

Sermon – 02/04/2006 am

Seeing God

Study Text: John 14:7-11

If you had to choose between being blind or deaf what would you choose? Not an easy choice – but not many would choose to be blind. Sight is such a wonderful gift. We can see the sun and the stars, the trees and the seas, and lots of other beauty in the creation – even our own face when we look in the mirror!

But the ability to see can also be a handicap. Those who can see often think that only what they can see exists. ‘Unless I see it with my own eyes I will not believe’ they say – I wonder what those who are blind say! The Scriptures remind us that the things which are seen are temporary. It is the things which are not seen that are eternal (II Corinthians 4:18).

All people have a desire to see God. Many believe that God exists but since they cannot see him, God is of little concern to them. Some however, say that since they cannot see God then he does not exist. In their arrogance and ignorance they declare ‘if God exists then let him show himself – then I will believe’.

But then there are people like Moses (Exodus 33:18) and like the apostles who wanted to see God and his glory. Philip said to Jesus *show us the Father and it is sufficient* (14:8). Philip’s question was in fact a response to Jesus’ declaration regarding the Father. *From now on you know him and have seen him* said Jesus (4:7).

Know the Father

Jesus told his disciples he was going away. He was going to die on the cross within a few hours, he was going to rise from the dead in three days, and he was going to ascend to heaven in fifty days. He was returning to his Father’s house. In so doing, by his death, resurrection and ascension, Jesus would open the door to heaven; he would become the way, the only way for human beings to go to heaven. All people are of course cut off from the Father by sin.

Did the disciples understand this? Not at this stage. It would only be after the ascension and Pentecost that they would understand what Jesus was saying and what he was doing. It would only be by the power of the Holy Spirit that their hearts would be enlightened.

If you had known me said Jesus *you would have known my Father also* (14:7). This was not the first time he said this. He spoke the exact same words to the Pharisees when they questioned him about his authority to call God his Father (8:19). Jesus repeatedly claimed he was sent by God his Father and that all he said and did were the words and works of his Father. He declared *I and my Father are one* (10:30). Therefore to know Jesus was to know the Father, to believe Jesus was to believe the Father. Here with his disciples he goes a step further in proclaiming his unity with God by saying *he who has seen me has seen the Father* (14:9).

See the Father

From now on you know him (the Father) and have seen him said Jesus. The apostles were taken aback at these words. What was Jesus saying? Was he saying ‘right now you are looking at God’? Somewhat bewildered Philip asked ‘Lord, show us the Father and we will be happy’.

For three years they had been with Jesus, hearing all his powerful words and seeing all his mighty works. They recognised him as the Messiah or Christ, the one God promised to send as their deliverer – even if only from Roman oppression. *You are the Christ, the Son of the living God* confessed Peter (6:69). But what Jesus was saying now went beyond their understanding of Messiah.

Jesus said he was going away. He was leaving them and they were still being oppressed. He was going to a place they could not come, going to his Father’s house and then coming back again. ‘What was Jesus talking about?’ Then of course there were his words *I and my Father are one* (10:30) and *I am in the Father and the Father is in me* (10:38, 14:10, 11) The Jews were trying to kill him for claiming to be equal with God. And now Jesus actually says *he who has seen me has seen the Father*. The Jews would have exploded in anger if they heard such ‘blasphemy’.

The Jews were strict monotheists. They believed in only one God. *Hear O Israel, the Lord your God, the Lord is One* Moses taught them (Deuteronomy 6:4). The leaders of the Jews sought to kill Jesus because he said God was his Father, *making himself equal with God* (5:18). If he performs miracles and claims to be divine then he must be another god they concluded (Matthew 12:34).

The Jehovah’s Witnesses in all honesty must conclude the same thing when they translate John 1:1 as ‘the Word was with God and the Word was a god. Jesus clearly claimed to be divine. If he is not accepted as God the Son, then he must be another god. There is no valid position for a non-divine Jesus, a Jesus who is not equal with God, here in the Scriptures. Abandon Scripture all together, like Mohammed, if you cannot accept Jesus as God the Son.

The disciples, who were also Jews, struggled with the claims of Jesus, but they did not abandon him. Many turned away when they found Jesus’ words too hard to understand, but not the disciples. *To whom shall we go* said Peter, *you have the words of eternal life* (6:68). They continued to follow him and believe him. They did not attribute his mighty works to the devil but believed them to be the works of God and revelations of his glory (2:11).

The disciples accepted Jesus as the Son of the living God (6:69) but could they accept him as God the Son? Could they accept that in Jesus they saw the glory of God, the ‘fullness of the Godhead dwelling bodily’ (Colossians 2:9)? Could they accept that seeing Jesus they had seen the Father? Jesus claimed nothing less than equality with God the Father. Philip’s question – *Lord, show us the Father* – was somewhat offensive to him. He gently rebuked Philip for asking such a question.

The Trinity

We have come here to the great mystery of the Trinity – the Holy Spirit will be introduced before the chapter ends. Paul could describe the unity between Christ and the church as a great or profound mystery (Ephesians 5:32). How much more is the tri-unity of the Godhead a profound mystery! There is one essence or nature that exists within all three distinct persons

of the Godhead. So when God reveals himself it is the same nature that is present. It is one and the same glory – the glory of the Father and the Son.

Philip was not present on the mountain when Jesus was transfigured, but that did not matter. Those who were with him did not comprehend his glory anyway. Jesus' face was altered and his robe became white and glistening (Luke 9:29). Jesus who was now in their midst in the upper room revealed the glory of God to the extent that they could comprehend it at this time. Any greater revelation and they would have cried out like their fathers did before Moses – *this great fire will consume us and if we hear the voice of the Lord our God anymore we shall die* (Deuteronomy 5:25).

In Jesus Christ, God came into this world and revealed himself to mankind. The Son is *the brightness of his glory, the express image of his person* (Hebrews 1:3, II Corinthians 4:4, Colossians 1:17). Jesus is not simply an ambassador or envoy of God the Father any more than he is just a prophet. God has his angels as messengers to do his bidding. Jesus is greater than the angels (Hebrews 1).

God the Son came into this world, born of a woman in Bethlehem, but still being in essence God. Jesus lived among men revealing the glory of God in all his mighty works, but supremely in his work on the Cross. On the Cross he obtained atonement for sin, for the whole world, and for all time. None but God the Son could offer up himself as a lamb without blemish.

If Jesus was not God; if Jesus could not say 'I am in the Father and the Father in me'; if Jesus could not say 'he who has seen me has seen the Father', then you are still dead in your sins. If you do not believe in this Jesus who declared Himself to be divine and equal with God, then you are still dead in your sins. If Jesus was just another prophet chosen by God to declare his words, if he was just a wonderful teacher of the truth, if he was just an upright law-keeping man like Moses or David, then you are still dead in your sins.

Conclusion

If you think it would have been wonderful to be there with Jesus in the upper room and see him as the disciples did, remember this question of Philip's. It was not until Jesus had died, risen from the dead and ascended into heaven; it was not until the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them that they understood these things. The Holy Spirit enlightened their eyes as Jesus promised.

You live in the last days, the days when Jesus has poured out his Spirit, the Spirit who dwells in the heart of all believers. The Spirit helps us to remember and understand all that Jesus said and did (14:26). With eyes of faith you can see Jesus more clearly than they did.

Remember the words of the apostle Paul and focus on things that are unseen, for they alone are eternal. *Set your mind on things above* where Christ is seated at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:2). Believers are not earthly people; we do not try to bring Christ down (Romans 10:6). We go to him who has indeed raised us up to sit *in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus* (Ephesians 2:6).

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