

“How To See God Face To Face”

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Menifee United Church of Christ

Introduction

Kenny Chesney had a hit country song recently. “Everybody Wants To Go To Heaven.” Kenny Chesney sings, “Everybody wants to go to heaven: Have a mansion high above the clouds. Everybody want to go to heaven: But nobody want to go now.”

Now, ain't that the truth? That song is funny, because it is the truth. I don't know about you, but I want to go to heaven, so I can, hopefully, see God face to face. But, like most people, I can wait to go to heaven - thank you very much - until I'm about a hundred years old or so. And yes, I do believe in heaven, as a place of eternal bliss. Maybe heaven is like Vegas, only you don't lose your money, you win at the craps table or at the slot machine, forever; and every night you get to see a great entertainer: Frank Sinatra, Whitney Houston, Glenn Frey. Or maybe heaven is like a big library, filled with all the books you've been meaning to read, and now you have till the end of time to read them. Or maybe heaven is like a never-ending beach that you get to walk along, or perhaps you can swim in the heavenly ocean, in shark-free waters, of course, for all eternity.

Eternity in heaven is what we all want, I think. So, how about you? Do you want to go to heaven one day, perhaps far off into the future, so you can, hopefully, see God face to face? What do you think God will look like? Will God look like the way artists have portrayed God over the years? Will God look like a white-bearded man, sitting on a cloud; sort of like Santa Claus, without the red suit? The Bible doesn't really give us a description of what God will look like. But at least one person in the Bible has seen God face to face: Moses.

A Biblical Example

Moses, according to the Book of Exodus, came down from Mount Sinai. He was carrying the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets. You'd think that would be miraculous enough. But also, his face was shining. He was radiant. Moses was positively glowing. The reason his skin was so bright was because he'd seen the face of God. Moses saw God face to face. Moses' face was reflecting the glory of God.

God, that must've been something to see: Moses' face. Did his face look sun burned? Did his face look like he'd seen a ghost? Or did his face look all lit up, like a Jack-O'-Lantern? None of us knows for sure.

Sure, this might be a true story. Or it might be a myth. God talking to Moses, face to face, on a mountain? That might make for a good Sunday School story for children. But are adults expected to take that story literally? Some people do. And it's alright if you do. This is a United Church of Christ church. You can decide for yourself. But as the late religion professor Marcus Borg used to tell his students: Let's not argue about whether this really happened, let's just talk about what it means. What does this story mean? I believe it means that you shouldn't think of God as some Distant Being, outside of the universe someplace, outside of your day to day life. I believe it means that you should think of God as some Benevolent Being, as someone accessible to you, as someone as close to you as a nearby mountain, or maybe as close as the person next to you. I believe it means

that God is a Supreme Being so close to you, that you can see God face to face, like some see Jesus.

Another Biblical Example

Jesus, according to the Gospel of Luke, went up on the mountain to pray. He took three of his disciples with him. While Jesus was praying: His face changed. His clothes became dazzling white. We say he was transfigured. Then Moses and Elijah appeared. And Jesus and Moses and Elijah all appeared in glory. Then a cloud came and covered all of them, including the disciples. And they heard a voice from the cloud. "This is my Son, my Chosen; listen to him!" Then Moses and Elijah were gone and everything returned to normal.

Normal, or natural, was far from what happened. What happened was supernatural, of course. The scripture says they heard a voice, presumably God's voice, since the voice said, "This is my Son." I wonder, in addition to hearing God's voice, if Jesus also saw God's face. I wonder that because Jesus was transfigured, like Moses was on Mount Sinai when Moses saw God's face. I wonder what Jesus looked like transfigured: Did his face look sun burned? Did his face look like he'd seen a ghost? Or did his face look all lit up, like a Jack-O'-Lantern? Don't be afraid. It's okay to wonder.

Wonder is what I'm filled with when I think of God's voice. I'm an old radio guy who loves voices, so I wonder what God's voice sounded like. Did God's voice sound like Walter Cronkite? "This is Walter Cronkite. This is God. And that's the way it is." Did God's voice sound like Casey Kasem? "This is Casey Kasem. This is God. And now...on with your life." Or did God sound like a woman, like Julia Child? "This is Julia Child. This is God. Eat more butter." Don't be afraid. It's okay to wonder about God.

Still Another Biblical Example

God, according to the book of Genesis, wanted to make humankind in God's own likeness. So God did that. God created men and women in God's own image. God blessed them. God told them: go make babies. That was a command from God that humans have gladly obeyed for millennia. And now there are more than 7 billion people on the face of the earth who all have the face of God, when you think about it.

Think about it, though. No two of us look alike. (I suppose unless we're identical twins.) And yet: we're made in God's image, we're made in God's likeness, we're made to look like God. And yet: some people have white faces, some people have brown faces, some people have black faces. And yet: some people look like their mother, some people look like their father, and some people don't look like either one - and hopefully they don't look like the mailman. (Kidding!)

Kidding aside, maybe we all just don't look like God physically. After all, Jesus said, "God is spirit." So: maybe we all look like God in our spirit, maybe we all look like God in our soul, maybe we all look like God on the inside. So: maybe we all don't look like God physically, maybe we all look like God spiritually, maybe we all look like God in our hearts. So: maybe that's why we are all children of God, maybe that's why we are all brothers and sisters to each other, maybe that's why we are all brothers and sisters to Jesus. Maybe that's why what matters most about us is not what we look like on the outside, but what we look like on the inside. Because on the inside, I believe, every person looks like the face of God.

A Modern-Day Example

The face of God is what I saw yesterday in our church. In fact, I saw several faces of God yesterday. I saw the face of God inside the people who volunteered to serve a Free Breakfast to those in need. I saw the face of God inside the people who received a Free Breakfast. And I saw the face of God inside the people who volunteered for our BAG Day, Buildings and Grounds Day, as they cleaned and cared for our church, outside and inside.

Inside every person that I saw yesterday, I saw God's face. Inside every person that I see today, I see God's face. Inside every person that I'll see tomorrow, I'll see God's face. God's face is what I saw inside the 49 same-sex couples whose weddings I performed in recent years; including the same-sex wedding I performed last July in this church; the first and only - so far - same-sex wedding performed in this church's 54-year history. I hope I'll perform many more same-sex weddings in this church in the future, so I can again see God's face.

God's face is not always easy to see inside every person. It's not always easy to see God's face inside an abusive parent. It's not always easy to see God's face inside a thief. It's not always easy to see God's face inside a murderer. Life is not always easy. It couldn't have been easy for Jesus to see God's face inside the people who nailed him to a cross. And yet he said, "Forgive them God for they know not what they do." But life is sometimes easy. It's easy to see God's face inside someone we love. It's easy to see God's face inside someone who loves us. It's easy to see God's face inside a child.

Conclusion

A child, ten years old, was staring through a store window at the nice shoes and clothes on display. The child had no shoes on and the child's clothes were rags. An adult passing by saw that the child needed help. So the adult invited the child into the store, bought the child a pair of shoes and some clothes. They came out of the store and the adult said, "I hope you have a nice day." The child said, "Thanks. For everything." Then the child asked, "Are you God?" The adult chuckled and said, "No, I'm just one of God's children." Then the child said, "I knew you had to be related somehow."

Somehow, I believe, that adult saw God's face inside that child. And, I believe, that child saw God's face inside that adult. When you pass people on the street and look at them, I hope you see God's face inside them. When you look at your children or your grandchildren, I hope you see God's face inside them. When you look at yourself in the mirror, I hope you see God's face inside you. Because, make no mistake, in all those examples, you will be seeing God face to face.

Face to face is how Moses saw God. And when you see God face to face, like Moses did, I believe you'll be filled with reverence, wonder, and awe. So, when you look at others, and when you look at yourself in the mirror, I hope you're filled with reverence, wonder, and awe. Because you are seeing as Genesis says, the image of God. You are seeing God face to face. And when you do that, I believe, you will be transfigured, like Jesus was, and, I believe, you will glow with the glory of God.

Closing Prayer

Let us pray...

God of Love,

Help us to see you inside others.

Help us to see you inside ourselves.

And help us to see you face to face.

Now and forevermore.
By the power of the Holy Spirit.
And in the name of Jesus.
Amen.