

Series: "Corona, Corona"

Sermon: "Faith Eyes: What Are We Really Trusting?"

Text: Matthew 4; Luke 24:13-35

RGGJR/FBCCS/4-25-20 **UNEDITED**

- Good morning, good afternoon or good evening. Thank you for listening!
- Since I can't see your faces and I don't know who is listening, let me sneak in a few statements of truth we sometimes use that identifies who we are if you don't know us. This is not all we are but it gives you a taste:
- Since this is still close to the day we celebrated the Resurrection, We can say: **The Lord is risen! He is risen indeed!** (and we are still thinking about the nature of the New Life that brought us in this message today)
- We do say: **Everlasting LIFE is a gift...by God's grace alone, through simple faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone!**
- We frequently say: **We can't GO to church...We ARE the church!**
- And we sometimes say: **The church does not exist for its own sake but for the sake of the world God loves!**
- I have two notable internet discoveries this week that I feel I should mention. The second one at least introduces my sermon. The first is a general observation related to what I want to say of how we easily get stuck in our ways until we are forced to examine how we think—even to examine our foundational paradigms.
- The first is "***vegetable peeler man.***" It's a short video of a man who seems genuinely excited to have discovered one can peel a carrot or other vegetables with a vegetable peeler utensil in both directions rather than just using the staccato method of rapid return to the same direction. I suspect the man is likely just a good actor in exhibiting his amazement but the point is made. Changing times can help us see things in different ways—even see basic assumptions that were wrong or incomplete.

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- My second internet gleaning is shown in the ad I posted with this sermon. One day this week, this was the only ad that made it through Ad Block software on a conservative news site I scan.
- It not only made it through, all at once, it filled every slot on the page an ad might possibly go into properly proportioned for each location.
- If I were a mystical man, I would have thought I was getting a message from somewhere. It might have been God speaking through the advertising algorithm controlling the ads I had been sent.
- Except, the ad was from a trade group that represents big pharma not God. If you can't see it, the one I attached here shows a serious researcher dressed in serious protection gear pipetting something into a tube in a lab.
- The ad copy over the top of the picture reads: "***Because science is how we get back to normal.***" Then you are invited to learn more and you can do that by reaching the website of "PhArma," the trade group representing pharmaceutical companies that placed the ad.
- The outsiders—people like most of you and me—outsiders to state politics and state skullduggery—don't know for sure if it wasn't so-called "*science*" being done in a viral lab in the so-called "*normal*" world of competition between powers that got us into this mess in the first place.
- If so, does anyone really want to return to that "*normal*" world via that world's "*science*?"
- I'm not knocking science, pharmaceuticals or vaccines. I fully expect science to produce a possibly helpful vaccine and maybe an anti-viral drug to treat folks who get the virus.
- I'm rather, illustrating the point I have been making for a few weeks now about post-resurrection to New LIFE "faith."

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- It seems obvious to me that Pharma is saying trust *science* for the answer in this confusing time. Science will tell us what to do to fix this. Science will help us see in the dark.
- Again, is science useless right now? Absolutely not! As I said, I expect it will prove itself worthy of faith to many because it will discover something that "works" to bring back, more or less, the "normal world" people are craving for a sense of security.
- Can science see in the "dark?" It depends what we mean when we say, "the dark." Science can reveal things that the naked human eye—the eye of our flesh cannot see unaided.
- However, if you listened last week, you know when Jesus talked to his followers—to Thomas and others—about "seeing in the dark," he wasn't talking about making a broader spectrum of light waves visible.
- He was talking about seeing all of life, all of their existence, all of their truths through a different set of eyes." I called them "the eyes of faith."
- The "eyes of faith" will sometimes show those who are relying on faith in who God says and God's promises things that the eyes of flesh cannot ever see. The faith-folks in Hebrews 11 experienced this.
- But, the eyes of faith regularly do something else for the sight of those who believe God and it is just as important as seeing things that do not yet exist.
- Eyes of faith are like glasses that change the appearance of the already existing world so that men and women of faith can see what already is realistically—which is as God sees it.
- Eyes of faith are meant to be the lenses that shade every last bit of a believer's paradigm for understanding the realities of this world.

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- As I do more and more video meetings, I have noticed the LED lights in my office make me look yellow. I chose that warmer "temperature" of lightbulbs because I didn't want the harsh—bright white of the "daylight" color bulbs. But, as I say, my current bulbs make everything yellowish on camera.
- In this case, it would take a long philosophical discussion to decide what is my *real* appearance—bright white or yellowish—that is, what is reality. But that is not my point.
- My point is that these lightbulbs cast a shade over everything so that it is perceived differently. Eyes of faith perceive not just the future but also the present with a reality "colored" by believing God is who he said he is and does what he says he will do.
- Eyes of faith perceive a different reality. If those eyes of faith are tuned to the wavelength of trusting science as that ad suggests we should be, they will see reality through science's eyes. That has not always been good!
- If we look through eyes of faith in God and believe he is who he says he is and never lies or fails, we will see all of reality from the toothpaste we use in the morning to the cure for Covid-19 colored that way.
- Seeing with eyes of faith then is a way of perceiving life not simply a way to decide what might work in the future.
- Seeing with eyes of faith is not a from-time-to-time mystical experience of Christians, it is a way of walking around in all of life as believers.
- If you think back through the week in Jerusalem, the crucifixion and the resurrection of our Lord, you'll remember pretty quickly that believers in Jesus—born again children of God—don't receive perfect eyes of faith at the time of new birth.

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- If you read through the epistles of Paul and others to early churches, this truth is reinforced. Believers grow in their eyes of faith throughout their lives.
- When we get back to Genesis we will see this in the life of Abraham. God did not *immediately* upon leaving Ur of the Chaldees give Abram and Sarah, a child named Isaac and then *immediately* ask Abram to trust him enough—to have clear enough—mature enough—eyes of faith to immediately take that precious baby to Moriah and offer him as a sacrifice. Abraham's life is a life of learning to see everything better and better through eyes of faith.
- That is the same way our lives as believers work. Just as with Abraham, when, along the way, we feel God wants something and we see a way to get it done and we chose to act out of the prized American value of *pragmatism*, we waste that opportunity to strengthen our eyes of faith.
- When faced with challenges to our comfortable paradigms—our normal—we immediately move to do good things for God to return things to those normal we risk the missing the core of the lesson for learning to see with eyes of faith.
- That core lesson is summed up in the words of Psalm 46:10 which in the NIV read, "***Be still and know that I am God...***" or in the NET "***Stop your striving and recognize that I am God....***" In other translations the emphasis for Israel in a mess is to let go of their thoughts of finding a way. They are to let go even of finding a way from God to fix their predicament in that moment. Instead, in circumstance of confusion, fear, and feeling the need for a "fix," — they are to focus on one truth—one overarching reality over all of their life—their God is indeed God.

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- This is what will brings eyes of faith when they are seeing with eyes of flesh. It is not solving the problem and looking back and saying, *"Wow! I must really have been trusting God to have done something that wonderful, brilliant, courageous etc. That must have been faith at work in me."*
- No, faith at work—seeing through the eyes of faith as I have been putting it, would have been stopping, letting go of all the possibilities of a fix and when the eyes of flesh were screaming for a cure, pausing to know that God is God.
- As I said, I believe learning this is a lifetime endeavor for most of us.
- Then, what is the curriculum? Of course, James tells us that all kinds of trials bring us into the classroom to learn to see through eyes of faith. So, does this mean I must wait until I perceive a big trial or even smaller ones to learn? I think not.
- I believe that God has given us his Word not so we can know how to do things as Christians but mainly so we can truly know him, through eyes of faith, by who he himself says he is and what he says he does and what he promises to do rather than us guessing at who God is by how we feel about him and think he ought to be.
- How we feel about God and think he ought to be and do will almost always be colored by eyes of flesh. God's Word gives us trustworthy lessons for eyes of faith.
- Think about how important this was for Jesus as he walked on this earth. How did Jesus guard against seeing his circumstances—seeing reality through flesh eyes instead of faith eyes?
- One foundational example will suffice to see the pattern. You can read it in ***Matthew's Gospel chapter 4***. It is the narrative of Jesus facing the temptations of the devil in the wilderness. It was at the beginning of his ministry—his public doing of God's will on the

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redemptive mission. The Holy Spirit of God took Jesus there so this is no mistaken side trip. Jesus has fasted forty days and nights, so he is physically weak.

- Weakness of any sort is a circumstance when we humans find it particularly difficult not to resort to our flesh eyes to see reality. We find it difficult not to look for a "fix" and then attribute that to faith in God because it seems to have worked.
- What did Jesus do when the deceiver tempted him in a time of weakness to look through eyes of flesh and accomplish good things of God's plan based on that reality? ***He quoted Scripture!***
- *"Prove you are God's son by turning stones to bread. God wants people to know you are his son, right?"*
- ***"Man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God."***
- *"Well, then, if you are the son of God, show us how important you are to God's redemptive plan. Throw yourself off the high point of the temple so people will see that God will not let you die." The deceiver even quotes Scripture to make this one seem more valid.*
- ***"No, it is written that you are not to force the hand of God by giving him a test like this."***
- From the high mountain, the devil suggested the world belonged to Jesus so he should *"just take it"*—of course Jesus would have to bow before the deceiver to receive what his eyes could see. To eyes of the flesh it might have made sense. To eyes of faith it did not because it is written ***"Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only."***
- Eyes of the flesh would have told Jesus all the deceiver suggested and offered was in line with what God had promised. So, why not just do it this way? It would work, right?

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- Eyes of faith, however, knew what God truly wanted in the moment because they knew what God himself had said in Scripture—God’s Word that Jesus had learned.
- Had God provided a step-by-step recipe for this exact situation with dates and times, exact map coordinates and a script for Jesus to make it work **by faith**? No. But he had provided clarity about who he was and how he worked so that Jesus, as a weakened human could rely on Scripture to see with eyes of faith.
- This was Jesus himself, *“Being still and knowing that God is God!”*—through Scripture.
- In this post Resurrection Sunday sermon thinking about the nature of new resurrection LIFE, I’ve been headed to Luke 24 and the description of two disciples walking out of Jerusalem on the Road to Emmaus. It took place one the day of the resurrection. The women had seen the empty tomb. Peter and John have run to the tomb to find it empty as well. Luke picks up my closing story in verse 13 of chapter 24:
- *¹³ Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. ¹⁴ They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. ¹⁵ As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them; ¹⁶ but they were kept from recognizing him.*
- How were they *“kept from recognizing him?”* Did God “blind” them? Could it have been eyes of flesh couldn’t see because they wouldn’t believe in a resurrected human?
- *¹⁷ He asked them, “What are you discussing together as you walk along?”*

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- *They stood still, their faces downcast. ¹⁸ One of them, named Cleopas, asked him, "Are you only a visitor to Jerusalem and do not know the things that have happened there in these days?"*
- The irony is wonderful. Cleopas is asking the resurrected Jesus if he is the only human around who can't **see** what is going on. Can't **see** what has happened.
- ¹⁹ *"What things?" he asked. "OK, I'll play along for the lesson in faith," says Jesus.*
- *"About Jesus of Nazareth," they replied. "He was a prophet, powerful in word and deed before God and all the people. ²⁰ The chief priests and our rulers handed him over to be sentenced to death, and they crucified him; ²¹ but we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel. And what is more, it is the third day since all this took place. ²² In addition, some of our women amazed us. They went to the tomb early this morning ²³ but didn't find his body. They came and told us that they had seen a vision of angels, who said he was alive. ²⁴ Then some of our companions went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said, but him they did not see."*
- Their eyes of flesh had this all planned out. Jesus was going to redeem Israel from its occupied mess maybe even spiritually. Some claimed to have seen him alive again, but come on!?! And, now he is gone. We will never SEE what we expected to SEE happen.
- ²⁵ *He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! ²⁶ Did not the Christ have to suffer these things and then enter his glory?" ²⁷ And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself.*

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- Now, this is a key point to what I have been saying for weeks and you may need to think about it for a bit before you agree or disagree.
- Jesus did not take them on an emotional heart journey to remind them of all the wonderful stuff they had seen him do and say with their eyes of flesh. Jesus did not make the lesson about trying to believe harder some mysterious, internal way.
- No, Jesus went back to what God himself had said about himself, his plan, his, Messiah and all of it from the prophets on to help these men see what had happened and was happening with eyes of faith rather than eyes of flesh.
- Eyes of faith always rely on Scriptural truth—not human emotions, dreams, desires to do what we think God wants and so on.
- Again, did Scripture provide a detailed recipe for what a man named Cleopas and a friend ought to do to fix their confusion and depression on that day on a 7-mile trek to Emmaus if they met a man who turned out to be the risen Lord?
- No. But Scripture gave them LIGHT for their eyes of faith that would color reality differently showing God's certain reality
- As I said weeks ago, it didn't matter how strong I felt in my heart the ice was when I stepped onto a frozen pond to play hockey. What mattered was the truth of how thick the ice was in reality. God is the only one who knows all reality—in absolute truth. He has shared some of that reality with us in his word and said, "Now, rest and trust me for the rest of it."
- *²⁸As they approached the village to which they were going, Jesus acted as if he were going farther. ²⁹But they urged him strongly, "Stay with us, for it is nearly evening; the day is almost over." So he went in to stay with them.*

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- *³⁰ When he was at the table with them, he took bread, gave thanks, broke it and began to give it to them. ³¹ Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, and he disappeared from their sight. ³² They asked each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us while he talked with us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?"*
- *³³ They got up and returned at once to Jerusalem. There they found the Eleven and those with them, assembled together ³⁴ and saying, "It is true! The Lord has risen and has appeared to Simon." ³⁵ Then the two told what had happened on the way, and how Jesus was recognized by them when he broke the bread.*
- Did "hearts"—feelings—emotions come into play? Absolutely!
- When? Was what they felt in their hearts what gave them light to see with eyes of faith? I would say absolutely not!
- Even things they had seen with mostly flesh eyes—like the breaking of the bread—took on a new appearance in reality after Scripture had opened their faith eyes to see reality.
- What turned them from the eyes of flesh to eyes of faith? Was it seeing the way Jesus held the bread differently than anyone else? No, it was being reminded from Scripture what God had said about who he is and what he is doing in Scripture—reminded from Scripture about the Messiah of God and what he would be like and do.
- I have learned my heart feelings are often right but are not always trustworthy enough to be the light necessary for me to have eyes of faith.
- Do I have heart feelings—leadings—impulses? Yes. Are they how God wants to open my eyes? No, rather, I think they are sometimes the result of God opening my eyes through knowing Him from his Word.

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- I forget who God is and what he has promised at times and so I must return to the Word again and again.
- I sometimes think, by now, I must know the Word well enough that I have who God is and what he has promised all wrapped up once and for all. Then something happens and I discover you can peel a carrot in both directions and my neat paradigm of God needs to be sharpened again by what he has said not what I think he ought to have said.
- If I don't do this, I find myself seeing more and more from eyes of flesh rather than eyes of faith.
- What does Psalm 46:10 say again? *"Be still and you'll perceive the godly faith-plan to fix things in the feelings of your heart?"*
- Or, does it say ***"Be still, and know that I am God?"***
- When we have been stilled and we know again who God is from who ***he*** says he is in Scripture not from who we feel he might or should be, then we can act in confidence—then we can do in alignment with what matters the most—seeing with eyes of faith not flesh eyes.
- I guess you can call that "acting in faith," if you like. But, please be careful about doing that. ***Sometimes we mostly want certainty instead of God.***
- Then the question becomes what are we really trusting when we say we are "acting in faith?"
- We go to Scripture, not to find the certain recipe for success in what we feel God wants us to do for Him. We go back to be reminded and learn even more of who he is and what he has said so we can walk in his light with faith eyes even when the world is in darkness.
- ***I suspect I will be learning this critical but often, in our culture, pragmatically-overwhelmed truth as a believer every day for the rest of my life!***