

JESUS SEES

Attention is one of the most powerful forces in the world. Along with food and water, a baby needs the attentive gaze of a human face. The baby's joy or anger or sorrow is reflected in the face of another. Psychologists speak of this as ATTUNEMENT. The baby realizes it is possible to be somehow connected to – in tune with – another human being. The face disappears and the baby tries to figure out how to bring it back. This face becomes the mirror through which the child learns whether it is a source of delight or disappointment. A child simply cannot survive without the face. The face is what tells the baby that it matters.

Erik Erikson: "Hardly has one learned to recognize the familiar face when he becomes also frightfully aware of the unfamiliar, the strange face, the unresponsive face, the averted face and the frowning face. And here begins that inexplicable tendency on man's part to feel that he has caused the face to turn away which happened to turn elsewhere.

Gerald Egan reports a study in which students, at a prearranged signal, switched from a slouched, passive, no-eye-contact posture to leaning forward and looking attentively at the teacher. He responded dramatically. When they reverted at another signal, he reverted to his old monotone "after some painful seeking for continued reinforcement."
(Are whole congregations secretly in on that experiment?)

That's why there are certain faces you look for, certain people that encourage you ... because they pay attention! (Notice that attention is so valuable that we don't GIVE it, we PAY it.)

ONE OF THE GREAT MIRACLES IN LIFE IS THAT GOD PAYS ATTENTION TO US!

God instructed his priests to bless Israel in this way ...

Numbers 6:24-26 (KJV) The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace.

Numbers 6:24-26 (MSG) God bless you and keep you, God smile on you and gift you, God look you full in the face and make you prosper.

To turn your face is not casual listening of a preoccupied mind. It is undivided, whole-hearted attention. "I'm fully devoted to being with you." God's face is not just "turned" to us, it is "shining" on us – a face of delight, like that of a proud parent. Our faces grow radiant only in the presence of those we love most deeply. That is how God loves us.

Over and over the Psalmist says, "Don't hide your face from me!"

The gospel of John tells the story of a man that no one paid attention to. He had spent his entire life being ignored. He was simply not worth noticing to most people. To say he was lonely would have been the understatement of a lifetime. He was blind; he was a beggar.

People would try to look the other way; he would try to do something to catch their attention. He was used to being ignored; it was what he did for a living. He was just another face in the crowd – but not to Jesus!

The very first words in the story are: "And as Jesus passed by, he saw a man which was blind from his birth." (John 9:1)

How many years had it been since someone turned his face toward this man? Jesus actually looked at him. He saw the hurt and hopelessness of a life lived in endless night. No one has ever seen like Jesus!

JESUS SAW PEOPLE NO ONE ELSE EVER LOOKED AT! He saw a tax collector, a woman desperate for healing at the hem of his garment, a widow giving in the offering, children that the disciples wanted to usher away, and little things from nature that often popped up in his teaching.

In Jesus' day, people believe in a cause-and-effect relationship between suffering and sin. It made them feel better if they could think that a suffering person deserved his suffering. When we judge people, we feel less of an obligation to pay attention to them. So they put this man in a category and forgot him.

He was blind – that was too depressing
He was a beggar – that was too demanding
He was a product of sin – that was too disgusting

Ralph Ellison wrote of the pain he felt as an African American in a white society: "I am invisible ... simply because people refuse to see me."

Someone once asked Mother Teresa what she saw as she walked the streets of Calcutta. "I see Jesus in a distressing disguise."

John includes a detail that tells us just how ignored this man had been. After his healing, when he returned to his neighborhood, they asked: "Is not this the man who used to sit and beg?" He has been begging in the same place for most of his life – but they didn't know what he looked like. They never paid attention to him!

Have you ever felt unnoticed? Ignored? Alone? If you could just get someone to notice how bad you are hurting! (ILLUSTRATIONS HERE)

"Cipher in the Snow" is a classic short film made in 1973 which retains the power of its message even today. This film is based on a true story, and is basically about a young boy (the "cipher" of the title) who simply falls dead in the snow one morning after a bus ride. The teacher who investigates what happened finds that the boy had no real friends, and essentially died of loneliness. The teacher learns that he was the boy's favorite teacher, yet he can hardly even remember who the boy was.

I've talked to that person many times ... different faces, different details, but the same feelings. I've counseled with that person in the office ... I've prayed with that person in the altar ... I've BEEN that person. Have you?

1 Corinthians 1:26-28 (KJV) For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

1 Corinthians 1:26-28 (MSG) Take a good look, friends, at who you were when you got called into this life. I don't see many of "the brightest and the best" among you, not many influential, not many from high-society families. Isn't it obvious that God deliberately chose men and women that the culture overlooks and exploits and abuses, chose these "nobodies" to expose the hollow pretensions of the "somebodies"?

JESUS UNDERSTANDS!

Isaiah 53:2 (KJV) For he shall grow up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.

Isaiah 53:2 (NCV) He grew up like a small plant before the Lord, like a root growing in a dry land. He had no special beauty or form to make us notice him; there was nothing in his appearance to make us desire him.

TELL STORY OF HAGAR (Genesis 16)

Genesis 16:13a And she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me.

Psalms 34:15 (KJV) The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.

1 Peter 3:12 (KJV) For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

Remember the little games you played with your kids?

- What does the doggy say?
Hunter's daughter – what does the birdy say? BANG!
Emily – what does the ... INTERRUPT ... quote Scripture
- Peek-a-boo ... I see you!
Children learning that the face is ALWAYS there!

Old Testament – THE GOD WHO SEES

New Testament – THE JESUS WHO SEES (God's personality in flesh)

Exodus 2:25 (KJV) And God looked upon the children of Israel, and God had respect unto them.

Exodus 2:25 (MSG) God saw what was going on with Israel. God understood.

2 Kings 14:26 (NLT) For the Lord saw the bitter suffering of everyone in Israel, and how they had absolutely no one to help them.

Job had questions at first, but he became more and more confident as his trial went on that God could see him!

Job 10:4 (KJV) Hast thou eyes of flesh? or seest thou as man seeth?

Job 23:8-10 (KJV) Behold, I go forward, but he is not there; and backward, but I cannot perceive him: On the left hand, where he doth work, but I cannot behold him: he hideth himself on the right hand, that I cannot see him: But he knoweth the way that I take: when he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.

Job 28:10 (KJV) He cutteth out rivers among the rocks; and his eye seeth every precious thing.

Job 31:4 (KJV) Doth not he see my ways, and count all my steps?

Job 34:21 (KJV) For his eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings.

Psalm 94:9 (KJV) He that planted the ear, shall he not hear? he that formed the eye, shall he not see?

1 Samuel 16:7 (KJV) But the Lord said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.

Isaiah 66:2 (KJV) For all those things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, saith the Lord: but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.

Matthew 6:6 (KJV) But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly.

That's it? That's the comfort? I'm supposed to be content because God SEES me? Not quite. The God who SEES is MOVED with compassion.

Matthew 9:36 (KJV) But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd.

Matthew 14:14 (KJV) And Jesus went forth, and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick.

What is the God who sees looking for?

Luke 5:20 (KJV) And when he saw their faith, he said unto him, Man, thy sins are forgiven thee.

It wasn't even the paralyzed man's faith ... he was in the atmosphere of his friends' faith. But he had to be willing to participate! God saw their faith ... and God moved!

Some people have spiritual attention deficit disorder!

The work of God is the work of paying attention to the people and the things that mean so much to Him. And when you pay attention you say, "You are the most important thing in my world right now."

Right now, we need to pay attention (by worship) to the moving of God's Spirit. He is the most important priority in this service at this moment.

CLOSING # 1

The Hebrew Scriptures of the Old Testament give us this phrase: "The apple of God's eye." It literally means "the little man of the eye" – so close that you can see your reflection in God's eyes!

Psalm 17:8 (KJV) Keep me as the apple of the eye, hide me under the shadow of thy wings.

CLOSING # 2

Life is not fair, but God is just ... and heaven will be the great equalizer!

Revelation 22:4 (KJV) And they shall see his face; and his name shall be in their foreheads.