

## Having the Eyes of Our Heart Enlightened

Psalm 100; Ephesians 1:15-23

November 23, 2008

By Dr. David B. Freeman, Pastor  
Weatherly Heights Baptist Church

I remember the first time I was truly captivated by the beauty of fall foliage. This fall has been beautiful. Green Mountain has been a masterpiece. But I really do remember the *first* time the beauty reached out and grabbed me. I hate to admit it, but I was actually in college. My beauty sensors bloomed a bit late, okay? I had always heard people make comments about how beautiful the fall colors were. I might even have agreed with them: “Yea, that’s nice.” That’s like you who worked on the Saturn V driving down I-565 and seeing that spectacular monument to human intelligence and creativity and saying, “Oh, that’s nice.” Or a new mom seeing her crying, pink little miracle for the first time and saying, “Oh, isn’t she’s nice?” It’s a pretty underwhelming response!

I was working at a church in Bessemer, Alabama, when I was a student in college. One of my responsibilities was working with the senior adults, which I loved. They were a wonderful group. I was driving the church van full of senior adults one fall day from Bessemer to Chattanooga. We were going to visit the Chattanooga Choo Choo. As I drove up I-59, right about the Ashville-Oneonta exit, I remember being overwhelmed by the beauty of the fall colors. It was as if I had never seen it. I was about twenty years old, so I know I had seen it. At least with my eyes, I had seen it. That fall day was different though. It was as if something within me had been awakened to the beauty of fall colors, and I was seeing with more than just my eyes. Maybe Paul’s words from our text for today are appropriate to describe what happened to me. The eyes of my heart were enlightened.

I have found that to be a fascinating phrase. It is used nowhere else in the Bible. And the more I’ve studied it the more I’ve become convinced that there is a connection between having the eyes of our heart enlightened and thanksgiving, truly being grateful.

This is what I think that phrase means. In the days of the Bible, the heart, not the mind, was believed to be the seat of human understanding and will. Today we think of the brain or mind as the seat of understanding and

the heart as the seat of emotion. But for them the heart was the place of understanding. This passage from Psalm 10 is an example: “They think in their heart, ‘God has forgotten...’” The heart was the place for thinking, understanding, and human will.

The eyes had special significance too. The eyes were believed to be a window into one’s life, into the self, into the soul if you prefer that terminology. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus called the eyes “the lamp of the body.” Through them, they believed that you could see into the person, not into the body cavity but into the self. When I was a volunteer chaplain at a nursing home in seminary, I got to where I could tell how some residents were doing by looking into their eyes. Have you ever looked into someone’s eyes and had the feeling that no one was there? They were living, breathing, but no one was home behind those eyes. The eyes tell us a lot. They are a window into the self.

So think about that phrase—the eyes of one’s heart enlightened. I believe Paul is describing here a window into our innermost self. It is a window into the you of who you are, with no pretense, nothing dressed up.

Now, imagine having that enlightened, awakened. It is an experience somewhat like driving down the interstate and suddenly being aware of beauty in a new and wonderful way. Suddenly you are profoundly thankful, truly grateful, for something you had never even noticed. It was there all along, and others had a profound appreciation for it. But you didn’t until the eyes of your heart were enlightened.

What Paul is saying in this text from Ephesians is that this happened to his readers in Asia Minor, not about fall beauty, but about the God who had created them and what God had done for them in Jesus of Nazareth. The eyes of their heart were enlightened, Paul said, so that they experienced God in a way they never had. It wasn’t that God had suddenly appeared to them. God had been there all along, and they hadn’t noticed. Paul says that the eyes of their heart were enlightened to the reality of God in, around, and among them. The text says that they had a greater appreciation for three things: Christian hope, what Paul calls our “glorious inheritance,” and then the power of God in their lives. That new awareness of the richness of life in Christ produced thanksgiving, hearts that were truly grateful.

Something like that—having the eyes of your heart enlightened—has happened to many of you, hasn't it? Somewhere along the way you were awakened to the reality of God in your life. The person and teachings of Jesus took on a whole new meaning. Those things were there all along, but somehow you hadn't noticed. And when we slow down to think about it, simply be aware of it, thanksgiving wells up within such that it cannot be stopped.

I read something this week that I thought was good. It is from a Presbyterian minister who says that we can look at life in one of two ways, either like a merry-go-round or like a journey. If we look at life like a merry-go-round, we see lots of pretty colors, fantasy-like boats, swans, and seashells. There is loud pretty music, a lot of brass to hold onto. He says that life like a merry-go-round is a lot of fun but it goes nowhere. It only moves round and round in the same old path.

He said that Christian faith has always looked at life like a journey. If you have read the classic book *Pilgrim's Progress* by John Bunyan, that is how he presented the Christian life, with mountains to climb, rivers to cross, and swamps of despair to make it through. But at the end of the journey awaits the Creator of everything, waiting to receive us in love and rejoicing.

If we are thankful only for the abundance of things in our lives—food and shelter, clothing and cars, etc.—we are looking at life like a merry-go-round. We are thankful as long as the merry-go-round is turning and the music is playing and there are brass rings to hold onto. But when the eyes of our heart are awakened, we begin to see life like a journey. We are thankful for the gift of Jesus Christ in our lives. We know that our relationship with God through Christ is more important than anything on the merry-go-round. And we trust that at the end of the journey, our God is waiting. When we slow down to think about that, thanksgiving takes on a new dimension, a much deeper dimension, welling up from within such that it cannot be stopped.

Have you noticed the mules? Down on south Parkway just before Mt. Gap Road? They were still there Friday morning, resting, grazing, gaining their strength to pull the covered wagons of Mr. Randy Boehmer up Brindley Mountain. That's quite a haul! Mr. Boehmer is an interesting man. He is here all the way from Arizona and is slowly making his way to

Florida. Along the way, in his own unique way, he is sharing the love of Jesus.

Here's his story. He was a taxidermist and never thought much about God or faith. In 1991, his parents died. His sister told his brothers and him to get whatever they wanted of their parents' possessions. She told them to clear it all out, and whatever was left would be taken to the dump.

That hit him pretty hard. Here was a lifetime of possessions. They were filled with memories—of his childhood, of his parents, of his home. All this stuff and most of it would end up in the dump.

Then in 1998 his wife died of cancer. More and more he began to believe that life must be about more than all these things that end up in the dump.

He says that nothing changed until the next year, 1999. He had an injury that left him in a cast to his thigh. To get wood for his stove, he had to crawl to the woodpile. He says that he remembers crawling to the woodpile on a sub-freezing day. He was exhausted and dirty. "I cried out to God," he says. "That was when I completely, 100 percent submitted to God."

Now he has a rather unusual ministry. His three covered wagons have solar panels on top that power a lamp inside. He has a tiny wood-burning stove and a gas grill for cooking. A car battery charges the electric-tape fence he stakes out to keep his mules in at night. Signs painted on the canvas cover of his wagons proclaim, "Jesus saves. Ask him."

Now granted it is a bit unusual. God hasn't called me to that kind of ministry...thankfully. But it is evidence of the power of having the eyes of our heart enlightened.

That is what I wish for each of you. Not mules and a covered wagon! No, I have become convinced that there is a connection between having the eyes of our heart enlightened and thanksgiving. That is what I wish for you, awareness of the reality of God in our lives and of the presence and power of Jesus Christ. And then just watch as thanksgiving wells up within such that it cannot be stopped.

## Closing Prayer

You have given us eyes, O Lord, and we see so little. Enlighten the eyes of our heart, so that we may see the beauty and wonder of life and faith. Amen.