

See That God Always Sees You (El Roi, "The God Who Sees Me")

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Bible Text: Genesis 16:1-6; Psalm 139:1-24
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Beloved of the Lord, you are beloved. Jesus Christ will speak to you, preach to you this evening through the earthen vessel within the congregation great through Genesis, chapter 16 and we'll be reading all the verses, we'll look at the whole kind of mini narrative here in chapter 16, aware of its greater context, particularly, we are going to be considering more closely verses 13 to 14, but I think it'll be helpful to look at it in its context of the chapter.

So Genesis 16, verses 13 and 14 as we consider another name of God, this is the only place where we learn this name, it's the only place that is given to us, El Roi, the God who sees me. We will also be turning to Psalm 139 to look at quite a few of the verses as we just sang together, we'll revisit Psalm 139 in the sermon. So I encourage you to have Psalm 139 open to read along with me because. We'll look at a larger section. So Genesis 16. and Psalm 139, and I'll direct you on the specific verses when we get there later here.

Hear now the word of God, Genesis 16, the entire chapter 1 through 16.

1 Now Sarai Abram's wife bare him no children: and she had an handmaid, an Egyptian, whose name was Hagar. 2 And Sarai said unto Abram, Behold now, the LORD hath restrained me from bearing: I pray thee, go in unto my maid; it may be that I may obtain children by her. And Abram hearkened to the voice of Sarai. 3 And Sarai Abram's wife took Hagar her maid the Egyptian, after Abram had dwelt ten years in the land of Canaan, and gave her to her husband Abram to be his wife. 4 And he went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes. 5 And Sarai said unto Abram, My wrong be upon thee: I have given my maid into thy bosom; and when she saw that she had conceived, I was despised in her eyes: the LORD judge between me and thee. 6 But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face. 7 And the angel of the LORD found her by a fountain of water in the wilderness, by the fountain in the way to Shur. 8 And he said, Hagar, Sarai's maid, whence camest thou? and whither wilt thou go? And she said, I flee from the face of my mistress

Sarai. 9 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Return to thy mistress, and submit thyself under her hands. 10 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, I will multiply thy seed exceedingly, that it shall not be numbered for multitude. 11 And the angel of the LORD said unto her, Behold, thou art with child, and shalt bear a son, and shalt call his name Ishmael; because the LORD hath heard thy affliction. 12 And he will be a wild man; his hand will be against every man, and every man's hand against him; and he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren. 13 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? 14 Wherefore the well was called Beerlahairoi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered. 15 And Hagar bare Abram a son: and Abram called his son's name, which Hagar bare, Ishmael. 16 And Abram was fourscore and six years old, when Hagar bare Ishmael to Abram.

This is the word of God.

As we consider Hagar's story, I'd like us to first consider the story of Jonah. Remember that Jonah traveled as far as he possibly could to get away from God's call upon his life, so really what he was trying to do was get away as far as he could from God, thinking especially at that time of God's special presence with his people in the Promised Land. He's thinking to get as far as way as he can. But God saw him and God brought a storm upon him, and God had him thrown into the sea, and God saved him from the sea with a great fish. As Jonah ran from God, God followed him, or rather, God went ahead of him, so to speak, and I can't help but think about cartoons. Children, maybe you've seen sometimes I just can't help but think Bugs Bunny, some of the cartoons have it this way, but you know how there's two cartoon characters, maybe in a race, and one's always trying to get ahead of the other one and every time he gets to some outposts along the way, the other guy's already there. How do he get there? You can picture Bugs Bunny maybe being there chewing a carrot, "Hey, what's up, Doc?" You know he's been there while the other guy's been running like crazy to get there, there he is, and then the next place there he is again. It's like, "I can't get ahead of you. How do you get there so fast?"

Well, it's because they're cartoons. They can go beyond reality. But it's almost like that God's just ahead of wherever Jonah is going. He's he's always there. He's with him along the way but when he gets to the next place, God's there, God shows himself to be there with the storm. He knew God was in it. He knew God would calm it if they threw him over. He prays to be rescued way out there, way deep down there, and he recognizes in the belly of the fish that God met him there and saved him with the fish and had him spit out on dry land. And then he went about what he was supposed to do.

So God, in a sense, was ahead of him everywhere, listening, watching, interrupting, redirecting. Jonah could not escape God's observation and the great thing about that is, Jonah could not escape God's provision. Even though this all went for a while at least without Jonah's own recognition that God was always there seeing, until God demanded and grabbed his attention.

God hears all verse 11, Ishmael means "God will hear." Notice it's in the context of hearing within afflictions. He hears. But particularly, we focus on the fact that God sees all. Let us look again at verses 13 to 14 of our text. "And she," that is, Hagar, "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? Wherefore the well was called Beerlahairoi; behold, it is between Kadesh and Bered." Now the well in verse 14, it means something like, you know, the well of the living one who sees me. So the well is also recognizing that God is the living one there seeing her, but then verse 14 especially she puts a name to God expressing what has happened. "You are God who sees me." And the Hebrew there is El Roi, God sees me. You are God who sees me. El Roi.

Now again, this is the only occurrence of this name in the entire Bible, but here it is. It's interesting because who gives this name to God, or who recognizes God by this name? The bondswoman, not the free woman; that's interesting to consider in the context, and it reminds us to look at the context of the chapter to get a sense of what it means that God sees me. You see, she's the bondswoman, not the free woman. You can think of Galatians chapter 4 that makes that contrast, the whole thing is a living reality allegory to be used later for the gospel. She's the one who receives God's personal attention here all by herself. She's the bondswoman. She's not significant other than to be the sad part of the allegory and yet she gets God's personal attention, and she speaks this name of his personal attention of her person, all alone in this place, with a baby in her womb having been pushed away, probably going to die though she's at the well.

Now let's remember the context. It's not simply about God's care for her, but his intent to ensure that she takes care of his call upon Abraham's life, his providential plan for Abraham. Now when I preached through this chapter originally going through Genesis with you, the message was God sees, God hears, and God overrules because we often try to go about things as if he's not watching, and as if we can try to force it upon him later. And we see that he sees, hears and overrules well, where am I getting that from? I think it's important to keep that in mind when she says, "Have I seen the one who sees me? You are the God who sees me." There's a little bit of like, "Oh, you're watching me. You're paying attention to what I'm doing and how I'm handling this problem." A little bit of that, maybe a lot of that to the story,

Sarai and Abram, now remember their names have not yet been changed to Sarah and Abraham, Sarai and Abram misuse Hagar to try and hurry along God's promise of a son. You'll notice by his age he still has a lot of waiting to do, but you'll notice by what the story says he's been doing a lot of waiting, and Sarah has to, Sarai. She's tired of waiting. She wants to force God's hand, if you will, and maybe she can try to do it and make it look like it's okay, but God sees it. God sees Abram listen to rather than lead his wife, and he sees this abdicating of his leadership. God sees it all, but they try to force a promised son and they misuse this woman and then they abuse her, but Hagar's pride also makes it worse for herself. If you look at the details of the story, she's not exactly the hero of the story nor exactly the victim. But God hears and sees all of their sinful impulses and he governs them all along his perfectly perceived plan. Nothing goes

unnoticed and thus no one will go undealt with. That's a lot of what's happening in the chapter when she says, "You are the God who sees me."

This name El Roi, the God who sees me, describes God's attribute of omniscience. He knows all, also related to his omnipresence, he's everywhere. He sees everything for the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, 2 Chronicles 16, verse 9. Where might you travel this year? God will be there and he'll be watching. Proverbs 5, verse 21, "For the ways of men are before the eyes of the Lord, and he pondereth all his goings." What will you be doing where you go? God will be watching you. Proverbs 15:3, "The eyes of the Lord are in every place, beholding the evil and the good." Certainly he'll be there watching and recognizing the good, happy to reward it. Job 34:21, "For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings." Psalm 11:4 that we read today, "The LORD is in his holy temple, the LORD'S throne is in heaven." And from that vantage point, you might say the Psalm is expressing figuratively it goes on to say, "His eyes behold, his eyelids try, the children of men." He's watching and he's judging.

Come back to our story, our text, true story, Genesis 16:4 and 6. Let's look at Hagar. Let's see the part she plays. "And [Abram] went in unto Hagar, and she conceived: and when she saw that she had conceived, her mistress was despised in her eyes." She starts to act like she's so great but Sarah recognized at the beginning what Hannah knew, it's God who opens the womb to have a baby or God who closes it not to have a baby. I know modern times we think we're in charge of all that. We're not. God's in charge and here Hagar is acting like she's so great because she conceived but that was a gift of God, nothing to be proud about and starting to despise her mistress, whose idea it was to allow her to try to have a child in the first place. We're not going to be talking about all of that tonight with morality, but just recognize her pride here that brings on her this bad situation.

So God sees that too. Now look at verse 6, "But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, thy maid is in thy hand; do to her as it pleaseth thee. And when Sarai dealt hardly with her, she fled from her face." So Sarai didn't exactly kick her out. She was rough with her, certainly probably really bad, but Hagar is the one who ran. Instead of trusting God is watching and seeing the situation and will do something about it, Hagar gets proud and makes it worse. Think about it. She runs from the father of this child. She runs from this father who is very able to provide for this child as she runs into the wilderness. Not exactly the place we think of for a safe, happy home to protect our children. Sure it's a wilderness, it's not safe for anyone to be walking alone, especially a woman with child. Rather than humble herself in servitude with gratitude she puts herself and she puts her own child at risk by running. The angel of the Lord speaks reason to her, "You're not going to survive. Go back. Submit yourself." God also does not allow Abram, he doesn't allow Sarai to hide from their responsibilities to wait upon his promise for how they're going to get the promised child, and he doesn't allow them to skirt their responsibility to this woman and now to her son. And on behalf of Abraham, though not the line of the covenant, he blesses her child to have many, many children as well, a great nation, although it's interesting as you read about what that man in that nation, by the way, literally it's a wild donkey and you can kind of consider that maybe he's like mother, like son in the context,

but if you look at that, it's like, wow, that's really happening, isn't it, about the line of Ishmel.

God is everywhere present with everything about you everywhere. Just like Jonah and Hagar, this is for your good, and more importantly, the good of others whom you affect. Whether you ran and strayed or whether you were banished and driven out, God yet sees you where you are and meets you there, meets with you there and meets your needs there. Even if, like Hagar and Jonah, you don't recognize it for a while and then you're surprised to find it out, even if, like Jonah and Hagar, your afflictions are self-inflicted where you find yourself as a consequence in result, even if that be the case, God is not disinterested in you and he sees to it that you will be interested and notice him now there. And frankly, a lot of times that's where he does get our attention, isn't it? So feel him tapping your shoulder. Turn around and have a good talk with him on your knees. Be thankful for if, like Hagar and Jonah, he left you unnoticed and unattended, you would be left all to yourself thus you would be left to die alone in the desert or in the sea. What's more, if El Roi personally watches and waits upon the bondswoman and her son, how much more does he watch over you, his free children of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob?

And with that thought, let us turn to Psalm 139 together. You sang most of it this evening, we considered it last week, singing it, thinking about it related to the blessedness of children in the womb, but there's this broader context, we think about tonight, the fact that he sees us. Everywhere, he's always looking and watching and watching over us, especially his children of the covenant. Psalm 139 to begin with verses 1 through 12. Let's read together.

1 O LORD, thou hast searched me, and known me. 2 Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising, thou understandest my thought afar off. 3 Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. 4 For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O LORD, thou knowest it altogether. 5 Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid thine hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it. 7 Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? 8 If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. 9 If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; 10 Even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. 11 If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. 12 Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.

Beloved, you meditate on that as you think about God as El Roi, the God who sees me, and then you pray verses 23 and 24 that he would help you see yourself the way he sees you.

23 Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts:
24 And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way
everlasting.

Be thankful God watches over you wherever you go. Be thankful he does not look away, but looks down more closely and watches over you. Stop and think of him as El Elyon again, the most high God over all the universe. Think about that vantage point indeed. He looks down and think if you're in an airplane, you look down, you can't make out any of the smallness of the details of the people. We feel so big. I appreciate being in airplanes, I realize how I small, or even be on a mountain, look down over a community. It's amazing, I was just there and I can't see where I was or anybody else there. Think about how small and insignificant you and I are to the rest of the world. They don't even know we exist. Very few people are even aware that we exist. Very few people are aware when we die. "Precious in the eyes of the Lord are the death of his saints." And precious are his saints while they are living for him. He looks down, imagine all the way down from so high, zooming in closer and closer, closer and closer to the earth. Now the mountains are seen, the oceans, the cities, the buildings become clear. Homes now, down into your home, down into your bedroom, down into your closet, down into wherever you are, driving along alone in the car, thinking you're the only person in the world, and there he sees you. There he's watching you. There he's watching over you yet still. Go ahead and drive into the desert. Go ahead and get on a plane. There he is watching your every moment. Go ahead and turn off the lights. Makes no difference. He's watching. He sees you.

He's paying attention to you and certainly we, like Hagar, will say, "Oh, you are the God that sees me. Am I seeing the God that sees me I haven't recognized? Here I see that you're seeing me and in my affliction, which I brought upon myself, you're taking care of me. You're correcting me and directing me back. But you not only see me, you hear me." God is always there. God is always aware of you and your present experience. Again, think of the quote in the bulletin today, you know, just focus on the present. The past is over. The future, you're not there. The only moment you have is now and that is where God is.

I love the song by, and if I had thought of it earlier I'd share it with you tonight, but I didn't think of it till now, but Michael Card, "Let me know you in the now." I did share that with you in a pastor's post years ago related to a sermon, you can see it on our, you can see the video on our website if you like, you can search it there easily. "Let me know you in the now," that is, let me know you as El Roi.

You will never go unnoticed by God. You will never go overlooked by God. Isn't that helpful? Do you not feel so very insignificant but God is paying attention to you, God almighty, the God of gods and Lord of lords is seeing you. And do we not feel together quite unimportant and insignificant, but God is choosing to meet with you in his holy presence and see you, and hear you, and speak to you, and show himself to you. May you respond, "You are the God who sees me." And may that be enough. For just as he met with Abraham along the way in his exhaustion and despair, "What's your problem? I am

your shield. I am your exceeding great reward." God, if you see me, I'm never alone. God, if you see me, how I spend my moment right now, it's very important even in the ordinary things, as we've been studying Wednesday nights.

He is El Roi, God, who sees me. God never closes his eyes against you. Don't be blind. As motivation to return to his call upon you and to serve him, open your eyes and see that God always sees you. This is the message for you this evening. See that God always sees you.

Let us pray.

Lord, even now you are watching us from your throne in heaven, by your Spirit on earth, through our union with Christ. You're watching over us as you watch us, including your discipline, redirecting our steps, overruling our own effort to be king. We acknowledge that we are often acting as if you do not see and that you are not watching, sadly, living out what the wicked say about you in the Psalms. But your eyes are everywhere trying men's hearts, including our own hearts. Not only do you look down and see us, you see inside us. Indeed, search our hearts, O Lord. Know our hearts. Try our hearts. Know our thoughts, and if there be any wicked way in us, lead us out of it, redirect us as you see us and see to our holiness, and see to our perseverance. Show us ourselves, help us to do one of the hardest things, not only see you seeing us, but to see what you see in us and what we're doing.

Help us, Lord, not to think we can hide from you running far away, turning the lights off, escaping by sea or in the desert, there you are. And Lord, as we often find ourselves, bringing ourselves to the precipice of despair and danger, in the wind we hear your small voice and remember how great you are. We hear you coming to rescue us, our great shepherd, bringing us back to the fold, saving us from utter ruin. Lord God, we do thank you for looking to us, for paying attention to us, by paying attention to me caring enough not to leave me to myself, not to leave us to ourselves.

Lord, open our eyes. Give us your light that we would see light. Open our eyes that we would behold wondrous things out of your law. Guide and direct us putting your light in our eyes that it would enlighten our whole body. Open the eyes of our heart, Lord. We want to see you as El Roi, the God who sees us, the God who sees me.

As we take of the Supper tonight, let us recognize you are not only here preaching to us now but feeding us now with yourself. Let us look and see and remember that you died on the cross for us, for me. You were thinking about your people. You were seeing our need ultimately to ever be seen by you and to see you in eternity. And one day we will see you face to face and know you even as we are known, but we will be in resurrected bodies and sin no more and there will be no reason to even think to hide from you. We'll walk with you in the garden and not be ashamed, nothing for you to see that would displease you, nothing for us to see that would cause us shame. Thank you for this vision. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus. The author and finisher of our faith and recognize he's

always with us. He will never forsake us. He will see to all our needs even to turn us back from our own running away, trying not to be seen.

Thank you, Lord God, that you do not let us stray but you always bring your sheep back to the fold. Thank you, Lord, for letting us hear your voice and as it were, to see you, our Good Shepherd, drawing us together before you this evening, watching over us as we look up to you as a handmaiden to her mistress, as we lift up our eyes unto you who watches over us even as we sleep. Strengthen us, O Lord, according to how you have revealed yourself to us in your scripture, and let it fill our minds and our hearts and let us adore you as we look upon you, eager to see you one day face to face and tell you how much we love you. Thank you for first loving us. Thank you for seeing us before we saw you. Thank you for enabling us to see for we were blind and we confess, we are still often wearing blinders. Rip them off our faces and cause us to see, cause us to see you as we take the Supper, just as we revisited this morning in Sabbath school, you broke the bread and then their eyes were open to see you whereas before they did not recognize what they were looking at. Let us see you indeed as our Savior this evening, remember you in the acts of the Supper and see our salvation and remember it is finished.

You have looked upon us, you've caused your face to smile upon us for your own name's sake, for your mercy's sake, for you are God, that keepeth covenant and keepeth mercy. Let us see that. Let us see that you see that when you look on us through Jesus Christ in whom we have our union and with whom we will have communion this evening, blessed fellowship. You see me. What more do I need to be fulfilled and have purpose and power to live for you. Let each of us say that for ourselves. Be blessed, maybe surprised, but be blessed to say to you, "You are a God who sees me." Let us stop running from you then. Let us draw close to you this night and enjoy your watchful shepherding over our souls, bodies, families and church. We pray these things in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord. And all your people said, amen.