

“God’s Goal and Desire”

Sermon Series: Forgiveness, No. 3

March 16, 2025

Psalm 130

1 Out of the depths I cry to you, Lord; 2 Lord, hear my voice. Let your ears be attentive to my cry for mercy.

3 If you, Lord, kept a record of sins, Lord, who could stand? 4 But with you there is forgiveness, so that we can, with reverence, serve you.

5 I wait for the Lord, my whole being waits, and in his word I put my hope. 6 I wait for the Lord more than watchmen wait for the morning, more than watchmen wait for the morning.

7 Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption. 8 He himself will redeem Israel from all their sins.

We’re in the book of Psalms this morning, chapter 130. You’re welcome to turn there with me, if you’d like.

~~~~~

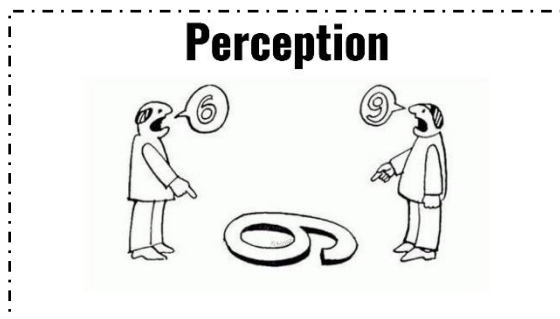
About forty years ago, political strategist Lee Atwater coined the phrase, “Perception is reality.”

Perception is reality.

What was he suggesting?

He was saying that, **regardless** of objective **fact**, whatever someone **perceives** to be true **becomes** that person’s **reality**, which then shapes that person’s understanding of the world... and then how he or she lives and functions in the world.

Here’s a simple example.



So ... what is that on the ground in the picture there ... is it a 6, or it is a 9, ... or is it just some sort of strange scribble?

What is it?

Depends on your perception, doesn’t it? How you see it. Where you stand.

~~~~~

Now, of course, Atwater's statement is wrong at its core...perception is **not, truly** reality. That's because objective truth **does** exist...even about this figure on the ground there.

In this case, we don't know the **intent** of the person who put it there. Were they placing a 6 on the ground or a 9?

Or did they accidentally spill paint that just wound up looking like that?

We'd have to ask whoever put it there to know for sure, but if we **could** ask them, we **could** be **sure** what that figure really, truly is.

Apart from knowing that though, each of these guys will go on through life thinking they saw either a 6 or a 9 there on the ground ... and as much as a number on the ground can **affect** a life, it **will** affect **theirs**.

Apart from knowing the **truth**, their **perception** will **absolutely** shape their reality.

~~~~~

The same kind of thing happens with people's perception of **many** more **important** things, including God.

What we perceive about Him, whether true or not, tends to become reality for us and winds up coloring and shaping the way we understand Him ... which **then** affects the way we live our lives.

For example, if you prayed when you were little and asked God for something and He did not give you what you asked for, your perception of God may be that He's uncaring or aloof or that He doesn't listen to what we say...or maybe that He doesn't exist at all.

Now, the extreme opposite may be true as well. You may have asked God for something at one time and He gave you what you asked for... He answered your prayer.

So your perception of God may be that God answers every prayer that's prayed exactly as you prayed your prayer back then. So, you're always trying to get just the right words, the right cadence ... you have to kneel, you have to do this, you have to do that to get God to give you what you want.

You see, based on just one observation ... one perception ... you've made a determination of who God is; and your life, to some degree, reflects that determination.

That's just one example of how perception can become reality in our lives about God.

~~~~~

The problem is – perception is **not** necessarily reality, **especially** when it's **our** perception ... **human** perception ... which is so often **flawed**. We don't see things clearly like we should **and** ... **especially** when it comes to **God**, who is **far more complex** than some single, random observation of ours might be able to capture.

We can't trust in mere perception to tell us what we need to know about God ... which is one of the messages of this Psalm, Psalm 130.

The Psalmist wants to make sure we understand that, though it may not always *seem* like it to us, God's *goal* and *desire* is to *forgive*.

God's goal and desire is to forgive.

~~~~~

Martin Luther called this Psalm "the proper master and doctor of Scripture," by which he meant he thought this Psalm teaches the basic truth of the gospel...humanity's predicament and God's solution to it.

And it is that last part that's really emphasized ... that can sometimes challenge our perception ... the way we see things in our world: God really does have a solution to the human problem. ... to our human problem.

~~~~~

The Psalmist begins by declaring that we live "in the depths," which is probably an abbreviated way to say, "in the depths of the sea," which is an expression that appears often in Scripture.¹

The idea is that the human condition is one of drowning ... *not* in water, but in *distress*. We humans here on earth ... we're overwhelmed, and we're being sucked down into deep waters of trouble ... where death always prevails. That was the psalmist's assessment of the situation.

Now you, personally, might say, "Hey, not me. I'm doing great!"

But this isn't just about us, individually. It's bigger than that.

The reality the Psalmist is speaking of here is that trouble that's *deep* and *wide*...that *all humanity* faces: the brokenness of the earth,

the illnesses we bear in our bodies,

the wars we fight against one another,

the misunderstandings and hurt and dysfunctions that plague us and our cultures, our whole societies, our globe.

You don't have to look far to either see or feel all this kind of stuff

It's all of that *that* we *all* suffer, and it all comes to us, in one way or another, from sin, both individual and corporate.

Verse 3 tells us that all of that ... all that troubles us ... comes from our departing from the way of God, both *individually* ... *and* as a *race*— the human race.

The trouble we suffer is because of sin ... because of *generation upon generation* of sinful behavior and ungodly choices.

Because of all that, we live in the depths, the Psalmist says, where every part of life is upset.

But the key point of the chapter, which you can see in verses three and four, is *how* we *perceive God* in the *face* of all our trouble.

What does God think of all this trouble we suffer? What does He think about it?

¹ Isaiah 51:10, Ezekiel 27:34

~~~~~

If you were raised in what I would call a legalistic or even, in some cases, an abusive home ... where your parents (or whoever was raising you) were always hovering over you just **waiting** for you to **mess up** ... to disobey them or to do something they declared wrong ... so that they could then **punish** you ... so they could bring the hammer down on you ... if that is how you were raised ... and especially if that was done somehow in the name of God, then it is very likely that your perception of God reflects that idea of someone just watching and waiting for you to make a mistake, so He can **punish** you.

I might add, too, ... that sort of childhood doesn't just affect your idea of **God**, but probably **also** your idea of just about any authority figure.

If you were raised like that, today, you probably don't like most people who occupy places of authority because you see them as out to get you...out to harm you or shame you or prove themselves superior to you.

Because of how you were raised, your perception of people in authority has become the reality in your life.

But of course, that is not necessarily the truth.

Now there are certainly bad actors out there ... there's no doubt about that. But the fact is, most school teachers and principals and police officers and company presidents are not unreasonable, out-to-get-you tyrants. You perceive them that way, but in reality, they are not just watching for you to mess up so they can clobber you.

And, of course, God falls into that "authority figure" category.

If you are one who resists authority figures because of your past, then it's easy to understand why you'd resist God too...why you'd think God is just some "man with a stick" who's watching ... waiting for you to mess up so He can bring the hammer down.

It's sad to say, but that is a pretty common thought ... it was even for the Jews of the Psalmist's day: to understand God as one who's principal way with humans is to sit and just watch for sins so He can bring on the punishment.

But the Psalmist, here, says, about that notion of God, "**No ... No ... nothing** could be **further** from the **truth**."

In verse 3 there, he writes, "**If you, O Lord, kept a record of sins, who could stand?**"

In other words, if God operated like the abusive parent, there would be no hope for anyone ... no one would **ever** survive. In fact, even those who are **called** righteous because of faith and faithfulness would eventually be caught and doomed to the depths ...

because of sin.

Sin **really** is **that** pervasive, and if God operated like many people think ... like He's the state trooper with the radar gun that just loves to hit people with the biggest fine possible for one mile an hour over the limit ... if God were really like that, we'd all be toast ... every one of us.

~~~~~

What the Psalmist wants us to know, though, is that God does not operate like that. He does not think like that.

We may see Him that way, but that perception of ours is not reality, and so the Psalmist corrects us.

Where he says there in verse 4, “*forgiveness is with the Lord,*” he’s letting us know that both the *ability* to forgive ... *and also* the *disposition* to forgive ... belong to God; and that takes us back to perception.

While we may agree that God has the *authority* and *ability* to forgive sin, we might, in our spirits, *resist* the idea that God is *disposed* to do it ... that He *wants* to do it.

~~~~~

I’ve heard so many people ... *too* many people ... people who really do know Jesus say things like, “Well I hope God can forgive me,” or, “I hope God will forgive me.”

Listen, there no hoping about that. We don’t have to *hope* that forgiveness is God’s desire. We can *know* it: God *wants* to forgive. That’s the big message of the Psalmist here.

But not just the Psalmist.

This is exactly how Jesus describes God the Father in several of the parables He taught – the prodigal son, the forgiven debtors.<sup>2</sup> There are all kind of statements that Jesus makes all the way through His teaching. If you question it, take some time and really look at what Jesus says about the character of God.

You’ll find that Jesus’ consistent message is, “God *wants* to forgive.”

~~~~~

Now, is God holy? Yes.

Does God expect us to live according to His ways? Yes.

When we don’t do as God says to do, does God expect honest repentance from us? Yes.

But will God *forgive*? Yes.

Does God *want* to forgive? Yes. Yes. Yes.

The clear message of Scripture – both testaments – is that God not only is *able* to forgive, God is *willing* to forgive. God *wants* to forgive. God *looks* for *every opportunity* to forgive.

Forgiveness is not just part of God’s nature, like we said last week. Forgiveness is God’s *goal* and *desire* for humanity.

~~~~~

Now, some people seem to think the image of God as a forgiving God *diminishes* Him or *weakens* Him...makes Him *less strong* or *less powerful* or *less sovereign* or whatever.

But here, the Psalmist also corrects that. He says, “*No – in fact, just the opposite is true.*”

---

<sup>2</sup> Luke 7:41-42; Luke 15:11-32

Verse 4, ***“With You there is the forgiveness, therefore You are feared.”***

You see, the Psalmist directly ties God’s forgiving disposition with our ***fear*** of Him.

Now of course, to “fear” God is not  
like we fear dark alleys  
or we fear cancer  
or we fear tyrannical leaders  
or we fear nuclear war.

To fear God is much bigger than that. The English word “fear” is the closest we can get to the Hebrew concept, but it takes on the idea of giving up before Him ... laying down our arms in surrender to Him ... putting ourselves beneath Him without condition.

In a lesser, human way, it’s kind of like we do with a surgeon who is operating on us.

When we’re on the operating table, we give the surgeon ourselves with no reservation, don’t we? We hope he got the right notes; we hope he takes the right thing out of us and leaves what needs to be there. But we take ourselves out of the decision-making process, so he or she can do whatever they want with us.

That’s a form of fearing someone – it’s more than respect ... it’s more than even reverence. It’s respect and reverence that is put into action. It’s ***lived out*** in relation to that person.

So you see, to fear God is to receive both God’s authority ***and*** His ***disposition*** as the greatest reality in the world, and then to base our lives on that reality without any reservation.

And that includes God’s authority and disposition to ***forgive***.

That’s why the Psalmist tells us that embracing God’s forgiving disposition ... embracing God’s desire and goal of forgiving us ... actually increases the reverence He receives.

We tend to think it sounds more godly to say, “Well, since I’m living for Jesus, I ***hope*** God forgives me.” We think that sounds more respectful or more reverent to put what we say in terms of “hope.”

But that’s not more godly at all, because our premise ... our perception that God’s willingness to forgive is iffy and uncertain ... that’s false. That’s a false premise to think God’s willingness to forgive is uncertain.

We always give God more glory when we see Him...when we speak of Him...and when we treat Him as He really is. If we’re wrong about Him in our thinking then we misrepresent Him to our world.

~~~~~

That’s why the Psalmist writes here. He wants us to know ... to adjust our perceptions, if need be ... and to wholeheartedly embrace the fact that ***“with God there is forgiveness.”***

We don’t have to wonder about it.

We can ***know*** without a doubt that God’s goal and desire is to forgive.

God made the way of forgiveness in Jesus, not because He *had* to, but because He *wanted* to...and if we will give ourselves to Jesus, no matter what we have said or done in days past, God the Father will forgive us because that's not only His *nature*. It is His *goal* and *desire*.

The only question about any of it is ... *will we believe it?*

Will we trust, in faith, that God's goal and desire is to forgive us?

Will we trust ourselves to Jesus, His Son?

So we might have relationship with Him, ...

So we might fulfill the role God created us to fill, ... and ultimately ...

So our world might be restored.

Will we believe that God really does want to forgive and live in harmony with every person on earth ... every person who will say "yes" to Jesus ... both now and for eternity?

~~~~~

If you've had a perception of God based in some past experience ... you've thought that He was hard and unyielding and out to get you ...I declare to you that

that perception of God is wrong ... and

today is the day to change it.

Today is the day to find God as the loving, welcoming, Heavenly Father that He is ... who does have rules to live by ... but who's given us Jesus, His son, that whoever trusts in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

If there's a perception of God in your life that needs to change ...

if the Lord is speaking to you about His willingness to forgive,

or maybe your need of His forgiveness,

or maybe your willingness to forgive someone else,

would you respond to Him? Would you trust Him with that and say "yes" to Him?

### **Closing Prayer:**

Lord, if You are speaking this morning ... if You are challenging perceptions ... if You are drawing our minds back to things that happened years and years ago that have wrongly colored our view of who You are as our heavenly Father, Lord, we would give You freedom to do whatever You need to do in us

so that we might experience Your forgiveness,

so that we might know that we are forgiven,

so that we might have the power to forgive others.

Whatever it is that You'd like to do in us this morning that will make our lives more complete, that will reflect You more perfectly, Lord, we want You to do that. So, would You have your way ... have your way in all of our hearts we pray.

### **Invitation:**

If the Lord is speaking to you about something and you'd like to lay that before Him or say "yes" to Him, you're welcome, always, to come and pray at this altar. We're going to close with just a couple of verses of song. If you'd like to come, you're welcome.

**Closing Song:** – “Amazing Grace”

**Closing Word & Benediction:**

Martin Luther King, junior, said, “Forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a permanent attitude.” That is true about God, and God seeks to make it true about all who know Him.

For, as somebody said, we are most like beasts when we murder, we are most like men and women when we judge, but we are most like God when we forgive.

*Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and present you before His glorious presence without fault and with great joy...to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*

Thanks for coming to worship this morning. Go in peace.

~~~~~

All material may be freely used where needed and helpful, but in the interest of integrity, please note the source.