

The Secret of the Vision

by A.B. Simpson

The sermon teaches that God can be found in various ways, including nature, His Word, His providences, His people, the ordinances of His house, and the secret place of the heart, and that believers must have an open face, heart, and will to meet Him.

Scripture: Job 23:3

Topics: "Seeking God", "Divine Presence"

Description

A.B. Simpson emphasizes the deep longing of the soul to find God, as expressed in Job's cry for divine presence. He outlines several ways to encounter God: through nature, His Word, providences, His people, the ordinances of the church, and the secret place of the heart. Each method reveals God's character and love, encouraging believers to seek Him actively and recognize His presence in all aspects of life. Simpson concludes that God desires to meet us personally and that we must be open and responsive to His call.

Transcript

"Oh that I knew where I might find Him! That I might come even to His seat! . . . Behold, I go forward, but He is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive Him: on the left hand, where He does work, but I cannot behold Him: He hides Himself on the right hand, that I cannot see Him." (Job 23: 3, 8, 9.)

This is the cry of the soul that longs for God and feels after Him if haply it may find Him. This is the deepest cry of every true spirit, the deepest need of every human life, and the greatest prayer that God can answer for a soul. For "this is life eternal, that they might know You the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom You have sent."

How shall we find God? How shall He become to our consciousness more real and satisfying than any other personality and other need?

First, we can find God in nature. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night shows knowledge. . . . Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world."

Nature alone is not able to reveal God in His gracious character as the sinful soul needs to know Him, but after we know Him from His Word, then nature is full of the most blessed illustrations of His character and

the most vivid unfoldings of His love and power; and the whole creation becomes to the consecrated soul a great temple with the blue heavens for its dome, the glowing stars for its lamps of fire, the vernal earth for its emerald pavement, and the voices of the ocean, the thunder, the hum and song of the whole animated creation for its ceaseless anthem of worship and praise. There is a sense in which everything we see in this beautiful world is but a letter in the great alphabet of truth, telling of Him who

"Shines in the sun,

Refreshes in the breeze,

Glow in the stars,

And blossoms in the trees.

Lives through all life,

Extends through all extent,

Spreads undivided,

Operates unspent."

I am sorry for the man that cannot see God in every turn of the beautiful kaleidoscope of nature and hear His voice in every note of the great organ of this voiceful world.

Second, we find God in His Word. Nature alone spells out but half the sentence and writes upon the heavens and earth, "God is," but leaves an awful blank and note of interrogation. The Bible alone can finish the sentence and write the complete revelation, "God is Love." The nineteenth Psalm, from which we have quoted, quickly passes from the natural to the supernatural and to the testimony of the Word respecting the attributes and glory of God. While the heavens declare His glory and the earth His handiwork yet it is "the law of the Lord" that "is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple. The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever: the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

This Book is the mirror of God. On every page we behold His glorious face. In Genesis we see Him before there was anything else to see, the supreme and solitary Being who was before all things. And then we see the teeming universe spring from His mighty creating hand, sustained by His almighty providence. The fall of man wrecks His beneficent plan, but God is still there equal to the occasion with His wonderful resources of redemption. The story unfolds and each page shines with the presence of God. The brightest character of the ante-deluvian world, holy Enoch, is distinguished by the fact that he walked with God, and it is more than Enoch we see. Abraham is but a little child stepping out into the unknown, holding the hand of God. Joseph, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David, all represent the peculiar presence and personality of the infinite and ever-present God. The whole story of the Old Testament is a constant revelation of God amid all the changing scenes and overruling all the elements and forces of evil as well as good. The New Testament brings to us the vision of God in the face of Jesus Christ and leaves us with the Holy Ghost as the perpetual Presence of God in the inmost heart and life of every believer.

But the God of the Bible is more than this. To believing souls He is not only God but our God. This Book is more than a mirror. It is a love letter with your name inscribed upon it, a bankbook by which you draw from your great deposit all that it promises. The only way to make the Bible interesting is to learn to read it with your own name in it and to see in every promise a direct message for you. Would you meet God every day? Go to this precious Book for a personal word morning by morning and evening by evening and you will learn to prize it, to mark it as the memorial of life's crisis hours and the history of your own experience.

Third, we may find God in His providences, in the things that come to us day by day. Faith learns to recognize God in everything in some sense, even the things that come from the adversary and the hostile world. Every difficulty that meets us is but a challenge to prove the resources of our heavenly Father, but a vessel to hold some part of His usefulness, an occasion to prove that there is nothing too hard for Him, nothing too great for Him to undertake, nothing too little for Him to care about. Thus we find God not only in our blessings as we call them and the obvious tokens and gifts of His goodness, but in those things which are blessings in disguise, the trials, the sorrows, the obstacles, the adverse circumstances, the very temptations and conflicts that are pressed upon us by our relentless foe, the devil. It is possible to learn to look upon all these things as but tests that come to us from our Father's hand and opportunities of proving His love and power to help us; and, if we so receive them, it will come to pass that the most delightful remembrances of our lives will be the things that were most trying because they shall have been transformed into blessings and triumphs. We shall learn to look over the head of the devil and see God above and beyond him, and by and by we shall be able even to recognize him in a sense our ally, as God takes our very enemy prisoner and makes him fight our battles and help to carry our burdens. This is the devil's greatest humiliation and the Lord's greatest glory.

There is a story told of an old lady who was praying for bread in a time of deep distress. Some rude boys heard her prayer, and thinking they would fool her they brought a loaf of bread and, ringing her doorbell, they slipped away and left it there. The old lady got the loaf of bread and immediately got down on her knees and thanked God for answering her prayer. This was too much for the boys and so they broke in on her and told her that she was only fooling herself, for God had not sent the bread at all but they had just brought it. "Ah," she said, "boys, I know better. It was the Lord that sent it even if it was the devil that brought it." There are so many things which the devil brings, but the child of God can see that God sent them.

Beloved, we greatly miss the discipline of life and the victories of faith if we do not watch for God in all the hard places that come to us day by day, and learn to rise from these to our sublimest victories, to take the stones of stumbling which the devil puts in our way or throws at us and build a tower with them which will reach to heaven. If you want to meet God this week you will find a hundred places awaiting you where you can either surrender to the difficulty or trust your Father for victory and go forward with thankfulness and praise.

Fourth, we can find God in His people. For the Church of Christ is His body and represents the very features of the glorious Head. It is "with all saints" that we learn to "know the height and depth, the length and breadth of the love of Christ." It is a divine art to learn to recognize the Master's face in the faces of His children and the Master's presence in the common things of every day.

It is said a distinguished artist once was employed to paint the likeness of an empress. She was far from beautiful and yet he was expected to make a beautiful portrait. He visited all parts of the empire and took the portraits of all the beautiful women in the different cities, and out of these lovely portraits he made a

composite picture representing all that was most striking and beautiful in each of them, and then, by an exquisite touch of art, he put into this composite picture the expression of the countenance of the empress, that subtle and peculiar something which belongs to a face which represents its personality. It was the countenance of the empress, but the features were those of all the princesses of the land.

In a higher sense the people of God are the images of the Master, and if we have both His faith and love we shall be able to find Him in His humblest disciples. Often when weary with service and even baffled at the throne of grace in finding the very thing we needed, have we gone forth to visit some sick and suffering child and found at that bedside the Christ we had been looking for and met in some simple expression, some incident, some word of message, some marvelous example of patient suffering or victorious faith the very thing we needed. We have met God. We have received the messenger wanted. We have received more than we gave, and we have gone forth deeply realizing that we have been with Jesus and that we have seen the Lord.

Fifth, we can meet God in the ordinances of His house, in the worship of the sanctuary, in the broken bread and memorial wine, in the hour of united prayer at the altar of public consecration, in the anointing service and baptismal flood, and in the ministries and services of His own house. There is a peculiar sense in which His promise is true, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them." Let us not make the mistake of forsaking the assembling of ourselves together or lightly esteeming the sanctuary and its services, for while God is present in the hearts and homes of His people yet He loves the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Israel.

Sixth, we can meet God in the secret place of the holy heart and the inner vision of the waiting spirit. This is God's favorite temple. While heaven is His throne and earth His footstool, His chosen sanctuary is the humble and contrite heart where He loves to come "to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones." God is always waiting to meet the devout spirit in the inner chamber of the soul when we come by the new and living Way in the name of Jesus.

But there are some things that we must remember and do if we would really meet God in the secret place of the soul.

We must have the open face. "With open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord." Many things may intercept the vision. One of them is the love of the world. The heart that is intensely fixed on earthly pleasure and worldly delights is incapable of seeing God.

Yonder the mighty telescope at the Lick Observatory had to be planted five thousand feet above the sea to lift it out of the mists of the lower air and bring it into the unobstructed vision of the heavenly worlds. Down on the plains of Sodom, Lot had no vision of God, but on the heights of Bethel, Abraham with nothing on earth but God to care for, received the covenant promise and the heavenly vision.

Again, the cares of the world, the anxieties of life are just as powerful to hinder the vision of God. There are many reading these lines who are so worried and distracted by a thousand earthly perplexities and troubles that their hearts are not at leisure to fix their eyes upon Jesus and behold the vision of His love. One look at Him, one sight of His almighty care would take away all your anxieties and give you the peace of God that passes all understanding. Oh, look up from your cares with open face and hear Him say, "Cast your burden upon the Lord, and he will sustain you."

Again, the fault may be some grosser sin. A heart steeped in earthly passion and unholy thought, imaginations, desires, purposes full of hatred, full of bitterness or full of impure desire, can never see God. "Without (holiness) no man shall see the Lord." "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God."

We need not only the open face but the open ear, for God wants to speak to us, and He will not speak unless we are willing to listen. And so we find old Habakkuk saying, "I will set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what He will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd." He was ready to hear and therefore God had something to say. He expected that he might be reprov'd, instead he received messages of promise that became the keynotes of faith to the Church of God for all the coming ages. God will speak to us if we will hearken and He will always speak some word of love.

We need the open heart for He has said, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man will hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." God is waiting not only to speak to us but to sit down and feast with us, to bring His heavenly banquet for our supply and taste of our poor gifts and sup with us as well as have us sup with Him. But we must open the door. The heart must be yielded. The affections must be opened without reservation to the inmost depths of our being.

We must have the obedient and responsive will. "Whereupon," says the apostle, "I was not obedient unto the heavenly vision." God comes not only to tell us things but to have us do them. His visitation and messages are for a practical purpose, and He expects a practical response. Have we already obeyed what we know? Are we willing if He should meet us this day to gladly respond and say, "Lord, I will go; speak, Lord, for Your servant hears"? He came to little Samuel of old because He knew that Samuel would obey Him. He will come to you if He can find an open face, an open heart and an obedient will.

Finally, God shows us the vision of His grace and glory that we may take all He shows us and claim all He reveals. "All the land which you see," He said to Abraham, "to you will I give it." "We have received . . . the spirit which is of God," the apostle adds as an echo of the same truth "that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God." We know them first by the revelation of the Spirit and then we take them by the appropriating act of faith. So He is waiting today to show us the vision of His infinite grace and power and then to give us all He shows us. Lift up your eyes, beloved, and look far and wide and long and steadily. Take it all in, for all that you can see God will give you. Look out upon the hard places of your life and behold Him waiting to transform them into victories. Take in the whole circumference of His resources and promises and then say, "All is mine." It is as if a father should take his favorite child through some beautiful place and ask her to inspect and admire its treasures of taste and beauty and, after she had feasted her eyes upon it and expressed her admiration of its loveliness, he should hand her the key and say, "My darling child, all this is yours." And so He is saying to us, "All . . . which you see, to you will I give it." Let us look, let us take, and then let us use the fulness and the blessing all for Him and for those to whom He has made us witnesses and trustees of His grace and blessing.

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