

SLIDE 1. Mother's Day

Sunday May 12, 2024

What does it mean to be seen by God?

SLIDE 2. Text: Genesis 16

For context: God promised Abram (in chp. 15) that he would make his offspring as numerous as the stars

And yet here they were – Abram and Sarai – in their 80s – childless.

NOT – grand-childless – but without a single child of their own.

NOT a star in sight!

Waiting... or NOT.

Sarai gave Hagar to Abram as a substitute wife – as if she was no more than a possession – someone to serve a purpose – which is inconceivable to our contemporary western mind - but it was a common practice at the time.

A married woman who could not have children lived in shame – her own and that of her community - and was often required to give a female servant to her husband in order to produce offspring – to have heirs – to keep the family name alive.

The children born to the servant woman were considered the children of the wife.

Abram – then - was acting in line with the custom of the day.

But out of line with trusting God.

Abram and Sarai had trouble believing God's promise to make Abram's offspring as countless as the stars – so they took matters into their own hands.

Which led to all kinds of problems.

Like – animosity: *When she knew she was pregnant, she (Hagar) began to despise her mistress (Sarai, v. 4).*

Like – blaming: *Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering" (v. 5).*

Like – irresponsibility: *"Your servant is in your hands," Abram said. "Do with her whatever you think best" (v. 6).*

Like – mistreatment: *Then Sarai mistreated Hagar; so she fled from her (v. 6).*

I wonder if Abram and Sarai even noticed she was gone...

God did!

The angel of the Lord found Hagar near a spring in the desert... And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from and where are you going?" (v. 7).

SLIDE 3.

God sees Hagar.

God knows her name.

God talks to her.

"I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered (v. 8).

Then God guides her and makes His own promise to her – like the promise he made to Abram – that her descendants would be too numerous to count (v. 9).

Wow. Think about what's happened here.

Hagar – who was nameless to Abram and Sarai – as far as we can tell from this chapter – who was treated as a body to produce offspring for an infertile couple – who was mistreated by that couple – who (because of being mistreated) fled from somewhere to nowhere – was guided by God - was seen by God in her running away – was cared for by God by asking questions about her well-being - was called by name by God – and who – in the end - had the longest recorded conversation with God of any woman in the whole of the OT.

The God-of-the-Universe saw, knew, and talked to this nameless and unseen creature!

To which we might say then - that being seen by God is to be made significant!

Then Hagar did something that no one in the Bible ever did - she gave God a name.

Up to this point – the only person giving God names was - God Himself – names like: "Elohim" – "the Creator" / "Yaweh" – "the Covenant Maker" / "El Shaddai" – "the Almighty."

These are big and beautiful and transcendent names.

She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me" (v. 13).

It is likely that Hagar would have known about God by His big and beautiful and transcendent names – but now she knows Him because He met her need: her need to be seen.

It seems to me that we all have this existential need.

Maybe this is why – in our childhoods – we would yell, "Watch me, Mommy! Watch me, daddy!" And then ask, "Did you see me?!"

To quote someone else who quoted someone else, "You don't really understand human nature unless you know why a child on a merry-go-round will wave at his parents every time around – and why his parents will always wave back." *William Tammeus*

SLIDE 4. God says: ***"Before I formed you, I saw you. My eyes saw your unformed body"*** (Ps. 139:16).

SLIDE 5. And to the children of Israel – who were in exile – miles and miles from home – maybe wondering, "Does God see us anymore?" - He said: ***"My eyes will watch over you for your good"*** (Jer. 24:6).

SLIDE 6. And then tenderly – the prophet Zephaniah says of God: ***The Lord your God is with you, he is mighty to save. He will take great delight in you, he will quiet you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing*** (Zeph. 3:17).

SLIDE 7. What does it mean to be seen by God?

- a. It is to be made significant.**
- b. It is to be understood.**
- c. It is to be strengthened.**

What does it mean to be seen by God? It is to be made significant.

It is as it was for Hagar – we can feel insignificant – unnoticed – undervalued – little – isolated – dismissed – alone – misunderstood - taken for granted – maybe even abused - but then we can choose to believe – we can choose to remember – that God sees us – that He watches over us for our good, that He is with us, that He delights in us, that He will quiet us, that He sings over us.

That the God-of-the-universe sees you!

The God who tends to galaxies. The God who sustains this planet! Or as Paul says – the One *who is before all things, and in him holds all things together* (Col. 1:17).

Think about that for a second...

God holds the sun at the right distance from the earth – any closer and the temperatures would quickly rise to unlivable levels and solar radiation would make it deadly to go outside – any further – the planet would quickly cool and potentially freeze.

God holds the planet to livable temperatures with an insulating atmosphere.

God holds the right chemical ingredients for life – including carbon and water.

God holds the processes that shape the earth and its environment which constantly cycle through the planet.

And our planet is just one planet in one galaxy in one solar system in a universe of an estimated 2 trillion galaxies!

And yet God has His (metaphoric) eyes on you.

It is as Louie Giglio once said, "We are significant insignificances."

Maybe we could put it this way: Imagine you're at a concert of your favorite band. You're sitting in level 2 – just happy you got tickets. The space is packed with people. It's noisy and chaotic. And in the middle of a song – a spotlight swings your way – and narrows its focus – so that its light lands on you. It's as if the singer is singing just to you – just over you. Imagine now that that's the way it is because – out of all that was going on, from out of all those people – that singer *sees* you!

How would that make you feel?

Some would say, "Significant."

What does it mean to be seen by God? It is to be understood.

Ps. 33 says: *The Lord looks down from heaven. He sees all humankind; from his dwelling place he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth — he who fashions the hearts of them all, he who **understands** all their works* (Ps. 33:13-15).

God looks. He sees. And He *understands*.

He commiserates – which is to say that God shares in our misery – He laments with us – He co-miserates with us - because He sees us – and because He has lived this life as Jesus Christ.

Have you ever been misunderstood?

You've tried to explain it in a different way – maybe even in a different language. You've used analogies and similes and metaphors, flip charts and pie graphs, slideshows and Youtube clips. You've made appeals to the listener to imagine something similar in their life happening to them and to remember how it felt for them.

And they get it – and they don't – because they weren't there! – they didn't see it! – and even if they were there and did see it – none of us has perfect recall or empathy.

But God does. He sees all humankind... and He understands.

He gets it – and He gets it. He sees us in HIGH DEFINITION - as life happens to us and as we happen upon life, and He recalls all of the details of what we do and what is done to us with PERFECT MEMORY.

No need to yell, "Watch me, daddy!" – because He always is.

He sees what we do in secret – and He has forgiven us our sin through Jesus Christ and He rewards us for our obedience – our alignment with His good will.

And He sees the good and bad that has happened to us – and rejoices with us in our joy and grieves with us in our sorrow.

We don't need to try to explain it a different way. God sees it all – perfectly – so that we can know that we are understood!

What does it mean to be seen by God? It is to be strengthened.

Let me ask you: What do you think about and feel when you think about God seeing you, watching you, seeing all of it?

Do you think: "O no!" OR "That kinda feels like stalking!" OR "Does that mean there's no such thing as existential privacy?"

Something else?

The bible says: *The eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to **strengthen** those whose hearts are fully committed to him* (2 Chron. 16:9).

God watches us so that He can strengthen us.

We are like kids learning to walk or ride a bike or land that back flip.
We need an expert, loving, and reliable - spotter.

God is that spotter to those who are committed to Him.

He supplies us wisdom when we ask for it.

As the bible says: *If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him* (Jas. 1:5).

He supplies His power when we ask for it.

As Paul prayed for the Ephesian church: *I pray out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being...* (Eph. 3:16).

This part of Paul's prayer for the Ephesians is also for you and me. We can always ask God to strengthen us with power through His spirit in us - who are committed to Him!

The story of Hagar is one of my favorites in all of Scripture.

Because - like her - I just want to/I just need to be seen.

I can feel insignificant - unnoticed - undervalued - little - isolated - dismissed - alone - misunderstood - taken for granted - maybe even abused - but then I can choose to believe - I can choose to remember - that God sees me, that He knows my name, and that He talks to me.

And we can remind each other that to be seen by God means (amongst other things) - that we are significant - that we are understood - and that we are strengthened - by the God who rejoices over us with singing.

What does it mean to be seen by God?!

That we are never alone and that we always have the most powerful ally in the universe - in our corner.

Let me pray.

Father-God, thank you for seeing us, knowing our names, and talking to us. We are made significant and known and empowered by your watchfulness.

Thank you – on this day – for our moms and grand-moms and for those in our lives who have acted like moms to us when we have needed them to – for women who have cared for us, spotted us, and taught us. We are grateful for them.

May you bless them today and through the year with strength and wisdom as they commit their lives to you.

In Jesus name I pray. Amen.