

“The Face of Jesus Christ”

Genesis 33:4-11 2 Corinthians 4:3-6 Mark 9:2-9

In Psalm 27, David is seeking the face of the Lord.

Psalm 27:7-9a . . . ⁷Hear, O LORD, when I cry aloud, be gracious to me and answer me!

⁸"Come," my heart says, "seek his face!" Your face, LORD, do I seek. ⁹Do not hide your face from me.

David is afraid the Lord is hiding his face from him even as he seeks the face of the Lord.

Why is it so important for David to seek and see the face of the Lord?

David answers that question in Psalm 27:1 . . . ¹The LORD is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The LORD is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

When David can experience the Lord's presence as the "stronghold of his life" and see the Lord's face as the "light of his salvation" then his life is good. Then he can see the "goodness of the Lord" in verse 13.

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word "panim" can be translated as "face" or "presence" The more literal translation is "God's face".

The story of the creation of Adam implies that the first thing Adam saw when he opened his eyes was the face of God.

Genesis 2:7 . . . ⁷then the Lord GOD formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and the man became a living being.

Adam was in the presence of God, beginning a loving relationship with him. We, too, have been created to live in a close relationship with him.

But sin breaks into our relationship which results in fear, guilt, and shame. After eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve hid and fled from God's presence.

Despite our disobedience, God always turns his face toward us and shines upon us with grace and forgiveness.

Moses suggests to Aaron that he bless God's people with these words in Numbers 6:24-26 . . . ²⁴The LORD bless you and keep you; ²⁵the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; ²⁶the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace.

I often use this blessing at the end of worship or at the end of a graveside service but will add in a few words that are especially effective if the sun is shining.

"The Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face to shine into your faces and be gracious to you. May the Lord lift up his Spirit into you and give you his peace".

I like the imagery of God shining into our faces and lifting up his Spirit, his presence into us. God's shining and turning his face toward his people expresses joy and shows acceptance, favor, respect, and forgiveness.

Psalm 4:6 . . . ⁶There are many who say, "O that we might see some good! Let the light of your face shine on us, O LORD!"

The people want to see some good happening and the psalmist responds by saying, "Let the light of your face shine into our faces, O Lord".

We need this smile of God because God's smile on us moves us to smile on each other. David could not imagine life without God smiling on him. Psalm 13:1 . . . ¹How long, O LORD? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me?

By the end of Psalm 13, David has rediscovered God's presence and love.

Psalm 13:5-6 . . . ⁵But I trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. ⁶I will sing to the LORD, because he has dealt bountifully with me.

The story of Jacob wrestling with a stranger and then meeting with his brother, Esau, is very illuminating because the whole narrative of Genesis 32 and 33 is composed around the key word *face*. The Hebrew text literally states that Jacob was fleeing from the face of his brother, Esau (Gen. 35:1); thus, "the face" means a person here. The image of Esau haunted Jacob for 20 years; during this time, he never visited his native lands, his parents, or reconciled with Esau. But before Jacob could meet with his brother, he needed to meet with his God. Before he saw the face of his brother again, he had to see the face of God.

The word *face* appears in these two chapters in crucial places, testifying to its significance. This expression appears four times in just one verse, yet English translations usually do not catch the textual interplay with this word. A literal translation highlights Jacob's thoughts: *I will cover his face with these gifts that go before my face, and afterward, when I will see his face, perhaps he will lift up my face* (Gen. 32:20). Jacob wanted to blind—that is, appease, pacify, or calm Esau's anger, thus literally covering Esau's face with extravagant gifts so that Esau would not see and remember the wrong that Jacob did to him. The many presents were his attempt to change Esau's attitude toward him. The phrase *to lift up one's face* means "to favorably accept," "to be kind," "to forgive," "to be friendly," "to receive another person."

Jacob then wrestled with "a man" (Gen. 32:24) in whom he recognized a divine Person (from a Christian perspective, this Person is identified with the pre-incarnated Christ)! This is why he calls the place "Peniel," which means the "Face of God" in Hebrew and reasoned:

" 'It is because I saw God face to face. and yet my life was spared' " (v. 30). What did Jacob read in the face of God? God gave him a new name and blessed him (vv. 26-29).

Later that morning, as his brother was approaching him, Jacob went forward to meet him by bowing down before Esau seven times (Gen. 33:3). Because Jacob first humbled himself before God, he was now able to humble himself before his brother, and Esau graciously accepted him. In that moment of reconciliation (v. 4), Jacob burst into a special recognition. According to Genesis 33:10. Jacob confesses that he sees God's face in Esau: " 'If I have found favor in your eyes, except this gift from me. For to see your face is like seeing the face of God.' "

" What was Jacob reading in the face of his brother? The same expressions of love. compassion, forgiveness, and grace that he saw in the face of God earlier. God's smile on Jacob is reflected in Esau's acceptance of his returning brother. What do people read in our faces when they interact with us?

What did Peter, James and John see in Jesus' face when he took them to the top of a mountain and "he was transfigured before them, and his clothes became dazzling white?"

What did they see in the faces of the two men, Elijah, and Moses, who appeared with him and were talking to him? Two men who have known suffering and God's grace. Two men and three disciples who see the face of God in Jesus – a man who already knows his destiny of suffering and death.

And what did Jesus say about seeing the face of God? You will see the face of God when you feed the hungry, give the thirsty something to drink, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, care for the sick, and visit the prisoner.

Do people see the face of Christ in our faces?

In our text from Paul's Second Letter to the Corinthians, he does not back down from confronting unbelievers who have been blinded by the gods of this world. He reminds us that "God's light shines out of darkness, God's light shines out of suffering, God's light shines in our hearts.

2 Corinthians 4: "God's light had shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ".

Paul is transfigured when he experiences that in and through his suffering and servanthood, God will give him the grace to go forward.

When have you seen the face of Jesus Christ?

His face gives you assurance of His presence. The face of God provides emotional stability and balance in a world of loneliness, anxiety, and fear. You are loved, cared for, and protected.

The face of Jesus leads and guides you. God's presence empowers his people to do his mission and to be faithful witnesses. The face of God brings perseverance, endurance, and a sense of identity as followers of Christ. Seeing the face of Jesus transforms our life together.

Revelation 22:3-4 . . . ³Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; ⁴they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads.

Jim Howe, whose funeral was yesterday, talked about what we "see" in our loved ones. How do we "see" others? Jim wrote... I loved a quote by Dr. Wayne Dyer, "When you change the way you look at things – the things you look at change." When you apply that thought, you

may actually see why this is a beautiful moment, a time to honor our loved ones. A time to be thankful for my part in your life. A time to share our love. A time to celebrate both an end and a beginning. A time for trusting God's plan. So carry on my sweet survivor. Carry on my lonely friend.

May the peace of God . . .

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