

What kind of eyes of faith do we have?

Numbers 13:16-4:12

Thomas Hawkins was riding a bus. A woman in the next seat had several children traveling with her. They were shouting, fighting, and throwing things at one another. Occasionally one of these objects hit another passenger. The woman was completely indifferent to their behavior. Thomas interpreted the mother's behavior as poor parenting. He increasingly became angrier. He was ready to offer a sarcastic comment about the mother's behavior.

Suddenly, the mother shook herself out of her daze and said, "I'm sorry. My mother who lives with us just died. I'm going to the hospital to make arrangements and get her things. I just don't know what we are going to do." Thomas Hawkins' assumptions immediately changed, along with his feelings and intended actions.

Don't we all do this? We leap to assumptions. We misread behavior and situations. Our biases, experiences, and the way we see things, lead our thinking and actions. These often get us into trouble. The greatest human factor that influences our lives is the way we see things. The way we see ourselves; our spouse; friend; boss; children; jobs; our past; our problems; our political and economic orientation. In fact, the greatest human factor that influences our lives is the way we see everything in life.

A photographer for a national magazine was assigned to take pictures of a forest fire. He was told that a small plane would be waiting to take him over the fire. He arrived at the airport where a Cessna was waiting. He jumped in with his equipment, shouting, "Let's go!" The pilot swung the plane into the wind. Soon they were in the air.

"Fly over the north side of the fire and make several low-level passes," said the photographer.

"Why?" asked the nervous pilot.

"Because I'm going to take pictures," retorted the photographer. "That's my job."

After a long pause, the pilot replied, "You mean, you are not the instructor?"

Assumptions, interpretations, what our eyes see, and our past experiences color how we see events today. Our perspective makes all the difference as to whether we are going to be a success or failure; victorious or defeated; happy or unhappy. We know there is more than just one way of looking at things. The story that was just read from the Bible illustrates this. It shows two different types of seeing – eyes of fear or eyes of faith.

You know the background of this story. Moses had led the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt. They had escaped the Egyptian army and had wandered in the wilderness for two years. They were on the edge of the Promised Land. And God told them to pick a leader from each of the 12 tribes to go spy out the Promised Land. They received specific instructions. Check out how good the land is; the kinds of people there; are their fortifications or not; are there trees; and bring back some of the land's produce.

Verses 21 and 23 tell us where the 12 spies explored. Verses 23 and 24 tell us that at the end of 40 days, they all returned carrying grapes, pomegranates, and figs. They reported to the whole

community, verses 26 and 27, “We went into the land to which you sent us, and it does flow with milk and honey. Here is its fruit.”

Sounds like a good report, doesn't it? But the spies, the tribal leaders, continued. Verses 28 and 29. “The people who live there are fierce, their cities are huge and well-fortified. Worse, we saw descendants of the giant Anak. We are like grasshoppers to them. Amalekites are spread out in the Negev; Hittites, Jebusites, and Amorites hold the hill country; and Canaanites are established on the Mediterranean Sea and along the Jordan.”

But Caleb, one of the spies, silenced the people and said, verse 30, “Let's go up and take the land – now! We can do it.”

However, 10 of the spies replied, “We can't attack those people; they are stronger than we are.” They spread scary rumors among the Israelites. “It's a land that swallows people whole. Everybody we saw was huge, they were giants.” Verse 31-33

It's important to notice that only 2 of the spies, the tribal leaders, Caleb & Joshua had eyes to see that God would give them the land. But 10 leaders saw all the obstacles. The 2 said, “We can.” 10 said, “We can't.” 2 spies had eyes of faith. Ten spies had eyes of fear. They convinced the people to side with them. Worse, the people began to grumble, & wanted to pick a leader & go back to slavery in Egypt. These 10 leaders caused an entire generation and more to die in the wilderness because they choose not to see God's view.

Notice **four things about seeing with the eyes of fear.** *First*, the 10 spies and most of Israel ***misunderstood and underestimated what the Almighty could do.*** They saw the number of tribes that needed to be conquered. They saw the size of some of the people. They saw the fortified cities. They focused on these things instead of their Creator's promises and power.

This story is a warning and a head scratcher as to why they forgot they had been miraculously freed from slavery in Egypt, the strongest nation in the world at the time. Instead, they believed, those nations were stronger than God and that God could not fulfill the promise. And even worse, they begin to rebel against God and God's leaders. The people did not have eyes to see, even after all the Almighty had done for them.

Have you ever noticed that the longer we look at a problem, the bigger it gets? And the longer we look at a problem with the eyes of fear, the bigger the problem gets? That's what happened to the people of the city of Jericho. They had the 40 years Israel wandered in the wilderness to stew about Israel's God. They know Israel's story of freedom from Egypt. They knew how God helped them conquer other tribes and cities. It seems they had more faith in God than Israel!

In Joshua chapter 2, verses 8 to 11, when another set of spies went out to spy on the city of Jericho, Rahab hid them from the authorities. She told them, “I know that God has given you the land. We are all afraid. Everyone in the country feels hopeless. We heard how God dried up the waters of the Red Sea before you when you left Egypt, and what he did to the two Amorite kings east of the Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom you put under a holy curse and destroyed. We heard it and our hearts sank. We all had the wind knocked out of us. And all because of you, you and your God, God of the heavens above and the earth below.”

Talk about irony! The people in Jericho and Canaan were scared stiff! They had been scared for 40 years, ever since the Red Sea escape. But the Israelites were scared stiff about the wrong thing! They didn't trust God to keep helping them. They didn't have the proper eyes despite their own history. They made their God too small. Through their own assumptions they made their God too weak! Fear with all its logic, rationality, and emotions, takes our eyes off our Savior. It's a wonderful weapon of Satan. All he needs to do is get us to be fearful, lazy, and take a good deep look at ourselves. And then we waste 40 years like the Israelites did.

The *second* result of seeing with the eyes of fear is *the Israelites underestimated what they could do*. They say themselves as grasshoppers compared to the giants in the Promised Land. They believed they were unable to conquer the fortifications. They put themselves down. They had a poor self-image. "We are little insects ready to be eaten up! We could never do this! It's too big a project."

After 400 years of conditioning to being slaves, the Israelite still saw themselves as slaves. Even though they had seen God at work firsthand: The Red Sea crossing, providing manna and quail, providing water, giving the law, and the pillars of fire and cloud, they still didn't realize their Creator loved them. And wanted to lead them. It is difficult to break habitual thought patterns. They not only underestimated what God could do, they underestimated what they could do.

In Joshua, chapter 15, verse 13 and following, we have what I think is one of the most delightful stories in the Bible. Caleb lived through the 40 years in the wilderness and as an old man, he deliberately asked for the specific land the giants occupied. When Israel did invade the land, Caleb drove out the sons of Anak – the giants. Maybe, the giants fled as Caleb and his family approached. Maybe they were so fearful they ran away. But the Israelites were so scared of those big, tall people! What irony! Caleb demonstrated the same fearlessness he had as a leader who believed that God would give Israel the land. So he asked for and made sure he and his descendants occupied the land of the giants. He had eyes of faith. He trusted God's promise. And Caleb had a big, "I told you so!"

The *third* result of having eyes of fear is, *problems never defeat us, our perspectives do*. We need to honestly face reality. But reality can be changed. The Almighty is in the business of helping us see that our problems can at least be managed & often they can be resolved. Sometimes God does all kinds of miraculous things. One of the joys of the life of faith is having the eyes to see our Savior's activity. Is a coincidence really a coincidence?

The Bible says, "Greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world." (John 4:4b) This is given to us in the context that God's Holy Spirit is more powerful than Satan, false prophets and even the antichrist. We don't need to be afraid when God's Spirit is with us. We just need to see properly.

Jesus tells us in Matthew 19, in the event with the rich young ruler, that it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God. The disciples then wondered, "Who can be saved?" A practical question! A camel cannot go thorough eye of a needle – so what about us who are following you Jesus? So Jesus answered, "For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible." Eyes of faith – expect and see our Creator at work.

Often a problem we are facing is not our problem. Our real problem is the way we see our problem. Our problem is our perspective. I like a saying Rose's Mom had on her refrigerator. "If you think you can or if you think you can't - you are right." The Israelites missed God doing the impossible for them, so wandered in the wilderness for 40 years.

The *fourth* result of having eyes of fear is, that *it leads to predictable results*. *First*, it leads to *discouragement*. In Numbers 14, verse 1, we read, "Then all the congregation raised a loud cry & the people wept that night." They had a pity party for themselves. There is nothing less attractive than a group of people feeling sorry for themselves.

The *second* predictable result when we do not have eyes of faith; when our perspectives defeat us is: *discontent*. Numbers 14, vs 2 says, "and all the Israelites complained against Moses and Aaron; it would have been better to die in Egypt or the desert." They grumbled, complained, and blamed their leaders, the Almighty, but not themselves. They did not want to take a risk by going into the Promised Land, so they whined and felt sorry for themselves. This in turn blinded them even more to what God had already done for them. People who do not have eyes of faith, fill their faith and emotional vacuum with being stuck in a culture of blame, complaint, hopelessness, rebellion and not taking responsibility. It's, so and so's fault!

The *third* predictable result of fearful eyes is *defeat, imagining the worst, and going backwards*. Numbers 14, verse 3, "Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Would not it be better for us to go back to Egypt?" And they said to each other, verse 4, "We should choose a leader and go back to Egypt." This is discouragement, discontent, and going backwards.

At times it's good to pull events apart to understand the full dynamic of what is going on. This helps us learn. Even though these responses mesh and go together, it's good to identify our individual responses and the group response, so we understand ourselves better when we go down the same path in the future. So in these verses we also see the *fourth* predictable result of fear filled eyes: *grumbling, murmuring, and whining*.

And we must not ignore the *fifth* predictable result of a lack of eyes of faith – *rebellion*. They preferred slavery in Egypt. The known past looked more secure than the promises of God. Many people would rather live-in slavery of some kind, emotionally, relationally, spiritually, addictively, and even politically, rather than risk the hard work of freedom. It feels safer. They accept the miserable rather than reach for the impossible. The tragedy of this story is all the Israelites needed was a different perspective. Instead of seeing with eyes of fear they could have seen with eyes of faith, trust, hope and belief.

In contrast I have heard of a woman, not a believer in Jesus, in Myanmar who says, in effect, "Peace is the only answer. We have had 70 years of war or oppression. So now, with the military taking away our democracy, the common historical response is – get guns. But this has never worked. So, I'm trying to promote peaceful approaches and responses to our situation." Eyes of faith while living in the midst of fear.

But 2 of the spy leaders had eyes of faith. Caleb was blessed to live long enough – to

possess the land of the giants. Joshua lived to become the leader of the generation who entered the Promised Land. They modeled the words of Ephesians 1:18 and 19. “I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which Jesus has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and God’s incomparable great power for us who believe.”

Enlightened eyes have hope, know what they are called to do, see the riches of the Kingdom of God, know the greatness of God’s power, and live with God’s power active in their lives.

We were born with five senses – hearing, taste, touch, smell and sight. Everything we experience in life comes from these senses. When we are born again, we are born spiritually. The God shaped blank inside of us was really activated. It got fully turned on and our spiritual senses started developing fast. Our spiritual eyes started seeing the things of the Almighty. A familiar Bible verse suddenly pops out at you in a new way. A spiritual truth shows up in a sermon, poem, book, TV program or someone’s phrasing. Have you ever pondered about an event and all of a sudden, you understood it with clarity you had never had before? God was giving you spiritual intuition, insight and wisdom.

God through the Covid pandemic has blessed the world with better eyes to see – racism, the plight of necessary workers, economic systems, governments, obedience, truth, freedom, ecology and so on, with new eyes. That information was all around us, but it seems – all of a sudden – these issues are staring at us, in the daily news.

Is Covid in some way a gift from our Creator, and an earthly warning, to see the world with the Almighty’s eyes? Should we really try to “get back to normal,” or is the Holy Spirit trying to tell us there is so much wrong with what is normal with the world, we need God’s solution? Is Covid a warning to us about how we are living? Do we have eyes of fear of faith? Skepticism or denial or are we ready to conquer the evils in our world?

When the first cosmonaut circled the earth, he came down & said, “I looked for God everywhere and I searched the heavens and did not find God. So, there is no God.” Atheists applauded.

Three weeks later, John Glenn, who was a follower of Jesus, circled the earth and said, “I saw God everywhere. I felt his presence with me.”

Which man was right? Both were. Jesus says, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the Kingdom of God unless they are born again.” (John 3:3)

When Rose and Dan first went to Brasil, a relative who was fearful of travel outside the United States, gave Rose a little American flag to take with her. It was to remind her she was American and it was to help keep her safe. The relative had good intentions. But we are urged to look above as Colossians tells us. There is the place we receive eyes of faith that overcomes eyes of bewilderment and fear. Your assignment this week is to read Luke 24 and 2 Kings 6, which are wonderful stories about being able to see.

Every church comes to times when the stakes are high and the risks are great. It either moves forward in faith or settles into mediocrity and safety. People step up their involvements or decrease their contributions. The decisions we make, the attitudes we choose; are going to decide whether we do our thing or God's thing. Do our eyes keep looking backwards or do they pray, plan and anticipate the future? As we look to the future, let's be a church finding it's way into the next Promised Land, with eyes of faith wide open, eager to see what God is going to do for us and in us, and cooperatively work together. Let's be proactive instead of reactive, or like the 10 spies.