

THINGS ARE SELDOM WHAT THEY SEEM

Rev. Richard Rogers

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So do you know what the top eight children's costumes are this year? I'm going to share them with you and you're just going to try to guess where they're from, alright? I had to go to my kids and my grandkids to even finish this list! Alright; so you ready?

First one: Shrunken Head Bob. What's that from? Shrunken Head Bob? *Beetlejuice! Beetlejuice!* Somebody got it.

Raygun. Number two; Raygun. Anybody know what that's from? It is from the Paris Olympics: the break dancer from Australia that got a zero. Her outfit is the number two children's Halloween costume.

Catnap. My kids tried to explain it to me and I still didn't understand it so I'm no help here at all.

Alright. Dolores? *Beetlejuice*, as well.

Pomni? *The Amazing Digital Circus*.

Envy? *Inside Out*.

Red? You know that one? Well, this says *The Descendants*, but you're probably right.

Alright. And Dr. Doom. I think it's a Marvel, right?

So what I want you to see: in kids culture, we are so completely out of it! [Congregants laugh] We're not even close to being in it in kid culture, we are so outside the mark; we are unbelievably unaware.

Now, you may not you may have known that already. But tomorrow, there might be some ghosts or vampires or Power Rangers or princesses that show up to your door. True? Maybe! And will you be frightened if a ghoul or a ghost or a vampire shows up at your door? [Congregants: "No!"] Why? Because you'll know that there's this beautiful little child underneath there that is dressed up. But you actually will know that the costume they're wearing is just a costume.

Now, when it comes to adults, can you see through their costume and see that divine expression? Or do you actually believe who they think they are?

See, one of the problems with perception ... actually, there's two. And from the human point of view and from the spiritual point of view, what we perceive may not be accurate. And the other part of this -- the meaning that we attach to that perception -- may not be accurate at all.

And why this is a problem is because I believe that we are missing the best part! Because we're so involved in seeing our drama and our problems and the situation, that we don't get to see the glory of God. We don't get to see the kingdom of heaven that's supposedly all around us.

Jesus said, "*The kingdom of heaven is all around you and men see it not.*" Right? The implication is that women do, and men just won't stop for directions. [Congregants laugh] Right? And so, what if within you is this kingdom that you just don't see?

You say, "*Richard, I see life accurately.*" Maybe! But what if you don't? What if there's a whole world within you that you aren't perceiving? You say, "Well, I know what I see!"

It's like, "*Well, do you really?*"

How many have heard the story of a child and, inside their closet, they see a monster. And they get up to duel the monster -- to fight the monster properly -- and they flip on the light switch. And the moment

they flip on the light switch, what happens? The monster's gone! Because when you turn on the light, how many of the issues or the problems of life are gone?

See, we actually believe this idea that seeing is believing. And it's a common expression that people actually hold. But what if it's just not true? What if what you're seeing is just a small fraction of what's really there? Could you imagine opening the possibility that you could see more than you've ever seen before? And that we could actually do that?

You know, research shows that there are really three major problems with the way that we see things. The first one is **confirmation bias**. And confirmation bias says that ... causes people to seek out information that confirms what they expect to see, what they expect to believe, what they expect life to look like. So, imagine every day -- with this confirmation bias -- you get up and you see the world you expect to see. And, because we've seen the world so many days in a row that way, we tend to see the world the way we expect to see it. But what if the world's not like that at all?

The other problem is **context**. Context surrounds us. And sometimes a context actually can change, and our perception doesn't change with it. For example, the story of the kid with seeing the monster. Or low light: you see shapes that aren't really there. And over and over again, we literally have to focus on what we're seeing to make sure that what we're seeing is actually there.

And the last one is **false perceptions**. The brain interprets the information, even when it doesn't have enough information. So it gives us an image that may or may not even be there.

See, the expression, "*Seeing is believing*" originated from a 17th century English clergyman, Thomas Fuller. He was the inventor of the brushes. [Congregants laugh] Sorry, I was just saying who was still awake. Right? And his actual quote was, "*Seeing is believing, but feeling is truth.*"

Could you say with me -- to just to entertain the possibility, "***I don't know.***"

Together: [with congregants] "*I don't know.*"

One more time, like we actually mean it: [with congregants] "*I don't know.*"

So what are you looking at? [With congregation:] "*I don't know.*"

What do you believe is out there? [With congregation]: "*I don't know.*"

And the more I want us to just open the space for this! Because, you know, we've seen the little slogan that's in the London Underground that says, "Mind the Gap." And "Mind the Gap" is such a powerful concept. Because when we mind the gap, we allow for there to be a space between what we see and the judgment or the perception or the story that we attach to it. Because if we're willing to mind the gap -- if we're willing to open to that space -- then Spirit can actually reveal something that our eyes don't yet see.

And more and more and more, the more that we walk by spiritual sight -- not by physical sight -- allows us to discern and experience all the good that God is. Because most of us have had a preconceived idea that was passed down to us from generation to generations on how life is and how it works. And we begin to believe that.

And what if tonight, we could just create a gap and, and that gap could allow us to perceive and experience things that are greater than we ever had before.

"I don't know."

Together: [with congregants] "*I don't know.*"

Like, did anybody's head explode by saying that out loud? [Congregants laugh] Like, our whole life, for many of us, has been based in us feeling safe and secure by us knowing. And even when we didn't know, we didn't even realize how often we made up a story, or we filled in the details, instead of just opening a space that says, *"I don't know."*

Together: [with congregation] *"I don't know."*

Because if we're willing to open that gap -- open that space -- then it's amazing what Spirit can reveal to us if we are willing to take it into prayer. And just to say, *"I don't understand this"* or, *"I don't know this"* or, *"I need help with this"* or, *"Help me see this in a different way."* And the moment we create that gap -- that space -- then Spirit can reveal so much more than we were ever led to believe.

But the moment we think we always know ... And we know what it feels like when we're in that ego place where we just go from one moment to another, always thinking that we know: *"I know what this is. I have got this figured out. I understand this."*

And what if it's just not true? What if there's a whole universe that's available to us, if we are willing to suspend our judgment for a moment to see the kingdom of heaven?

And the other problem is, not just in our perceptions, but the other problem is the meaning that we attach to our perceptions. So not only do we see life a certain way, but then we tell ourselves a story about what that means. So somebody gives us a cranky face. Right? And not only do they give us a cranky face, but then we instantly know what that means. *"Oh, they're mad at us"* or, *"They don't like us anymore."* Or we go into a whole story of what that means. And it may not mean that at all!

When I was in seminary, this woman gave this great talk. It was a great talk, and it made me so uncomfortable. Have you ever had one of those kind of talks? Where the person is ... such a good talk! And yet, it's kind of just making you cringe on the inside because you know it's just for you? You know there are other people in the room, but you know that talk is just for you. So I'm cringing. I'm cringing on the inside; I'm making faces. And she stopped her talk about three quarters of the way and left the room. There were like 20 of us in this room and she ran out crying. And we're all like, *"What happened?"*

And apparently, I was making so many cringy faces that she thought it was a terrible talk. And she was so embarrassed that she ran out of the room!

I had to say, *"No! It was a great talk, and you were making me very uncomfortable. But it was a fantastic talk!"*

And she said, *"Richard, you should let your face know that then!"* [Congregants laugh]

Well, my face did know it, and I was working on it! You can't give me a spiritual process that sometimes I'm going to make crunchy faces. And now, when somebody's making a real crunchy face, I thought, *"I hope this is working for them!"*

Right? But it wasn't the situation. It was the meaning that she attached to it! You know, somebody doesn't call us for a lunch date on time, and we go into a whole story about what that means. So it's not even the perception that is the problem ... but then we have perception upon a perception. We lay over this meaning, and the meaning is just a story that we tell ourselves that may or may not even be accurate! So, our perceptions can be messed up, and then we add a messed up meaning on top of it. It's amazing how we can even get through a day!

And what would happen if we suspended that?

You know, in ancient times, when the thunder and lightning would happen, they had a meaning that God was angry. And now we think, *"Oh, we're too sophisticated. We know that it's a chemical reaction in the atmosphere, and it's brought on by electricity."* And we go into this whole, *"Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah."*

But 5,000 years ago, it was just one ticked off God -- or multiple -- but we had meaning.

And what if today we just suspend all that? You know, the first lesson in "A Course in Miracles" is:

"Nothing I see in this room [on this street, in this window, in this place] means anything."

Together: [with congregants] *"Nothing I see in this room means anything."*

One more time: [with congregants] *"Nothing I see in this room means anything."*

It's like, *"Well, Richard, I've got to have meaning. Life's supposed to have meaning!"* No! It's an experience! Just stay in the experience and don't tell the story. Just stay in the experience and let go of all the meaning so that you can just experience life in a basic, primitive, wonderful way.

It goes on, the lesson:

"Now look slowly around you, and practice applying this idea very specifically to whatever you see:

²This table does not mean anything.

³This chair does not mean anything.

⁴This hand does not mean anything.

⁵This foot does not mean anything.

⁶This pen does not mean anything.

Then look farther away from your immediate area, and apply the idea to a wider range:

²That door does not mean anything.

³That body does not mean anything.

⁴That lamp does not mean anything.

⁵That sign does not mean anything.

⁶That shadow does not mean anything."

And I want you to see that there is such a power when you can suspend your perceptions; when you can suspend the meaning; when you can suspend the judgment. Because if you create the gap, then all things are possible. In that moment that you don't go into a judgment, the Spirit of God can actually reveal something in you and through you that is greater than you can imagine.

And when you look at yourself -- when you think about yourself; who you are -- and that's why it's so much fun to wear costumes! Because costumes take us out of our story; out of our drama; out of the way we dress. And we put on a new persona and we feel into that one.

And in that one how does that feel? *"Well, I like to be a little chef-y!"* [Congregants laugh] Right? *"I like to be a little baker-y!"* Right? Because it moves us out of who we think we are, and we experience our self in a more organic way.

William Shakespeare said, *"All the world is a stage, and all the men and women merely players."* See, but we believe that we're playing this part. And then we play this part for so long that we think that part is who we are.

And what if tonight you could just suspend that? What if you just aren't the person that you thought you were? And what if God could reveal in you and through you an aspect of you that's actually greater?

So, tell me what you see in your life? And what is the meaning that you've attached to it? And what would you rather see?

So, I'm serious about that! When you look at your life, what do you see? Do you see joy and love and abundance? Is that what you see? And then, what's the meaning that you attach to it? If you're not seeing all the abundance or all the love or all the joy that you want to see in your life, what's the meaning that you attach to that? And what if we actually suspend both the perception and the meaning that you have attached to it? And you actually experience life free from both of those: the perception and the meaning?

See, you know, we're in this 40-day period of gratitude. And gratitude actually changes the way we see the world. And I believe that, in our toolbox, gratitude is one of the most profound ways that we change the way we see the world. Because as we begin to give thanks for anything in our life, we begin to notice it more often.

So, if you want to experience greater abundance or greater love or greater joy or greater peace, as you begin to give thanks for it in your life, it literally changes the way you perceive. And you begin to notice that very thing around you more and more and more.'

And because the Infinite is truly all around us, as we give thanks for anything, we see it more. You want to see the kingdom of heaven? Give thanks for the kingdom of heaven. You want to see greater love or joy or peace or abundance? Whatever it is you want to see, as you give thanks for it, you actually become more and more aware of that! And you begin to see the kingdom of heaven all around you. It actually works!

Practicing gratitude can shift your mindset from a negative to a positive. It can even create lasting changes in how you interact with the world.

So what's some of the benefits of gratitude? The first one is that **gratitude creates a biochemical reaction in your brain**. As you express gratitude, your brain releases dopamine and estrogen ... not estrogen ... serotonin, which are neurotransmitters that enhance your mood and make you feel better.

Now, look at that! I want you to see this, right? If you're looking at a scary world, is being depressed an appropriate response? Yes! If you're looking at a scary world, it makes absolute sense to be depressed about it. And we can try to change that -- our depression -- or we can change the focus of what we're looking at so it's no longer depressing us.

If you're looking at the negative parts of your life, and that's what you focus on, we should be depressed! If you're looking at the kingdom of heaven -- if you're looking at the glory of God; if you're looking up -- it actually changes our brain chemistry, and it actually makes us happier.

Two: **gratitude changes our cognitive process**. Gratitude can help restructure your cognitive process, training your brain to be in tune with the positive. Now, has anybody ever walked into a room and forgotten why you're there? Has everybody reached that milestone where you walked into a space and, for the life of me, you cannot remember why you're there? Right? It's a part of the natural aging process that you lose your mind. Cancel, cancel. Right?

And what I want you to see is that gratitude actually stimulates the cognitive process in your brain and activates your brain at higher and higher levels. That, if you're not functioning at the highest level that you would like to be functioning at, what I want you to see is gratitude actually helps your cognitive process.

And it also shifts your perception. Gratitude can shift your perception -- and the feelings of lack or insecurity -- to feelings of abundance, satisfaction and faith. It changes, as I said, your brain chemistry. It changes your cognitive process and it shifts your perception.

Like, this is so fundamentally important! If you want to experience more and more God in your life, gratitude is one of the most powerful tools that you have. If you want to experience the kingdom of heaven right here and now in your life, gratitude is one of the most powerful tools you have. Because when we begin to give thanks; when we begin to focus on the good; when we begin to acknowledge – *“Thank you, God, for all the joy, all the peace, all the abundance!”* – you actually begin to experience it. And it was there all the time, but you weren't experiencing it ... because you were being depressed by focusing on the negativity.

This is incredibly powerful stuff! You know, we all hear it ... [says in a mincing voice] *“Well, yes, give thanks.”* But this is a game changer, friends. This can actually open the door to your greatest life.

That you have to be willing to give thanks, as Jesus taught us, before we see it. And in the act of giving thanks before you see it, you begin to see it.

You want to see the kingdom of heaven? *“Thank you, God, for the kingdom of heaven in my life.”* And then I witness it over and over again.

“Thank you, God, that I'm witnessing abundance in every level of my life.”

“Thank you, God, for the love that is healing myself and my family.”

“Thank you, God, for the health that fills every cell and fiber of my being.”

“Thank you, God, that I am blessed every day.”

And the more that we give thanks, we move the focus off of the problem and onto the glory of God!

This is so powerful! That, as a ministry, we have dedicated 40 days of giving thanks ... and giving thanks over and over and over again! Because one day at one meal is not transformative. It's nice. I mean, giving thanks at one meal is nice. You get, you know: *“Thank you God for all this turkey. Thank you, God, for all the football. And thank you God for the great nap I'm about to take.”* [Congregants laugh] Right? But it's not really transformative.

But, if for the next 40 days, your constant process is, *“Thank you, God, for [the life that you want.]”* *“Thank you, God, for the love; the joy; the peace; the abundance that is mine.”* It actually will transform your life so that you see the good that your heart mind and soul is seeking! And it looks so superficial! It looks like it wouldn't work! But it may be the most powerful tool you have to change the way your life works.

“Thank you, God, for all my blessings.”

Together: [with congregants] *“Thank you, God, for all my blessings.”*

“Thank you, God, for the kingdom of heaven.”

Together: [with congregants] *“Thank you, God, for the kingdom of heaven.”*

Will you pray with me?

Tonight, I invite you to open your eyes that you may see the glory of God. Open your eyes that you may see all the good that God is. That, every time we looked into the dark places of life; every time we look into the scary places of life; every time we looked into the needy places of life; let our eyes be lifted higher that we may see the glory of God. Let us have the discipline and the mastery to no longer look

into the darkness, but look into the light. Let us see the glory of God and let the glory of God fill our lives in new and powerful and creative ways.

Thank you, God, for a new vision for my life and for my world. Thank you, God, for the glory; the goodness; the peace; the power; the abundance that is mine. Thank you, God, for every good thing! And I rejoice and I give thanks, and I am made new. And so it is. Amen.

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