

## YOU SEE ME

### Genesis 16:13

She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.”



Special Music: “You See Me”

Rita Springer + Seth Condrey

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4kSAPeLVW84>

## **INVISIBLE PEOPLE**

Doug Standish hated it when his feet got cold. He didn't mind the winter so much, but once the cold settled into his feet, he became oblivious to everything else around him. Doug never thought he would be in this situation. His parents had died when he was still a sophomore in high school and he had no siblings, so he had lived with his grandmother until he graduated. The day after the ceremony, he found himself at the recruiting office signing up to join the Army. He didn't want to continue to be a burden on his grandmother, so it seemed like a good way to get on with his life and make something of himself.

Doug served two stretches in Iraq as a gunnery field engineer before he returned to the States. His grandmother had passed while he was away, so he didn't have a place to come home to. He also discovered that there wasn't an abundance of opportunities for gunnery field engineers among the civilian population. He had tried to take odd jobs here and there but just didn't fit in. Doug still got massive headaches after leaving the Army, probably due to the constant explosions of the canons that he had maintained. He might have re-enlisted and done another tour if it hadn't been for the headaches.

It didn't take long for the money to run out and he found himself drifting from one place to another, always looking for a chance to find a job that he was suited for. Doug wasn't really picky about what kind of job it might be, just something to keep his head above water. But that opportunity hadn't come up and he was down to his last five dollars.

**This is why Doug found himself sleeping in the alcove at the entrance of Audrey's Forgotten Treasures on Main Street in Parable, Texas. He had a backpack with a spare set of clothes and wore a second-hand pair of hunting boots that he had picked up at a Salvation Army in Austin. He had also managed to wrangle a wool coat, but it was a size too small, which made it uncomfortable. Still, it provided him with some sense of warmth.**

**Suddenly, something hit his boots, followed by someone thrown to the sidewalk. Startled, Doug found himself awake and staring into the eyes of a deputy marshal who was on the concrete next to him. The deputy was rubbing his knee and looking none-to-happy.**

**"Officer, I'm sorry," Doug managed to mumble.**

**"What in the world are you doing? You can't be here! We don't allow vagrancy here in Parable," Deputy Dusty Forrester replied, still rubbing his knee.**

**"I was just trying to stay warm and out of the wind, officer."**

**"I don't care. That doesn't change the law. You can't be sleeping in doorways! You should be grateful that Audrey isn't here yet to open up or she might make me throw you into a jail cell for a couple of days."**

**Doug thought about that for a moment before he replied. "Well, Deputy, that might be for the best. Here, let me help you up." Doug got to his feet and held out a hand for Dusty to take.**

Dusty took his hand and pulled himself up. “Thanks,” he said, “but what do you mean that it might be for the best? I have no desire to arrest you.”

“But if you do, Deputy, then at least I will have a warm place to sleep and I will probably get some decent chow. I’m tired, cold, and hungry. Jail sounds like a step up right now.”

“Oh, you don’t mean that,” said Dusty.

“Oh, but I do, Deputy. Go ahead. Do your duty. Put the cuffs on me and take me away.” Doug turned his back to the deputy and put his hands behind him waiting for Dusty to slap the cuffs on.

“Now stop that. I’m not taking you in.”

“But you would be doing me a favor, Deputy! I’m ready.”

Dusty grabbed the man by the shoulders and spun him back around. The man hadn’t bathed in days and smelled pretty ripe, but there was no hint of him being inebriated or high. Dusty wasn’t sure what to do with him.

“What’s your name,” Dusty asked.

“Doug. Doug Flanders,” replied the man. “And before you ask, I don’t have any ID to prove that. My wallet was stolen from me when I was in Austin.”

“Look, Doug. This is what is going to happen,” said Dusty. “I am taking you back to the sheriff’s office. It’s just a couple of doors down. I’m not going to throw you into a jail cell, but we do have a shower for our prisoners where you can get washed up. I assume you have some clean clothes in your backpack.

**When you finish cleaning up, I will get you some breakfast at Daisy's across the street and you can tell me what brought you here. Does that sound like a plan?"**

**"Yeah, sounds like a plan," said Doug quietly. It was obvious that he was embarrassed by his situation and a little disappointed that the deputy refused to arrest him. "Lead the way, Deputy!"**

**After Doug had cleaned himself up and put on his fresh clothes, Dusty led the way to Daisy's Dinner. They sat in a booth and Donna Krenshaw waited on them. "I'll just have coffee, Donna. I already ate this morning. Doug here, though, would like the mega breakfast with coffee and biscuits." Dusty wasn't going to ask Doug what he wanted. He just wanted to make sure the man was well-fed.**

**"Sure thing, Dusty," Donna said as she took the order back to the kitchen.**

**Dusty turned his attention back to Doug. "Now Doug, how did you wind up here?"**

**Doug told the deputy his story and how he wound up in Parable, TX with five dollars in his pocket and no prospects. Dusty thought to himself, 'No wonder jail looks good to him.'**

**"I see you, Doug. I'd like to help," said Dusty.**

**"Deputy, no offense intended, but you would never have seen me if you hadn't tripped over my feet. The worst part about all this is, that when it happened, people started ignoring me. They avoided talking to me. They don't**

even see me, anymore. People like me become invisible. The only time people choose to interact with me is if I am in their way.”

Dusty had to think about that for a moment, and he didn't like what he was seeing in himself. “Give me a minute, Doug,” Dusty said with consternation. “We can start getting you some help right now. Let's get you back on your feet.” The deputy stood up and looked around the crowded restaurant. He tapped his spoon on his coffee cup but that didn't seem to catch anyone's attention.

“Hey, everyone,” Dusty shouted and the conversations in the restaurant came to a hush. “Listen, folks, I need your help. I have with me here a veteran who is down on his luck and struggling to get by. Anyone want to help him get back on his feet?”

And the most amazing thing happened. People stood up and left their tables and came towards Dusty and Doug. Each one looked Doug in the eye, shook his hand, thanked him for his service, and then added something to the kitty that was growing on the table. It was rather overwhelming.

Maria Gonzalez also told Doug to come by the Beauty Palace later and she would take care of getting him a decent haircut. Steve Nash, the owner at New to You told him to stop and get some fresh clothes. Pastor Chuck suggested that he come by the church fellowship hall in the evening for the church social and dinner. Patty Smithers said she could use some help out at the bee farm. The Mayor, Cora Henderson, asked him to drop by next week because she had a job that she thought he might be interested in. And when Donna Krenshaw came

back to freshen up the coffee, she let Dusty know that breakfast was on her. The money on the table would certainly pay for a few weeks at the Bent Tree Motel, but Dusty knew that Jackson Sellers probably wouldn't take the money, but instead would let the young man do some work for his keep.

Doug was overwhelmed by the generosity of the people of Parable. He had never been anywhere like this. These people really cared about each other. They even cared about him. They saw him. Doug was beside himself.

Dusty turned to Doug, held out his hand to be shaken, looked him straight in the eye, and said, "I see you, Doug. I see you."

**She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: “You are the God who sees me,” for she said, “I have now seen the One who sees me.”**

There is so much spiritual protein in the story of Abram, Sarah, and Hagar. In chapter 15 of Genesis, God promises Abram that he will be the father of many nations. And yet, his wife Sarah, was unable to bear children. There was a lot of pressure put on Sarah, mostly by herself. For how could her husband fulfill this prophecy from God if she couldn't bear him any children? That must have been so very frustrating for her. She must have felt that she was letting her husband down, and she blames God. Genesis 16:2 says this:

**“so she said to Abram, “The Lord has kept me from having children.”**

While it may not be the focus of this lesson, I do want to take a minute and step into this. Aren't we guilty of this? I know I am at times. Can't you hear Sarah's rationale here? 'Abram is supposed to be the father of many nations, but I'm his only wife, and I can't seem to bear children. It's not Abram's fault. He is doing his best and he wants children. I am doing my best and I want to bear him children, so it is not my fault. Therefore, “The Lord has kept me from having children.” It's all God's fault. If he would just answer my prayers. he could fix me and I would have lots of children for Abram.'

At some point in our lives. we tell God (and please don't pretend that you have never done this) we tell God, “If you wanted me to do this thing you have told me to do, then you would have put me in a place that I am able to do it. If you wanted me to do this thing, then you would have given me the authority to get it



done. If you really needed for me to do this, then you would have laid the resources at my feet so that I had everything I needed to do what needed to be done. And since you didn't do that, God, my failure to do what you asked is really your own fault and not mine. If you want me to sing, then you give me a voice to sing. Don't make me develop it on my own. If you want me to preach, then you need to give me the ability to preach and not make me learn how to preach on my own. If you want me to deliver your message to the nations, I'm more than happy to do so, just don't ask or expect me to move. If you want me to move, you are going to have to force me to move."

Goodness, that sounds so haughty, impetuous, and full of hubris when I say it out loud. We seem to think that because we accept God as our Creator, his Son as our Savior, and The Holy Spirit as the guide for our conscience, that now we can blame him for all of our failures. We make God our scapegoat and it makes us feel unrepentant.

Well, Sarah is so unrepentant and so unwilling to trust God that she comes up with a plan to fix everything herself. She has an Egyptian slave girl named Hagar and she decides that it is alright for Abram and herself to use this girl as an incubator to build a family. She doesn't give the girl an option or ask her opinion. Hagar will never be a part of the family, much less be the catalyst for making Abram the father of many nations, because Sarah intends to take credit for all of it. After all, she is the slave's mistress, and it was her idea to use Hagar to solve the problem.

But then the strangest thing happens. Hagar gets pregnant, and Sarah gets angry and jealous, and Hagar gets a little uppity, “ha, ha, ha. Look what I did that you couldn’t do?” Sarah’s response could have been a script from a soap opera.

**Then Sarai said to Abram, “You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my slave in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the Lord judge between you and me.”**

“This whole thing is your fault, Abram. If you hadn’t put so much pressure on me, I never would have allowed you to sleep with Hagar. God knows that you did this to me. He will judge you for this.”

Abram responds by telling Sarah that Hagar is her slave, and she can do with her what she wants. So, Sarah mistreats Hagar horribly to put her back in her place and bring her down a few notches. Hagar is so despondent and feels used and abused, even by slave standards. Her response is to run away.

The extended family dynamic formed here caused by resentment, humiliation, feelings of inadequacy, and superiority would cause any family therapist to seek counseling themselves. But it is necessary to understand this dynamic to get to the meat of our message.

After she runs away, Hagar stops at a spring near the road. God, in his infinite wisdom, love, and compassion, sends an angel to comfort her. The angel reassures her and prophesizes concerning what is going to happen with her, and also with her son when he is born. He also tells her to go back to her mistress.

The angel wants her to understand that her story isn't completely written yet. And then something extraordinary happens. This slave girl, who was treated with such indifference, who, through no fault of her own, had become an invisible person, whose only redemptive value was in her ability to procreate as a proxy for her mistress, now stood in the presence of an angel sent by God. She feels seen. She is no longer invisible.

**She gave this name to the Lord who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."**

She realizes that even though no one else sees her, respects her, cares about who she is, or values her as a human being, God sees her. God not only sees her, but he also sees greatness in her. This Egyptian slave who wasn't even from Hebrew ancestry, is elevated into the presence of the almighty God.

And I want all of us to humbly consider this: being from Egypt, she probably still leaned into her Egyptian religious training and worship, now finds herself seeing the God of the Hebrews, because the God of the Hebrews sees her.

**"I have now seen the One who sees me."**

As followers of Christ, aren't we called to see people through the same lens that Jesus sees them? It's so easy to turn away. It is too easy for us to not engage with people that we are uncomfortable around. We simply roll up the car window or walk past them without meeting their eyes. We feel that if we don't offer them our hand, they won't feel any obligation to take it. It can leave us feeling cleaner than if they had. We don't let our minds envision Jesus touching

**the lepers, healing the sick, looking into the eyes of the poor and defeated, or sitting at the table surrounded by the outcasts of society who follow him wherever he goes. All because he takes the time to see them as they are and meet them where they are at.**

**That's really what people want the most. They want to be seen. They want to be acknowledged. They want to be viewed as human beings in their sadness and their joy, in their poverty and their wealth, in their sickness and in their health, with all the varying human emotions, conflicts, situations, and interactions that make us all human.**

**You know, Doug in our story today never asked for help. He only wanted to be seen for who he was rather than what people assumed and perceived. His poverty and his homelessness weren't his main problem. His main issue was that society had chosen to forget him, to make him invisible so they didn't have to deal with him. 'If we ignore him, he will eventually go away.' Can anyone envision Jesus ever saying or doing such a thing?**

**Jesus doesn't expect us to try to help everyone we encounter. But maybe we can help that person that we just tripped over because we didn't see them. Maybe, just maybe tripping over them is God's way of making us take notice and step into their situation. Isn't that what Jesus does for us every day? We aren't deserving of his compassion, love, and mercy, but it is right there for us every moment of every day. If we call ourselves followers of Christ, how can we do any less?**

**God bless you all!**

**AMEN**

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