Hearts Aflame: How to See Jesus in All of Scripture (Part 3)

Introduction

The Text

"They said to each other, 'Did not our hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the Scriptures?'" (Luke 24:32).

What Is the Bible About?

- A. I wonder, if I were to ask you what the Bible is about, what would you say?
 - 1. It's a book about morality—it's a book of rules, of do's and don'ts, things you have to follow if you want to be good person and you want God to like you. It provides a helpful ethic, I suppose, although it's a bit burdensome if we're honest.
 - 2. It's a book of ancient history about people and places far removed from us today. It's valuable for what it is, but it's not all that relevant anymore.
 - 3. It's a book about me—how I can be encouraged and filled up, and how God loves me and all that. I open the Bible because I need the nice little sayings in it to get me through. I have my favorite sections and verses that are particularly uplifting to me and I tend to go back to those often and ignore the stuff that's too bloody or weird or confusing.
- B. Well, if we were to ask Jesus this question—What is the Bible all about?—do you know what he'd say? It's about him. From beginning to end it's all about him.
 - 1. Is it a book about morality, sure, I suppose in one sense it is. Is it a book about ancient history and things? Yeah it is that, but so much more. Is it about the way of fulfillment for people. Absolutely.
 - 2. But the piece at the center that holds all of this together and ensures we understand it rightly is Jesus. The Bible, before it is about anything else, is about Christ and the gospel.
 - a. The moral teachings are properly understood only in light of it.
 - b. The ancient history is recorded only with a view to it.
 - c. We find fulfillment and encouragement only in and through it.
 - i. Jesus and his cross. That's what it's about.
- C. And that's what Jesus is so jealous that these two on the road to Emmaus see, because he knows it will so greatly help them.

- 1. Hence, you remember, back up in vv. 25-27: "25 And he said to them, 'O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! 26 Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?' 27 And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself."
 - a. And, as we read in v. 32, it's in the middle of this Bible study, as it were, that their hearts begin to burn within them.

Every Day + Every Page

- A. Jesus knows that what we need more than anything else every day is to see him and the gospel afresh—that's what will lift our spirits and light a fire in our bones—and that's why God has painted portraits of him and the gospel on every page of our Bibles.
 - 1. You can't miss him!
 - a. And yet, just like these two disciples here, so often we do.
- B. And that's what this little mini-series we've launched off into now is really all about. I want to try to help us with this. So the title: Hearts Aflame: How to See Jesus in All of Scripture.
 - 1. This is now part 3 and you recall we're making our way through a little diagram I created called the Hub Diagram.
 - a. The idea is if Jesus and the gospel aren't at the center of your Christian life, it won't turn.
 - b. And the twelve spokes coming out from this hub really are twelve different ways we can see Jesus and the gospel in the Scriptures as a way of keeping him ever before us.
- C. We've covered the first four to this point . . .
 - 1. Jesus is (1) the Realization of Every Promise; (2) the Fulfillment of Every Prophecy; (3) the Essence of Every Symbol; and (4) the Substance of Every Shadow.
 - 2. And this morning we'll look at two more: Spoke #5: Jesus Is the Apex of Every Attribute; and Spoke #6: Jesus Is the Unveiling of Every Mystery. (I'm skipping over the one about the Epitome of Every Theme for now just because the two we're looking at today dovetail so wonderfully together, as you'll soon see.) So let's go!

Spoke #5: Jesus Is the Apex of Every Attribute

What Is God Like?

A. What is God like? What are his "attributes"?

- 1. There's been much conjecture, obviously, through the ages. Men and women, because we've been created in the image of God for relationship with God, we've always lived with a certain awareness of and curiosity about God.
 - a. Hence, all the various religions of the world—not just the major ones but all the minor variations as well. People are trying to put forward their sense of what God is like.
- B. Now as Christians, we've been convinced (for various reasons I cannot go into here) that the Bible is, in fact, God's self-revelation, his self-disclosure, his communication to us about who he is and what he is like.
 - 1. We don't have to guess. We don't have to hypothesize. He's told us.
- C. Nevertheless, as you read through the OT, you realize there is still much about him that remains a bit fuzzy.
 - 1. One of the old Princeton theologians, B.B. Warfield, would say that the Old Testament is "a chamber richly furnished but dimly [lit]." The light comes streaming in later in Christ and you see all that's there, but initially, it's a bit dim. I love that.
 - a. There's so much in the OT, but it's hard to make it all out at times. Who exactly are you God? What are you like?

Face to Face

- A. One way we might bring this out is to look at the idea of God's face in the OT.
 - 1. To see his face is to see him as he really is. And, in the deepest sense, God, in the OT at least, says that's not going to happen.
- B. You remember the story with Moses and God, nearby the one we looked last week. Moses is with God in the tent of meeting it would seem and he cries out: "Please show me your glory" (Exod. 33:18). That's awesome. He's respectful but, no doubt, full of deep passion and intensity.
 - 1. (Pause and consider: when's the last time you really yearned to see God's glory? Have you ever cried out for fresh vision of who he is? Let's join Moses in this plea even now: "Please show me your glory!")
- C. But how does God respond? It's very interesting. He says, v. 19: "19... I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' ... 20 But, ... you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." 21 And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, 22 and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23 Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen." (vv. 19–23).
 - 1. You can't see his face and live. He's too holy. We're too sinful. It would be disastrous for us. We can't see his face, not because God is against us, but precisely because he is for us.

- D. This is why anytime a person starts to catch sighting of God's glory and things, they cower back, they cover their own face, lest they see his.
 - 1. So even Moses, when God first appears to him in that burning bush, we're told in Exod. 3:6 that he "hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God."
 - 2. Or Elijah in 1 Kings 19:13, when he discerns God's voice in the whisper, we're told that "he wrapped his face in his cloak."
 - 3. Even the angels in the presence of God can barely manage the sight of his glory. So in Isa. 6:1-2, the prophet writes: "1... I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim. Each had six wings: ... with two he covered his feet, ... with two he flew [(and) with two he covered his face)]."
 - a. We cover our faces lest we see his face and perish in the sighting of it.

The Glory of God in the Face of Christ!

- A. So who is God? It's a bit dim. And we don't dare turn up the lights. But then, with the arrival of Jesus, everything changes . . .
 - 1. As John in the opening chapter of his gospel: " ¹⁴ And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth. . . . ¹⁸ No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known" (John 1:14, 18).
 - 2. As the author of Hebrews writes in the opening chapter of his epistle: "He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature" (Heb. 1:3).
 - 3. As Paul the Apostle writes in Col. 1:15, 19: " ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God ¹⁹ [I]n him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell"
 - 4. Or finally, and most profoundly, as Paul puts it in 2 Cor. 4:6: now we see "the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ."
 - a. When we look into the face of Jesus we are looking into the face of God.
- B. Jesus himself would say as much . . .
 - 1. John 12:45: "[W]hoever sees me sees him who sent me."
 - 2. Or John 14:8-9. When Philip says to him "Lord, show us the Father . . ." how does Jesus respond: "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."
- C. I wonder if you ever noticed on the Mount of Transfiguration, this little detail. "And as he was praying, the appearance of his face was altered," Luke tells us (Luke 9:29). And Matthew goes further: "he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun . . ." (Matt. 17:2).
 - 1. What an amazing thing! On this mountain, Peter, James, and John are beholding in Christ what great men like Moses and Elijah had to hide their faces from.

a. And wouldn't you know it, there on this mountain, Moses and Elijah appear as well and they're talking with him, they're looking at him, they're not hiding, they can see. The glory of God in the face of Jesus.

How Can This Be?!

- A. How?! Why aren't all these men instantly consumed the way anyone would be if they ever tried to set foot on the sun or take in its full glory.
 - 1. What an analogy God has given us in the sun. You can't even look at it for a few seconds without frying your retinas. Have you ever tried to view a solar eclipse? They go on and on about eye safety. Unless you have specialty eyewear, it's kind of anticlimactic. You can't even look up there. You see it through a pinhole in a shadow cast on the ground.
 - a. And so too as sinners, we can't look upon God in his white-hot glory, can we? And yet here they are. How?!
- B. Well, recalling that story from Moses we took up at the first, it's because Jesus not only reveals to us the Father, he also shields us from the Father.
 - 1. Moses could only catch a glimpse of God's glory from his place there in the shelter of the rock. Similarly, Elijah could only catch a glimpse of God from his place there in the cave.
 - 2. But Jesus is both our sun and our shelter.
 - a. We can look unflinchingly upon his radiant face only because, as Luke goes on to tell us, "he [has] set his face to go to Jerusalem" (Luke 9:51), where, of course we know, it will be slapped and spit upon by sinful men, where ultimately he will throw himself in between us and God, taking in himself the wrath we deserve.
- C. You remember the sun goes dark at high noon as he's hanging there on the cross.
 - 1. One way to look at that detail is from Christ's perspective. And with that we understand that the sun of God's blessing is going out, as it were. Jesus is being cast into outer darkness.
 - 2. But another way to see it (and I confess this is the first time I've thought of it like this) is from our perspective. And, in this case, we understand that the sun of God's fury is being shaded by Jesus. We are sheltered by him, tucked safely in the cleft or cave of his mercy, as it were.
- D. And he's doing all of this, why?
 - 1. So we can look upon him. So we can know him. So that as the book of Revelation dramatically concludes: "[We] will see his face" forever (Rev. 22:4)!

Hearts Aflame

- A. Now, what this means practically for us is that, when you're reading the OT and you come across some attribute of God, you can know that whatever it is, though it may be a bit dim and hard to fully grasp in the OT, it comes to full light in Jesus.
 - 1. So you trace the line of it to Christ and you get full understanding. The light comes streaming in and you see not only great stuff in the NT, but the rich furnishings of the OT.
- B. Everything we see in God in the OT, the wattage is turned up all the more in Christ. In order to gain proper understanding of it, you must see it through him and the gospel . . .

His Compassion and Kindness

- A. So you get a sense of God's compassion and kindness in the OT from all manner of texts.
- B. But when you trace that line to Jesus, it moves from low resolution to 4k, right? Compassion is put on full display.
 - 1. There he is always standing in the gap for the weak the oppressed; eating with tax collectors and sinners and those the world despises; so gentle he wouldn't dare break a bruised reed or snuff out a smoldering wick; he's ministering to little children; he's feeding the hungry; he's healing the sick; he's raising the dead; he's embracing the leper; he's forgiving the prostitute; he's leaning over to the thief on the cross next to him with concern, with compassion: "Today you'll be with me in paradise."
 - a. You see the compassion of God in Christ for you. And your heart catches fire!

His Justice and Wrath

- A. You know, if I could say, this is true even if you take God's justice and wrath as you see it in the OT.
- B. There's a misunderstanding we can often make, that God in the OT is grumpy and a bit of a jerk, but in the NT with Jesus he shows his softer side, or something. But that isn't true.
 - God is wonderfully compassionate and gracious in the OT. And that's turned up in Jesus in the NT.
 - 2. But just the same, God's justice and wrath aren't set aside by Jesus, it's amplified.
- C. The cross, for one thing, is radical in its message about the holiness of God and his fury against sin. It tells us something more extreme than the OT ever did.
 - 1. Yes, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16).
 - 2. But we could also spin it the other way like this: "God so hates sin that when that sin is placed upon his only beloved son, he feels such a holy fury towards him that he must perish in his wrath."

- D. If sin wasn't such a big deal to God Gethsemane would've gone a lot differently, wouldn't it have?
 - 1. "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:39).
 - 2. But the cup didn't pass from him. Because there it's not possible for us to be saved any other way.
 - a. Yes, this turns up the wattage on the revelation of God's love but it also turns up the wattage on the revelation of his wrath.
- E. And so the book of Revelation tells us, those who reject the covering of Christ and the cross, those who would dare to stand before the face of God on their own two feet, they will be consumed, not just by the God of the OT, per se, but by the Lamb.
 - 1. So we hear the cry of those kings and great men in Rev. 6 calling to the mountains and rocks: "16 Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb, 17 for the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?" (vv. 16–17).
 - a. "We rejected the covering of Christ, now we're like Moses without a cleft, Elijah without a cave. Oh let the mountains crush us before Jesus gets a hold of us."
 - i. You thought the conquest of Canaan in the OT was tough? It was just a picture, a shadow of the judgment to come in Christ.
- F. But, you see, now you discern God's wrath through Christ and the cross.
 - 1. And you realize it's not that he's mean or vindictive. He took the wrath on himself first if we would receive it. He has to do away with evil in the age to come or heaven won't be heaven at all. He's got to make an end of it either in Jesus or in hell.
 - a. So, again, your heart, where it perhaps would have been confused and perhaps troubled by some of these things in the OT, when read in the light of Christ, now it's strangely warmed. You take his wrath seriously, no doubt, but seen through the cross you realize it is a part of the good news for you in Jesus.
- G. Jesus is the apex of every attribute.

Spoke #6: Jesus Is the Unveiling of Every Mystery

A Biblical Whodunnit?

A. Now, what do I mean by "mystery" here? Well, I'll tell you what I don't mean. When I say "mystery" I don't intend for you to think of Agatha Christie or the Hardy Boys or Sherlock Holmes or something like this. We're not talking about mystery in the sense of your favorite detective novel or movie. I like those things. They're fun.

- 1. But that's not what Jesus is unveiling in the OT as we move into the NT. Some sort of whodunnit or whatever.
- B. This is why I decided to put these two spokes together. They're related, as you'll see. But Jesus is unveiling something of the mystery of God—who he is, how he works, what he's planning to do with the world and the cosmos. That sort of thing.

The Secret Things Belong to the Lord

- A. To get at this, there's a text in the OT that seems like a good place to start the discussion: Deut. 29:29. Moses, of course, is addressing the people of Israel there, about to enter the land, and he says this: "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."
 - 1. You notice there are two categories identified by Moses here. The "secret things" and the "things that are revealed." The former belong only to God. The latter to his people.
 - a. And the clear implication is that the only way a secret thing of God's becomes something of ours is through revelation—he has to reveal it, to disclose it, to unveil it. Until then such things remain secret, or a mystery, to us.
- B. The Greek word for mystery [Gk. musterion] only shows up in one place in the Greek OT—Dan. 2.
 - 1. There, if you recall, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar is having these dreams and he doesn't know what they mean. It's a mystery.
 - 2. And none of his own wise men or magicians or sorcerers could decipher it's meaning. So he's furious. And he orders that they all be killed.
 - 3. But Daniel, the Hebrew exile there, we're told that he and his buddies "seek mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery" and that "the mystery was revealed to Daniel in a vision of the night." And, in response, Daniel blesses God as the one who "reveals deep and hidden things; he knows what is in the darkness, and the light dwells with him" (vv. 18, 19, 22).
 - 4. So he rushes in first to the one who was supposed to kill all the other wise men and he intercedes and says: "Do not destroy the wise men of Babylon; bring me in before the king, and I will show the king the interpretation" (v. 24).
 - 5. And so he's brought in and there before Nebuchadnezzar, and he opens boldly with these words: " ²⁷ No wise men, enchanters, magicians, or astrologers can show to the king the mystery that the king has asked, ²⁸ but there is a God in heaven who reveals mysteries" (vv. 27–28).
 - 6. And he proceeds to unveil the matter for him in such a satisfactory way that the king himself concludes at the end: "Truly, your God is God of gods and Lord of kings, and a revealer of mysteries" (v. 47).
- C. So the mystery is unveiled and these men are saved. Well, what is this?
 - 1. It's so many things, but one thing it is for sure is a shadow of Christ! Jesus, as we'll soon see, is the ultimate Revealer of mysteries and Savior of sinners. And Daniel here is just a picture of that, a preparation for the great unveiling coming in Christ.

The Mystery of Christ

- A. When we read the OT, there are many hidden or secret or mysterious things—things that only ultimately come to light in Christ and the gospel.
- B. This begins to be hinted at even in Jesus' own ministry:
 - 1. So Jesus as he's about to reveal the meaning of the parables to his disciples would say: "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God . . ." (Luke 8:10). And he proceeds to explain. He is the revealer of these secrets.
 - 2. Or in Luke 10:21-24, in a manner similar to Daniel we told that he blesses the Lord in the Holy Spirit and says: "21 'I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children; yes, Father, for such was your gracious will. 22 All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows who the Son is except the Father, or who the Father is except the Son and anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him.' 23 Then turning to the disciples he said privately, 'Blessed are the eyes that see what you see! 24 For I tell you that many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, and did not see it, and to hear what you hear, and did not hear it.'"
 - a. Something is shifting with the arrival of Jesus. The curtains are starting to draw back. The "secret things" are becoming "revealed [things]."
- C. This becomes all the more evident in the teaching of the Apostles, especially that of Paul:
 - 1. So in Rom. 16:25-26, he says that his "25 gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ [is] according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages 26 but has now been disclosed."
 - 2. In 1 Cor. 2:7, he says that he and his fellow ministers of the gospel "impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glory."
 - 3. The essence of it, he says, is "Christ and him crucified" (v. 2) and eyes are opened to it only "through the Spirit" (v. 10).
 - 4. And he goes in 4:1 to say that they are "servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."
 - 5. In Eph. he says that God in the gospel has made "known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ" (1:9).
 - 6. He elaborates further in 3:7-11, saying: " ⁷ Of this gospel I was made a minister according to the gift of God's grace, which was given me by the working of his power. ⁸ To me, though I am the very least of all the saints, this grace was given, to preach to the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, ⁹ and to bring to light for everyone what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God, who created all things, ¹⁰ so that through the church the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places. ¹¹ This was according to the eternal purpose that he has realized in Christ Jesus our Lord."
 - 7. Back up in 3:3 he refers to all this as the "mystery of Christ."

- 8. And later in 6:19 he refers to it as the "mystery of the gospel."
- 9. Then in Col. 1:25-26, Paul writes that "the mystery hidden for ages and generations [has now been] revealed to his saints" in Jesus and he's been appointed a steward of such things.
- 10. And then in Col. 2:2-3 he expresses his great desire that the believers there "²... reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ, ³ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."
- D. This is why, by the way, when Peter is talking about what's been unveiled to us in Jesus and the gospel, he says we see here, "things into which angels long to look" (1 Pet. 1:12).
 - 1. What a stunning statement! It's not altogether unlike what Paul just said back in Eph. 3:10 about how it is "through the church [that] the manifold wisdom of God [is] now [being] made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly places." He's talking about angels and things and how God's plan in the gospel, mediated now in and through us, is being made known to the cosmos, even the angelic beings. What a thought!
 - a. You hear the gospel concerning Christ and him crucified and you yawn, perhaps, because you've heard it a thousand times before.
 - b. The angels hear it and they rush to the edge of heaven as it were that they might peer down and get yet a better view of it. They long to look into it. Because the great mysteries of God and his plan for the cosmos are unveiled in it.
- E. The "secret things" are becoming "revealed [things]" through Jesus and the gospel!

Hearts Aflame

- A. So much of the OT seems incomplete and doesn't make sense until you read it towards Jesus and see it in light of the cross. It's only then that the pieces start to come together.
- B. I thought at this point, it would be best to read you something recounted by Tim Keller in his book on preaching: "Ray Dillard [a brilliant OT scholar] . . . once told me personally that one of the main questions constantly raised by the historical books, from Judges through 2 Chronicles, has to do with the nature of the covenant. The covenant is 'I will take you as my own people , and I will be your God' (Exodus 6:7). The question is this: In light of the constant failures of the people to live up to their covenant promises to serve God, is the covenant conditional or unconditional? Will God say that it is conditional? ('Because you broke the covenant, I will cut you off, curse you, and abandon you forever.') Or will he say that is unconditional? ('Though you have rejected me, I will never wholly abandon you, but I will remain with you.') Which is it? Ray said that anyone reading the Old Testament closely will find that sometimes God seems to be saying it is conditional, while other times he seems to be assuring the people that it is unconditional. This mystery is one of the main tensions that drive the dramatic action. Since his people have forsaken him, will he forsake them?

There seems to be no simple answer that will not compromise something we know of God. Will his holiness give way to his love, so that he overlooks sin? Or will his love be overwhelmed by his holiness and justice, so that the divine hammer falls? Either way it seems he is not as truly loving or as truly holy as he otherwise reveals himself to be. See the plot tension in the story? [Or we might say: 'See the mystery here?']

And then Jesus comes, and as we see him crying, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' we realize the answer. Is the covenant between God and his people conditional or unconditional? Yes. Yes. Jesus came and fulfilled the conditions so God could love us unconditionally."

He then concludes: "All the seemingly loose threads and contradictory claims of the rest of the Bible come together in Jesus" (Preaching, 71-73). He is the unveiling of every mystery.

- C. You get what he's saying here, right? You can read the OT sometimes and come away thinking God is a bit schizophrenic. Which God are you going to get on one day or the next? You never know. He could comfort you in his grace or consume you in his wrath.
 - 1. Approaching him might something akin to playing a game of Russian roulette. You spin and pull . . . and hope for the best.
 - a. So it might seem, until you see God as revealed in Jesus. Then, as Keller says, it all comes together. And you realize, he gets the wrath so that I get the grace. God doesn't compromise who he is to save me. He upholds both at the cross in magnificent fashion!
- D. Have you ever read the OT and come away scratching your head thinking: "Well, that's confusing. That's a bit hidden from my understanding. That's a mystery."
 - 1. Might I encourage you to do a couple of things with that in view of what we've seen here.
 - a. First, pray for God to show mercy and help you understand, for the mysteries of God are only spiritually discerned and we rely on his gracious will to reveal them to us, we can't merely think our way into the deep things of God.
 - b. But second, consider the matter through the lens of Christ, his cross, and the gospel. For God says that all mysteries are ultimately unveiled there.
 - i. You'll find by the Spirit, in the gospel, that all manner of biblical knots come untied and begin to make a bit more sense.
- E. But let me also say this, and here's where we'll end. Sometimes it's not just the OT that seems mysterious, right? Sometimes our lives feel like a jigsaw puzzle we just can't put together, a door we just can't get open. We get lost and confused and turned around.
 - 1. Well, let me tell you: Jesus doesn't just unlock the mysteries of the Bible, he also unlocks the mysteries of life—what it's about; how to find lasting joy and satisfaction; where we came from; where we're headed; why life is hard; how to get it right; and so forth.
 - a. This is essentially what Jesus means when he says: "whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 10:39; 16:25).
- F. Anyone feel lost and confused amid the complexities of this life? Here's the final exhortation, come to Jesus. He doesn't just hold the key that opens that door. He is the key that opens it.
 - 1. He is the unveiling of every mystery.