

THE GOD OF THE SEEING EYE

"And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me: for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?" Genesis 16:13.

Before we can really understand the significance of these words, we must know something about the poor afflicted woman who uttered them, whose name was Hagar. Her interesting biography is painted with the vivid colors of Eastern romance. Yet it is not pleasant reading because it brings out the darker side of ancient domestic life.

Affairs were badly snarled in the household of the patriarch Abraham. He and his aristocratic wife, Sarah, wanted a son -- had indeed been promised a son. But there was no evidence of this promise being fulfilled, as Sarah was restrained from child-bearing. When the waiting grew long, Sarah's faith grew weak. In that weakness she arranged that her husband should make a second wife of their Egyptian maid, Hagar, and by her have the son for which they longed.

It is a fine testimony to the divine appointment of monogamy as the ideal for marriage that this piece of folly turned out wretchedly for all parties concerned. When Hagar was about to bear Abraham a son, Sarah became increasingly jealous and bitter. Hagar was impudent and Sarah was quick-tempered. Both were proud, sensitive, tactless and unwise. Neither tried to understand the other's point of view, so wounded pride wrought mutual misunderstandings, resulting in ill feeling and open hatred. Sarah finally made it so unpleasant for Hagar that she had to flee from Abraham's camp and take refuge in the desert.

Near the edge of the desert, just before she cut herself off from the land of her adoption, Hagar sat down to rest by a fountain of water. Doubtless her countenance was pale with grief and tears of bitter sorrow ran down her cheeks. But she had no one to quarrel with except herself, and she soon tired of that. She felt sorry for herself, and probably for her folly also. She had left a comfortable home and knew not which way to turn. So she sat down to think, which is always an effective cure for tantrums. Fortunately the nearby fountain of refreshing water slaked her thirst and cooled her ire.

There wasn't any one with whom she could converse, which made matters even worse, for when anything is wrong with us we like to have someone to listen to our troubles. While all alone, without any help, advice or hope, an angel suddenly appeared to her and gently asked her where she came from and whither she was going. Without any apparent fear she proceeded to tell her story. The, addressing her in kind, tender and affectionate terms, the angel gave her some good advice. "And the angel of the Lord said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands." That was about the last thing she had thought of doing. Although it was hard for her to do so, she was assured by the angel that it was the only thing for her to do. Then the angel gave her the wonderfully encouraging promise that she should bear a son who would afterwards rise to great power and honor, whereupon she was instantly inspired with wonder, love and praise.

Under the inspiration of this discovery she exclaimed, "El-roi," which is translated, "Thou God seest me." Hagar found, as each of us must find, that He is "The God of the Seeing Eye." The living God, who saw her, had compassion on her, and comforted her, followed her with His watchful eye when she left the home of her mistress, when she wandered in the wilderness weeping, and when she sat down fatigued at the side of the fountain, Just think how merciful God is!

I. The Eyes of Penetration.

"Thou God seest me." The word which the Greeks applied to God implied that He was a God who could see. They called Him Theos, and they derived that word from the root Theisthai, which means to see, because they regarded God as being the all-seeing One. When we say "God" we refer to the One who sees everything.

God sees you as distinctly as if you were the only person in all the world. Nothing about you or your circumstances is hidden from Him. Others may not see you; some may even forget you; but God's eyes are always on you. God does not lose sight of you in any group relationship, but He sees you personally. His eyes are piercing. He can see you through the thickest walls. He looks into the deepest and darkest dungeons. Nothing is ever shut out of His sight. He even sees what is in the heart. He sees you continuously — in the darkest shades of night, in the brightness of the day, in the night of sorrow and in the day of trouble. Whether at night or during the day, waking or sleeping, alone or in company, there is not a moment when He does not see us. He sees what we are and what we do. Nothing escapes His observation. Everything lies open to Him. "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in His sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." He sees us individually, completely and constantly. Wherever we are, we are in His presence; whatever we think, it is in His presence; whatever we do, He sees us. He reads all our thoughts, knows all our emotions, purposes and aims. "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." Proverbs 15:3.

To Hagar it was evident that God not only finds us, however isolated we may be but that He reads our secret souls unerringly. She felt that she was understood. Here was one Who, though unseen Himself, saw her with a penetration that went straight to the depths of her being. He saw that with her it was a case of being "more sinned against than sinning." He saw the humiliation that burned in her spirit, the fear that clutched at her heart. He saw it all. That is the kind of God He is.

Therein the eyes of the Lord exceed our dull vision as an x-ray exceeds a flashlight bulb in penetration. When dear old Samuel went to the house of Jesse to anoint a king to take Saul's place, he looked with favor on a big brawny son called Eliab. Yet the Spirit of God restrained him from putting the anointing oil on this handsome young fellow. You are putting too much store by his rugged body and excellent features, God seemed to say. Then came this illuminating word to the prophet: "For the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart." I Samuel 16:7. Man has sight, but God has insight.

II. The Eyes of Preservation.

That each one of us is the subject of God's personal observation, love and care is a most comforting, encouraging and challenging fact. His eyes not only look within us, but they watch over us. Here we pass from the idea of their penetration to the thought of their pity and provision. The emphasis shifts from that of searching to that of supervision.

For a splendid illustration of this truth in the life of Hagar, one turns to the twenty-first chapter of Genesis. Her baby boy has become quite a lad by this time. The strife in the family, instead of being better, is worse. When the storm breaks, it sends Hagar and Ishmael out as fugitives in the desert, their only provisions being some bread and a goatskin canteen of water that Abraham had given them.

When the bread was consumed and the water was gone, their plight grew terrifying indeed. A desert can look innocent and intriguing from the window of an air-conditioned Pullman car, but it is terrible to man or beast wandering foodless and waterless across its seemingly endless sands. However, for this mother and her son the time of marching had passed. They were too exhausted for that. Ishmael in particular was marked for death. Over there by a leafless shrub lay her lad; while here, a few steps away, sat Hagar in a half-delirium of weakness and grief. She shuddered as she heard him give a low moan.

And then suddenly came that same Voice which had called to her before when she felt bereft and broken in the wilderness! Her plight was bad then. Now it was desperate. And the voice said unto her, "What aileth thee, Hagar? fear not; for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is." "Where he is!" Out here in this barren and blistering desert? Yes, "Where he is," wherever that may be. We call such places "God forsaken," but if God is keeping watch over this anguished mother and this famished lad, then there are no "God-forsaken" places.

But listen! The Voice goes on, "Arise, life up the lad, and hold him in thine hands; for I will make him a great nation." So he is not going to die. Somehow he is going to pull through. God has a work for him. As we read on, it says, "And God opened her eyes, and she saw a well of water; and she went, and filled the bottle with water, and gave the lad drink." He was thus delivered in the desert. Instead of it conquering him, he conquered it. It is a parable of the life of faith: under the watchful eyes of our faithful God we can turn the place of our trouble into the place of our triumph.

Do we know what it is to live and act on the conviction that in all the wide world there are no places which are strange to or impossible with God? Or do we spend so much time bemoaning our so-called "fate" and blaming others for contributing to that fate, that we haven't time to look unto the "God of the Seeing Eye"? That was Hagar's temptation. It was easy for her to linger bitterly over the thought that Sarah had wronged her. It was easy for her to brood over the way that Abraham had let her down.

Living under the eyes of God does not mean, as some suppose, that we shall always escape the bitterness of life. What it means, ultimately, is simply this: that my surrendered life is in the good hands of God, and in HIS keeping I am secure whether in life or in death. In His keeping I am safe whether in prosperity or in penury.

III. The Eyes of Anticipation.

God's eyes see ahead of us. We have learned that they are eyes of penetration and eyes of preservation. We are now confronted with the reassuring truth that they are eyes of anticipation.

In Hagar's case, "God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water." It is not said that God opened a well for her, although He could have done so. It does tell us that the touch of God's kindness was on her eyes, enabling her to see the well that had been there all the while. The reach of Abraham's foresight in her behalf had been a canteen of water, which was soon emptied; but the reach of God's foresight was a bountiful well of water. In her hour of agony Hagar discovered that God had been there ahead of her. The well of unexpected supply and refreshment was waiting for her. It only needed eyes to see it and the purpose to make use of its resources.

A gifted newspaper man, who signed his name simply as "A London Journalist," wrote the book, "The God Who Matters." In it he told about a professional diver who, despite the influence of a godly mother and countless sermons he had heard in church, remained away from Christ. He knew many passages of scripture from memory, and had been moved often by the great gospel hymns. Yet through it all he had refused to accept Christ and be saved. Then one day he was sent down for a deep-sea dive. There, on the bottom, he noticed a piece of paper stuck to something. He picked it up. It was a gospel tract and on it, in prominent letters, were the words, "Thou God Seest Me." That totally unusual and unexpected experience proved to be the point of his turning to Christ. As he expressed it, "When God sent the gospel down to the bottom of the sea for me, I could not resist any longer." The "God of the Seeing Eye" had been there ahead of him -- even on the bottom of the sea.

Remember, God sees ahead. When you arrive, where He already is, look for His hidden source of supplies. You will prove in your life what Mary Slessor of Africa said she proved in hers, "I should never have been able to do anything but for this, He always went in front."