

"SEEK MY FACE"

Advent II

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The Protestant Faith

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Today is Advent Sunday and our thoughts turn to the promise that the Lord Jesus Christ will come in a similar way to his going into heaven. The Christian church has always been characterised by the attitude of expectancy as we wait for the completion of God's purposes of salvation, purposes already magnificently demonstrated by the resurrection of Jesus, and most certainly being brought to their conclusion by God the almighty Creator. Jesus will come in His kingly rule, for all authority has been given to Him. Christians should always have this hope and expectancy of the coming of the Lord very vividly in their consciousness. It characterises the Christian. St. Paul in writing to the Thessalonians reminded them how they had turned from idols to serve the living and true God and to wait for His Son from heaven (1 Thess. 1:9); and in writing to the Philippians (Phil. 3:20) he said that Christians are looking for their Saviour coming from heaven where their hearts and lives already are. And Peter wrote how Christians should be waiting and anticipating that day (2 Peter 3:12); while John in his letter says that that day will bring us face to face with Jesus Who will transform our lives to be like His and in the light of this hope we are to live our present life seeking to please God and to reflect His character (1 John 3:2).

So Advent is a joyful season of hope in which we are to re-orient our lives and direct our thoughts once more to God's purpose in the Lord Jesus Christ. We should base all our actions and hopes and values on the expectancy and the certainty of God's completion of His purposes for us and the world when Christ's kingdom will be established and we will reign with Him for ever and ever.

The last statement in the Bible about human achievement is found in Revelation 22:6, where the bliss of eternity is described in the simple phrase "they shall see God's face". That means we will be in relationship and fellowship with God in a personal way; we will be in His presence, speaking with Him, face to face. This is the final conclusion for humanity, the culmination of the human story which began in Genesis 1 in the Garden of Eden. In any purposeful activity it is the final result which shows what was the purpose of all the activity that went before; so we may

say that God's purpose in creating man and the purpose of the present life that He has given us to live, is that it should culminate in the full fellowship in heaven when we will see God face to face and He will dwell in us and we with Him (Rev. 21 & 22). Since this fellowship with God is the ultimate objective in God giving us life in the first place it should be our objective in the way we live our present day life. We should seek God's face now. In Psalm 27:8 we read "Seek ye my face" and our response is "Thy face, Lord, will I seek". This command is also the greatest privilege; that we should be invited, indeed commanded, to seek the face of God, to seek His presence and fellowship even now while we wait for the coming of Christ with that friendship and fellowship which will be deepened and completed when we shall see Him as He is. It has been God's purpose that His people should seek His face, for those who seek Him will find Him. He reveals Himself to those who seek.

In the Old Testament the whole people of God assembled at Sinai. There, God spoke to them face to face; and later at Jerusalem the whole people of Israel used to meet at stated times to seek God's presence in His temple. For God is related to us not only individually but He is also related to us in the group - where 2 or 3 are met together in His name, Christ has promised to be present and the word 'church' reminds us that we stand in God's heavenly presence in a group, because the word 'church' means a group or gathering. Yet, at the same time, we are individuals and God speaks to us in our inner personality. For the Israelites there was the 'tent of meeting' outside the Israelite camp and "everyone who sought the Lord went out to the tent of meeting" (Exodus 33:7). Those who seek Him will always find Him and this encounter does not leave us as we were before. Fellowship with God through His Spirit transforms. You may remember how this was shown outwardly in the case of Moses - whenever he came from communing with God, his face shone. It is through the Spirit of God that we meet with God, and this was the individual Israelite experience. The Spirit of God and the presence of God are the same. Thus the psalmist prayed: "cast me not from your presence. Take not your Spirit from me (Ps. 51)". In the New Covenant, our knowledge of God has deepened, for God has revealed Himself fully through Jesus, the Son of God, and the Spirit is now given to all God's

people. St. Paul wrote in 2 Cor. 4:6 "God has shone in our hearts to give the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". As we have fellowship with Jesus His glory shines in us; just as the glory of God shone in Moses as the result of speaking with God face to face, so too it is the Christian's experience. In 2 Cor. 3:18 St. Paul applied the passage about Moses to the Christian. As we look into the face of Jesus in fellowship we are transformed into the glory of Christ, that is, Christ's character shines out in us. His Spirit is seen through us and this is the glory of God.

God gives us His glory in that He gives us Himself; His Spirit indwells us and our lives shine through this indwelling Spirit. In John 17 Jesus said that he had given to His disciples the glory that God had given Him and this was fulfilled on the day of Pentecost when the Spirit of God was poured out on all believers.

The Scripture commands us to seek this glory, to seek God's face. Romans 2 reminds us that those who through patience in well-doing seek for glory, will receive eternal life. We seek this glory in Christ who is the glory of God. As we wait for His return we should seek His presence through prayer. We need a regular time for prayer, we should let no day go by without prayer. The same applies to reading of God's Word, we need a regular time and a regular scheme. This is God's command, "seek ye my face" and our reply should be "thy face, Lord, will I seek", seeking Him now as well as looking forward to the day when He will come in the glory of His kingly rule. We should seek Him not only in our private prayer but seek him in the Christian group. We should seek Him in all our natural groupings, in our own home with our spouse, praying together to Him; with our family reading His word together and praying over it; we should seek him in a Christian group drawn from our place of work or from our neighbourhood, and we should seek Him in the local congregation.

What is your reason for going to church? Is it to seek the face of Jesus in anticipation of His return, as Advent reminds us? For if this is your motivation for church-going, then you will seek Him firstly in your own private prayers and then in

your family and in your friendship groupings as well as in the Sunday congregation. The purpose of life and its culmination is to see the face of God, to be in His presence, friendship and fellowship; a present experience and a future fulfilment. Has that got a grip of you? Are you waiting for the Saviour from heaven or are we so absorbed in the ephemeral things of the world and of material possessions that we have forgotten all about it. The command is clear 'seek ye my face' and our reply should be "Thy face, Lord, will I seek".

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