastor Steven Dixon grew up in Manchester and now leads Hillsong Brisbane, that in itself is a preach somewhere. Pastor Steven preached on people as people and not projects and it took root very quickly. I think first it is important to define what a project is. A project is an individual or collaborative task that is carefully planned to achieve a particular aim. They have a beginning, a middle and an end. I recently have been away with my company on engineering training and large corporations love the word 'project'. They gave us various structures and tools to apply to projects and really laboured the point that projects have a beginning a middle and an end. However, if you start to think of people as projects then we can fall into the trap that there's a point where we're done, we've arrived, we've finished trying to better ourselves and I don't know about you but I certainly can't claim that. Another reason why we can't afford to think of people as projects is because then we begin seeing them as a means to an end. We begin to

see them for how they can achieve something for us and draws us away from loving them how Christ loves us, unconditionally.

Similarly, people in Church are not projects. It is not our mandate or mission to fix or mend or repair people. Jesus didn't call us to do that but very often it becomes our immediate response when we meet brokenness but we forget we are broken too. All we were called to do is bring them to the one that fixes, bring them to the one that heals, bring them into an environment where they can have a relationship with a heavenly father and allow the holy spirit to do the healing; to do the mending. We were never meant to fill a God-shaped hole.

Finally,

3. What do you see when you see yourself?

I think it's almost too easy sometimes for our default to be that we see ourselves in our flaws. That we only see what we don't like, we only see what we can't do. I remember a while ago I was at a point where all I could think about when I came to Church was what I had done wrong that week, not because Church was judgemental but because I hadn't let my life be a fair representation of the impact Jesus had on me. It got to a point where it would stop me from doing certain things, stop me wanting to pray for people because I thought well who am I, I'm not worthy enough to minister to someone else. A point where I didn't want to be on worship because I wasn't perfect, you can't put me at the front. All the while I hadn't realised that what I was really doing was undermining the power of God's grace; I hadn't asked for his forgiveness but instead I chose to keep the guilt and shame. I hadn't fully understood that God's gift of grace, I knew that it wasn't cheap but I forgot that it was completely free.

God didn't call me to be perfect, he doesn't care about what qualifies us, he doesn't care about what disqualifies us. He only calls us to be faithful. "Well done my good and faithful servant"

In Jeremiah 29:11; a very well-known scripture it says '*For I know the plans I have for you*'. I'm gonna stop there and take a second to acknowledge a few things. Here we have we see that we have us, humans, mankind, and we have God. God being a divine being, our superior no doubt. Thinking to a company or a corporation, when the CEO of the company, the most senior position tells you about their plans, for the company it is usually based in selfish ambition. Based in where they see themselves and the organisation in years to come. What they do not outline is what they see for you specifically. In this passage it goes on to say that God himself in all his divinity has a plan an he plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you a hope and a future. Across verses 10 and 11 there when God is telling us what he wants most, he refers to us 6 times and to himself only once. God based everything around us and so desperately desires a relationship with us. So much so that he gave his one and only son to die for us, for you and for me.