



# Auburn Presbyterian Church

*Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to everyone*

13025 Bell Air Drive, Auburn, CA 95603 (530) 823-3916 apc@auburnpresbyterian.org

## “We Want to See God”

**2 Kings 2:1-12; 2 Corinthians 4:3-6; Mark 9:2-9**

Almost every day, I run into something that makes me scratch my head in wonder. For example, why do they put Braille dots on the keypad of the drive-up ATM? Why are there Interstate Highways in Hawaii? Why do you need a driver's license to buy liquor when you can't drink and drive? If 7-11 is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, why are there locks on the doors? If you're in a vehicle going at the speed of light, what happens when you turn on the headlights? Why do we drive on parkways and park on driveways? Why is it that when you transport something by car, it's called a shipment, but when you transport something by ship, it's called cargo? You know that little indestructible black box that is used on planes? Why can't they make the whole plane out of the same stuff?

And then there's my opinions. Why do other people disagree with me, when what we're talking about seems so obviously true? Take this picture, for example. It's obvious that this is the rear/side profile of an Inuit/Eskimo in a white landscape.

What? You see a Native American with black hair, facing the left of the picture? No, no, no! It's obviously the Eskimo in winter. . . .

See what I mean? OK, this is an optical illusion, but I think you get the point. Two people can look at the same thing, and see it very differently.

I've worked with pre-Christians for more than 35 years. How is it, in an event where a powerful appeal is made to turn away from sin accept Christ, that one person gets it about Jesus and acts on that decision, and the person sitting right next to them is totally unmoved? How do you explain that?



This morning, I want to look into God's Word with you, and find some of the several answers to this kind of question, and what that means for us in our lives and ministries. Let's start with the departure of Elijah, found in Second Kings, chapter 2. In the Hebrew Bible, the books of the Kings follow the books of Samuel the prophet, which follow Joshua and Judges. Find chapter 2, and listen with me for the Word of God TO US TODAY, as I read these words aloud. *[text]*

That's some event for Elisha, and probably for Elijah, too. His master, whom he loved, was gone. In this case, we can truly say, "God took him." Now it would be up to Elisha—the disciple—to take on the mantle of his master, and stand in the gap between God and the Israelites. Elisha must have felt the weight of that, on top of his distress at seeing his master taken away.

Have you ever seen God as vividly as that? Not many of us have. It seems that Elisha, because of his years with his master Elijah had grown very sensitive to God's presence, so that he could see God at work, vivid and clear in a rare moment. Because of his faithful service with God, Elisha was given a vision of God.

Now let's shift to the New Testament. Find Mark's gospel, chapter 9, starting in verse 2. This is the familiar story of the presence of God wrapped around Jesus. Keep your Bibles open, and listen with me for the Voice of God to US. [text]

This event brought Peter, James and John—Jesus' inner circle of disciples—right into the presence of God. These three see Jesus *blazing*, and with the two greatest figures from God's loving history with Israel. Here's Moses, giver of "The Law"; here's Elijah, greatest of "The Prophets". "The Law" and "The Prophets"—these are the two major divisions of the Hebrew Bible—and the three disciples see these heroes are standing with their Master!

It didn't matter that Peter's suggestion made almost no sense; no one was paying attention to him in that moment. He's probably still speaking when a cloud—long a symbol of the presence and guidance of God—rises up and surrounds them in dense fog they cannot see through. And then this voice—who could it be but God?—"This is my son whom I love so much. LISTEN TO HIM." Perhaps you'll remember these same words, back when Jesus was baptized. But now, in the middle of his ministry, God gives Jesus' disciples an additional big shove: *Hey, stupid Galileans—LISTEN TO HIM!*

Mark's gospel is pretty hard on Jesus' disciples. Time and time again, Jesus tells them something, and they don't get it. In John's gospel, chapter 3, we find the famous conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus, a highly-educated teacher of the Law. Read it. Several times, Jesus says something, and Nicodemus consistently misunderstands. It's as though Jesus is on one level, and Nicodemus was on another level, and they talked past each other. So it's not just Jesus' disciples who don't understand. It's just that Jesus' disciples get so many more chances, so many more lessons, so much more time—24/7, for about three years. Mark especially, seems to think they are really dumb. And yet—much of what Jesus says to them is so out of their experience and world view, we shouldn't be too hard on them, any more than we should be hard on Nicodemus. This mountaintop episode today concludes with verse 10, where Jesus tells his 'inner circle' men not to mention this vision until the Son of Man has risen from the dead: "They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what 'rising from the dead' meant." They're just not getting it.

The most amazing example of not getting what is right in front of you is in the last incident in Matthew's gospel, chapter 28, where we find "The Great Commission". Here's verses 16 and 17. "Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. <sup>17</sup> When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted." Excuse me? They had seen Jesus hung out naked in public in pain and total humiliation; they had reports of where his body was buried. They had heard reports of the tomb being empty, when the women went there 'on the third day', and some of the women actually met him, alive and walking and talking and giving directions. Now here Jesus is, himself. "When they saw him, they worshiped him." That part, I get. "But some doubted." Really?

Can you get a grip on this? How is it that true insiders could have any doubt, in the very presence of the Risen Jesus? All I can guess is that they could not imagine such a thing. It must be an illusion—maybe something like the optical illusion we began with this morning; 'it's just

my mind playing tricks on me'. And the end, they KNEW Jesus was dead. "Game over"; Jesus had been defeated. The disciples had fled from their Master and had gone into hiding, lest they, too, get picked up by the Temple police and tortured like their Master. They expected things to cool down, and by the time most of the pilgrims in Jerusalem for the Passover feast had headed off toward their towns and countries where they lived, they could go back home, too. But suddenly, they are confronted with the challenge to doubt their doubts and believe their beliefs, to re-open their hearts to hope. And at the first, some of them could not do it.

Paul, Jesus' most famous follower, put it this way in his Second Letter to the Corinthians, chapter 4: "And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing. The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," [Gen. 1:3] made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." To paraphrase him, Paul says it's God's Enemy who has blinded some people, while God gives His Spirit to lead other people to grab onto Jesus as Savior and Lord.

From what we've encountered this morning, it seems that people have to be READY to see God. (Some of Jesus' own followers were ready to trust their experience with the Risen Lord, and some were not.) Also, it seems to me that people have to have a RELATIONSHIP with God, or want it badly. And the third factor I take from our Scripture tour this morning is, God's Spirit has to ROUSE someone, to bring him or her to see, with unveiled face, Jesus for Who He is, and begin to reflect His glory in their own lives. *Readiness, relationship* with God, and *rousing* by the Holy Spirit.

In the middle of Jesus' ministry, after perhaps two years of preaching, healing, teaching, driving out demons—one day from the crowd two Greek men found one of the Twelve disciples, and asked him to help them see Jesus. When Jesus gets this request, it's a major sign for him that his ministry is bearing fruit beyond just the Jews. And Jesus is ecstatic! Remember John 3:16? "God so loved the world,"—not just the Jewish nation—"that He gave [us]"-- Himself. Symbolized by these two guys from a Greek background, the world is wanting to see Jesus, to see God show up in their lives.

Is that you, too? Are you ready? Will you be willing to detect God when others don't see God at all? Are you ready to be surprised, to have the "optical illusion" FLIP INTO FOCUS? It may not be a big change—it's just a picture. But when you see God, it makes all the difference in how you see everything else.

Are you already part of a relationship with God? Do you talk and listen to God (we call that, "prayer")? Do you LOVE God more than anything else? Jesus said, it's the pure in heart that will see God. (Matthew 5:8)

Are you asking God's Spirit to help you see Jesus, to rouse your senses to a level where God—Who is always working around us—becomes detectable? There's a song I used to lead with my youth group, "Have You Seen Jesus My Lord?" It captures this new way of seeing.

*Have you seen Jesus my Lord? He's here in plain view.*

*Take a look, open your eyes. He'll show it to you. [by John Fischer]*

And the verses point us to—nature (the sunset, the clouds); to the family that knows God; to people helping others with no interest of their own. “Then,” the song says in each verse, “you’ve seen Jesus my Lord.”

Do you want to see God? Look at Jesus! And look for God at work around you. Move toward God—God’s display, God’s self-disclosure, God’s activity into which He is inviting you. Celebrate! And respond!

(Music: *Celebrate Jesus, Celebrate!*)

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on February 22, 2009, by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]