

“John: Seeing God”

Deuteronomy 18:15-22 • John 12:37-50

First Presbyterian Church, Corpus Christi, TX

Rev. Charles S. Blackshear • October 22, 2023

Have you ever thought about what God is like? I sure hope you have. If so, what did you come up with? When I do premarital counseling with couples before their wedding, the first thing we talk about is faith. I begin by asking them to tell me about God. I'll say, “describe God to me.” The reason I ask that is because what you believe about God will determine how you respond to Him, how you will treat other people, really how you will live your life.

So what is God like? And how do you know? The answer to the second question is that the only way we can know anything about God is that He has revealed Himself to us. The Scriptures show us how God has intervened in history to reveal Himself to us. But God has also acted to show Himself to us more fully. He came here in person!

Today we are looking at this last section of John chapter 12. As we talked about last week, this is the major turning point in the Gospel of John. The first twelve chapters are often called the “Book of Signs,” because they show us Jesus’ ministry through seven great miracles. Each of the miracles are included to show us who Jesus is. Chapter 13, then, begins what is sometimes called the “Book of the Passion,” because from here to the end of the Gospel details the events surrounding Jesus’ death on the cross and his resurrection.

Last week we looked at Jesus’ final public appeal for the Jews, especially the Jewish leaders, to believe in him. But as verse 37 says, “Though [Jesus] had done so many signs before them,” including healing a man born blind and raising Lazarus from the dead, “they still did not believe in him.” But John then tells us that there were many, even of the Jewish authorities, that did believe in Jesus but did so secretly. This would probably include people like Nicodemus, who came to visit Jesus under the cover of darkness and said, “Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God,

for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.” Another Jewish leader who secretly believed in Jesus was Joseph of Arimathea who went to Pontius Pilate and received permission to bury Jesus after he had died on the cross.

Perhaps it was these leaders that Jesus has in mind when he cries out, “Whoever believes in me, believes not in me but in him who sent me. And whoever sees me sees him who sent me.” This is another one of those places where Jesus clearly claims that He is God in person. So the answer to our question, “What is God like?” is that God is like Jesus!

It would be impossible to say this too much. Until you understand that Jesus is God you will never understand God. In John 14, Thomas, one of Jesus’ disciples, says to Jesus, “Show us the Father and that will be good enough for us.” Jesus answers, “if you have seen me, you have seen the Father. I and the Father are one.” Like I said, what you believe about Jesus will determine what you believe about God and how you live. Just recently I read a quote by a church leader who asked how you might view Jesus differently if you thought he came to show us how to live, instead of coming to die. The truth is you would view Jesus very differently and incorrectly. For one thing, you would have to ignore what we learned last week, where Jesus said in verse 27 that the cross *is* why he came.

Without the cross you cannot know God. As pastor and commentator Rick Phillips puts it, “We learn that God is love by seeing the love of Jesus, especially as he offers himself on the cross. We see what it means that God is holy when we observe Jesus’ actions. Jesus lives out God’s wisdom and displays God’s saving power.” In other words, we learn what God is like by looking at Jesus who said, “whoever sees me sees him who sent me.” The word “see,” though, means more than just looking with our eyes. It translates the Greek word

theoreo, which is where we get the English word *theory*. It means to see but also to perceive and understand. Jesus is telling us that by studying and reflecting on his person and work we will come to know God.

In addition to seeing, we also *hear* as Jesus speaks for God. In verse 49, Jesus says, "I have not spoken on my own authority, but the Father who sent me has himself given me a commandment—what to say and what to speak." He's saying, "the Father has given me *what* to say and *how* to say it. The whole message is from God." I realize this can be kind of confusing. If Jesus is God, why does he not speak with his own authority? Does this contradict Mark 1 that says the people "were astonished at his teaching, for he taught them as one who had authority?" No. In his divinity Jesus had the authority of God to speak. What Jesus is doing is pointing people away from his human nature. He doesn't want them thinking that what he is saying is based on his human authority as a rabbi. We find the same thing when Jesus heals people and then tells them not to tell anyone about him. He doesn't want them seeing it as a human action when it was God working.

You could say that when we see and hear and understand Jesus for who He is and what he has done, you could say we will become enlightened. Of course, that's what Jesus *did* say, which is our second point today. He said in verse 46, "I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness. As Christians, Jesus does not leave us in the dark about who God is or what He's like. All through the gospel, John keeps returning to this theme of Jesus as the light of the world. In chapter one he said of Jesus, "The true light, which gives light to everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him. But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to

become children of God, who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God." Then in chapter 8 and again in chapter 9, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world."

What does it mean that Jesus is the light of the world? For one thing, it means that apart from Christ this world is in darkness. You don't have to look very hard to find that darkness on display. The terrorist attacks in Israel a couple of weeks ago and the ongoing aftermath of those attacks shows how dark that darkness can be. The fact that we can see those attacks as evil is because of the light of Jesus. As Phillips puts it, "Jesus is the One who came to impart light in order that we might see what goodness, truth, and righteousness are, and above all might see what God himself is." People in darkness, who don't have the light of Christ, are unable to distinguish good from evil.

As the light, Jesus doesn't just point out the darkness, He comes as the solution to darkness. He came to deliver you and me from our own darkness. As 1 Peter 2:9 says, "you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light."

That leads us to the final point, the danger of unbelief. In verses 47 and 48 Jesus says, "If anyone hears my words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day." When Jesus came the first time it was not to judge but to save. He came to reveal God's mercy to the world. When He returns it will be as supreme judge.

Jesus is here speaking primarily about the religious leaders who heard his message and saw the miracles, especially healing the man born blind and raising Lazarus. By the miracles Jesus had proved that he had come from God

and it's pretty clear that the Pharisees realized it. So as James Montgomery Boice has said, "Their rejection of Christ was thus a rejection of God." It is this rejection of God that is so dangerous. So this serves as a warning for us as well. As Boice says, "So even while Jesus can prove to have come from God, while Jesus meets our greatest need by showing us God, and while Jesus shines light to lift us out of darkness, people still will not bend the knee to him. For this they are responsible." Each of us is responsible for our response to God in Christ.

My deepest desire for you, my most earnest plea, is that each of you would take Jesus seriously. I pray that you would spend time in the light, reflecting on what Jesus did and what He said. Trust that when you see Him you see God. I beg you to take God's word seriously and know that they are the words of life. And I pray for the day that you stand before God and hear, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

Amen.