

Who can show us any good?

We live in a world that has been dominated recently by bad or sad news. Economically as a nation, we are struggling with the aftermath of the credit crunch crisis – rising unemployment and national debt, short-time working and businesses going bankrupt, deflationary tendencies, and the erosion of savers' investment income.

I am also writing this newsletter in the week in which personal sadness has struck one of our leading politicians – the death of six-year-old Ivan Cameron, bringing untold grief to his loving parents, David and Samantha Cameron, and their other two children.

So, the question posed by David in Psalm 4.6 is just as relevant to us today as it was to the people of his own generation 3,000 years ago. And so is the answer!

*Many are asking, "Who can show us any good?"
Let the light of your face shine upon us, O LORD.
[Psalm 4.6]*

The Face of Jesus

None of us knows what the face of our Lord Jesus Christ looked like. There were no mobile phones around in his day for people to record an instant digital image of his features. Nor have any paintings or drawings survived from his brief 30 years on earth.

But the Scriptures provide us with several fascinating descriptions of the face of Jesus, and of how it appeared to those who were privileged to set eyes on it.

➤ **It shone with divine glory, Mat 17.2**

Matthew tells us that *Jesus took Peter, James, and John with him and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There he was transfigured before them. His whole appearance changed as the disciples were privileged to catch a glimpse his divine glory; and his face shone like the sun!* What an awesome sight it must have been!

We're used to seeing the sun as a pale, watery disc in the sky, partially obscured by mist or cloud. But Matthew likened the glory of Jesus' face to the midday Mediterranean sun, shining in its full strength.

The Bible tells us that *God lives in unapproachable light* [1 Tim 6.16]. So, when God the Father wanted to reveal to the three chosen disciples something of the true majesty of his Son's deity – *his sheer goodness* - how appropriate that it should be in the form of brilliant brightness, *unrivalled glory!*

It's impossible for any of us to look at the sun with our

naked eyes, without us being blinded by it. Similarly, when John was granted a glimpse of the present glory of Jesus in his risen, exalted and glorified state, *he fell down at his feet as though dead*, not least because *the face of Jesus was like the sun shining in all its brilliance* (Rev 1.16-17). This is how we should imagine Jesus to be *now* – utterly overwhelming in his glorious majesty. Shortly before Jesus went to the cross, he prayed to his Father God in heaven, *Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began* [John 17.5]. John's vision on the island of Patmos assures us that this prayer has been amply answered!

*Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.
He burns with holy fire; with splendour, he is crowned.
How awesome is the sight, our radiant King of light!
Be still, for the glory of the Lord is shining all around.*

➤ **It bowed in awful anguish, Mat 26.29**

In the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus once again took Peter, James, and John to one side. *He began to be sorrowful and troubled*, Matthew tells us. *Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me." Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."* [Matthew 26.37-39]

On the mountaintop, the disciples were shown the goodness of Jesus' unrivalled glory, in his shining face. In the Garden of Gethsemane, they were shown *the goodness of Jesus in his unparalleled love*, in his bowed face. In his very real humanity, Jesus shrank back from the full horrors of the cross awaiting him. To be executed by crucifixion, was to die in one of the most *painful* ways ever devised by human beings, in our barbarity. But for a Jew, it was also a *shameful* thing to be crucified; for in Deuteronomy 21.23, Moses, inspired by God's Spirit, had declared, *"Anyone who is hung on a tree is under God's curse."*

Jesus knew that the cross would mean him suffering God's curse against all human sin – past, present and future; deliberate and unintentional; calculated and inadvertent; sins of thought, motive, words and actions. Jesus knew that as he bore our human sin in his own body, he would be cut off from his Father God in his own spirit and soul - the One with whom he had enjoyed unclouded fellowship from eternity past.

If we ask ourselves the question, *"Why did Jesus go through with the cross? Was it simply out of a sense of dutiful obedience to his Father God?"* – the answer is an emphatic *"No!"* He did it for you and for me: *the*

Son of God ...loved me and gave himself for me, Paul wrote with a sense of amazement, in Galatians 2.20.

*We may not know, we cannot tell, what pains He had to bear;
but we believe it was for us He hung and suffered there.*

Trust is a big issue for many people today. "Who can I really trust?" people ask themselves. "Who will be really good to me - and for me? Is there anyone who will genuinely put my interests before their own?" David's answer to the burning question of his own day and ours (*who can show us any good?*) was to be found in the face of Jesus. As Jesus bowed his face to the ground in prayer, he committed himself to go through with the cross for your sake and for mine.

If the shining face of Jesus on the mountaintop evokes admiration from our hearts, surely his bowed face in the Garden of Gethsemane evokes heartfelt adoration.

Matthew reveals one further fact about the face of Jesus, in his Gospel.

➤ ***It suffered great contempt, Mat 26.67***

As we move from the mountaintop and the garden to the High Priest's house, we find that in this religious place, the religious leaders of the day *spat in the face of Jesus* [Mat 26.27]. It was bad enough for the rough, mocking Roman soldiers to do this [Mat 27.30], but utterly appalling for the religious leaders to do it.

*Bearing shame and scoffing rude,
In my place condemned He stood.*

To spit on someone is to show utter contempt for that person; it's to reject him out of hand. It's to despise him and deliberately humiliate him. Yet, this is what the most religious people of his day did to Jesus, the one who was willing to die for them as their spotless sin-bearer.

So, is there any goodness to be seen in a spat upon face? I believe there is – ***the goodness of unflinching faith***. 1 Peter 2.22-23 tells us that *Christ committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.* Jesus displayed the sheer goodness of unflinching faith in his Father God in the face of the extreme provocation.

➤ ***It reveals God's goodness, 2 Cor 4.6***

Paul reminds us that *God 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* [2 Cor 4.6]. When many in our world are asking themselves the age-old question, *Who can show us any good?* – we know that

the answer lies in the face of Jesus. It's a face of unrivalled glory, unparalleled love, and unflinching faith. It is a face that calls forth from us admiration, adoration, and acclamation.

➤ ***It 's a source of great blessing***

In view of all that we read about the face of Jesus in the New Testament, it's not surprising that the famous Aaronic blessing for the Jews contains a reference to our Lord's face.

*The LORD said to Moses,
"Tell Aaron and his sons, 'This is how you are to
bless the Israelites. Say to them:
The LORD bless you and keep you;
the LORD make his face shine upon you
and be gracious to you;
the LORD turn his face toward you
and give you peace."
So they will put my name on the Israelites,
and I will bless them."
[Numbers 6.22-26]*

➤ ***It 's a face to seek***

When the Bible speaks about us *seeking the Lord's face*, it is encouraging us to discover and enjoy intimate fellowship with a God who longs to bless us!

- *If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves, and pray, and seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land* [2 Chronicles 7.14].
- This is why Psalm 105.4 urges us to *look to the LORD and his strength -seek his face always!*
- And so in Psalm 27.8, David responds by saying, *my heart says of you, "Seek his face!" Your face, LORD, I will seek!*
- And so we will want to say with the psalmists, *May God be gracious to us, and bless us, and make his face shine upon us* [Psalm 67.1]. *Restore us, O God; make your face shine upon us, that we may be saved* [Psalm 80.3,7,19]. *Let your face shine on your servant; save me in your unfailing love* [Psalm 31.16]. *Make your face shine upon your servant and teach me your decrees* [Psalm 119.135].

As Easter approaches, may we be those who seek the Lord's face afresh and enjoy true fellowship with him.

David Hunt