

“The Visible God?”—Colossians 1:15-16

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Visible God?”, is Colossians 1:15-16 → *Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him.*

This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Where would you go to see God? Some of the answers to this question which I’ve encountered include:

- “I experience God in nature. When I see the beauty of His creation, the majestic nature of His glory in the mountains and His power in the created order, I feel like I’m in the presence of God!”
- “I see God at church. When I walk into the sanctuary of a church building I feel a sense of God’s presence where I can “bear all” my troubles and struggles before Him.”
- “I see God in the Bible. When I’m reading it I encounter His involvement in history. This reassures me that He is involved in my “history” as it is unfolding day by day.”

Each of these concepts express the desire of people to experience

God visibly in some kind of a concrete manner, kind of like getting to sit down and have a cup of coffee with Him. However, at the same time, one may be fearful (or at least apprehensive in some way) of such an encounter because it will produce an intense awareness of your sin in the presence of His holiness. Still, people look for God to reveal Himself visibly in their lives.

As people who have been created to depend so much upon our senses to determine reality it is rather hard for us to trust in a God we cannot see. By nature mankind has always wanted to trust in a visible god. The problem is that our human natures, which are created in the image of God Himself, see God from a sin-corrupted perspective and end up in idolatry when left to our own conclusions.

At the mention of the word “idolatry” many people may immediately think of the worship of idols—that is, a visible object created out of stuff of the earth. That is idolatry. The Old Testament Scriptures mention the household gods which individuals or families possessed, to which they looked for help, protection and guidance in life (cf. Judges 17:5,14-20). The Egyptians developed such a system of idolatry that we’re not even sure how many gods they actually claimed. The prophet Elijah constantly struggled with the prophets of the false god Baal (cf. 1 Kings 18) and the Philistines claimed a statue named Dagon as their god (cf. Judge 16:23; 1 Samuel 5:2). We could also mention the polytheistic religions the Romans

and Greeks. Many of their gods are familiar to us because they are taught as Roman or Greek mythology in our schools. However, they certainly were not considered myth to the people in Jesus' day.

Even God's people, the Israelites, turned to idolatry while Moses was on the Mount Sinai for forty days and nights receiving God's laws. They pressed Aaron, Moses' brother, to make them a god to lead them because they could no longer "see the LORD" in the presence of His servant Moses. In that incident they shaped their god from gold in the form of a calf (cf. Exodus 32), one of the gods of Egypt. Could it be that people generally look to someone or something bigger than themselves for direction, help and meaning in life? The popular TV program is not called "American **Idol**" for nothing.

In the desire to see the invisible God the principle is rather simple: "We call 'em as we see 'em and if we don't see 'em, we make 'em up!" Or, "We call 'em as we see 'em and we make 'em up on the basis of how we see 'em!" Romans 1:19-23 describes the outcome of such a principle. It says: *What can be known about God is plain to people, 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. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him, but they became futile in their*

thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things. Ultimately people trying to see the invisible God without the Holy Spirit's revealed knowledge will end up worshiping and serving the created rather than the Creator.

Therefore, the first step in being released from such *darkness* is to be brought into the Light in order to see clearly—that is, the light **of Christ**. Since we in our sinfulness cannot see the visible God properly, God revealed Himself to us in the ultimate way in the Person & Work of Jesus Christ in order to make it possible for us to see Him clearly and have a proper relationship with Him. As verse 15 of our text says: *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. John 1:14 says that God became flesh and dwelt among us in the person of Jesus. John 1:18 goes on to tell us that no one has ever seen God; the only God, Who is at the Father's side (i.e. Jesus), He has made Him known.* People actually had the opportunity to have a cup of coffee with God during the earthly ministry of Jesus!

Problem is, many of the people refused to believe that Jesus was the visible God because of satanic delusion. 2 Corinthians 4:4 says that *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. This is why seeing God in the Person & Work of Jesus takes faith which only the Holy Spirit can give. 2 Corinthians 4:6 goes on to tell us that *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.* This “illumination” is given by the Holy Spirit working faith in our hearts through the means of grace.

As you place your faith completely in the atoning work of Jesus then you’ll have a whole new perspective toward every area of your life and the world around you because it is a perspective lived under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Despite the fact that every aspect of creation is tainted by sin—a fact we can see clearly enough in our world—we will see the greater purpose for all created things as expressed in verse 16 of our text. Just as *all things were created by Jesus, in heaven and on earth,* notice they were also created **for Him.** We and everything else around us were created for the purpose of bringing God the ultimate praise and glory through faith in Christ Jesus.

However, seeing this greater purpose can only happen by recognizing an “invisible god” of a different nature—the idols or idolatries hidden in our hearts. They are also invisible in the sense that we may not even be aware of such idols until they reveal themselves to others in our selfishness, self-righteousness, manipulations, resentments, worry, unforgiveness and so forth. Even then we may not see these

sinful actions, just as so much of the time what people observe in our behavior is actually oblivious to us. King David recognized this and prayed to Yahweh in Psalm 19:12 → *Who can discern his errors? Declare me innocent from **hidden faults**.*

These “invisible” gods in your own life are dealt with like all idolatry—by repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, the true God and true man. As true God and true man He accomplished all that is necessary for you to be forgiven of all idolatrous attitudes and actions through His perfect life and death and His resurrection, never to die again. This is why Colossians 1:18 also refers to Him as *the firstborn from the dead*.

When you place your faith completely in Jesus, the Christ, the God-Man Who accomplished the work of your salvation in the accomplished facts of history, the invisible becomes very visible as the Holy Spirit works forgiveness in your heart today. It will even be reflected in actions which display that God is a very real presence in your world as you live forgiven in Christ in the daily vocations and actions of your life.

God is visible today in Christ. He reveals Himself through His Word and sacraments as He comes to us with His redeeming work in Jesus again and again to deal with our idolatrous struggles, known and unknown. There we too get to experience Him in a very real and physical way through the working of His Holy Spirit. He reveals Himself through His *body, the church*—people who have experienced His resurrection

power in their lives as they trust completely in the Person & Work of the visible God, Jesus, and live new lives in Him each day. There too people experience Him in very real and physical ways as His church reaches out to others as His incarnational presence through acts and words of mercy, love, grace and forgiveness of sins in Jesus. Amen.

When Simeon held Jesus in his arms he burst forth into a song,
praising God that He had the privilege of meeting Jesus.

We too burst forth into the same song after we experience
the presence of Jesus in the Lord's Supper:

Lord, now You are letting Your servant depart in peace,

according to Your word;

for my eyes have seen Your salvation

that You have prepared in the presence of all peoples,

a light for revelation to the Gentiles,

and for glory to Your people Israel.

(Luke 2:29-32)

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