

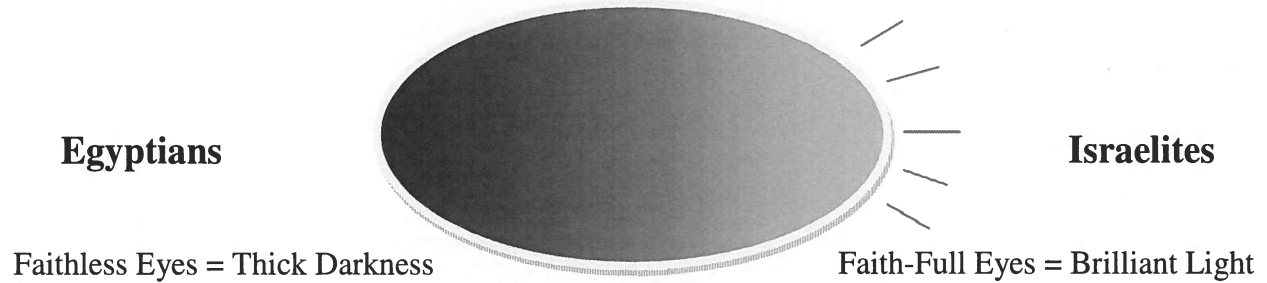
The Eye Of The Beholder

On Sunday, we continued our series called “Voices of Angels” by focusing on the actions taken by the angel of the Lord when the Egyptian army threatened to overwhelm the Israelites.

1. Warm-up Question: To illustrate how quickly a day, week, or life can change, Jeff told the story of the candle that fell over and made it look like he wet his pants. In recent weeks, when have you had a brush with the unexpected – something that surprised you?
2. Life has a way of teaching us that we’re not in control. On your own journey, when did you begin to learn that lesson? What happened?
3. The Israelites had been slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years. But then came a series of catastrophic plagues that convinced the Egyptians they had to let the Israelites go. By the thousands, the Israelites streamed out into the wilderness, carrying whatever they could take on short notice, ready to discover a whole new way of life.
 - a. What do you think the Israelites were thinking and feeling in the first few days of their journey out of Egypt?
 - b. What do you think the Egyptians felt as they watched them go?
 - c. What might have caused the Egyptians to change their mind and decide to go after them – and what does that tell us about human nature?
4. Read Exodus 14:10-22.
 - a. In verses 11 and 12, the Israelites express their utter despair. When in your life have you felt like this – overwhelmed, confused, why me Lord?
 - b. Look again at verses 13-14. What meaning or message do you draw from these verses?
 - c. Verse 19 mentions both the angel of God and a great cloud. As you picture it, what does the angel look like? What does the cloud look like? Or is the cloud simply the angel’s way of manifesting itself? How do you see it?
5. In this passage, the angel never says a word. She doesn’t need to. The message is in what she does. In particular, Jeff urged us to focus on two great object lessons in this passage. **Lesson 1: You are never alone; there are angels all around you.**
 - a. During her near death experience, Anita Moorjani came to a great realization. She says, “I realized that I was surrounded by spiritual beings who were always around me even when I did not know it.” Do you agree with Anita? What do you believe about angels and how they affect our lives?

- b. In Daniel 3, when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were thrown into the fiery furnace, King Nebuchadnezzar was stunned to see them unharmed, walking around, accompanied by a “fourth person” who looked “like a son of the gods.” (Daniel 3:25.) Jeff also shared the story of how Ernest Shackleton and his crew survived an Antarctic disaster. As three of them trudged over frozen mountains, they sensed the presence of “a fourth person” with them. Have you ever had an experience like that or known someone who did?
 - c. Read Jesus’ words in Matthew 18:10. Do you believe in guardian angels? Why or why not?
6. The second great lesson in this passage is drawn from the dramatically different perceptions the Egyptians and Israelites had of the cloud that came to rest between them. Verse 20 says, “Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to one side and light to the other side.” Think about it. Both sides encountered the same cloud. One side (the Egyptians) perceived it as thick darkness that blocked their way, while the other side (the Israelites) perceived it as brilliant light that lit their way. In the Bible, the Egyptians represent faithlessness and the Israelites represent ‘faith-fullness’. From this, we drew **Lesson 2: If I look at the challenges of my life through faithless eyes, I see only darkness. But if I look through faith-full eyes, suddenly there is great light in even the darkest circumstances.**
- a. Jeff described a situation when he was a young adult that seemed like something awful (not being able to become a philosophy professor at his Christian college). But that roadblock led him to pursue law school and to the miracle of being admitted to Harvard, which taught him a dramatic lesson: What we perceive as terrible circumstances are often used by God to channel us in the right direction, lighting the way forward. When in your life have you experienced that same phenomenon where something seemingly bad led to something really good?
 - b. Read Matthew 6:23. What is Jesus trying to teach us here? What does a “healthy eye” look like? What does an “unhealthy eye” look like?
 - c. To help us get a better “eye” on life, Jeff offered four suggestions. No. 1: Give up control and embrace life as it is. No. 2: Give up control and embrace life as it is. No. 3: Give up control and embrace life as it is. No. 4: Dare to envision the power of God at work in your life as it is, in EVERY situation. Jeff said, “Faith is not just looking at a tough situation, imagining your desired outcome, then insisting that happen. That’s just an effort to take back control. Faith is when I look at a tough situation, believe that God is at work in it, and surrender the outcome to God, expecting that God will bring light out of the situation one way or the other.” Do you believe that? If so, are you living it? How can we do better at “letting go and letting God”?
7. Take a look at the diagram on the next page and answer the questions printed below it.

Exodus 14:20 - Diagrammed



Self-Application Questions:

- ✓ For you, in your life right now, what situation does the cloud represent?
- ✓ What does that situation look like through faithless eyes?
- ✓ But then, what do you begin to see if you try to look at it through faith-full eyes?
- ✓ Which perspective will you choose to embrace?