

Birds of the Bible: Perception vs reality

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But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:31 NIV

Today we start a new series, on the birds of the Bible. And today we are going to be looking at one bird in particular, the eagle.

Isaiah chose the eagle, because of its dominance in the world of birds. The eagle is the top of the avian food chain. It is large, powerful, majestic, and a fierce adversary.

From its nest it looks down on the world. It is the King of birds.

Isaiah, in chapter 40 of his book, compares those who hope, those with faith, to this most powerful of creatures.

With faith, we can take flight. We can rise above our earthly paradigm, we can fly unfettered, as free as a bird, up in the sky.

We can soar on eagle's wings, with no fear, and the absolute confidence that comes with might and power... and faith.

Is that how you feel when it comes to your faith? Do you feel like a mighty eagle with wings outstretched, high above the clouds? Or do you feel more like the robin, walking along in the early dawn hoping to catch a worm every now and again. Or maybe you like safety in numbers, and would rather be a red-winged blackbird, a grackle or a pigeon.

As free as a bird.... No responsibilities, no paperwork, no credit cards, no washing up, housework, no IRS, no GPS, no STRESS.

Is that what you thought you were getting when you started your walk of faith on this earth? A free ride? **Newsflash. Faith is a verb. It requires action.**

Hebrews 11:1 Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Unlike the eagle which can see far in the distance, we find it difficult sometimes to see what is right in front of our noses.

Faith involves looking ahead, looking up, looking around.

We are good at looking down, looking in all the wrong places, and looking very un-Eaglelike a lot of the time.

And a lot of that has to do with the difference between perception and reality.

Human beings have difficulty identifying the difference between perception, what they think they are looking at, hearing or experiencing, versus the reality of the situation.

Animals act on instincts. An eagle sees a squirrel in the far off distance. He sees breakfast. He swoops down, and he has his breakfast.

Human beings, now that's an entirely different matter. First of all the difficulty of deciding what to eat for breakfast is for many people, a challenge in itself. There are so many variables at play. What did I have for breakfast yesterday? What is available to eat? What is good for me? What is bad for me but I still really want it?

Reality check. You need food. Now.

Faith can help with all the decisions in life. If you let it. Faith by its very nature is stepping forward into the unknown. If you step into the known, you are not stepping forward in faith. You're just stepping.

On Saturday we had the windup lunch for our small group. We were talking about our faith, and each person had their own 'take' on what faith involved. Reading the Bible, being loving, not thinking about yourself, loving God, avoiding sin. Accepting Jesus.

All our words were flavored with our life experiences.

One of us had learned to let go and stand back, and let God go to work, following a difficult challenge.

Another was still struggling to come to terms with different faiths, and the part they played in the world.

The good thing is that everyone was right.

Our perceptions had led us to think, our perceptions had helped us to consider, they shaped our conversations.

But what were we rooting our faith in? What lay behind all these perceptions, emotional responses to the day to day business of life?

We are all in search of incontestable truths that will lift us up like eagles, and let us fly high in the sky, sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

There are three truths that I want to present to you today, that will help you fly high, above the perceptions, the muddle of life on the ground, which often prevent us from seeing clearly, let alone take off.

First reality check. God is good.

Second. Jesus is real.

Third. The Holy Spirit is at work in this world.

A while ago I talked about a college professor I knew who said that as he had gone through life, he had perceived many things, but that it had taken a lifetime to move on from perception to reality.

God is good. We have a Creator who is good. Who is grace, who is compassion, who is love. We have a God who loves us, who comes alongside us in times of trouble. Who reaches out to us on a daily basis and invites us to take His hand and trust him. He invites us to put our hope in Him. He, and He alone can help us fly. God is Good.

Second. Jesus is real. He was a real man, born in a real world, and is the real solution to the problem mankind has had with its relationship to our good God. God entered our world. Christians do not believe in relying on their own efforts to reach up to God. They believe in a good God who reaches down into this world, to be with us.

Jesus is not a fictional character. The vast majority of scholars and academics agree that he lived, and that he died on this earth. Millions of men and women of faith, have accepted this reality, and shaped their lives accordingly. If you believe that Jesus is real. That changes everything.

Third reality check. The Holy Spirit is at work in this world. Perception: the ability to see, hear, or become aware of something through the senses, is very different from reality. Perception is our interpretation of what we see. Our 'take' on the situation.

Reality is the unvarnished truth.

The Bible is full of examples for us to learn from.

When David walked out on the plains of Elah, the perception was that Goliath would win. They saw a small boy, versus a large man, and came to the wrong conclusion. The reality. David won.

When Daniel was thrown into the lions den,
turned up to rebuild Jerusalem,
Baal and had water poured on the piles of firewood,
When Jesus arrived to find Lazarus dead,
apostles were thrown in prison...
failure was inevitable.
that Nehemiah would fail,
of Baal would win,
and that the apostles would surely die.

When Nehemiah
When Elijah faced the prophets of

When the
the perception was that
That Goliath would win,
that the prophets
that Jesus would fail,

All these perceptions were absolutely and totally wrong. The reality was that
Daniel survived, Nehemiah succeeded,
Elijah triumphed, Jesus brought

a man back from the dead,
apostles walked out of the prison free men.

and the

Perceptions are dangerous things. They are misleading. The reality of faith is often the opposite of our perception.

We see ourselves as hopeless. Without hope. Wrong.

We see ourselves as failures. Wrong. Wrong.

We see ourselves as unworthy of God's love. Wrong. Wrong. Wrong.

It's our perceptions that muddy the waters. If we can cling to the truth, we can rise above our human condition, and we can fly like eagles. Up above the earthly constraints.

God is good.

Jesus is real.

The Holy Spirit is at work in this world.

With these three realities, you are armed and dangerous.

You are no longer pulled this way or that by your senses, or tricked into believing this or that on the basis of what your anxiety or anger or fear tells you.

You know the truth.

Hebrews 11:1. Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.

Perception vs reality. The Samaritan woman at the well. She perceived him first as a man, and then knew him as the real Messiah. She lifted him up in her mind and soul, and as a result was lifted up herself.

We are called to lift up Christ in our lives, and to be lifted up by God.

What is it that is holding you back? Fear, anxiety,
anger, disappointment, envy, greed, pride? These are all perceptions, that
twist our minds and keep us on the ground looking for the occasional worm like the robin, or
chattering like a cloud of grackels.

If you want to fly you need a reality check. Three reality checks.

God is good. Jesus is real. The Holy Spirit is at work in this world.

You see we were designed to fly high. We were
designed to be in communion with God. When we see with the eyes of
faith, then we see reality.

But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint. Isaiah 40:31 NIV

Let us pray: Heavenly Father, help us to rise above our human nature, and embrace the reality of You, Your Son, and Your Holy Spirit.

Be with us this morning as we celebrate communion

We ask you humbly to reach down and touch us with your grace and love.

In Your Son's precious name. Amen.