

## The Big Picture

### Introduction:

When we think about the big picture we're talking about perspective. Each of us tends to view the world through the lens of our own experience and our own self-interest. As someone said: "We're all tuned in to the same radio station – WII FM – What's In It For Me?"

That goes a long way towards explaining what's wrong with the world, doesn't it? Perhaps you've heard of this quote from Pastor Martin Niemoller about what happened in Nazi Germany in the days leading up to World War II.

*"When the Nazis came for the communists,  
I remained silent; I was not a communist.*

*When they locked up the social democrats, I remained silent;  
I was not a social democrat.*

*When they came for the trade unionists, I did not speak out;  
I was not a trade unionist.*

*When they came for the Jews, I remained silent;  
I wasn't a Jew.*

*When they came for me,  
there was no one left to speak out."*

I love the way that Rick Warren began his best-selling book, The Purpose-Driven Life. He said: "It's not about you." God has placed us here on this planet and He designed us for community. The truth is that we need each other – even those of you who won't admit it.

We here at Clearview Community Church understand that. Each of us are recipients of the grace of God, who is in the process of restoring us to full relationship with Himself and with others. That's what the church is all about. We believe in God – and He believes in you. Because of that, we believe in you too – not because any of us are **all that** in and of ourselves, but because each of us were created in the image of God. That image has been marred by this sinful world, but it's still there. So Dr. Tony Evans

wrote that *“The definition of a church is a community of believers who’ll convince you you can make it, then stand beside you while you try.”*

That’s not the end of the story, though. We’re not redeemed to sit, soak and sour. We’re changed so that we can join up with what God is doing and make a difference in our world. As William Temple said: *“The church exists for the sake of those outside it.”*

So I want to encourage you this morning to try to broaden your view of the church and the world. As we look back at the Scriptures we see story after story of God’s intervention in human affairs. Each of those stories began with a challenge to be faced. Many of those challenges appeared to be of the impossible variety. Almost without exception, those stories also included an ordinary human being whose heart God had touched. There was a nation to be saved; there were hurting people to be helped; or there was an enemy to be confronted.

Things haven’t changed all that much. Every day we see families in need of help; and people fighting addictions or health issues beyond their control. Others are fighting to overcome events of their past or facing economic challenges that have them treading water. Many others are struggling to find meaning in a culture that glorifies celebrity and trivializes the sacred.

So as we look at the big picture this morning, the challenges facing us as families and as a church, and as a community, what are the lessons we can learn from Scripture? As I was studying for this message and reading how God interacts with us I noticed how often there are questions involved. So, I’d like to deal with three of those questions that I found in the Bible and look at them in our context.

The first question comes from Exodus 4:2.

### **1. What is That in Your Hand?**

This question came from an encounter between God and Moses. The nation of Israel had been suffering under the hand of Pharaoh in Egypt and things were going from bad to worse. Moses, who was a Jew but had been raised in Pharaoh’s house, had gotten so angry about what he had seen that he had murdered an Egyptian.

Some forty years later, God came calling. It was time for the Jews to be free and Moses was God's choice to lead them. He was very quick with the excuses. I don't speak well, I'm not smart enough; my suit's at the dry-cleaners. Finally he asked God "*What if they do not believe me or listen to me?*"

God's answer is our first question: "*What is that in your hand?*" It was an interesting question. It wasn't like he had a nuclear weapon in his hand. He didn't have something helpful like the latest book on diplomacy or the private number of the Assyrian king. He had a simple shepherd's staff. A piece of wood.

God said, "throw it down" and instantly it became a snake. He ran, but God told him to grab it by the tail. When he did it became a staff again. What's the point?

God was letting Moses know that the challenges he faced were not anything to worry about. This battle was God's battle and He had it all under control. Whatever God had placed at Moses' disposal was enough.

Now that's a principle that we all need to learn. When God calls us to do something, often the first thing we do, after measuring the challenge, is to look around at our limitations. We go through the list of our deficiencies. The lesson to be learned here is that, when God calls us to do something, He will take care of the details.

I believe that God is asking all of us this very same question – "what is that in your hand?" What do you have that may seem so very ordinary to you, but that **could be** exactly what God is looking for? It could be your business sense; it could be your athletic ability; it could be your mechanical or woodworking, or seamstress skills. We've got to understand that all that we have is God's, given to us to bless those around us and to make a difference. When we use what we have in obedience to God, He makes the miraculous happen. It's like David with his little shepherd sling and stones from the creekbed. It certainly didn't intimidate the giant, but it was what he had. And God used him to bring down the giant. What is that in your hand?

The second question is taken from John 6:9 (KJV)

## 2. What is that among so many?

It's a famous story. Jesus had travelled out into the wilderness and huge crowds of people had followed Him. They had been walking for a while and were tired and hungry. Jesus told His disciples to find them something to eat. There were 5,000 men plus women and children, so it was a large crowd.

They weren't near a town, so there was no bakery to provide food, even if they had the money to buy it. As the disciples began to explore the options available to them, Andrew spoke up and said, "*Here is a boy with five small barley loaves and two small fish...*" and then the question... "***what is that among so many?***"

The implication is clear – what we have is not enough. But he was saying more than that. With that question he was saying that the needs of all of these people could not be met here in this place on this day. He was giving a very simple mathematical equation: 5 loaves + 2 fish does not equal food for thousands. And he was right.

In human terms this was an impossibility. The disciples were certainly not capable of manufacturing an answer to this dilemma. But they didn't account for Jesus in their equation. You see, 5 loaves + 2 fish + Jesus = more than enough food for thousands. In fact, the disciples collected more after they were done than they had when they started. That's impossible. Exactly. That's why Jesus had each of the disciples collect a basket of their own so they could see it for themselves.

What's the lesson? When we give God what we have, He takes care of the rest. Or at a deeper level: we must first give God what we have if we expect Him to meet the need.

We're surrounded with seemingly insurmountable problems. There are many days when, in our human nature, we see the situation and ask the question, "what is that among so many?" But God loves to use the small, seemingly insignificant, things and people of this world to do things that were never thought possible. I love the fact that, in order for one of Jesus' more famous miracles to occur, it first took the step of faith of a little boy.

Folks, do you want to change the world? It starts with one small step – bring what you have and offer it to Jesus. Watch what will happen.

The third question comes from John the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter, and it speaks of expectation. Jesus was beginning His ministry. He'd just been baptized by John the Baptist out of obedience. By the way, if Jesus submitted to baptism, so should you. Then He began to preach and to recruit the disciples who would follow Him. One of those disciples was Phillip. When Jesus called Him, Phillip excitedly went to call his good friend Nathanael. He told him, in John 1:45, *"We have found the one Moses wrote about in the Law, and about whom the prophets also wrote—Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph."*

The response from Nathanael was so typical of people:

### **3. Can anything good come out of Nazareth?**

What was he saying? He was expressing the thoughts of so many people at so many places at so many points throughout history. In common language what he was saying was this: *"You've got to be kidding."*

Really Phillip? The Saviour? The Messiah? From Nazareth? That's not the way it works. Everyone knows that the only people who make a difference in this world are born to the right people in the right places. They have all of the opportunity: the right teachers, the right DNA, the trust fund, the political connections, you know... Jerusalem maybe. But they certainly don't come from some hicktown like Stayner – I mean Nazareth.

It's funny how people think so differently than God does. When the Jewish people were being harassed and intimidated by a huge Midianite army, He went looking for a hero who was hiding out in a winepress, threshing his wheat. He was from the lowest family, from the lowest clan, from the lowest tribe in Israel – and God says, *"Perfect – just what I'm looking for."*

When King Saul blew it, and God sent Samuel out to Jesse's home to anoint a new king for Israel, Samuel and Jesse just assumed that God would pick the oldest and the strongest, but no... God went on down the list through all of the brothers until there were none left. Samuel had to ask if this was all of them. Jesse said that there was one more, but the little guy was out in the fields keeping an eye on the sheep. Sure enough, God chose David, the shepherd-king.

He also used people like Rahab, a former prostitute who would go on to become one of the ancestors of Jesus Himself. Really? Yes, really.

In 1 Corinthians 1:26-28 Paul wrote to the church in Corinth. He said: *"Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are."*

Can anything good come out of Stayner? Can we really make any kind of a difference? Absolutely. I'm firmly convinced that there are some world-shakers sitting right here in front of me who are very well disguised as ordinary people.

So, to quote Max Lucado: *"Ignore the ones who say it's too late to start over. Disregard those who say you'll never amount to anything. Turn a deaf ear toward those who say that you aren't smart enough, fast enough, tall enough, or big enough – ignore them. Faith sometimes begins by stuffing your ears with cotton."*

*"In a concrete world of paychecks and power brokers and bleeding ulcers, He calls us to live our lives with a conviction of invisible hope. He calls us to fight evil, to do good, to buck systems, trusting that in the end it will make a difference."* – Bill Hybels