

7 – “Clear Eyes, Full Heart” // *Something Better, Something Greater* // 2 Kings 6:8–23

Announcement:

One of the things God has put on my heart to pray for our church lately is that we will be less of an event people attend on the weekend and more of a community they belong to. That’s what a church is: not a religious show, but a community—a community of friends, a family of believers. The primary way you experience that here is in a small group.

There is another reason we emphasize small groups here at the Summit—in RDU, it’s a way that many people will first get connected with the gospel. Many times they won’t come *here*, but they are willing to meet with you in your home, or with a group over breakfast. For many people, your small group will be their intro into Christianity.

Currently we have 350 small groups, meeting in locations all across the Triangle and at all time of the weeks, but 40% of you who attend regularly are not in a small group. Our goal this year is to DOUBLE the number of small groups we have, for two reasons: We have a lot of believers here who need to be belongers... and we want to equip you to reach a lot of people we’re not reaching.

So, I want to challenge you to lead a small group. You may not feel qualified, but we will make it really easy, team you up with some great people, and train you.

For some of you, you need to lead a small group in your workplace, gym, or neighborhood with a bunch of people who would never come here.

For both of you, your first step is to join us at the Small Group Leaders Conference this coming weekend.

- All of our current leaders will be there and it will be a great time to hear how you can plug in and start a small group of whatever kind.
- Friday night will be with your campus, Saturday morning we will all be together at our brier creek campus. You can RSVP at SummitRDU.com or on The City right now.

And I want to challenge you, if you’re not in a small group, to go ahead and plan to get in one. Your spiritual life needs this; your family needs this. The community aspect of the body of Christ is as important as the preaching! In a few weeks we’ll explain how you can do that **through GroupLink**, so stay tuned, but for now, we need a whole slew of you who are interested in leading, co-leading, or even hosting a small group to come to leader training this Friday night at your campus!

Introduction:

So my dad grew up in the country... two brothers, a younger and an older. They were all built just alike, but his younger brother was never able to get into sports the way the older two were, and *this is why*...

- Hatchet story

Accidents that involve the eyes are particularly frightening because we know that to lose our sight would dramatically change our lives.

When I got LASIK surgery I was nervous because my wife was about 7 months pregnant with our 1st child and we both thought, “What if I never get to see her?”

Without sight there is so much of life that you'd miss. We'd never see the beauties of color, or feel the thrill of looking into the eyes of someone we love, or the joy that comes from seeing that look of delight on our children's faces.

Spiritual sight is 10,000x more important than physical sight. Spiritual sight is how you perceive God. Without spiritual sight you'll miss out on the most glorious displays in the universe. One of the most tragic curses of the fall was that our sin left us spiritually blind, and perhaps worse, unaware that we were blind. We still think we can see.

The miracle of the prophet Elisha we are going to look at today addresses spiritual blindness. As I've explained to you, "Elisha, the greater prophet," is just a foreshadowing of Jesus, the greatest of all prophets. Elisha's **ministry was remarkable**, doing things that no prophet who had come before him had ever done. And Jesus would do them all to a greater degree.¹

Elisha's name in Hebrew means "God saves." His ministry existed to demonstrate the saving power of God. So you have to read this story of Elisha healing blindness through the lens of what Jesus accomplished for us.

2 Kings 6:8–23, NIV²

⁸ Now the king of Aram was at war with Israel. After conferring with his officers, he said, "I will set up my camp in such and such a place."

⁹ But then the man of God would send word to the king of Israel: "Beware of passing that place, because the Arameans are there." ¹⁰...Time and again Elisha warned the king, so that he was always a step ahead of the Arameans.

As you can imagine... ¹¹ This enraged the king of Aram. He summoned his officers and demanded of them, "Tell me! Which of you is on the side of the king of Israel?"

¹² "None of us, my lord the king," said one of his officers, "but Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells the king of Israel the very words you speak in your bedroom." (He taps our phone lines and reads our emails—he's like the original NSA.)

¹³ "Go, find out where he is," the king ordered, "so I can send men and capture him." The report came back: "He is in Dothan." ¹⁴ Then he sent horses and chariots and a mighty army there. They went by night and surrounded the city.

¹⁵ When the servant of the man of God got up and went out early the next morning, an army with horses and chariots had surrounded the city. "Oh no, my lord! What shall we do?" the servant asked.

¹⁶ "Don't be afraid," the prophet answered. "Those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

¹⁷ And (then) Elisha prayed, "LORD, open his eyes, that he may see." Then the LORD opened the servant's eyes, and he looked and saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

¹ "Say to John: the blind receive their sight... the lepers are cleansed... the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them." (Matthew 11:5).

² I edited a few of the phrases in this story for flow. Original meaning is fully preserved.

¹⁸ As the enemy came down toward him, Elisha prayed to the LORD, "Strike this army with blindness." So he struck them with blindness, as Elisha had asked.

¹⁹ Elisha then told them, "This is not the road and this is not the city. Follow me, and I will lead you to the man you are looking for."

- Doesn't that remind you of a Jedi mind trick? "These are not the droids you are looking for."
- Listen (important): Hebrew scholars point out that this was probably not a total blindness, but something more like a delusion ...³ Because, if they were completely blind, they probably wouldn't continue on in their mission. "We all lost my eyesight, but we've got a job to do!"
- The indication is that this blindness is a delusion. They can't really perceive where they are or what is going on!

And so he led them to Samaria.

- Now, Samaria is about 10–12 miles from Dothan. Even marching at a brisk clip, that would have taken at least 3 hours, and I ask this: what kind of small talk did the Syrian commanders and Elisha make during those 3 hours? They say to Elisha, "So, what is it that you do, anyway?" "Oh, I used to run a farm, but haven't had the time for it lately." "And where are you leading us, exactly?" "Uh . . . nice place . . . just around the bend here . . . friendly people... barbecue is fantastic." Had to have been a little awkward.
- Samaria, btw, was, at the time, the capital of Israel, where the king of Israel lived with all of his army.

²⁰ After they entered the city, Elisha said, "LORD, open the eyes of these men so they can see." Then the LORD opened their eyes and they looked, and there they were, inside Samaria. (standing now as captives, in front of the king of Israel—this is the "oh, crud" moment)

²¹ When the king of Israel saw them, he asked Elisha, "Shall I kill them, my father? Shall I kill them?"

²² "Do not kill them," he answered. "Would you kill those you have captured with your own sword or bow?"

- In other words, "You typically would not just kill prisoners of war, would you?"
- And these are not even your prisoners; they are God's prisoners!
- So, he says...

"Set food and water before them so that they may eat and drink and then go back to their master." ²³ So he prepared a great feast for them, and after they had finished eating and drinking, he sent them away, and they returned to their master.

I love this next line... "So from then on the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory."

The plot of this story revolves around **2 sets** of blind people: one, a believer; the other of a group of unbelievers. **What both most need** is to have their eyes opened.

Let's talk first about...

I. The Blindness of The Believer

Elisha's servant was terrified because he saw the size of the army against him. But he was blind to the presence of the God who was fighting for him and the size of the army that he fought with. Essentially, he **doubted two things**:

- The **steadfastness** of God's love and the **strength** of his power.

³ Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible.

- He thought God had abandoned them. “We’re surrounded. We’re abandoned. There is no hope.”
- The essence of sin, for a believer or an unbeliever, is a lack of faith in God’s goodness.
 - The reason **we reject God’s ways** and pursue our own path is we don’t think God is infinitely good, or trustworthy. We don’t trust him.
 - The **reason we are afraid** or worried is we don’t believe God’s promises—that he is **good**, that he is **always fighting** for us, that he will **never leave** us or forsake us, or that he is **working all things** for good.
 - Martin Luther said that every sin begins with **an evil heart of unbelief**.
- Religious people, like this servant, often doubt God’s goodness and love as much as unbelievers do. Unbelievers show their unbelief by walking away from God. **Believers show it** by
 - ...being constantly worried and fearful about their lives, or about their futures.
 - Or, how about this: religious people show their unbelief in God’s goodness by thinking they have to perform at a certain level before God will love and accept and bless them. They see God as an adversary who has to be won over through their good works. “God, I’ve done this much... won’t you bless me, now? Won’t you receive me into heaven? **Martin Luther said that our good works are a “defense against the goodness of God.”** Think of the **irony** of that statement! Our good works are a defense against God’s goodness declared in the gospel, because we don’t really believe it, so we try to earn his love by their good works.

So God, in answer to prayer, opens the eyes of this servant to see that the **armies of God’s love surround** this murderous hoard of Syrians, and that this **huge Syrian army is nothing** compared to the millions upon millions of angels that God has surrounding those that he loves.

When you are afraid, you need clearer vision. Here’s what Paul prayed for the Ephesians:

- *“I pray that you... may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses all knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” Eph 3:18–20*
- *Paul* does something in that verse very uncharacteristic of him. He loses his words. He says, “The love of Christ surpasses all knowledge and my ability to describe it.” So he prays that we might sense, feel in our hearts:
 - **The length of God’s love.** How long is God’s love? In Ephesians 1:4 Paul explained that from all eternity God has set his love on those whom he loves. We were **chosen in him**, he said, before the foundation of the world. **Think about that** for a minute: **if you are a child of God**, there has never been a time when God did not know about you and love you. Before you were born he had determined to save you. Before you sinned he determined to save you. He had set his affection on you before your creation, set the day of your salvation, and orchestrated the events of your life to bring you to himself. **Isn’t that what “chosen in him before the foundation of the world” means? He didn’t do that because he saw goodness** in you; while you were still a sinner God loved you. As Pastor Tony explained to us a few weeks ago, it’s like an **adoption...**
 - **The height.** How high is God’s love? David says in Psalm 103... “For as high as the heavens are above the earth, that’s how great God’s love is for us.” You ever look out at the stars?
 - Light travels at 186,282.2 mps. In the time you snap your finger, light circles the globe 6 times. In one minute, light travels 11 million miles. It takes 8 minutes for light to get from the sun to our planet. (so when you feel a sunbeam on your face it left the surface of the sun 8 minutes ago). In one day, light travels 160 billion miles. In one year, light travels an unfathomable 5 trillion, 865 billion, 696 million miles.
 - The outer edge of the universe, according to astrophysicists, is 15.5 billion light-years away!
 - If that seems incomprehensible, it’s because it’s virtually unimaginable. That’s the measure of the love of God for his people.

- **The breadth:** How wide is the love of God? Wide enough that it controls all things? Paul said in Eph 1:11 that he works all things according to the counsel of his will. There's not **1 stray molecule** in all the universe, or, as you see in this story, he has **10,000 upon 10,000** angels surrounding every square inch of this planet. **What if you believed that?**
- **The depth:** How deep is God's love? Deep enough to reach into the lowest hell to save us.
 - **Romans 5:6-8...**
 - *While we were still weak, Christ died for the ungodly.*
 - *For one will scarcely die for a righteous man; though for a good man one may dare to die...*
 - *BUT God...*

So to the believer: Open your eyes of faith... Listen:

- **Ps. 34:7-10**, "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him. Oh, fear the Lord, you his saint... for those who seek the Lord lack no good thing!"
- What if I really could open your eyes this weekend? Based on what we see here in 2 Kings 6, can you imagine what we'd see? Do you have the faith to see that God is good, and always fighting for you? That **nothing can separate** you from the love of God? Not **death nor life**; not **angels or rulers**, nor **things present nor things to come**, not **powers**, nor **height nor depth...** can separate you from the love of God, and wouldn't you say, "If **God really is for me**, *who can be against me?*" And "all things work together for good..."
- It is **interesting to me how Paul**, in Ephesians, **sets up a contrast** to being filled with the Spirit and being drunk with alcohol. He says, "Do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit.
 - Both are ways to deal with your problems. Alcohol, though, blurs our perception of reality. It helps us to drown out our fears, worries and sorrows; it dulls our pain.
 - The Spirit does the opposite. He doesn't blur our sense of reality; he expands it. He lets us see that the armies fighting for us are greater than those fighting against us.

You say: "Oh, but I can't see them, and I can't feel their effects, either?"

Let me point out a **little detail** you may have overlooked but a Hebrew person probably would not: It's in **vs. 10**. Where did this vision take place? **Dothan**. Any Jewish person would recognize Dothan as the place made famous by another man of God in deep trouble. Joseph had been thrown into a pit and then sold him into slavery at **Dothan** (Genesis 37:17). In that pit Joseph prayed that God would deliver him. Did God answer his prayers? Yes, but not the way he expected. He was sold to a group of slave-traders from Egypt. He was falsely accused by Potiphar and thrown into prison. He was forgotten by a butler. But God was working in all this stuff to get Joseph into a place where he could rescue both himself, his family, and all the people of God.

If God had answered Joseph's prayers from that pit the way Joseph wanted, all of Joseph's family would have perished physically and spiritually. ***So the chariots of fire and the angels were there for Joseph, too, fighting for him, but they were in stealth mode; they had their silencers on.***

That's how it may be for you sometime, believer, but you can be sure that God is always fighting for you, even when you can't track the footprints of his angels or hear the rumble of his chariots.

For confirmation of that you need look no farther than the cross...

You say, "Well, why does God do it that way, you ask?"

- Well, I'm not God so I can't answer that question fully, I do know that one of the things God is always doing is perfecting our faith; testing our resolve in his goodness. You see, God is not just

interested in **resolving our situations**; he's also interested in **restoring our faith**. And so often he ordains struggle as a part of that process?

- **"Like a child trying to push against the hand of a parent, the parent gives only enough resistance to test the resolve of the child, so God resists us in prayer, to see our resolve in his goodness." Martin Luther**⁴
- Can you see the rest of your life through the lens of Calvary? **John Calvin** said that the cross is our **"spectacles of faith."** They bring otherwise blurry situations into the sharp focus of God's love.
- **Gospel-spectacles give you the ability to see a world filled with horses and chariots, working all things according to the counsel of his will.**
- What you need, believer, is not a new "sight" of the angels but "insight" into the heart of God.
 - You see these setbacks you are going through as permanent.
 - This broken relationship will destroy your life
 - This failure ruins your career
 - You are worthless. Nothing but failure and pain are in your future.
 - All lies! *"The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him. Oh taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!"*
 - The **battle for your life** has been completely won. So just **hold onto God's hand** and let it play out!

So, the blindness of the believer. Now we deal with...

II. The Blindness of the Unbelievers

How are *they* blind?

- Well, they think God (and his people) are their enemies, and that if they can just capture and eliminate the man of God, their problems would be over.

So Elisha **strikes them with a kind of physical blindness**, which you can see is a picture of spiritual blindness. (Remember, what he gives them is a delusion. They think they can see but they really can't. That's how the whole life of an unbeliever is. They think they can see clearly, but they can't.)

Elisha then **confounds** them. He tells them they are seeking the wrong person, and then walks them into Israel's capital, which puts them into a completely indefensible, vulnerable state.

This is what God does. Paul says that he confounds the plans of the wise brings it to ruin.

- The wise people at the tower of Babel tried to rebel against God, so God confounded their language so that they can't understand each other.
- Abraham's son Isaac tried to rebel against God by giving the blessing to Esau, his favorite son, rather than Jacob, who was God's choice. God blinded Jacob so that he mistakenly confers the blessing onto Jacob.
- This is what always happens, and you'll never know its happening until its too late because you are under a delusion...

So Elisha confounds them, and leads them to a position of complete vulnerability... but **then does something** no one is expecting. He throws them a huge feast and lets them go. When they finally snapped out of their blindness, they expected an onslaught of judgment. Instead, Elisha gave them a feast of grace.

- Don't miss the irony here. **They thought the resolution to their problems would come through capturing and destroying God's man. Instead, they found blessing when they were captured by God's man.**⁵

⁴ David Steinmetz, prof of OT at Duke Divinity School, sermon given at Beeson Divinity School in 1996, "Calving and Luther on Interpreting Genesis." Beeson Divinity School podcast, 10/9/12.

So many overtones of Jesus here:

- When Jesus came, everybody missed him. They were blinded, and they were “seeking the wrong guy,” just like Elisha said to these soldiers.
 - The Jews thought they needed a conquering warrior who would get rid of all their enemies. The Greeks thought they were looking for a brilliant philosopher-king. When the real Messiah showed up, who would serve the poor, wash feet, and die as a substitution for sin, they missed him.
- Like Elisha, Jesus took his enemies into the heart of the capital, to the throne room of God’s justice, but instead of judgment he gave them grace.
 - Instead of calling down the legions of angels upon them in judgment, he prayed, “*Father, forgive them.*”
 - This was the foolishness of God that confounded the wise!

But it achieved ultimate victory. Ultimate victory is not to destroy your enemies, but to turn your enemies into friends, and that’s what Elisha did with these soldiers, and what Jesus did with us.

Many of you are under the same delusion these soldiers were under, their blindness is a picture of our blindness.

- ***You think that God is your adversary...***
 - (his rules are bad and restrictive; he doesn’t care about you—he’s abandoned you to the ravages of life;
 - he’s your adversary who wants to throw you in hell and so you’ve always got to be proving yourself to him).
- The tragedy is that **at all points you think you can see!** It all **seems so clear**, but you are blind.
 - It reminds me of the story I’ve told here for years about a surgeon named **Leo Winters**. I don’t know if this story is true, but it goes like this...

You are going making the biggest mistake of your life all while thinking you see clearly! It reminds me of what Jesus said to the Pharisees after he had healed the blind man in John 9:

- “If you were blind, you would have no guilt; but now that you say, ‘We see,’ your guilt remains.” (John 9:41)
- If you knew you were blind, you would seek God for sight. It’s because *you think you can see* that your guilt remains.

Like these **Syrian soldiers**, *You think **you’re going to find** what you’re looking for by capturing some earthly attainment—a job; a relationship; a certain salary or level of fame. But just like in this story, **you will only find** what you’re looking for when you are captured by God.*

- True joy is not in the boyfriend or the scholarship or the retirement package or a new house or the new job, it’s in being reconciled to God!

And so how has Jesus attempted to wake you up? He did more than simply throw you a feast and let you go. He took you into the heart of his capital, but rather than taking vengeance on you, he poured out the feast of his flesh and blood upon you.

- On the cross, he could have called down these legions of angels to deliver him, but he didn’t. He suffered, willingly, turning his back on their help, so he could save you.

⁵ The phrasing of this comes from Tim Keller in his message on this passage.

And that should do 2 things to you: 1. It should change your heart about God; and 2. It should show you that you can trust him.

- You see, all the **previous prophets**, like Elisha, **had the angels by their side**. Jesus was the only one who did not. He was forsaken by them, and by God... so that he could save us.
- **Muslims have a hard time with the crucifixion**. They believe Jesus was a prophet, but on the cross Judas replaced Jesus. They say, "Why would God allow his servant to be forsaken?" So that he could save you! Unbelievers see it that way. It **makes no sense** to them. It is **foolishness**.

But it is through this foolishness that Jesus saved the world. The believer looks at this foolishness and says:

*Amazing love! How can it be,
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

*'Tis mystery all: th' Immortal dies!
Who can explore his strange design?
In vain the firstborn seraph tries,
to sound the depths of love divine.*

*'Tis mercy all! Let earth adore;
let angel minds inquire no more!*

*Amazing love! How can it be,
that thou, my God, shouldst die for me?*

These soldiers in 2 Kings were changed "**...from then on the bands from Aram stopped raiding Israel's territory**" (2 Kings 6:23). And that was only from the slightest touch of grace!

- The soldier by the cross was changed by seeing Jesus' grace toward him. He said, "Surely this man is the Son of God."
- What changes your heart? What melts the heart of stone?

*1. I saw one hanging on a tree
In agony and blood
Who fixed his loving eyes on me
As near his cross I stood*

*And never till my dying breath
Will I forget that look
It seemed to charge me with his death
Though not a word he spoke*

*2. My conscience felt and owned the guilt
And plunged me in despair
I saw my sins his blood had spilt
And helped to nail him there*

*But with a second look he said
"I freely all forgive*

*This blood is for your ransom paid
I died that you might live."*

*3. Thus while his death my sin displays
For all the world to view
Such is the mystery of grace
It seals my pardon too*

*With pleasing grief and mournful joy
My spirit now is filled
That I should such a life destroy
Yet live by him I killed.*

Chorus: *Forever etched upon my mind
Is the look of him who died—the Lamb I crucified!
And now, my life will sing the praise, of pure atoning grace
That looked on me and gladly took my place.⁶*

MUSIC

The sight of that turns God's enemies into friends.

Conclusion:

Both believer and unbeliever alike need to see a fresh glimpse of God's love. That one look will do more than 10,000 practical points or doctrinal lessons.

- There are kind of 2 major views on preaching... doctrinally deep/relevant. Goal of a gospel sermon: worship. That look is what changes.
 - Some of you seem to **thrive on Bible knowledge**.
 - Listen: I love it. But you don't need more Bible trivia facts and insights into Hebrew words. You need a fresh view of the **love of God**. One look at the cross is worth **10,000 Greek verb tenses**.
 - I think **sometimes you Bible students** might weary God with your incessant quest for knowledge. Jesus didn't die just to fill your head with information, but your heart with love.
- I just want you to see! And I can't create that in you through eloquent words. Even Paul couldn't do it, so he prays in the middle of a book that God would allow them to see the height and depth and breadth and length... Eph 3.
 - Paul knew all the teaching and study in the world can't produce spiritual sight.
 - And he knew this first hand. On the road to Damascus, he had all the Bible knowledge in the world, and was blind to the truth of Jesus, and God literally struck him blind on the road to Damascus to help him see that!
- God gives this kind of knowledge as a gift, and as an answer to prayer!

Prayer:

- For sight!

Communion:

- I want you to see this as God's verdict on you.
- I think most of my life has been me trying to construct a narrative where my sin is not really that bad. This is the verdict. Jesus did not die for a part of you. All of you had to be killed. Paul said, "I am convinced that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwells no good thing." This is what you really deserve.

⁶ "The Look," Sovereign Grace Music

- This is bad news, but this is where the gospel begins.
 - The greatest obstacle to true worship is not seeing the sinfulness of sin. We underestimate the depth of our depravity and sin. There was no good left in us. Our intellects needed to be crucified. Our righteousness and our love.
- The gospel is that God did what we could not do... that he was infinitely good. In our hearts we have a hard time believing that, which is why we are always trying to do enough good works to be good enough to be accepted by God.
- Luther said that we do good works “as a defense against the goodness of God.” There is nothing you can do to gain acceptance by God, God has done it all as a gift of his grace. Just receive it. “Lay your head down; down at Jesus’ feet.”
- And believe the gospel!
- Romans 6:11 says, *“So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.” (Romans 6:11)*. In the middle of my 8 year old saying this, it made sense. Believe the gospel, and its power is yours.
- *“The love of God does not find, but creates, that which pleases it.”* By believing the gospel he creates righteousness in you.
- Believers: The servant could have looked at that hill all day long and not seen the first angel. God had to open his eyes.
- You can look at these elements all day long and not see the glory and love of God bursting through it. That’s why you are bored during communion and your mind wanders. Pray that God would open your eyes.

Song: *“When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”*

Bullpen:

strength of God's power and

He **raised** the dead. He **healed** lepers. He **gave sight** to the blind. This is all pointing to Jesus, who would describe his ministry this way, *"Say to John: the blind receive their sight... the lepers are cleansed... the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them."* (Matthew 11:5).

I read this story about a woman who was on her way home. She saw an 18-wheeler following her really close. As she sped up, so did the truck. She exited the highway; he followed. She ran a red light; so did he. She finally found a rest stop and got out of the car, running in fear. But the trucker ran up to her car and opened the back seat, where there was a man hiding. She was running from her protector and not even knowing it.

The ultimate goal of salvation is absolute, unwavering faith in God's goodness. Job.

God tests your faith in his goodness. God doesn't always open your physical eyes to his love and power and all the angels carrying out his will. But through the lens of Calvary, you can see them.

- Thinking about this... When you start to date somebody... And everything's going well and you find some glaring fault that makes you derail the whole relationship.
 - The Seinfeld episode... broke up with a girl b/c she ate her peas one at a time or had a weird laugh.
 - And I guess that is not entirely inappropriate. (Although some of you guys are way too picky. I always think it is absurd when some guy tells me he broke up with a girl b/c she had split ends when he's got a mole with hair growing out of it...)
 - But my love for my kids is totally different. I don't discover a fault in one of my daughters and say, "Sorry, Kharis... this is just not working out. It's not you, it's me." Actually, her faults become something that make me love her, if possible, even more. I have compassion on her and want to protect her... and help her with her weaknesses.
 - That's how God's love for us is. Tender, compassionate, like a father with a child.
 - Imagine if when you had to wear a little label on your back with all you annoying habits, like the warning label on a carton of cigarettes: Warning: will cause cancer. Warning: very self-centered; will cause extreme irritation.
 - But when God saw us, he saw everything, all of our flaws and shortcomings, and loved us anyway.

He is using everything: every injustice, every scheme of our enemy, for his purpose.

- In **Eph 5:18** Paul commanded the Ephesians, who were undergoing a significant amount of persecution, **"Do not be drunk with wine, but be filled with the Spirit."** **Eph 5:18**
 - Don't miss the contrast.
 - Alcohol makes you less aware of your surroundings; the Spirit makes you more aware. To the size and love of God's power.
- Earlier in that book, Paul, the most articulate expounder of Christianity, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, tries to describe the love of God. And he does something very uncharacteristic: he loses his words and says, "The love of Christ surpasses all knowledge and my ability to describe it." And then he prayed,
 - I think I've told you before...

Shortly after I got married I heard an ad on the radio by a doctor offering laser eye surgery for a ridiculously-low price. It didn't occur to me that contracting out your eyeballs to the lowest bidder was not really a good idea.

I think it was the fastening of the strap around my head that finally triggered in my mind what was about to happen. Suddenly it became crystal clear that they were about to remove my cornea and reform my retina with a high-powered incineration laser. And I had priced it out to the lowest bidder.

Now helpless, I watched the little knife slice off the cornea of my right eye (I realize that doesn't sound like the kind of thing you want to watch... but where else is there to look at that moment?) After the cornea was removed, I was treated to a 2-minute kaleidoscopic light show, coupled with a curious burning-rubber smell... and though 2 minutes doesn't sound like a long time, it feels like days when your cornea is in a petri dish on the table beside you.

All I could think about the whole time was, "What if there is an earthquake?" Earthquakes are not common where I live in North Carolina, but I've watched the History Channel's "Unexpected MegaDisasters" enough to know that there's no telling when the next big one is coming.

Thankfully, no earthquake. And the whole process, for both eyes, lasted only about 15 minutes. The doctor replaced the cornea on my eye, painted it over with a little eyeball-super-glue, sat me up, and ever since then I've been able to see 20/20.

For those of you considering laser eye surgery, be encouraged. (I've heard they've improved it a lot over the years).

Now, truth be told, I probably wasn't in any real danger of losing my sight. But lying there during the surgery I had some sober moments to reflect on the value of sight. Without sight there is so much of life that we'd miss. We wouldn't know the beauties of color and or the majesty of a sunset. We wouldn't know the thrill that comes into our hearts from seeing a look of delight on our children's faces or the affectionate gaze of our spouse.

Spiritual sight is even more important. Spiritual sight is how we perceive God. Without spiritual sight you miss out on the most glorious display in the universe. And the tragedy is that if you are spiritually blind you have no idea that you're missing anything at all.

"Thus while his death my sin displays, For all the world to view, Such is the mystery of grace, It seals my pardon too; With pleasing grief and mournful joy, My spirit now is filled, That I should such a life destroy, Yet live by him I killed."

Typically, when I prepare to teach on a passage, I'll often check around to see what other pastors have done with various passages, and I found a message by Tim Keller particularly helpful on this passage, and a few of the things I say today come from him.

Keller: Both religious and irreligious are alike blind (Keller on failure to trust God as core sin. Both irreligious and religious lost see him as adversary. You mask your unbelief *as good works*, trying to win God over.

Jesus was forsaken by the angels, unlike all the previous prophets who had them stand by their side. The soldier by the cross was changed by seeing Jesus grace; the criminal was changed by the fact that Jesus did not respond with insults.