

Our hope is that we would see Jesus face to face. We can only have this hope if we presently know him by faith. The Son of God came to earth in the flesh, and he revealed himself to his people. By revealing himself, he was revealing his Father. He was making known the great mercy of God on helpless sinners. But those who thought they were already wise could not recognize that he who stared them right in the face was the very Wisdom of God himself. Those who trusted in their own righteousness could not recognize that Jesus was the very righteousness of God who freely forgives sins and shows mercy. They were not looking for mercy. So they were blind and unable to see what the Father made known.

But Jesus rejoiced over this. Because the Holy Spirit does not give wisdom to those who don't need wisdom. The Holy Spirit doesn't save those who don't need saving. He doesn't reveal mercy to those who don't need mercy. Of course, everyone needs wisdom. Everyone needs saving. Everyone needs mercy. But those who are too proud and secure in their own wisdom and righteousness remain blind to what God reveals. Jesus rejoices over this, not because he is happy that people stubbornly refuse to believe in him. No, Jesus rejoices, because he knows that God's wisdom, righteousness, and mercy are not gained by human wisdom, righteousness, or mercy. He rejoices that God's gift of salvation is not measured by earthly calculations, which only certain experts can understand. No, God sent his Son into the flesh to save sinners. God looks upon those who have been humbled. His face shines upon those who are broken in their hearts. He reveals his great mercy to little children.

You must receive the kingdom of God as a little child. This childlike faith rests on the words of Jesus and not on human reason. Faith does not try to figure out God's mercy and kindness. Faith simply clings to it and feeds on it like new born babies relying on the nurturing milk of their mother. Those who have this faith already have more understanding than the most celebrated minds of this world. A little child washed in the water of his baptism already has the Wisdom of God, which many kings and prophets longed to see for themselves.

Jesus rejoices in this fact. He rejoices in the riches of God's mercy. He rejoices that they are freely given to those who can't possibly earn them. He rejoices that those who are spiritually poor and unable to stand before God can now stand before him. They can face him. They can know him. And they have the sure hope that they will see him face to face. This is the good news delivered by the Holy Spirit. And it filled Jesus with joy. He rejoiced in this great mercy of God, even as he endured the suffering of the cross. Even as the judgment against our sin came down on him, he had this joy that God sent him into this world to save sinners. He came to show mercy. And blessed are the eyes that see it!

Jesus says that many prophets and kings longed to see what his disciples were seeing, but they didn't see it. King David declared in Psalm 130, "I wait for the Lord, my soul doth wait, and in his Word do I hope. My soul waiteth for the Lord more than they that watch for the morning, yea more than they that watch for the morning." The Prophet Jeremiah says in his lamentations, "It is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord." Isaiah says a number of times that he waits for the Lord to save. All the faithful kings and prophets waited and longed for the appearing of Christ, and they never saw him in their lifetimes. But they did not wait in vain. Their hope was in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth. They had this hope, because, despite the fact that they couldn't see him, they knew him. Despite their great wisdom, riches, and virtue, they knew that they were like filthy rags before God. They knew they needed the Lord's salvation. They trusted in it. And with Abraham, God counted their faith as righteousness in his sight. They could therefore wait in a sure hope.

This is the same hope we have today. St. Peter says that we do not see him, but we believe in him, filled with an inexpressible joy as we receive what our faith clings to. We presently receive the salvation of our souls through the mercy of Christ. So we wait in hope to see him face to face. We know that God looks upon our weakness and sins with compassion and mercy. We therefore long to see him just as he has promised.

Our faith receives what Jesus gives right now. We presently have all things by faith. We have, right now, eternal life, a new birth, present pardon, peace, and blessing while we tarry here on earth.

Hope, on the other hand, pursues what Jesus freely gives. It longs for what he has promised. It presses on with joyful anticipation for what our eyes cannot yet see. You can't have this hope for the future without presently having faith in what Jesus gives right now. In other words, you can't expect to see Jesus's face shine upon you if you don't already know him in his life-giving Word. Faith has eternal life. Hope waits for eternal life. Faith finds God's mercy right now in the Word and promise of Christ. Hope longs to see this mercy in the life to come.

We see now only by faith. We look to the future only by hope. But what do we currently see with our eyes? We long to hear for ourselves what Jesus spoke to his disciples, "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see!" But until that day, what do your eyes see? You see your neighbor. You see the one who needs mercy as much as you need it. You see the one whom God puts in your path, who is easy to ignore or neglect. You see your children and grandchildren who desperately need your attention, who need to be nurtured by the words of their Savior, and who are in constant danger from this wicked world to lead them astray. You see your classmate who can't make any friends, perhaps seems a bit strange, but he needs a friend who will converse with him and show him kindness. You see your coworker who needs to support his family as much as you need to. You see your neighbor who has been slandered or attacked. He needs a good reputation and stability as much as you need these things.

This is where Jesus wants you to see him right now. As you behold him by faith in his Word of grace, in his body and blood, as you long with a certain hope to see him face to face, you presently see him in the face of your neighbor.

This is called love. Faith sees Jesus in his promise of forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Hope looks to Jesus in the resurrection of the body and life of the world to come. And love sees Jesus in those he has given you to love right now.

But again, you can't have this love if you don't also have faith and hope. You can't see Jesus in your neighbor if you don't know him in his promise and wait for what he has prepared for you. Some people try to see Jesus in their neighbor without recognizing him in his word and promise. They say that being a Christian is all about making the world a better place for people to live. It all sounds very nice and pious. But they subtly throw away the gospel of Christ's atonement for our sins, and they replace it with some kind of a social gospel. The good news that Jesus saves us from the wrath to come is replaced with a political message of social progress and the end of poverty and inequalities. But those who promote such things are not recognizing Jesus at all. Even if they end up helping some people, they remain blind to God's true mercy in his Son. They are not relying on the message of God's mercy toward poor, helpless sinners. Instead, they are relying on their own wisdom and their own righteousness.

Jesus doesn't have us see him in our neighbors so that we would earn our way to heaven or bring about God's kingdom through worldly means. Those who think this way are only serving themselves. They want to justify themselves. They ask, "Who is my neighbor," not so they would follow the example of Jesus. No, they want to know what kind of charity will give them enough good press and attention from the world. And they certainly do get praise from the world. They certainly are recognized for their philanthropy and good works. As Jesus says, they have their reward right now.

If you want to earn salvation and eternal life, then you must keep the law perfectly. You must love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind. You must love your neighbor as yourself. You must deny yourself all your comforts and pleasures, and even life itself, all for the sake of this love. Do this, and you will live.

But the law was never meant to give us life. If a law had been given that could do that, then righteousness would have come through the law. Instead, Scripture has declared all people to be prisoners of sin so that we would receive life only through faith in the promise. The experts in the law thought they could earn salvation by following the law. Yet they only ended up justifying themselves, trying to figure out the bare minimum. They're fine with helping people as long as it doesn't require them to deny themselves. But this isn't how the law works. The law is not an easy do-it-yourself manual for gaining what only God can give. No, the law must expose your blindness. The law must make you face God and see your sin and his coming judgment against it. The law must teach you your need for mercy.

Jesus told this particular expert a parable of a man who was beaten up and left for dead. A priest and a Levite both passed by, ignoring that poor man. These were experts in the law. They knew all the rules. But no amount of expertise will bring about the mercy God desires. Instead, it was a Samaritan, an unlikely figure, who had compassion on this man. He treated the man's wounds, put him on his own animal, took him to an inn, entrusted him to the innkeeper, and payed for his stay. He gave generously. He was kind. Many have pointed out that this Samaritan resembles our Lord Jesus. He saw us dead in our sins, under the bondage of Satan, and swooped to the very depths to save us. By his wounds he has healed us and cleansed us of all sin. He entrusts us to the ministry of his Word, and he promises to return on the last day. But you can also see how the other man might resemble Jesus. He was left to die on a cross, abandoned by those who were supposed to love him.

And here is the point about love. God doesn't give you your neighbor so that you can gain salvation through your good works. No, God gives you your neighbor so that you would see Jesus. He wants you to recognize God's mercy. This is why he teaches you to *show* mercy. He teaches you to *receive* it as well. As you walk in this love, you begin to see what faith already fully grasps. But you only see as in a mirror dimly. You only see it in part.

Faith doesn't ask what to do to get life. Faith already has life in the promise. It finds Christ in his Word, in his death, resurrection, and ascension. Hope doesn't ask how to get to heaven faster. It rests in the promise and waits for Christ to appear. So love doesn't bother about how to earn anything. It sees Jesus in those for whom he died. We press on in hope for what we only see now by faith. Meanwhile, the love of Christ binds his Christians together. And while this often involves seeing very dark and embarrassing things, we are not put to shame. Instead, we rejoice in what God has made known to us. As we see one another's need for God's mercy, we can already begin to take comfort in our Lord's words: "Blessed are the eyes that see what you see." Amen.