

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
September 4, 2016

Seeing God

1 Corinthians 13:8-13

13:8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away.

13:9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part,

13:10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.

13:11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways.

13:12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

13:13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1. Holy God

Jesus said “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” (Matthew 5:8) Lord promised the blessing that people with pure heart can see God. However, God is a Spirit and does not have shape or appearance. How can we see such a God? Also, can we, sinful human beings, see the Holy God?

In the Old Testament era, God showed himself in the appearance of human being or angel. Abraham welcomed three travelers, and two of them were the angels and one was Lord God. Abraham stood before God and talked to the Lord. (Genesis Chapter 18) A man wrestled with Jacob until the breaking of the day at a place called Peniel. The man was God. When he knew it, he was surprised and said, “For I

have seen God face to face, and yet my life has been delivered.” (Genesis 32:30) The name of the place “Peniel” has meaning of God’s face, and Jacob and chosen people experienced that they met God face to face.

As Jacob said, for the sinful human being, to see God means death and this was scary. God talked to Moses from the burning bush, Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God. (Exodus 3:6)

Prophet Isaiah saw God in a vision. The vision that Isaiah saw was that Lord God was sitting on the throne in the heaven, and the hem of the cloth was filled in the shrine. The shrine is where God is living, and even the hem of God’s cloth can not enter the shrine. This vision tells us that God can not be in any places on the earth, and he is very great and holy. When Isaiah saw this, “Woe is me! For I am lost.” (Isaiah 6:5) Even Isaiah who followed God’s words and preached them to the people, he felt that he was vanishing when he was standing in front of God’s glory.

When we were in Japan, a person who despised the faith in Jesus Christ came to my wife, and said, “If God exists, show me God!” My wife said “I can not show you God but I can pray for you to see God”. Then he was surprised and said “Please don’t do that”. Even the people who despise God, they know that to see God is very scary. Isaiah was a very faithful believer, but he could not stand in front of God and felt he is vanishing. If so, how can the people who despise God, stand in front of God? They will vanish immediately. If someone says, “Show me God!”, you can only answer like this. “If you see God now, you are going to die. Is this really OK with you? Are you serious in wanting to see God?”. God is a very Holy Being, and it is not that

easy to see God.

2. God's Face

But God has mercy and allows those who believe in Him to live even after having seen Him and fills their heart with blessings. “To see God” does not mean to recognize him all five sensory input, but to see Him beyond our sensory input. In other words, it is a blessing that through the spirit we are able to see God as a Spirit. Seeing Him with our spirit or with our faith is described as “to see the face of God” in the Bible. Adam and Eve lived their life looking upon the face of God until they had sins. But when they had sins, they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden (Genesis 3:8). Ever since then, humans have lived avoiding His face, but God has been showed his face to us, humans. The human spirit can never sustain without looking up to the face of God.

In the Bible, there are expressions such as “Hands of God”, “legs of God”, “eyes of God”, and “ears of God”, but does not mean God looks like a human. These words express various characters of God, such as power, wisdom, knowledge and His various attributes. Likewise, “face of God” also expresses that God is Person. To seek for the face of God means to seek for the personal interaction between God and human.

Professor James Houston in Oxford University wrote about his impression of Japan in the preface of his Japanese-translated version of “Life in Christ on the Dangerous Edge of Things” as follows; “The first strong impression I received on the Japanese culture was from the people who just got off from the subway bound for Tokyo on a rainy

day. Everyone was walking as if they were hiding in their umbrella. Therefore, I could not see their faces because they were as if wrapped in a plastic bag.” Prof. Houston wrote these comments to touch upon the importance of “person”. We often hear the description of “Japanese whose face is invisible”. In Japan, a group is considered to be more important than an individual. It is pointed out that “person” is buried in the materialism and production activity. But the Bible teaches that God is “person” and humans should recover their personhood in God. God invites us to seek for his face and meet him in person; that is to build a living relationship with God and have the fellowship of person to person with God.

The Bible calls, “Seek the LORD and his strength; seek his presence continually!” in Psalm 105:4. And, Psalm 27:8 says, “You have said, ‘Seek my face.’ My heart says to you, ‘Your face, LORD, do I seek.’”

Humans can see the face of God, not by eyes but through the eyes of faith. Moreover, seeing His face will not destroy us, rather we will be given the life and satisfied by seeing Him. Those with a pure heart that the Lord Jesus described, refers to the faithful heart seeking God’s face. God proclaims to the believers “I am your God and you belong to me”. Therefore, the believers answer “ you are my God and I belong to you”, and we will build a personal relationship among God, You and me. Psalm 27:4 says , “One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple.” I pray that all believers will have these desires in their heart.

3. Through Christ

In the New Testament era, people could see God through Jesus Christ. In John 1:18, it says, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.” This phrase is not ignoring the fact that Abraham, Jacob or Moses, those who were “chosen,” experienced to see God in the Old Testament. Needless to say, it doesn't make it meaningless the faith of people having seen God's face. John's words just attempt to explain that God have shown Himself in various ways in the past, but through Jesus Christ, His begotten Son, He showed Himself in the best way over anything else.

So, that's why Jesus said in John 14:9, “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.” Also in Colossians 1:15, it is written, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation,” Moreover, Hebrews 1:3 describes, “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.” God's Son became man and belonged to this world, and we could see the invisible God because of Jesus Christ. He is the “exact imprint,” the identical figure of God, so we living in the New Testament era could clearly know and “see” God the best, compared to any prophecies, visions, or special phenomenons.

However, people cannot see God without “sight,” no matter how God try to make Himself visible. Jean Calvin maintained that the Bible resembles the eyeglasses. God gives us the Bible in order to clearly see God, but if people are totally blind, the eyeglasses cannot help them see. So, Calvin suggested that people need the Spirit to let people have the eyesight to see God.

Holy Spirit works in the believers, and gives them knowledge to

understand God, and the eyesight to see God. Paul talked about that Moses spoke with God face-to-face, and implied that Christians have experienced the illumination and seen the glory of God more than Moses. In 2 Corinthians 3:18, saying, "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit." Christian people, according to this phrase, could recognize and see God much more assured than the believers in the Old Testament. We have to behold this blessedness and give thanks, then know God more than present, through this special gift.

"Being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another," this has already begun inside of the believers who were saved and received Holy Spirit. They could see God and Jesus Christ even in this world, but after all, when the salvation will have been achieved, their faces will be much clearer. In 1 Corinthians 13:12 it's written, "For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known." At the ancient time, the mirrors were made of bronze. If mercury was implied, it shows things clear, but not like the present ones anyway. Now people see God through the ancient mirrors, but when the time comes, face to face.

We often encounter the things illogical, unreasonable, outrages causing questions. Some of them will never bring the right answers. However, when we directly see God, all of them will be wiped away. The more serious the believers were, the more embarrassed by their own faith. They would be painful in their hearts, because they don't have enough communication with God. It will be, however, wiped

away within His grace.

Those who believe in Jesus Christ live in the light. Even though they experience the darkness of death, they could admire His shiny face. A blind hymn author, Fanny Crosby, brought the verse, saying, “And I shall see Him face to face, And tell the story, saved by grace.” She was blind, but amazingly positive and bright in her personality, and I think that’s because she saw God through the eyes of faith anytime in her life. Likewise she did, those who directly see God in their lifetime, will receive the grace to meet God in the day of achievement of salvation.

(Prayer)

Dear Father, You prepared the light of Jesus Christ for us, not left us roving around in the darkness, yet gracefully made Yourself visible, and also prepared the light of Holy Spirit, to shine over the believers inside out. As Jesus Christ said, we hope to be pure in heart for believing in you and admire your face, to be blessed to see You. Still we pray for our eyes of faith opened up. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.