

John 1:9-18
(Exodus 33:18-23; 2 Corinthians 4:1-6)
“The Knowledge of the Glory of God”

Introduction

Author Phillip Yancey gave shape to the cry of the human heart in the title of one of his books, *Where is God When It Hurts?* The subtitle made the human dilemma even clearer: *Disappointment with God*. The question has been posed in art and literature, in music and philosophy, and by every reflective person who has seen trouble and experienced heartache. But the entire testimony of Scripture refutes the charge that God is silent and absent when we are in pain. The universe displays God’s glorious presence; our consciences call us to obey to him and our hearts to worship him. The prologue to John’s gospel goes so far as to identify God’s Son as the Word that stands behind and makes possible all thought and speech and action, the very Creator of the universe, the life and light of the world.

The problem is on our end: we are not listening. We are so busy asking our questions, demanding our rights, seeking to satisfy every want and desire, entertaining our selves. We turn up the music or put on a movie. We are surrounded by noise. Have you built into your day reflective time to get alone away from the noise, away from the incessant yakking of the TV and radio, away even from music and all that would sooth and distract and keep you from listening to what God wants to say to you? Have learned to recognize his voice in the midst of the cries and whispers of a noisy world? John tells us in these verses of the incredible extent to which God was willing to go to make us his children, and of the even more incredible response that has marked human relations with her Creator.

Our time together studying God’s Word this morning will be well spent if we ask ourselves, not merely whether or not we *understand* these verses, but whether or not we have *responded* to them in a way that brings us life and light. John will end his gospel by telling us that he wrote it in order that we the readers “may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing [we] may have life in his name” (20:31). But he wants us even now, from the very beginning of the gospel, to realize that he is writing about matters of eternal consequence, and that our response matters ultimately.

I want to be as clear as possible so that no one will mistake what I believe John is telling us about what we can know and experience, only because Jesus laid aside his glory and was born as one of us. I want to underscore two claims made by John in the verses before us and ask two questions raised by these claims: The first claim is this: If you would know who God is and what he is like, look at Jesus. But this raises a question: How does one look at Jesus? The second claim is this: If you would experience the reality of God’s presence within your life, receive Jesus. But that raises a second question: How does one receive Jesus?

Body

1. If you would know who God is and what he is like, look at Jesus.

In these verses, John finally identifies the one who is God's Word in human flesh as Jesus Christ (1:17). He tells us that in him "we have seen his glory, glory as from the Father, full of grace and truth" (1:14). And again, John writes, "No one has ever seen God; the only God who is at the Father's side, he has made him known" (1:18). So the culminating revelation of God is found in this one man, who is God incarnate, God in human flesh: Jesus Christ. If we would know God, we must see Jesus.

2. But how does one see Jesus?

How do we, living two millennia after he walked the earth, see him so as to know God? Three ways that I would commend: See him in his written Word, the Scriptures; see him in his Sacrament in which his sacrifice is made present and visible to us; and see him in his Body, the Church, in worship, in fellowship and scattered in the world as salt and light. [Illus: Aquinas's vision of God's glory that ended his work on the *Summa Theologica*.]

3. If you would experience the reality and fullness of God's presence within your life, receive Jesus.

Jesus has brought us even more than knowledge *about* God. He brings us personal, intimate knowledge *of* God. John writes, "And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace" (1:16). What is this grace? It is what John has already described as "the right to become children of God" (1:12). He will further describe it as involving a new birth, a new beginning, forgiveness of sin (3:3, 16-17), the gift of the Holy Spirit, and the assignment of continuing Jesus' own ministry (20:21-23). [Illus: The testimony of "churched" persons – even pastors – who later *receive* Jesus and are transformed.]

4. But how does one receive Jesus?

Because you trust him you begin to follow him. The more you know him, the more you surrender to his Lordship and place your hope and confidence in him. Salvation is not merely an event in your past, but an entirely new life. Salvation is the experience of the reality of God's grace at work within you, his Spirit convicting you of sin and giving you a longing for righteousness. It is a new direction with new priorities, a new basis of meaning and significance, a new ground of security and hope, a new dream, a new destiny. And in the fullness of his grace he gives you, not only the right, but the power to begin to live as you were created to live, if only you will keep to the means he has provided for growing in his grace.

Conclusion

So, where might one who desires to see who God is and to experience the reality and fullness of God's life – where should such a person begin today? Ask God's Spirit to reveal to you the idols of your heart that are blinding you to his presence: what is your great passion, your ground of confidence? What stands at the center of your life and your sense of meaning and purpose? Confess to the Lord how quick you are to follow your own ways, and to try in prayer to bend him to do your will, rather than seeking his will and gladly submitting to it. Ask the Lord to fill you with his life, with the strength and desire to begin to subordinate your passions and desires to him – his kingdom, his righteousness – believing that he is able to meet all of your needs “according to his riches in Christ Jesus.

Every day, and every moment that it comes to mind, believe and receive his promise of new life: believe that he has revealed his glory in Jesus Christ and that he has given you the right to be his child, and that “from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace” (1:16).

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