

Do You Really See the Real Jesus? (Philippians 3:7-12)

Introduction

I am the grandchild of farmers. Both my mom and my dad grew up on farms in rural Oklahoma. As a result, I have always felt like I grew up between two very different worlds. One world was the suburban city life that I had living in a subdivision on the outskirts of Oklahoma City. The other world were the rural worlds of Checotah and Fletcher, Oklahoma, my parents' hometowns. This tension made for some interesting moments during my younger years.

One time in particular comes to mind. We were traveling west on I-40. As we reached the outskirts of Amarillo, TX, an interesting scent began to waft into our minivan. It was the scent of thousands of cows doing what well-fed cows do - relieving themselves. Needless to say, this smell become more and more overpowering - almost nauseating - as we got closer and closer to the stockyards on the outskirts of town.

As the smell worsened by younger brother and I become more and more vocal in the back seat. "This is disgusting! This is so gross!" we exclaimed. Add to this the over-exaggerated sound of us gagging and it would give you a picture of the situation in the Hefner minivan.

In the middle of all this commotion and carrying-on, my dad looked back at us, cracked a sly smile, and said, "Smells like money."

How could this be possible? Unless my dad was a robot, he was experiencing the same moment that we were. He was seeing the same cows, hearing the same moos, seeing the same cow-patties, and, most importantly, smelling the same smell. What on earth would cause him to react positively to this?

It was simple. He grew up on a farm. He recognized the incredible monetary value of those thousands of cows in a way that my brother and I did not.

This is merely an example of something that we see over and over again in life - and something we see over and over again in Scripture. Namely, that is possible for two people to witness the same event and yet see (and experience) totally different things.

We see this happen numerous times during the earthly ministry of Jesus. The crowd would all see the same miracle and yet only some would believe that he was the Son of God. People would be in the same room with Jesus and yet only some would see him as Savior. We see this even among the twelve disciples. Judas walked and talked with Jesus for over three years - just like the other disciples - and yet he did not see Jesus as a Savior to be worshipped. Instead, he chose to hand him over to his murderers for some cash.

This leads me to my main question for you tonight: What do you see when you look at Jesus?

Another way of asking this would be: Do you really see the real Jesus?

To answer this question, let's look at our text for today, Philippians 3:7-12.

Paul saw the real Jesus (“...because of Christ,” v. 7)

In 3:1-6, Paul warns against the danger of joy-stealing, salvation-destroying legalism. He tells the Philippians to watch out for false teachers (he calls them “dogs,” “evil workers,” and “mutilators of the flesh”) who seek to heap onto the Philippians a works-based system of salvation. These false teachers are tempting the Philippians to look to Jewish law-keeping as a means of earning their own righteousness. Paul condemns and refutes these teachers by describing his own hopeless attempts at self-righteous law keeping.

After listing an impressive resume of outward deeds, Paul makes the incredible statement found in verse seven. He says that he considers his self-motivated deeds of righteousness as “loss.” This is an incredible statement when you consider Paul’s pedigree and his staggering commitment to Pharisaical Judaism prior to his conversion. Paul had spent the majority of his life as a young man devoted to the outward and self-motivated keeping of the law. He had spent the majority of his life as a young man committed to building an impressive resume of “good” deeds and “righteous” actions. Why on earth would he consider them as loss?

The answer is found in the last words of verse 7: “...because of Christ.” What does this mean? In light of our question tonight, I think an appropriate way to restate this verse would be: “But everything that was gain to me, I have considered to be a loss because I have seen the real Jesus.”

Do you remember Paul’s testimony? He was literally on his way to kill Christians (this is how zealous his “law keeping” was - Philippians 3:6) when the resurrected Jesus appeared to him. A light shown from heaven, Paul was immediately blinded and heard a voice calling out, “Paul, Paul, why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:3-5).

This event led to Paul experiencing a miracle in the flesh (his physical eyes were opened) and a miracle in the heart (his spiritual eyes were opened). For the first time, Paul really saw the real Jesus. What was the result of Paul really seeing the real Jesus?

Really seeing the real Jesus changes what you value:

First, seeing the real Jesus loosens your grip on the pleasures of this world. (AKA - Really seeing the real Jesus makes a Ferrari look like poop) (v.7-8)

One of the results seeing the real Jesus is a change in what you value. And, the first way really seeing the real Jesus changes what you value is in the way it loosens your grip on the pleasures of this world.

In verse 8, Paul states that he not only counts all his self-righteous law keeping as a loss, but that he also counts “all things to be a loss” because of seeing and knowing the real Jesus. What does this mean? I think this refers to all the good, sweet, enjoyable, and comforting elements of this life.

At this point, I want you to imagine the most precious thing in your life right now (outside of Christ). What do you have in mind? Maybe it's a thing - like a house or a car. Maybe it's a job - a good job with great co-workers and even better benefits. For most of you, I imagine, it is a relationship with a person - like your relationship with your kids, with your parents, with your best friend, or with your spouse.

This is what Paul is giving up. This is what he is laying aside. This is what he is considering as loss.

However, Paul doesn't stop here. He goes on. Not only does Paul call these things "loss," he goes as far as to call them "dung!" How is this possible? Or, to take it a step forward, let me ask this question: How is this righteous?

What would cause Paul to call the happiness of driving new car, the security of a paid-off house, the freedom of being an American citizen, the joys of parenthood, and the relational intimacy of marriage "loss?"

What would cause this? - What causes this is seeing the real Jesus - witnessing his surpassing betterness.

Look again at Paul's words in verse 8. Why does Paul consider all these good things as loss? Because he has in his immediate view the "surpassing value of knowing Jesus."

Compared to the treasure we have in Christ, a new car or a beautiful home looks like loss. Compared to the freedom that we have in Christ, the freedom we have as Americans looks like loss. Compared to the joy of being in relationship with the Father of Lights - who does what is best for all his children - every relationship on this side of eternity looks like loss. Not only that - it looks like dung. Jesus really is that much better. He really is.

Thus, the value that Paul places on the things of this world is a comparative one - the fleeting value of this world's treasures as measured against the incomparable value of seeing and knowing the real Jesus for all eternity.

It is only when we see the brightness of the Light of the World that the comparative darkness, loss-ness, and dung-ness of this world comes into view.

At this point, I am reminded of Paul's words in Romans 8:18: *"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us."*

I am also reminded of Paul's words in Philippians 1:21, *"For me, to live is Christ and to die is gain."* Living becomes Christ when you see the real Jesus. It is seeing the real Jesus that changes the way you see your own righteousness and the pleasures of this world.

However, really seeing the real Jesus not only changes the way you view your own righteousness and the pleasures of this world. Really seeing the real Jesus also changes the way you view

suffering.

Yes, seeing the real Jesus makes Ferrari look like poop. Yes, seeing the real Jesus makes a billion dollars look like a penny. Yes, seeing the real Jesus makes your best efforts look like filthy rags.

But, there is more. Seeing the real Jesus also makes a bloody cross look precious. This leads me to my next observation.

Really seeing the real Jesus makes suffering look sweet (v.8, 10)

The second way in which seeing the real Jesus changes the what we value is that it changes the way we view suffering.

In verse 8, Paul states that he has “*suffered* the loss of all things” (emphasis mine). This affliction comes as a direct result of Paul’s service to Christ. In verse 10, Paul states that his goal is to know Christ by sharing in his sufferings.

However, Paul does not speak of these sufferings as merely obstacles to be endured and overcome. Instead, he seems to speak of suffering as instruments of worship to be embraced. He speaks of them as servants of his joy in Christ. Because of his suffering, he will “gain Christ” (verse 8). Because of his sharing in the death of Christ, he will share and glory in Christ’s resurrection (verses 10-11). Thus, it is not the suffering itself that is sweet, but the one in whose suffering we share. Suffering is sweet because of the sweet Savior who walks with us in our suffering and is glorified through our suffering.

Thus, Paul’s goal is not merely to guilt you into giving up your life. His goal is to make you glory in giving up your life. His goal is for you to share in the joy that the Disciples exhibited. In Acts 5, after being brutally beaten and verbally chastened for preaching the good news about Jesus, the disciples rejoiced!

Consider Acts 5:41: “*Then they went out from the presence of the Sanhedrin, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to be treated shamefully on behalf of the Name.*”

This joyful embrace of suffering only happens if you really see the real Jesus.

However, a change in what you value is not the only result of really seeing the real Jesus.

Really seeing the real Jesus causes you to rest in him alone (v.9)

In verse 9, Paul continues and expands upon the idea of verse 8. Not only does Paul want to “gain Christ,” but he also wants to be “found in” Christ. What does this mean? It means that at the end of his life (which Paul, as a prisoner of Rome, plainly has in view in this text) Paul wishes to be found within his Master’s righteousness, not his own. This statement is an incredible protection for us today.

Paul has just stated in verse 8 that he will “gain” Christ by relinquishing all the treasures of this life. However, in case you are tempted to think that Paul is speaking transactionally - that by

giving up his earthly pleasures, his earthly freedom, and his mortal life he is somehow purchasing an eternity with Jesus - Paul states that his goal is to be “found in” Christ. What does this mean? Paul goes on to tell us.

According to verses 9-11, being “found in” Christ means resting in his righteousness alone, trusting in his power alone, hoping in his resurrection alone.

The obvious question that these verses raises is: What are you resting in? Your own good works? These are filthy rags and withered leaves (Isaiah 64:6). Your own earthly treasures? These are piles of dung (Philippians 3:8).

Really seeing the real Jesus will cause you rest in him alone.

How does one see the real Jesus?

At this point, an obvious question remains: How do you see the real Jesus? To find the answer to this question, one needs to examine John’s words in John 12.

John 12:37 states “Even though he [Jesus] had performed so many signs in their presence, they did not believe in him.”

This verse raises the question that we began the night with. Namely, why do people interact with the same Jesus, see him perform the same miracles, hear him preach the same sermons, and yet respond in diametrically opposite ways?

Take John 11 for example. In response to Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead, some people believe in Jesus as the Messiah (John 11:45) while others plan to kill him (John 11:53). Same miracle. Two totally different responses. How is this possible?

John the Apostle anticipates this question.

Look at his words in John 12:39-40: *“This is why they were unable to believe, because Isaiah also said: ‘He has blinded their eyes and hardened their hearts, so that they would not see with their eyes or understand with their hearts, and turn, and I would heal them.’”*

Why don’t the Pharisees really see the real Jesus? Because their eyes have blinded; because their eyes have been shut. Shut by whom? Shut by God.

This reality raises so many wonderful (and also several daunting) questions - questions regarding the extent, nature, and even the rightness of God’s sovereign election. These questions have been answered incredibly well by Pastor Sam in his sermon several weeks ago in his sermon on John 6. Also, you can always go directly to the Bible to explore this issue more (Romans 9 would be a good place to start).

However, for the sake of brevity and clarity. I want to revisit our original question: How does one see the real Jesus?

To answer this question, all one needs to do is reverse-engineer John 12:40. If it is true that God hardens the heart and shuts the eyes of hearts, then how can we ever see the real Jesus? The answer is simple. God must soften our hearts and God must open our eyes.

This truth is fleshed out so beautifully in our main text. In Philippians 3:12, Paul writes, “Not that I have already reached the goal or am already perfect, but I make every effort to take hold of it because I also have been taken hold of by Christ Jesus.”

This verse makes it so clear. We can really see the real Jesus because the Father first saw us. We can really know the real Jesus because the Father first knew us. We can really love the real Jesus because the Father has first loved us. We can really take hold of the real Jesus because the Father has first taken hold of us.

If this isn't enough, let me remind you of Paul's incredible words in Philippians 1:6: *“I am sure of this, that he who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.”*

Tonight, if you see the real Jesus, believe in him.

I leave you with the words of Jesus in John 12:44-46: *“Jesus cried out, ‘The one who believes in me believes not in me, but in him who sent me. And the one who sees me sees him who sent me. I have come as light into the world, so that everyone who believes in me would not remain in darkness.’”*