

## **It's All About Him XVII: Beautiful Jesus** **2 Corinthians 4:4-6**

**August 24 & 25, 2013**  
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This weekend I celebrate two of the most important moments in my life. It was August of 1997 that I preached my first sermon as the Senior Pastor here at Bethel Church. I was 29 and really had little idea what I was doing. I have enjoyed so many blessings over the years here and God has been so good to us. I also have learned some lessons the hard way and some things I wish I could do over. One thing I would not change is the subject of my first sermon, which was the greatness and glory of Christ. I wanted to begin my ministry here by placing Jesus at the center of where we were going. I dreamed that we could be a church that, in spite of our brokenness and failures, could honestly say at Bethel, *It's All About Christ*. Each year we revisit the same truth on our annual *All About Him* weekend and this is my 17<sup>th</sup> such message. I would not change that for anything.

The second celebration for me is that today (this weekend) is my very first ever wedding anniversary! Many of you have done this 10, 20, some even 50 times. I've watched you, been happy for you, wondered what it's like, even done vow renewal ceremonies and celebrations. I've smiled and congratulated over and over again. After all these years, now it's my turn! I'm rather excited about this.

These two personal celebrations have a lot in common theologically and lead to this year's *All About Him* message. You could ask, "Steve, after one year of marriage, what do you think of Jennifer?" I think she is more beautiful today than our wedding day. "Really? Because most people would say that their most beautiful day is their wedding day. The dress is just right. The tux is picture perfect. The hair and makeup are as good as they can be. How can you say that to you she is more beautiful today than your wedding day? For most brides that's as good as it gets and it's pretty much downhill from there."

That would be a very superficial understanding of both beauty and personhood. In Jennifer's case, over this year, I have seen her love me through her major life transition here to Northwest Indiana. I've seen her love me in spite of the bewildering experience of becoming the senior pastor's wife at Bethel Church. I have watched her love others and warm countless rooms with her effervescent smile. I have seen her behind the scenes in our home as she labors to make it a refuge for us. I admired her as we discovered our pregnancy and she bore the burden of a very difficult pregnancy. I'll never forget watching her give birth to our daughter. The grit and determination she showed humbles me. I've heard her countless times seek to encourage me when I am facing criticism or discouraging news. She has held me, prayed for me, and loved me with a wifely love that I had no idea she had the capacity for on August 25, 2012. I have been married to her for 365 days and she is much more beautiful to me now than on our first date, wedding day, or even honeymoon. A godly wife is a journey into beauty better than any sunset, art gallery, or symphony. Jennifer is beautiful. I have come to see it more clearly.

*So she wasn't beautiful to you on your wedding day one year ago?* She was. She is more beautiful to me now because I have come to see who she is more fully which provides me with more qualities to admire in her.

The same is exponentially truer of our admiration and worship of Jesus. When we are introduced to him, we may be intrigued but beautiful doesn't come to mind. But then

something happens. That something is supernatural. Like a blind man being able to see or a single man getting married, the hidden beauties of Jesus are revealed to our soul. There is more and more wonder at this Jesus. That is the subject of this *All About Him* message. This *All About Him* message is, *Beautiful Jesus*.

Our text is 2 Corinthians 4:4-5. As you turn there, in this section of Scripture Paul has developed a metaphor from the Old Testament. It comes from Exodus 34. Moses was the leader of the nation of Israel during their exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land. At Mount Sinai, Moses went to the top of the mountain and God gave him tablets on which he had written his Law, the covenantal stipulations which would govern God's relationship with Israel. When Moses came down from the mountain, his face was visibly radiant with the glory of God. So much so that he had to put a veil on just for people to speak with him.

Paul's metaphor in 2 Corinthians 4 is that as sinners, the veil is actually over our hearts. Like the veil kept them from seeing Moses, the veil on our hearts keeps us from seeing the glory of Jesus. Jesus' glory is there but sin has blinded us so we can't see it.

*And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, with ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:3-6 ESV)*

### **How We See the Glory of Jesus**

Paul's point here is that unbelievers cannot see this glory in Jesus. They have spiritual veils over their eyes. Blindfolds "to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel," that is blindness to spiritual understanding of God, sin, judgment, Jesus, cross, atonement, faith, forgiveness, eternal life. They can't see it. They don't get it. We didn't either in our past. We see evidence of this all around. Jesus is not a source of wonder, his name is a curse word. Those who believe in him are often thought of as small-minded and unintellectual. You may recall the mockery when a few years ago a presidential candidate said the hero of his life was Jesus. We see blindness to Jesus' glory all around. This explains why. The world cannot see him for who he is.

Verse 6 tells us how the spiritually blind are made to see. *For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.*

When did God say, "Let there be light"? Genesis 1. And there was light. The same God does the same kind of thing in the human heart. He says, "Let there be light." When the light goes on, we see what was always there and true, the glory of God incarnate in his Son Jesus. He's always been glorious just like the sun is always shining even if the blind can't see it. Once we can see true glory, we see Him.

### **What we see**

- *...To keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. (2 Corinthians 4:4)*
- *...Has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. (Verse 6)*

By God's sovereign grace, we are enabled to perceive in Jesus something that is not found in any other religious figure or any other intellectual or any other world leader or any other philosopher or writer or artist or hero. We perceive in him the full glory of God.

Seeing Jesus' "face" is metaphorical language. None of us has actually seen his face. But our face represents the real us. Many of our students are starting school and they will do school pictures and yearbook photos. They don't take a picture of your child's leg or elbow or foot. They take pictures of their faces. To know somebody is to recognize their face. *Oh, that's Susie. That's Sam.*

In salvation, God enables us to perceive in the person, ministry, life, cross, and resurrection, that Jesus of Nazareth was not just another man who did extraordinary things, but he gives us true facial recognition—Jesus is God incarnate; the embodiment of divine glory walking this earth.

*And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)*

What do we see? *His glory*. But what does that mean? Glory is what we spiritually see. His beauty is what we perceive and what stirs deep and holy affections for him. Beauty is our perception of His divinity.

How? It has nothing to do with his physical appearance. In fact, if we were to have met Jesus in Nazareth or Capernaum, he wouldn't stand out in a crowd. Isaiah 53 tells us his beauty wasn't in his physical appearance. He was very normal looking. He did not have a white flowing gown or model-like good looks. His beauty was of a different and much, much deeper kind.

### **He is beautiful as the perfect image of God**

*He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature. (Hebrews 1:3)*

We humans enjoy the distinction of being made *in* the image of God. We are like him in some ways. We have personality. We are relational. We have a spiritual nature. We have an intellect. There are many other qualities that make us distinct and give us intrinsic worth.

But Christ is not *in* the image of God, he *IS* the image of God. We are pictures of what God is like. Jesus is exactly what God is like. He is God. There is a world of difference between picturing something and being something. It's like the difference between seeing a picture of the Grand Canyon and standing at the edge of it. One gives the idea, the other gives the reality.

We are the pictures, Jesus is the reality. Christ is incarnate God, the very divine nature intertwined with our own human nature. We can't see or relate to an invisible God, but Jesus was seeable, touchable, hearable, and understandable. He was God in flesh. He is beautiful as the exact image of God in human flesh.

### **He is beautiful as the beauty of which all other beauties speak**

We obviously live in a stunningly beautiful world. Like the *Mona Lisa* is a tribute to Da Vinci's beautiful mind and *The Messiah* is a tribute to the glorious soul of Handel, every atom and galaxy of the universe is a beautiful tribute to the glorious creativity and power of Almighty God. Romans 1:19-20 says, *For what can be known about God is plain to them, because*

*God has shown it to them. For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made.*

The visible world is a physical, tangible, expression of God's invisible and spiritual qualities. What do we see? We see wondrous and glorious beauty—all of it speaking of God. He is the beauty behind all the beauty. The whole earth is full of his glory (Isaiah 6:3). But the Bible says that there was a reason God made the universe. Colossians 1:18 says, so that *in everything [Jesus] might be preeminent*. Or Romans 11:36 says, *For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To him be glory forever.*

While God is the beauty behind the beauty, there is one person in the Trinity specifically for whom and to whom all this was created. The Son, Jesus. Jesus is who this is primarily about. God is the beauty behind all beauty, but even more specifically, everything good and wonderful and beautiful in this world is speaking of the glorious and beautiful one, Jesus.

As you may know, this is a particular passion of mine, to help God's people realize what all these wonders and pleasures are here for, and for us to see, taste, touch, and hear them say what they are really saying to our soul. They are messages from God, little glimpses into the infinite. Little tastes of what Jesus is like.

What do we think of the little tastes and sights and sounds? Amazingly wonderful! They take our breath away and we want more sunsets and mountain ranges and symphonies and marital intimacies and friendships and wedding anniversaries! But in terms of scale, these are microscopically small, compared to the majesty of Christ's beauty. They seem big to us when they are all we've ever seen. It's like Mount Baldy seems big until you drive through the Rockies and the moon seems bright until you see the sun and Cedar Lake seems big until you see an ocean.

Before God takes the veil away, unbelievers live for the little beauty and the little wonder. So they live for their lake house and the NFL season kickoff and sexual pleasure. But then God takes the veil away and suddenly Cedar Lake isn't so big and Mount Baldy seems like a molehill. Why? We have seen his glory, *glory as the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

How I long for us to live in this world like Christ-savoring theologians who enjoy him in everything good and beautiful and wonder-producing. O how I long to live that way.

### **He is beautiful as the full expression of divine perfection**

This may sound confusing but it simply means this: if we want to know what God is like, we look to Jesus. He is the image of God. What do we see in Jesus?

### **He has compassion for the brokenness and pain of the human experience**

Over and over in the gospels, we see Jesus doing the remarkable and the culturally unthinkable: touching the leper to heal him; going to the widow in her grief and raising her son from the dead; caring for the Samaritan woman at the well; granting forgiveness to the repentant prostitute; hearing the cry of the blind man; feeding the 5,000 in their hunger; and restoring Peter who had denied him in his time of need. Think of the people—the lame man at the pool, the blind man along the road, the deaf man, and even Lazarus, the dead man. Jesus perfectly displays God's compassion for us in our pain and sorrow, loneliness

and disease, and even death. What is God like? Look at Jesus and see perfect justice and compassion and love—his love and compassion for you.

### **He has mercy for the humble of heart**

Not all who met him found mercy. Pilate didn't receive mercy. The Pharisees didn't receive mercy. Herod didn't receive mercy. Satan doesn't receive mercy. There is a condition. We must humble ourselves. But when we do, *A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not quench.* (Matthew 12:20)

### **His total self-giving sacrifice redeems sinners**

The cross stands as the ultimate statement of divine beauty. This seems strangely out of place because the cross was a tool of execution. Bloody agony. Mockery. Disgrace. Death. It was repulsive and disgusting. A most unlikely place for cosmic beauty.

Yet it was on this cross that Jesus displayed ultimate love by giving his life as a ransom payment for our sin. It was there that Jesus obeyed the will of the Father, even to death. It was there that Jesus conquered sin, death, and the devil. It was there that Jesus ushered new life, a new kingdom, a new rule and reign into a world of death. He is a new hero. A new Messiah. A new King. His name is Jesus. Jesus is the greatest beauty this world has ever seen and the cross was the canvas for his masterpiece.

We could go on to his power, wisdom, healing, justice, courage, mediation, servant nature, humility, self-control, joy, and perfection as prophet, priest, and king. But we can marvel at the glorious king of the universe dying in our place for our sin. To you, is that beautiful?

### **He is beautiful as the ultimate satisfaction and end for which all our desires long**

This *All About Him* weekend, I want to place this Jesus once again at the center of who we are as a church. He is why we exist. His glory is why we do what we do. His beauty is what draws our hearts toward him and toward serving him and all the expressions of that which this year will hold. All our ministries. All our services. All our giving. All our praying. All our teaching. All our small groups. All our children's ministries. All our *Mission Them* initiatives. All our everything all the time. Christ, his glory, and our worship of his beauty is the final goal for everything all the time.

*"Put the beauty of ten thousand thousand worlds of paradises, like the Garden of Eden in one; put all trees, all flowers, all smells, all colors, all tastes, all joys, all loveliness, all sweetness in one. O what a fair and excellent thing would that be? And yet it would be less to that fair and dearest well-beloved Christ than one drop of rain to the whole seas, rivers, lakes, and fountains of ten thousand earths."* (Samuel Rutherford)

God has taken away the veil so we can see and love and treasure and savor this Christ. Bethel, can we once again see him, the King of Beauty? Father, regarding your Son, we want to say his name is wonderful.

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