

To Resolve
Wk 3
A Proper Perspective

We've passed the half way mark now in this series on resolving conflict, after talking through the root of conflict, in our will we have to make the decision to push aside our will's and value the person over it. Two weeks ago we talked about how we communicate through conflict, that many times how you say something carries more weight than what you actually say. Then last week is really where the rubber meets the road for us. We broke down the story of Jacob and Esau, and despite the depth of the conflict, and the dysfunction of their family we see that time had a way of making things better and that by each of them having an encounter with God they were able to push aside their differences, push aside their hurt and their own will's and value the person over their own desires and brokenness. This week we'll be dropping the rubber on the road again, remember we said that we can look at tires, examine tires, talk about how they're made and what they look like but until we actually drive with the tires on the road all we know about tires really carries little importance. Until we put into practice these truths about resolving conflict they really carry no more weight than just mere information to us.

As the rubber meets the road again tonight for you, as you have the opportunity to take these truths and apply them to your life, my question for you is this. Have you ever put yourself in someone else's shoes? Now despite what some of you are thinking, I'm not entirely talking here about actually putting someone else's shoe on. But think for a second, do you remember when you were younger and maybe you walked around in your parent's shoes, playing dress up or whatever. Both my boys used to do this, and Hope still does. She'll put on Becky's flip flops and trudge around the house, one and a while she'll put on my shoes and she'll be like dad look at my new shoes, but you know what happens right? As soon as she starts attempting to walk around in my shoes, maybe less than a minute, she trips and usually falls flat on her face. Why, well the shoes are heavy for her feet, they're large and awkward when your feet are only seven or eight inches long. It's hard to walk in somebody else's shoes. But as we talk this week about resolving conflict we'll see, figuratively speaking, that it is a practice we have to put into action.

One of the important keys to resolving conflict is the ability to place yourself in someone else's shoes, to see things from someone else's perspective. Perspective is one of those things that we have a hard time talking about because it's difficult to wrap around. But simply put your perspective is the lens in which you see something through. Lots of different things affect the type of lenses in which we see something. Our attitudes affect our lenses. A person whose attitude is bitter and resentful is going to look at conflict as if it's all the fault of the other person. Whereas an attitude of humility and love is willing to forgive the other person and take responsibility for the conflict even if it is not his or her fault. Vision and purpose can also affect the way we look at things. A builder or contractor will understand what the building should look like when it's done (vision) and work toward that goal (purpose or mission). On the other hand the framer's vision is limited to one wall at a time and the guy who's moving the dirt may not even know what the purpose of his hole or trench is. They work on the same project but look at it differently. Experience also affects our lenses (or the way we look at things, perspective). Whether our parents are married or divorced affects the way we look at marriage, because of our experience. A coach will look at the game differently than the rookie athlete on the bench because of their experience. I mention all that to illustrate for you that there is more than one valid way to look at something, more than one way to see a conflict, and none of the sides may be wrong, but rather limited.

Jesus' disciples constantly found themselves looking at things differently than, looking at things through different lenses or a different perspective, than Jesus and even some of the other disciples. On one such occasion the disciples come to Jesus and ask Him a question, but before I even share with you the question I want you to think about how they were saying it, how they were communicating to Jesus and what they were communicating to the other disciples. Put yourself there.

James and John are two of Jesus' closest disciples, but their perspective was off. Their attitude was bold and tough. They were actually known as the "sons of thunder". They were probably loud and outspoken. They come to Jesus one day and they ask...

"Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." (*Mk. 10:35b*)

It's almost like they are being sneaky, like when where little. "Mom, if I ask you for something will you tell me yes?" Mom's usually like, "that depends on what it is". What sort of blows me away here is that, Jesus, He's God. So he already knows what they are going to ask. But in response he says, "What is it that you want"? Jesus doesn't give him the "depends" answer, he doesn't give them an answer at all he only ask that they would be honest. John and James come with this question, and of course they are communicating in this sort of sneaky way which, let's admit it, can sometimes start a conflict. They then reply with their question,

"Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." (*Mk. 10:37*)

Just to be clear on what they're asking, what they're saying is this, "Jesus, when you go back to heaven and everything is perfect and the way it's supposed to be. We'll we want you to promise us that we can sit on little thrones, you know on each side of yours" This would be the equivalent of us going to the president and saying something to this extent, "Listen Mr. President, will you do me a favor? Just tell me yes, even though you don't know what it is yet." Then after he gives the mom answer (cause he's not Jesus), "well it depends" then you or I would say something like this, "next time you're in the white house, I want to be the vice president". Now let's come to a few conclusions here, none of us are qualified at this point to be the vice president. We might think we know the job, but the reality is we really don't. We don't know where the vice president lives, we don't know what his life is like, and we don't have a clue. But yet we're bold enough to ask for the position. That's what John and James do here they ask Jesus for something they don't have a clue about. Yet they are bold enough, and probably arrogant enough to ask for it, why? Because of their perspective, because of the lens they looked through when they saw the kingdom of God. Their perspective is skewed because they lack understanding, they don't have the vision Jesus does. They are like rookie athlete's trying to coach the team. They haven't seen things from Jesus' perspective, through the lens of Christ.

If this seems like a recipe for conflict, it is. The other disciples hear this and they're just a bit upset. Ok, it's a little more than that. The scripture says that they're indignant; they're disgusted with these guys. The thoughts are probably ranging from "who do they think they are" to "Jesus, better put these guys in their place otherwise I'm out or I will". The other disciple's perspective is off as well, they are looking at the situation through the lenses of disgust and outrage. What they don't realize is that they as well as John and James are looking at the kingdom of God through worldly lenses. As a result their perspective is limited, they don't know what the kingdom looks like and they can't see the others point of view. This is like a CD manufacturer and an album artist going back and forth on how to write a song. Both of them have zero experience writing music, so neither one of them is qualified to comment to the artist. Yet they both are and it's a recipe for conflict.

Jesus see's this though. He see's all of it, he sees the limited perspective of James and John and responds to them with this thought,

"You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared." (*Mk. 10:38-40*)

Jesus says to them, "you don't know what you're asking". He tells them straight out and goes on to tell them what it takes to be like Him, to walk in His shoes. He asks, "Can you do what I'm going to do?" Again, from their limited perspective they respond that they can. Jesus says if that's what you want, so be it. Even though they asked for something without understanding what they were asking Jesus grants it to them. He grants them the path to know Him and become like Him, but on His terms. They won't receive the gift they requested. They still can't have those spots they are not reserved for them.

Jesus also sees the skewed perspective, the tainted lenses of the other disciples. Knowing that this is escalating, Jesus calls both groups aside and removes their tainted lenses and presents them with his lenses, the perspective of the kingdom.

"Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mk. 10:42-45)

What Jesus says to them is profound and simple. He says your perspective of importance, of authority; your lenses of being in charge are tainted by your environment, by those who are in charge around you. It's like a coach coming up to two rookies who are discussing the game as if they were coaches. The coach looks at them and says, "You guys are discussing coaching like it's a video game. You don't understand the game". The coach then takes his clipboard and hands it over to the rookies. The rookies see every player's name, every player's position, they play and what every player is good at in the specific position in the specific play. The rookies see the injury report, they see which players are playing with injuries, which ones are weak in certain parts and which ones are strong. The rookies gain a whole new perspective from the coach; they see the game through his lens, as if they were in his shoes. That's what Jesus does here, he says listen, "those around you; they lead the way you're asking to. They exercise authority and they lord over those entrusted to their care, they're power hungry, but that isn't the way for you. Stop looking at things, stop looking at leadership through their lens, through their perspective. And look at it through mine. If you want to lead like me, you have to serve. If you want to be great, you have to be a slave". These things are very figurative for us, but to them slavery wasn't something that ended 200 years ago. Slavery was all around them. They weren't living in a democracy where people had rights to vote, they were living under a brutal dictatorship where if you didn't like what was going on and said something about it publicly you were as good as dead. This wasn't a bible story for them; it was a way of life. Jesus rearranges their way of life, he rearranges how they look at leadership, authority, and power. He gives them a new perspective and new set of lenses to look at things through.

When you and I are in conflicts, are we looking at the conflicts through such tainted lenses that we are unable to see things from any other perspective, through any other lens. Are we so unwilling to look through another lens that we're asking for things, gifts, positions, maybe even our own way when we're not qualified for it and we don't know a thing about what we're asking for. You see when it comes to resolving conflict and we see the need to push aside our own will and value the other person rather than our own perspective and lens, a key to caring more about the person than ourselves is to put ourselves in their shoes and look at things through their lens. Another lens that's really helpful to look through, especially when the perspective of the person you're in conflict with doesn't make sense is that of Christ. How does he see this person, this situation, this scenario, this conflict? What does this look like in the kingdom of God is it really worth it? Is the person really worth winning the conflict, is the conflict really worth losing something or someone important to you. Is your way of looking at things really that important, or is there room to see through someone else's lenses. Even if their way is twisted and messed up to you, it's easier to deal with the person and or the issue when you can

see what they are looking at. It's like trying to do a puzzle without having the picture on the box to look at. You don't know what it looks like so you just wing it. It takes longer than it's supposed to and it's more difficult. If you had the picture of what the puzzle looks like, if you had the vision why wouldn't use it? God has given us the ability to look at everything through someone else's lens, some one else's perspective. In fact Jesus calls us to model his example, to look at things through His eyes. But will we?

Suggested Questions for Discussion:

1. Why do you think it's so hard to see things from somebody else's perspective?
2. What sorts of things make up the lenses we see people, situations, and issues?
 - a. Is that ok, *yes it's part of your life and who you are. The danger comes when you refuse to see from someone elses perspective. Remember that seeing from someone elses perspective is different than agreeing with their perspective*
 - b. Is it possibly to see from someone elses perspective and not agree with them?
 - i. When this happens can you continue to value the person over your will?
3. Before this issue escalates we see Jesus gather the groups together, why do you think it's good to have someone mediate when there's a disagreement?
 - a. Do you always need somebody, should you?
 - b. How do you know if you need a mediator or don't?
4. Whose lens should we always strive to see life through?
 - a. Why?
 - b. How do we do that?