

Eyes Wide Open: Seeing Clearly Psalm 145:8-9, 14-18

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I'd like you to look at some pictures. And for each picture I'd like you to ask yourself, "What does this picture tell me about God?"

[I'll show some beautiful pictures of nature and human interaction and some ugly pictures of war, disease and destruction.]

A little confusing, isn't it? You could look at a picture like this [show one of the beautiful ones again] and think of how God is so good, so kind and loving. And you could look at a picture like this [show an ugly one] and wonder if God is cruel or an absentee landlord.

And we do that with our own experiences, don't we? We judge who God is by how we experience life. If life is sweet and easy, it's easy to see God as kind and loving. If life is filled with hardship and tragedy, it's easy to see God as heartless, cruel or absent.

So, how do we really know what God is like? How do you see God?

We're in a worship series entitled "Eyes Wide Open." We're exploring various passages of Scripture and asking God to help us to see more clearly – to see ourselves and our world through God's eyes. And today I'd like us to consider how we see God. What image of God do we hold? What stories about God and God's character do we tell ourselves? Is God good, cruel, indifferent or does it depend upon the day? Is God up there, down here, in here, or all of the above? How we see God matters. It can be the difference between a faith that breathes life and joy into us, or a faith that imprisons us in fear and condemnation.

Today I want to invite us to put on the corrective lenses of Psalm 145 to see God more clearly. It's the final psalm of David in the book of Psalms. David was a man who had a long and deep relationship with God, and in this final psalm, David provides us a picture of the God he has come to know and love.

⁸ *The LORD is merciful and compassionate,*

slow to get angry and filled with unfailing love.

⁹ *The LORD is good to everyone.*

He showers compassion on all his creation.

¹⁴ *The LORD helps the fallen*

and lifts those bent beneath their burdens.

¹⁵ *The eyes of all look to you in hope;*

you give them their food as they need it.

¹⁶ *When you open your hand,*

you satisfy the hunger and thirst of every living thing.

¹⁷ *The LORD is righteous in everything he does;*

he is filled with kindness.

¹⁸ *The LORD is close to all who call on him,*

yes, to all who call on him in truth.

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Wow, what a picture of God David paints for us. And if you pay careful attention to it you'll discover that David describes both who God is...that is, God's character...and what God does. David says that God is:

- Merciful
- Compassionate
- Patient
- Loving
- Good
- Generous, and
- Helpful

That's God's character, and because that is God's character, David says here's what God does in David's own experience:

- God lightens our load when we're burdened
- God provides for our needs
- God grants our desires
- God rescues us from danger, and
- God protects us from evil

What a beautiful picture of God. How does that picture align with how you see God? If there's some misalignment, that's understandable. How do we reconcile David's picture of God with Bible stories in which entire populations are wiped out in this God's name? What about the thousands of children who die of starvation every day in this world? What about the tornado that devastates an entire town? What about the young parents who suffer alongside their sick child? How do we reconcile the picture that David paints of who God is with the harsh realities of this world and the harsh realities of our own lives?

When our vision blurs like that, when we struggle to get a clear picture of who God is, our faith calls us to put on the most powerful of corrective lenses: Jesus. Jesus entered into the ugly realities of this world. He didn't turn away from those realities. He embraced them. And the ugliness of his death, coupled with the beauty of his resurrection, shows us the pattern of what he is doing in this world – beauty from ashes, life from death, light into darkness, all things new. That, my friends, is what we dare to believe to be true about the God we worship. This is the picture of the God we cling to. No matter what we see in this broken world, above it, below it, around it, and within it, we see a merciful, compassionate, patient, loving, good, generous, and helpful God at work.

Just a couple of days ago, my wife Nancy and I participated in a charity bike ride called the Tour de SAVE. SAVE is a nonprofit organization that raises awareness around suicide. We got involved because dear friends of ours lost a son to suicide four years ago. I can't imagine anything more devastating, and yet, here were our friends working joyfully at this event, sharing stories and encouragement with others, and raising money in the hope that others won't have to experience what they have. Their faith and their faith community sustained them in the past four years. Their faith and their faith community guided them along the journey of grief. Their faith and their faith community led them to invest themselves into making a difference for others. That is God at work, beauty from ashes, life out of death, and it was a beautiful thing to see.

And friends, here is the challenge then for us as the Church. Scripture says that Jesus is the full embodiment of God. St. Paul, in his second letter to the Corinthians, said that Jesus is the image and likeness of God. The God we cannot see is made visible in Jesus. And now we are called to be that embodiment of God in this broken world. We are the living Body of Christ. You and I are called to live by God's grace and the power of the Holy Spirit in such a way that when people see us, they see a clear picture of the One who dwells in us.

Day in and day out, this is what the world sees [show those ugly pictures again]. And far too many conclude that either God is cruel or there is no God at all. So how can we help others see more clearly? What could you do this week to help others to dare to know the God that we know in Jesus Christ. That is our challenge. It's a challenge that we need the Spirit's

power to fully live into. So let me pray for us, as we step into that challenge this week, to live in such a way that we help the world to see and to know the God that David reveals, the God that Jesus reveals.