

Take a Look Inside

One morning this past week, I awakened ever so slightly from a dream. In the dream my sister was standing before us in a Sunday School class type forum. She was lamenting nostalgic days long gone by and things she wistfully wished she could do again or would have done better if she could go back. There was one outstanding characteristic.... the young lady talking to us did not look like my sister, although there were some similarities. For instance, she actually looked more like my niece, my sister's only daughter. In the dream I had this appreciable running dialogue with the Lord. I asked the Lord while I was sitting there, "Why doesn't Judy look like Judy?" I heard the Lord say, "Judy looks like what she wishes she looked like." This answer brought me into the twilight. As I awakened, I thought to myself, Judy was considered attractive by all who knew her. And the young lady in the dream was attractive also, but not more attractive by any means...just different.

Dreams are not usually the impetus for the Pastor's Word, but today I have some stirred thoughts about what I dreamed.

1. The inside is what really counts.

In Matthew 23: 25-28, Jesus said, "*Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess. Thou blind Pharisee, cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, that the outside of them may be clean also. Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness. Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.*" In the mind of God, you are what you are on the inside.

Have you ever been visiting someone out of town and they have said to you as they drive up to their favorite restaurant, "Now it doesn't look like much on the outside, but inside they serve the best fish in town." The old saying is so true, "Don't judge a book by its cover."

Our Lord looks past everything we see on the outside and goes straight for the heart. He said in Ezekiel 8:12, "*Then said he unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen what the ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery? for they say, The LORD seeth us not; the LORD hath forsaken the earth.*" Those in leadership in the House of Israel at this time were believing that what they do in secrecy will not be seen, even by God. God sees in our deepest most hidden imagination, in what the Bible calls "the chambers of imagery." Nothing is hidden from God. Who we are in the dark is who we really are.

2. Our looks come from two sources.

(A) The way God designed us

God's Word says, "*Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them*" (Psalm 139:16). God intricately formed and made each and every one of us. So often we rebel against the way we are made, some even mad with God for what they consider flaws. Even in the most extreme cases, we need to understand that God makes no mistakes. Moses argued with God about his perceived physical handicaps and his inability to be used by our Lord. It was then that God answered, "*And the LORD said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? have not I the LORD?*" (Exodus 4:11).

(B) The way we enhance ourselves

It has been said, “God determines how we look before forty; after forty, we determine how we look.” This old saying is not one hundred per cent true, but it is touching on a true principle. I have heard it said all my life, “sin leaves its mark” The Bible says, “...*the way of transgressors is hard*” (Proverbs 13:15). It is a medical fact, people who smoke have more dry, wrinkled and age-affected skin. Those who have imbibed alcohol consistently through their life will often be left with what is called “the whiskey voice,” the deep, raspy voice of one whose vocal chords have been cooked by alcohol. The two activities (smoking and drinking) that I just mentioned also shorten the life of the partakers. That fact is unquestionably true. The Bible alludes to these possible effects in the denunciation against drinking alcohol in Proverbs 23:32, “*At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder.*”

In the positive light, the Bible says in I Peter 3: 3,4: “*Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.*” is saying a godly woman is one who has dressed herself from the inside out. Her number one priority is not emphasizing her hair, her gold or attractive dress. Her main focus is holiness. “*For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands*” (I Peter 3:5).

3. People look at us differently than our perception.

Robert Burns, the poet laureate of Scotland wrote, "O wad some Power the giftie gie us, to see oursels as ithers see us!" To use modern English, he said, “O would some Power the gift to give us, to see ourselves as others see us.” Although I was only dreaming when I envisioned my sister looking the way she wished she looked, in life I often meet people who are not satisfied with the physical appearance God gave them. Sadly, I have known people who have undergone plastic surgery to change things that not only did not change, but from our viewpoint, did not improve their looks. So often what we determine is ugly to ourselves, in fact, is, not ugly to others. And as we intimated earlier, how God made us is never ugly to God; after all, He was the architect and builder! The people who love us in life are the people who love that which is beneath the surface. It is appropriate to say this to our unmarried youth - if you are in courtship or contemplating courtship with someone who does not accept your physical appearance, it is time to not only question, but to terminate that relationship. You don't want someone to love you for your appearance, because that will change. The people who love you are very satisfied with your appearance. It would do all of us good to see ourselves from the eyes of love. The maiden of Song of Solomon said of the one she loved, “...He is altogether lovely. This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem” (Song of Solomon 5:16). People who love you look for the beautiful, not the flaws.

4. Live for God and with acceptance.

In light of our discussion today, our conclusion is: God sees us for who we are, which is inward beauty above all. He made us inside and out, therefore let us live for the One who loves us most, i.e. God and accept the way He made us.

Let us make this prayer our personal prayer:

The Serenity Prayer

God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference. Living one day at a time; Enjoying one moment at a time;

Accepting hardships as the pathway to peace; Taking, as He did, this sinful world as it is, not as I would have it; Trusting that He will make all things right if I surrender to His Will; That I may be reasonably happy in this life and supremely happy with Him Forever in the next. Amen. --*Reinhold Niebuhr*

- Pastor Pope

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