We Can See His Face
John 5:39-47

The simple words of the Lord Jesus as He spoke to the Scribes and the Pharisees in this passage that we'll talk about today are so profound and so revealing, and yet, if we aren't careful, they can pass right by our minds as we read them. Those words in John chapter 5, verse 39 . . .

> 39"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me. (John 5:39)

Folks, I count these and other words like them as being part of that "secret wisdom" that the Holy Spirit spoke about in the words of 1 Corinthians chapter 2. Listen, verse 7 . . .

> 7 . . . we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. 8 None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (1 Corinthians 2:7-8)

Here, in John chapter 5 the Lord Jesus tells us that as we read the words given to us in the Old Testament scriptures, we should be able to see and to recognize that they prophesy and they testify about Him, about the Lord Jesus. And they do. They do!

Those words of the Lord Jesus again . . . John chapter 5, verse 39 . . .

> 39"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me. (John 5:39)

If we are careful to listen, we can hear and know that these words tell us much the same as do those that we read in the Book of Luke chapter 24, where Jesus was walking with the two men on the way to Emmaus. There, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, He (the Lord Jesus) interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself."

Folks, this is so encouraging for me. To know that the Holy Spirit who wrote these words of scripture will give us the "secret wisdom" to easily see the Lord Jesus as He walked within the events that are given to us in the pages of the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. This is precious.

Oh dear friends, we need to know and to understand that our Lord is "timeless". He didn't just arrive here in His birth to Mary. The Lord Jesus is "ever and always". He is eternal, from before time and creation to the eternity after this world is called to a close. He "is". He simply "is".

That's part of the meaning of His Name, "I AM! "I Am" is an "ever-present condition! When He told Moses that His Name was "I AM, He wasn't just giving him a name, He was describing who He was and who He is. He is everything existing within an ever-present now!

And no, you and I will never be able to fathom that meaning, but by faith, we can believe and accept Him as He is.

And again, it was as Jesus told these men, He, the Lord Jesus, is spoken about all through the pages of the Old and the New Testaments. And as we abide in Him, the Holy Spirit will reveal His presence within these words.

Sometimes, some of the words we read speak about Him as the "Angel of the Lord", such as on the occasion when Moses encountered the Burning Bush. But then, other wording clearly reveals that it was actually God Himself who spoke to Moses out of that bush.

And when we read the word "God" in those Old Testament scriptures, we need to always remember that Jesus Himself is God.

And while yes, our finite human minds will often get confused as we try to fathom the nature of the Trinity, we need to always remember that God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit, are always "One" and in full agreement and in full participation with each other in the things they say and the things they do.

With that being said though, it seems that as we study all the many Old and New Testament scriptures, we clearly see that it is the Son, the Third Person of the Trinity, the Lord Jesus who is most always at the forefront of all that has taken place on this earth.

In John chapter 1 and in Colossians chapter 1, we are told clearly that it was the Lord Jesus who created everything on the earth.

2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. (John 1:2)

And we are told in Hebrews chapter 1 that the Lord Jesus also holds everything on the earth together.
3 He upholds the universe by the word of his power. (Hebrews 1:3)

Everything that takes place on the earth is under His care, command and control. It is as Romans chapter 11 tells us, "For from him and through him and to him are all things".

And now, these words of today's passage given in John chapter 5, verse 39 where Jesus said to the Scribes and the Pharisees,
39"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me. (John 5:39)

One of my favorite glimpses into the mind of God and His "secret wisdom" involves the accounts given to us about Moses and the struggles Moses encountered as he led the people of Israel toward the Promised Land. The people were often especially rebellious.

On one of those occasions God was angry with His people almost to the point of letting them die there in the desert. The original stone tablets with the Ten Commandments on them had been broken and the journey towards the Promised Land seemed to be at an impasse.

But Moses, "the humblest man on the face of the earth" once again interceded for the people pleading for God's mercy.

And it was on that occasion that Moses asked God if he could see His face. For some reason that is important to our human form of understanding. We all would like to see the Face of God. And yes, God did that for us when the Lord Jesus came to live among us.

But dear friends, while the "face" that we might imagine being able to see on the human body of the Lord Jesus might have helped us in some way, that "face" was not the "Face" that God wanted Moses to see.

The mysterious truth that I have realized was taking place within this occasion was that while Moses was crying out to God for God to allow him to see His Face, God was already doing exactly that. Moses wanted to see the "physical face" of God. But God did not and does not have a "physical face" for Moses or for us to see.

The only way that Moses or anyone else would be able to truly see God's Face would be to see it within the testimony of "Who He Is. "God's "Face" is His "Holy, Righteous and Loving Nature", His "Holy, Righteous and Loving Attributes", His Virtuous Character, and the "loving Covenant" that He has made with His children, the Ten Commandments that He graciously gave to provide guidance and direction to them. And even then, to see this "Face of God", a person would have to have "eyes to see", the kind of "eyes to see" that only the Lord Jesus could give to them.

Oh dear Christian, do you understand what I am saying. The "Face of God" can only be seen by our looking at "who He is". His loving nature, His character, His attributes are "Who God Is" and that is how you and I will be able to "see His Face", by our seeing "His Face" as the Holy Spirit reveals "His Face" to us within the words of these scriptures.

May I say this again, perhaps a little differently . . . God showed Moses His Face in the next following verses of these scriptures here in the Book of Exodus, by describing Himself in the words . . .

> The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, **7** keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." (Exodus 34:6-7)

This is the true "Face of God!" And then, in the next few following verses of scripture, God also revealed His "Face" within the precious words of the Ten Commandments. And then following that, God proceeded to reveal "His Face" in all of the "Laws and the Prophets".

And praise be to God dear Christian, He didn't stop there. When Jesus then came to the earth, He made the "Face of God" so plain and clear. But not in

the "physical" face that Jesus bore, but within the humble character and righteous attributes that so obviously filled His Person.

And as Jesus said to the men of His day, "when you have seen me, when you have seen the "I AM" of who I am, you have seen the Face of God.

"I and the Father are One". And when you have seen Me, you have seen His Face and when you have seen His Face, you have seen me.

Again, don't you love the way God reveals some of His "secret wisdom" to us. Moses wanted to see the Face of God, and God revealed His Face through His loving attributes and His eternal covenant with us. And then, He revealed His Face in the Person of the Lord Jesus.

Isn't this a precious truth that's being revealed to us here in these words. You and I can know what our God looks like. All we have to do is open these scriptures. And Just as Jesus said, all of these scriptures, the Old and the New Testaments, they all testify, they all reveal the Face of God. And when we have seen Jesus, we have seen the Father.

Let's pause here for a few moments and again read the passage of scripture that we're studying today. And as we do, may I ask that you and I allow our minds to go on further passed just the literal words that Jesus was speaking to these religious leaders and to understand that there is a deeper truth residing within these words. A truth that these learned men were failing to grasp, but one that you and I surely can know if we will only allow God's Holy Spirit to help us.

Listen! This is John chapter 5 beginning in verse 39,

> 39 "You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have
> eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, 40 yet you refuse to
> come to me that you may have life. 41 I do not receive glory from people.
> 42 But I know that you do not have the love of God within you. 43 I have
> come in my Father's name, and you do not receive me. If another comes
> in his own name, you will receive him. 44 How can you believe, when you
> receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes
> from the only God? 45 Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father.
> There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope.
> 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe me; for he wrote of me.

47 But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"
(John 5:39-47)

One of the most difficult aspects of prophecy in the scriptures is that it is almost always veiled. Its secrets are cleverly hidden within all the other many words of scripture, so that unbelieving eyes and ears can't perceive its meaning.

We don't know why God does it that way, we just know that it is done by His intentional design.

Intellectual minds like those of the Jewish leaders that Jesus was addressing that day were able to read the scriptures and find many important historical and practical truths and applications within them.

And to the degree that their intellectual minds were able to go on further and rightly reapply the truths that they've learned, they would be blessed from having done them. But the blessings they received would only be temporary.

It's one of those strange and wonderful truths about the word of God, that even the ungodly can be blessed from having followed Godly principles. But if a person chooses to remain at the level of intellectual pursuit and they go no further, then the blessings stop at that level and never make it on into the eternal realm.

Jesus was telling these Jewish leaders that the scriptures they were reading contained far more than their intellectual pursuits would gain them.

Jesus was telling them that there were secrets hidden deeply within the words of Moses that could not be perceived with the human mind, with rational thought, words that spoke directly about Him.

These men's eyes could see the words and their ears could hear them, but their hearts and their minds couldn't comprehend them.

You might recall that Jesus often used the expression, "eyes to see and ears to hear". He would say, "He who has ears to hear, let him hear".

Some of those Jewish leaders did have eyes to see and ears to hear. Some did turn and follow Jesus. But most of them did not. It is one of those mysteries that God presents to us.

As I think about those men and the mystery of why some people come to Jesus but others do not, I recall the words of John chapter 6 where Jesus said,

> "I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst. 36 But I said to you that you have seen me and yet do not believe. 37 All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out. 38 For I have come down from heaven, not to do my own will but the will of him who sent me. 39 And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me, but raise it up on the last day. 40 For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who looks on the Son and believes in him should have eternal life, and I will raise him up on the last day." (John 6:35-40)

We see this very thing taking place within the lives of so many of the people who sit in our church pews each Sunday. The word of the Lord being given so clearly and so often, with some people hearing it and receiving it. But sadly, others who might be sitting in the pews right next to them hearing the same words but not receiving them. Their eyes "glazing over" and their minds going to a place more comfortable to the inclinations of their hearts.

But thanks be to God, that condition is not always permanent, not for the people of our day and not for the people of Jesus' day.

Our Lord spoke about that in 2 Corinthians chapter 3. There, through the words of the Apostle Paul, speaking about the people of Israel He said.

> 14 . . . their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. 15 Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. (2 Corinthians 3:14-15)

But folks, God does not leave us helpless. And He especially did not leave His people Israel helpless. He will provide a way for them to see Him. In the next verses that follow these, God speaks of His mercy and grace, Listen!

> 16 But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. 17 Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. 18 And we all,

with unveiled faces, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed . . . (2 Corinthians 3:16-18)

And no, as with His people Israel, God does not say that we will not struggle along the way, because we will, we will. Even the most devout of believers will struggle with God's word. But in time, He will make His word plain to us if we remain diligent and if we seek Him with all of our heart.

For some reason, those Jewish leaders confronting Jesus that day had a veil over their eyes and as they read the scriptures, they were unable to see anything that they did not want to see, and they clearly did not want to see Jesus within the scriptures.

But folks, as I listen to these words of the Lord Jesus, I can hear the sound of an "offer" reverberating within them. I can hear Jesus saying in effect, "Go and search the scriptures and if perchance, your heart is right, you will see me in them".

Perhaps I'm stretching these words of the Lord Jesus because I just of my own volition want to hear that "offer" being given within them, and I don't ever want to do that. I really want His words to ever and always remain His and His alone.

But I do hear that "offer" resounding within these words, an "offer" to remove that veil from their eyes if they truly want to see Him.
Listen to these words of Jesus again!

> 39"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me; 40and you are unwilling to come to Me so that you may have life. 46"For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about Me. (John 5:39-46)

May I say all of this again . . . that while these words of the Lord Jesus might have the sound of condemnation within them, Jesus was not doing that. Remember His whole purpose for being there. He said clearly to us in Luke chapter 19 that His whole purpose was one of mercy. He "came to seek and to save those who are lost".

Yes, later in the final resurrection He would sit as "Judge" over all people. But for that moment, His mission was mercy and He was standing there that day in front

of those men as the Savior. And He truly wanted them to open their eyes and their ears and hear His words.

And no, our salvation will not come as those Scribes and Pharisees falsely believed, through the "works" that they would do by reading and knowing and rigorously following the "commandments of the law" being given. No, salvation will come only through faith and through surrender to the Person and to the sacrifice that Jesus would make for us on the cross.

Those men standing before Jesus that day were exceptionally learned men, men of authority and position, men who had spent their lives studying the very words that Jesus was saying that they did not understand.

But with all of their reading and rereading, those learned men were still blind and deaf to the truths of God. As these words of Matthew 13 tell us, "Though seeing, they do not see, though hearing, they do not hear or understand."

They kept right on missing out on words of scripture that spoke specifically about Jesus, the Savior of mankind.

As we close out our time today, I want to repeat some of the things we said a moment ago, because it is so important that we open our eyes and see the Face of our blessed Savior.

And we need to begin with our taking a fresh look at our own souls, and asking ourselves the question, "Do we want to see the Lord Jesus in these scriptures? Do we truly want to see the "Face of God" as we read them?

Our answer really must be yes, yes, we do truly want to see His Face, the Face of God, the Face of the Lord Jesus. And we can, we really can.

We can see His unveiled Face within so many, many of His words given in these scriptures, words like these given here in the Book of Exodus,

> The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, **7** keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation." (Exodus 34:6-7)

And then, in the next few following verses of scripture as He also revealed His "Face" within the precious words of the Ten Commandments. And then following that, He revealed "His Face" clearly in all of the "Laws and the Prophets".

But then oh dear Christian, God especially revealed His "Face" so plainly and clearly when Jesus came among us. He said, "when you have seen me, you have seen the Face of God. "I and the Father are One". When you have seen Me, you have seen His Face and when you have seen His Face, you have seen me.

That is why Jesus said those words of our text today,
39"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; it is these that testify about Me. (John 5:39)

The question again . . . "do you want to see the Face of God"? And the answer again is, "open the pages of your bible and read". Jesus can be clearly seen all throughout those pages, both of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Praise the Lord!

Pray with me.