

Series: The Difference

February 14, 2016

## **Title: Seeing the Sun**

**[Slide 1]**

**Text: John 1:14-18**

### **The Unseen God**

#### **The Unseen God:**

At the end of his introduction to the story of Jesus, John reminds us of the one most impossible thing in our world: the impossibility of *seeing God*.

**[Slide 2]**

*John 1:18a The Message*

*No one has ever seen God,  
not so much as a glimpse.*

But it's not for want of trying! Moses begged God not to abandon Israel in the desert after they had worshiped the golden calf. He asked that God's *Presence* go with them. The Hebrew word translated "Presence" is actually the word "face." After God agreed to remain present with His people Moses made a much bolder request:

**[Slide 3]**

*Exodus 33:18 NIV*

*Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory."*

In response, the LORD promised to reveal His goodness. But as to Moses' ultimate desire to see *God's glory*?

*Exodus 33:20 NIV*

*But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."*

#### **Looking at the Sun:**

It's not that God wants to remain secretive. It's just that we *could never survive the encounter!*

For instance, when you go for a walk on a nice sunny day, there are all sorts of things to look at; and there is one thing that you should never look at – the Sun. Looking at the sun for less than 2 minutes will cause permanent damage to your retina and leave you with a blind spot. Of course, that's if you can stand the pain! The greatest damage is done by the light that *you cannot see*. The same UV light that gives you that painful sunburn at the beach burns both the outside and inside of your eye, and can leave you partially blinded for life.

#### **[Slide 4]**

In other words: We can look at the sun, but we can never really see it in all its glory and power. We will never be able to send astronauts to explore its surface. We have to be content with the view from 93 million miles on a cloudless day.

#### **Is that all there is?**

So does that mean that God will be, as it were, always 93 million miles away? It's great to know that Someone is running the Universe, but are we left here essentially on our own with the longing to truly *know Him* but with no way to get any closer?

John's story of Jesus answers that question for us:

#### **[Slide 5]**

*John 1:18 Phillips*

*It is true that no one has ever seen God at any time. Yet the divine and only Son, who lives in the closest intimacy with the Father, has made him known.*

### **The Face of God**

#### **Close Encounter:**

John begins the story of Jesus by retelling the Creation Story so that we can see how Jesus fits in it. He refers to Jesus as The Word, through whom all things were created. God and His Word, Father and Son are the One True God.

John then offers a New Exodus story centered on seeing the splendor of God. God had come to make a home with His people in the desert. His

splendor and glory were always veiled by a cloud. His dwelling was the tent sanctuary that He had commanded Israel to build for Him. Now, John says that God has come to dwell – literally, to “tent” – with His people once again, but this time in a much more immediate way!

### **[Slide 6]**

*John 1:14 Phillips*

*So the word of God became a human being and lived among us. We saw his splendor (the splendor as of a father's only son), full of grace and truth.*

No longer is God's splendor hidden by a cloud or confined to the innermost room of a sanctuary. God has now come to live with humans in a face-to-face relationship.

### **Seeing the Unseen God:**

John says, “We saw his splendor...” When Moses had asked to see God's glory, the LORD had specifically told Moses that he *could not* see God's face and live. The most that Moses could do was hear God's voice as He passed by.

But now John says that the *impossible* has happened. We have seen the glorious splendor of God, the glory that had always been too bright, too strong, too pure for humans to look at face-to-face. The One True Creator has become one of us – become “flesh” – and let us *see the unseen God*.

In a letter to fellow Christians John writes:

### **[Slide 7]**

*1 John 1:1-2 The Message*

*From the very first day, we were there, taking it all in—we heard it with our own ears, saw it with our own eyes, verified it with our own hands. The Word of Life appeared right before our eyes; we saw it happen! And now we're telling you in most sober prose that what we witnessed was, incredibly, this: The infinite Life of God himself took shape before us.*

### **Grace and Truth:**

So what does God look like when He appears as one of us? John says:

**[Slide 8]**

*John 1:14 Phillips*

*So the word of God became a human being and lived among us. We saw his splendor (the splendor as of a father's only son), **full of grace and truth.***

When Moses encountered God and His glory on Mt. Sinai he heard God say:

**[Slide 9]**

*Exodus 34:6-7 NIV*

*And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."*

When God revealed Himself and His glory, He told Moses His Name – the LORD – and He described the deepest essence of His character. The One God is "compassionate and gracious...abounding in love and faithfulness."

John tells us that when this One God became one of us, what John and the other disciples saw was this same love and faithfulness in action – right to the point of Jesus dying for us on the Cross. His splendor was the splendor of *grace and truth*. To see God's deepest character in action is to see the fullness of God's glory and splendor.

**Seeing the Sun****Sun\_Light:****[Slide 10]**

It's utterly impossible for us to truly "see" the Sun. Even our most sophisticated satellites and telescopes can only begin to probe its secrets. But that doesn't mean that we can't experience its splendor and power. God gave us eyes precisely tuned to capture a small fraction of the sun's light, what we call "visible light." We can turn off the lights in the morning and let the sun light up our world. We can look out over New York State at the end

of the day and watch the sun go down in a blaze of glory. We can't touch the sun's surface, but we can see its image in its light.

### **The Light of the World:**

Jesus described Himself as "the Light coming into the world." Isn't that something like the sunlight that races across those 93 million miles to light up our world? When we glimpse the sun in the sky we're seeing light from it, light that originated in it, light that is part of the sun now flung across the solar system.

When John saw Jesus, he discovered that he was *seeing the One True God*. This Jesus, God's creative Word from before eternity, had become one of us. The Light from the unapproachable One True God had come into the world.

That is why he could write:

#### **[Slide 11]**

*John 1:17-18 Phillips*

*For while the Law was given by Moses, love and truth came through Jesus Christ. It is true that no one has ever seen God at any time. Yet the divine and only Son, who lives in the closest intimacy with the Father, has made him known.*

### **Seeing the Sun:**

The people of John's day wanted more than anything to see the glory and splendor of God. Hadn't the ancient prophets promised that one day God would unveil Himself and display His full power to rescue His people?

#### **[Slide 12]**

*Psalms 102:15-16 NIV*

*The nations will fear the name of the LORD,  
all the kings of the earth will revere your glory.*

*For the LORD will rebuild Zion  
and appear in his glory.*

Wouldn't that mean that God would destroy Israel's enemies and make the whole earth cringe before His splendor and power?

And then the LORD actually came. He caused His goodness – His grace and truth – to rest upon His world. His true glory was there for those with eyes to see. He came to walk our journeys with us. He paused to experience time and loss. He even allowed His own life to ebb away on an awful cross.

**[Slide 13]**

*So the word of God became a human being and lived among us. We saw his splendor (the splendor as of a father's only son), full of grace and truth.*

When you see Jesus, you see God. Seeing Jesus is like *seeing the sun*.