

## “God Sightings”

Introduction: As you are no doubt aware, a great deal of time and energy goes into preparing for our VBS week! An important piece of that preparation takes place sometime the week before “opening night” when all of the leaders gather for a time of fellowship, encouragement, and prayer. During that time this past year I reflected briefly on a rather remarkable statement Jesus made regarding children, as he spoke to his disciples. They had all gathered in a particular house in Capernaum. Evidently there were families among them for Jesus singled out a child, and said the following (Mk. 9:37):

Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me;  
and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me.

Now, as part of VBS we ask the children each day to pay attention to all that goes on around them and to see if they can discover any “God Sightings” as we call them, places or situations where God is at work. These can range from offering help to a parent, to enjoying a sunset, to the healing of a cut.

What I wanted to notice for our leaders with this incredible promise of Jesus was that with each child that comes into our church, with each child to whom we extend hospitality, we, ourselves, are experiencing God sightings! Somehow, as we welcome children, we are seeing Jesus, and in seeing Jesus we are seeing God

“Blessed are the pure in heart,” Jesus said in his sixth Beatitude, “for they will see God.” So what does it mean to see God? How do we go about it? And maybe most importantly, why would we want to see God, anyway? My suggestion to you will be this: To see God is to see love, and to see love is to see life; when we truly see love, we can begin to live the life that is truly life.

### I. The Challenge of Seeing God

A. Let’s begin by recognizing how difficult it is to actually see God. God, Paul tells us, at the beginning of his first letter to a church leader Timothy, is “eternal, immortal, *invisible*.” He then ends the letter with this: “God [is] the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see” (1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16). God exists, in other words, in light so brilliant that no human can hope to approach him. He is so holy, so pure, that trying to see him would be like looking straight into the sun. The absolute beauty and brilliance of his character would burn our eyes! That’s why Moses is told by God, when he pleads to see God’s glory, to see God’s weightiness, the beauty and brilliance that makes God be God, that this would not be a good idea because no human can see this dazzling glory and raw beauty unprotected and live (Ex. 33:12-23).

B. Fortunately, God wants us to see him, and so in the OT we see him revealing himself to certain figures, Moses, or Job or Jacob, in unique ways that enabled them to see what other human beings at that time could not. When we come to the NT, a wonderful shift takes place. The ability to see God opens up to all in the person of Jesus. He is, as Matthew identifies him at the beginning of his gospel, Immanuel, which means, God with us (Ma. 1:23).

### II. Seeing God in Jesus

A. So, although John states at the beginning of his gospel, “No one has ever seen God,” he follows that up with this eye opening truth: “But the one and only Son, who is himself God . . .

has made him known” (1:18). This remarkable statement is then parsed out by Jesus himself as the story of his life unfolds. At one point he says, “No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father” (6:46). And then later, “If you really know me you will know my Father as well...Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (14:7-9). Jesus offers these last statements in the midst of teaching his disciples that to see him is to discover the way and the truth and the life, for he is the way of love.

B. That we see God in Jesus is affirmed throughout the NT. Jesus is the image of the invisible God (Col. 1:15); in Jesus all the fullness of God lives in bodily form (Col. 2:9); in Jesus the light of God’s glory is displayed (2 Cor. 4:6); and in Jesus we see the light of God’s glory because he is the exact representation of God’s being (Heb. 1:3). In Jesus of Nazareth, in Jesus the Christ, the face of the Living God is revealed. To see Jesus, in other words, is to see God. And to see God is to see love..

### III. Seeing Jesus

A. So if to see Jesus is to see God, what do we see in Jesus? In Jesus we see the God who loves us. In Jesus we see how God loves us. John, in his first letter, pulls these themes of seeing and loving and living together (1 John 4:9-12):

This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him . . . No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us

We see God in Jesus and in Jesus we see the way God loves us, and when we see the way God loves us we can begin to love the other, which is actually loving, and seeing, God himself!

B. In this regard, Jesus tells an eye-opening parable known as the sheep and goats (Ma. 25:31-46). In this parable, Jesus puts himself in the position of a king who is commending those who gave food and drink and clothing to the needy, showed hospitality to strangers, cared for the sick, and visited those in prison. Then, in a remarkable twist, the king declared that these people had done it all to him.

The incredulous response of the people runs like this:

Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?

The king responds: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these you did for me.” Jesus is saying that we see him in the face of the least, the last, and the lost, we see him when we lovingly meet the needs, both physical and spiritual, of the world’s marginalized. It is for these that Jesus has come, and so in loving them, we meet him. To see Jesus is to see God; to see God is to see love; to see love is to begin to live the life that is truly life.

### IV. Purity of Heart

A. So how does purity of heart come into the picture, for it is the pure in heart, Jesus says, who shall see God? The heart, in biblical thinking, is not just the place that pumps blood throughout our bodies. The heart is the control center, the core of our life. The heart is what enables us to see. To have that control center pure means not just to have it morally correct but to have it unmixed, or undivided. From the early days with his people Israel, God knew this would be a challenge, he knew the possible pitfalls that were out there. Though Joshua, God issued this instruction (Joshua 23:6-7):

Therefore, be very strong to keep and to do all that is written in the Book of the Law of Moses . . . that you may not mix with these nations remaining among you or make mention of the names of their gods or swear by them or sever them or bow down to them, but you shall cling to the LORD your God . . .”

It’s not that God’s people were to have no contact with the nations around them; they were in fact to be witness of God’s love to them. It’s that they were not to get mixed up in their religious practices and beliefs, for this would lead them away from the Lord, his love, and the life that is truly life.

B. And so the psalmist affirms (Psalm 24):

Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?  
The one who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

Psalm 86:11 adds to this desire as the psalmist prays: “Teach me your way, O LORD, and I will walk in your truth. Give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.” And in the NT James picks up on this aspect of purity when he instructs: “...purify your hearts, you double-minded” (4:8). When we’re double minded, when our hearts are divided, we are looking for love in all the wrong places. To truly and clearly see God, and his great love for us in Jesus, purifies our hearts so that we can see clearly the life that is truly life.

Purity of heart, therefore, has to do with integrity, with singleness of focus—a desire to walk in God’s truth—but also with transparency before God, with a recognition that we are not perfect and need God to continually cleanse and refocus us. As Psalm 139 helps us to pray: “Lord, search me and know me...see if there is any offensive way in me and lead me in the way everlasting, the way of life” (vv. 1, 24). As God cleanses our hearts, by the power of his Spirit, our eyes can begin to see. We can begin to see Jesus, we can then begin to see God, we can then begin to see love, and when we begin to see love, we can begin to really live.