

Jesus' Core Perspective

On Sunday, we continued our sermon series called “Experiencing Jesus at a Deeper Level” by asking, “What was the primary lens through which Jesus saw life, as he lived from day to day?”

1. It’s fascinating to get to know people, especially when they’re famous. Have you ever encountered someone famous? What did you learn about them in that encounter?
2. Jesus is the most famous person ever. Through the Scriptures and through a personal relationship with him, we have the opportunity to get to know him and become his friend (John 15:15), and in the process, learn more about God. Jesus said, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” John 14:9. In other words, the better we understand Jesus and what makes him tick, the better we understand who God is and what it means to be in relationship with the Supreme Being. With that in mind, let’s dig into a story that captures Jesus’ basic outlook on life. Read Mark 9:14-29.
 - a. When the father in this story first held his child as a newborn, how do you think he felt? If you’re a parent, how did you feel when you first held your child?
 - b. When months later the father began to notice his son’s symptoms, how do you think he felt? If you’re a parent, have you ever been in a similar situation?
 - c. We learn a lot about someone when they are placed in a desperate situation. And here Jesus is placed in a desperate situation. Look again at verse 25. What do Jesus’ words reveal about what he believed to be the ultimate cause of illness (and other bad things) in the world? Does Jesus see God as the cause of illness? If not, what does he see as the ultimate cause? What does the reference to an “unclean spirit” mean?
 - d. In various Gospel passages, Jesus speaks of Satan and evil spirits (demons). Some Christians take this literally, as referring to fallen angels. Others take these words as metaphors meant to conceptualize how evil seems to work in this world – active, intelligent, and strategic. How do you see it?
 - e. Jesus clearly saw the world as being a dangerous place where we are locked in a struggle with the power of evil. In Luke 22:31, Jesus warned Simon Peter, “Simon, Simon, Satan has desired to have you that he may sift you like wheat.” What does it look like for Satan/evil to try to sift someone like wheat? Can you think of a time in your life when you felt like you were being sifted?
 - f. In John 16:33, Jesus says, “In this world you will have tribulation. . . .” It’s not exactly our favorite verse because it suggests faith doesn’t exempt us from hardship. Christian author Brene Brown says she returned to faith and church when having a midlife crisis, hoping church and faith would be like an epidural that takes all the pain away. Instead, she discovered that church and faith are more like a midwife who stands next to you and says, “Push! It’s supposed to hurt.” What do you think she means? Do you agree?

3. When we put all the foregoing together, we get half of Jesus' basic outlook on life. To paraphrase Martin Luther's hymn, "The world is full of devils seeking to undo us." In other words, life is hard. Evil is active, intelligent, and strategic. So how are we supposed to respond? That's the other half of Jesus' outlook. When the father in our Gospel story falls into despair and says, "If you are able to do anything, have pity and help us," Jesus responds by saying, "If you are able! – All things can be done for the one who believes." Similar statements recur throughout the teachings of Jesus:
- "Nothing will be impossible with God." Luke 1:37.
- "For mortals it is impossible, but for God all things are possible. Matthew 19:26.
- "What is impossible for mortals is possible for God." Luke 18:27.
- a. Some Christians believe these words mean we can ask for anything we want and get it if only we have enough faith. Other Christians believe these words mean we should go into every situation believing, "Anything is possible here. I rule out nothing. Because God is here." This latter approach is often called "Possibility Thinking." Which of these two approaches most resonates with you – and why? Which is most consistent with your life experience?
 - b. Tell us about a time when you faced something terrible, but experienced either a miracle of deliverance out of the situation or a miracle of deliverance through the situation.
 - c. What's the downside of going into a situation without a strong belief that God is powerfully present?
 - d. What's the downside (if any) of going into a situation thinking that we can dictate the precise outcome of the situation if we only have enough faith?
 - e. In the current issue of *Time Magazine*, Guillermo Del Toro says, "These days, the safest way to appear intelligent is to be skeptical by default. We seem sophisticated when we say we don't believe and disingenuous when we say we do. Optimism is radical. It's the hard choice, the brave choice. Every day we all become the balance of our choices – choices between love and fear, belief or despair. No hope is ever too small. Optimism is not uncool; it's rebellious and daring and vital." Your thoughts?
 - f. On Sunday, after telling the story of Marian Anderson, Jeff said, "The statement that 'anything is possible with God' is not a rational proposition meant to be proven by a data driven formula. Rather, it's a defiant proclamation, a broken hallelujah that says, 'Ok, you may keep me out of Constitution Hall; I may never sing there. But it will happen; the day is coming when someone like me will. You can kick me down, but you can't break my spirit. Even if you kill my body, God will raise it right back up again. Because with God all things are possible! In any situation, all things are possible, so I (like Jesus before me) approach each situation with the open-ended, optimistic Possibility Thinking.'" Are you living with that mindset? If not, what holds you back?