

THE FACE OF JESUS CHRIST

"For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."
II Cor. 4:6

The Bible is a vast portrait gallery. In it God has preserved imperishably for us sketches and pictures which give vivid and wonderful ideas and mental photographs of the leaders of the people and of others less known. How splendid are the pictures that look down upon us from the ancient Scriptural walls as we wander through the great rooms in the vast art gallery of the Bible. There we see:----

Adam in his loneliness

Eve in her dialogue with the devil

Cain fleeing from the blood spots on the ground where for no cause except envy he slew his brother Abel.

Abraham welcoming angels at his door.

Daniel the greatest man of a 1000 years in the lions' den.

Daniel's fellow exiles in the fiery furnace.

Joseph coming down from the throne to greet his brethren.

Moses, the mighty law-giver, walking across the fields of achievement with the stride of a giant.

David, with his harp, at once king, poet, prophet, and musician.

Elijah, a seer who saw clearly, a great heart who felt deeply, a hero who dared valiantly.

John the Baptist, descending upon the iniquities of his day with a torch in one hand and a sword in the other.

On and on we might wander in this awe-inspiring, worship-begetting observation journey through the Bible art gallery which is unsurpassed. In the corners and continents of this marvelous Book one may wander for centuries and not see all its glories. But on every page he will get evidence and that all its portraits lose their splendor in the greater glory of the face of Jesus Christ. Of his blessed, sweet and dear face we will now speak. What kind of a face was it?----

I. A SAD FACE Sometimes. Because:---

Men were often deaf to the significance of his teaching.

Men were often unresponsive to the magnanimity of His nature.

Men were often ungrateful before the ministries of His mercy.

Men were often so stupidly blind to the beauty of His life.

He knew men and how deceitful and desperately wicked their hearts were.

He saw the unneighborliness, unbrotherliness, and ungodliness of their motives.

He knew the false standards, motives and ideals of men and women.

He saw the low slavery of those in inward bondage to bad motives and sordid objectives.

He saw men making such poor choices between things of value and of no worth.

He saw men pursuing their own disadvantage, shame and sorrow.

He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief in more ways than one.

His face often reflected the sadness of His heart. Sad because many:--

1. Believed life consisted in the abundance of things possessed.
2. Measured themselves by themselves and were not wise.
3. Were as sheep without a shepherd. Loving darkness rather than light.
4. Were participants in the degradation of love.

came

This sadness/ from a sinless heart that grieved over the foolish and perverse ways of men.

II. A SHINING FACE Sometimes.

"And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John, his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them, and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as light."

Only the sun could express the radiant glories of the face of Jesus when His Deity with shining brightness and heavenly Glory, lit up and shone through His body.

John marooned on Patmos saw seven golden candlesticks "And in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of Man....His countenance was as the sun shining in his strength."

We are also told that Saul was journeying to Damascus when suddenly "There shined round about him a light from heaven and he fell to the earth and heard a voice saying unto him Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" This light that shone round about Saul was the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. To this voice Saul made answer, "Who art thou, Lord? And the Lord said I am Jesus whom thou persecutest." Then Saul asked, "What wilt thou have me to do? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city and it shall be told thee what thou must do." So Saul stood up but Damascus, the plain, the white crest of Hermon, the roof tops, the walls of Damascus, the white hot road, and the blazing sun were all gone from his sight. But there was one thing he could see for it was burning in on his brain in the blazes that smote him to his knees. It was the light of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Then I am sure that the face of Jesus was shining, when the blind looked at Him with new-seeing eyes, when the deaf stood and listened to the world of sound He had opened to them, when the dumb talked after He untied the knots in their tongues, when the crippled went away whole, when the lepers went on their way cleansed, when crazy men went on their way with their reason restored, when funeral processions were broken up. His face shone because of the joy He had brought to others.

III. A STAINED FACE Sometimes:

1. With Tears

This happened in the little town of Bethany where for four days Lazarus had been sleeping in a grave the sleep that no noise can disturb, no life arouse, and no power molest. Jesus weeping came to his grave. Stained with tears was His blessed face in Bethany. Another time when His face was stained with tears was on a beautiful spring morning, when the birds were singing and the flowers were bursting into bloom; the children were shouting their hosannas and the multitude spreading their garments in the way to carpet a path for Him into the city of Jerusalem. In the midst of the crowd was Jesus with the tears of sorrow streaming down His face and He burst into a great sob as He exclaimed, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thy children as a hen gathereth her brood under her wings, and ye would not." No wonder He wept for He saw the wretchedness and wickedness of that city with its terrible calamities awaiting it. Wherever He looked He found unhappiness. The upper classes were bitter and discontented. The lower classes were sullen and hopeless. Their life and property were both insecure. Stained with tears His dear face over their calamities.

2. With Blood

In Gethsemane's garden the roots of His divine emotion put forth their crimson tears. "And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly; and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Behold the suffering Christ's face stained with blood. He gave His blood for us. Blood oozed out from the holes in His palms where the nails went. Blood spurting from the feet where the spikes were driven raggedly through. Blood dripping from His back where the merciless scourge cut His back to shreds. Blood gushing from His side where the savage Roman spear went its unholy way. Blood trickling from the thorn punctures in His brow. Yes, and blood staining His face when He was in the shadow of the old Olive trees.

3. With Spit

In Mark's Gospel one bold, bare, cruel statement stands out in all those darkening scenes namely, "They smote Him on the head with a reed and did spit upon Him." Matthew tells us, "They did spit in His face and buffeted Him." Shudder-

ingly shall we pass from the sight of that face befouled with spit, but as we pass may we never forget that His face was stained with spit for us. With tears and blood too for us.

I IV. A SMITTEN FACE

Matthew tells us "Others smote Him with the palms of their hands." Luke says, "And the men that held Jesus mocked Him and smote Him, and when they had blindfolded Him, they struck Him in the face." John says, "And they smote Him with their hands."

Think of it. Smitten the face where never dwelt the trace of indwelling hate. Beaten with their hard knuckles the face that never for one moment bore traces of sin. Smitten the face where no deceit, no hypocrisy, no insincerity, no dishonesty, no sin, or anything evil ever held reign or rule for one fleeting second. Some of us have forgotten the wounded side where the savage Roman spear drank deep the costly libation of His blood. We have forgotten the hands and feet pierced with the nails and stretched and torn with the weight of the precious body of the Suffering One. We have forgotten what a claim these scars constitute upon every life they have redeemed from death.

V. A SET FACE

"Therefore, have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed." "When the time was come that He should be received up, He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem." This makes us think of:-----

The pioneers who set their faces to the wilds and the wilderness.

Columbus with his face set across an uncharted, unknown, wild and awful ocean.

Judson with his face set toward a heathen land where he suffered valiantly for Christ in foul and filthy prisons.

Livingstone with his face set toward the islands of cannibalism, even when people warned him that the cannibals would make a drinking cup of his skull.

Luther with his face set toward the east when there was no shining of the yet unrisen sun of Liberty.

But none nor all of these means what it meant for Jesus to "Set His face" toward the Cross of Calvary. Jesus came to die for our sins and He would not be turned aside.

Jesus set His face to walk the last foot of the Calvary road, to bleed the last drop of Calvary agony, to suffer the last minute of Calvary pain, to drink the Calvary cup to the last bitter dregs. And He had to be heroic to have and to hold that set face for the road that ran from Bethlehem to Calvary was indeed a rough one.

That blessed love set face is calling us to more heroic living. Our modern religion is so at fault as to matter heroic. It speaks too often in the terms of contentment, of success, of comfort, Jesus never hid the sharp stone nor softened the shadows.

VI. A SCORCHING FACE

This is an aspect of the face of Jesus that we seldom think of. The Jesus of popular thought is a meek and mild-eyed saint who was always saying gracious things and doing gentle deeds. He was a man who spoke with wooing or cooing note and was unwilling to appear stern at any time. The Christ of History as John saw Him is a stranger to them. In popular thinking much is thought of His tenderness, sympathy, joyfulness, and prayerfulness, but little thought of His severity is shown. In popular speech much is said of His sinlessness, sufferings, and forbearance, but little is said of His severity. In popular writing today much is written of His patience, humanity, divinity, wisdom, and power, but few pages about His severity. In popular thought much is thought concerning His loveliness, faith and hopefulness, but little concerning His severity. Many look upon Him as a lamp glowing softly never as a furnace burning fiercely, as a zephyr ever whispering gently, never as lightning flaring furiously, or as a storm in full fury. As a river smoothly flowing, never as a ship hissing wrathfully. As balm sweetly scented, never as acid stringently cleansing. But Jesus was a man of indignation. His eyes flashed. His words burned.

VII. A SHROUDED FACE

What a day was that when Jesus died. If I knew all the languages and had an eloquence that excelled the sweetness of heaven's music, I could not adequately talk about it. But He died. And Joseph of Arimathea, a rich man, went to Governor Pilate and begged the body of Jesus. And Pilate marveling that He was so soon dead gave consent that they should take the body off the cross.

I don't know who pulled the nails out of those cold, icy hands, and from those poor blue-veined feet. Maybe Nicodemus, Joseph, John, Peter. Anyway Christ was taken down from the cross. And they wrapped his dear face in the grave clothes and carried Him out to the rich man's tomb and left Him there, all marred and scarred, where for the first time in thirty three years the cruel world left Him alone. And that night when He slept in the borrowed tomb there was not a man or woman among all those who had ever heard His name who believed He would live again. They thought His shrouded face would be just a banquet for worms. He was dead and no darker night ever shadowed human lives or ever gloomed a world. All witnesses must again take up the petty duties that were theirs from day to day for He whom Mary carried in the womb was now an occupant of the tomb.

VIII. A SEEN FACE

Yes. Here? No not here. For "Here we see through a glass darkly, but THEN face to face". What a thrilling satisfaction to the heart just to see the face of somebody we love. We cherish their photographs when they are absent, and in quiet moments we gaze upon the photograph. They write us letters and how we long for them. In greater hours they communicate by wire or wireless. But when the door opens, and we see the loved one's face, what an exquisite and thrilling satisfaction--and so, says Scripture, shall it be in heaven.

Here we have His photograph and love letters. Here, in the silence and secrecy of the regenerate heart, we often catch His wireless messages. But there we shall see Him as He is, face to face, without a cloud between, and we shall be satisfied when we awake in His likeness. That's enough for us just to look upon the face of Jesus.

Can you imagine yourself in the great throng that will crowd the Father's house, hearing the blessed Saviour ask various ones to tell us face to face the stories of their lives.

Moses will tell us of the forty silent days on Sinai.

Enoch will tell us how He walked into glory with God.

David will tell us the story of the Psalms.

Daniel will tell us of the night in the lion's den.

Paul will tell us all about his conversion.

Later we will hear Judson tell about his work in Burma.

The true and the great will all be there, and we shall see them and hear them at their best.

Like every family reunion, there shall be ONE, however, whose personality shall dominate. What would the gathering of all the saints amount to if he would not be there who went to prepare the place? It would be a palace without a hearth. It would be a tree without foliage; a sky without a sun. We have seen our Saviour in the sacred page; on the artists canvas; in the light of faith. But we want to see him as He is.

The joy of fellowship with our Saviour will not obliterate the joy of fellowship with each other, but each will be real enough to each other, yet entranced by his Lord.

"Friends will be there I have loved long ago,
Joy like a river around me will flow;
Yet, just a smile from my Saviour I know,
Will through the ages be glory to me."