

To God Alone Be The Glory

Perspective makes a difference in how we behave. One day back in the 1530s, Katie Luther had had enough. Her husband Martin had been moping around for far too long. Yes, it takes a lot to reform the church. Sure, there will be setbacks. Certainly, the people will be slow to understand God's burning desire to save them from their sins through his Son Jesus Christ. Without a doubt, friends and foe alike will twist your words when you make them uncomfortable by confronting them with the truth. But moping around for days on end was taking things too far. *So Katie Luther put on a black dress, the kind a mourner would wear to a funeral. She veiled her face behind black lace and, carrying some refreshments, she went in to see her husband who was behind his desk studying. "What's the matter, Katie? Why are you in mourning? Who died?" "My Lord Jesus has died." "O Katie, don't be ridiculous. The Scriptures clearly say the Christ cannot die again. Death no longer has mastery over him. The death he died he died once for all." "Well, yes, Martin, the Scriptures say that. But Jesus is dead nonetheless." "How can you say such a thing, Kitty?" "I can see it in your face. I can hear it in your voice. You are in mourning, Martin. So Christ must have died again." *Then it dawned on Martin Luther that, by his

mopey-ness, he was acting as if Jesus were not his resurrected and ruling Lord of all. He complimented his God-fearing wife for so wisely showing him another perspective, a godly perspective, a biblical perspective. Perspective makes a difference in how we behave.

Look at how much Peter's perspective has changed. Think back to how frightened Peter was when Jesus got betrayed and arrested in Gethsemane. Remember how he followed Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest to see what would happen to the Lord? On three occasions that night Peter was questioned about his affiliation with Jesus. First he denied knowing Jesus. Then he took a false oath affirming his earlier statements. Finally he called on God to punish him if he were lying—so afraid he was that he would get arrested. All his assurances to Jesus earlier in the day about being willing to die for him turned into empty boasts that night.

But now look at him. He goes to the temple openly to pray and to teach. Through Peter God heals a man who has never been able to walk. When the man starts jumping around and praising God so that a crowd of worshipers gather around Peter to find out what's going on, he proclaims a wonderful message of law and gospel to them. When the chief priests arrest him and put him on trial for proclaiming that

Jesus has been raised from the dead, Peter is so filled with confidence that he takes the chief priests to task for killing Jesus. But he doesn't stop there. He proclaims the good news about Jesus to them too! He wants them to believe.

What has happened to Peter!? God changed his perspective—that's what happened. Let's take a closer look at Peter's speech to the leaders of his people. May our merciful God adjust our perspective so that we see things as clearly as he does and as Peter did.

⁸*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them...* Well, that's one sure way of having your perspective changed: be filled with the Holy Spirit! But how? Although I can't see into your heart, I believe the Holy Spirit is in each of you who were baptized with water in the name of the Triune God. That's what Baptism does. The Holy Spirit enters the heart of the baptized, washes away all sin through Jesus' blood, and takes up residence in the heart. "Yes," you say, "that's what all our pastors have taught us, but that's not quite the same as what Peter experienced." And you're right, Peter experienced a greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit. But if you want to be filled with the Holy Spirit (as the apostle Paul urges in Ephesians 5:18-19), then speak to one another with Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. In other words, gather for worship so you can encourage your

fellow believers. Read the Scriptures daily, or a sound devotional book. Some of you will say, "I've been reading the Scriptures daily, and nothing like what happened to Peter has happened to me." And I say, just you wait. When the Holy Spirit wants you to tell someone what you know about Jesus, you will be filled with the Holy Spirit to just the right measure, and you will share the good news confidently. In the meantime, keep reading your Bible, because that's what the Holy Spirit will make use of when the time is right. Jesus promised (Matthew 10:19-20) that the Holy Spirit will give us the words to say when we are challenged for following Jesus, especially if we are put on trial, like Peter was.

Peter boldly responded, "*Rulers and elders of the people!* ⁹*If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple...*" Do you see how Peter is trying to change their perspective? He's basically saying, "What kind of people are you that you criticize us for doing good to someone who hasn't been able to walk since birth? And if we *are asked how he was healed,* ¹⁰*then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.*" Whewee! It takes some serious confidence to talk like that to others,

especially to those with enough authority to make your life miserable. But Peter's confidence is standing on solid ground. Although the leaders of Israel had had Jesus crucified, God raised him from the dead. This fact changed Peter's perspective. He would have loved our Easter hymn, "I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVES." You and I believe that He who was dead is now alive. He is sitting at God's right hand. And the last time I checked, he was still ensconced on the throne of the universe, ruling all things for the sake of us believers on earth. What can anyone do to change that fact? What can anyone do to take you out of the Lord's hands?

This changes our perspective on everything! Why do you come to church? When you were young, you may have come to church because your parents gave you no choice. (In fact hear a few kids muttering under their breath that the same thing is happening to them this morning.) Praise God if your parents always brought you to church because at some point you started liking church. Now you enjoy hearing about him who died for us and was raised, and you enjoy praising him. Sometimes God's Word changes our perspective quickly. Sometimes slowly.

But think how hard it must be for people whose parents didn't love God's Word. They don't know Jesus. They

get mixed messages about him, not just from so-called experts, but worse yet from watching Christians they know. If we worshipers lie, speak unlovingly, fire the F-bomb, drop the GD-bomb... And if we swear to God unnecessarily, or pepper our conversations with OMG, or stuff our faces, or won't forgive family, or repeat info that should not be repeated, why would anyone who doesn't follow Jesus want to know about our Savior from sin? This is why it is so important to petition God: "Please, Lord, keep working on us through your Word and Sacraments to change our perspective. We want to live as if our most important thought is: I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVES." It makes a difference in how we treat school mates and co-workers and family. It makes a difference in how we carry out responsibilities. It makes a difference in how we think about those who are different from us, especially those who don't know Jesus.

We probably won't get to witness to people who are actively trying to destroy the church, like Peter's listeners. So we won't likely need to get in anyone's face. It's far more likely that we'll need to speak the truth with gentleness and respect (1 Peter 3:15). But when we need to be firm, the Holy Spirit can make us as bold as he made Peter when it was time to say this the leaders of his people: Jesus ¹¹is 'the

stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.'

Now that's an interesting picture! Imagine a construction site where the masons are laying stones of many sizes. As they pick out each stone to fit with expert precision, they keep coming across this one stone that just doesn't fit into their plan. Finally they throw it into the dumpster so they don't have to look at it again. *That's what the chief priests did to Jesus. Every time they looked at him they said, "Jesus doesn't fit into our plans for this nation." They acted like they were in charge. But God gets to determine the course of history, and it was always his plan to have the Christ be the most important part of all history. Nations rise and fall. Civilizations wax and wane. New religions and comedians get trotted out for people who just want to feel better about themselves. But God sees sinners who need rescue from the punishment that sin deserves. God doesn't like to say, "You chose your course, now you deal with the consequences." He will if people persist in going their own way, but he prefers to forgive sins by grace, as a gift, through faith in Jesus.

Yet humans insist on doing something to help save themselves, at least in some small way. Our sinful flesh likes to share in the credit, or take all the credit. Think how many people don't want any help. "I can do it myself." That's a

good attitude in children learning to tie their own shoes. It's harmful in people who can be saved only if God does it all. Peter had the right perspective: ¹²*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.* Jesus is the only way. Salvation works only if it's a gift.

Think about your perspective. Are you positive only because that's what people expect of you? Do you see your life as great only because you have a great job or a great spouse or great parents or a great home or great toys or a lot of control over your life? Such things change. And when earthly blessings go away, or never come in the first place, you might sense that something important is missing from your life, or you can get to feeling mopey. The sure cure is the news that Jesus died for you and now counts you guiltless in his eyes, that Jesus rose from the dead and is preparing a place for you in his heavenly home, that Jesus rules all things for your benefit so that every bad thing will sooner or later be turned into a blessing for you, that you have a purpose in this life: serving Jesus and others.

May your perspective always start with: **I KNOW THAT MY REDEEMER LIVES.** May this truth affect your life every day. May your behavior in Christ be a great reason for people to take a closer look at Jesus.