

Experiencing God - Seeing God's Work

John 5: 15-24
Ephesians 1: 15-23

PREPARED BY
KEN GEHRELS
PASTOR
CALVIN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF OTTAWA
ONTARIO, CANADA

Brothers and sisters in Christ,

Henry Blackaby, in his teaching material entitled *Experiencing God*, suggests that there are seven statements which can be applied as basic truths of Christian living. They are:

1. God is always at work around you.
2. God pursues a continuing love relationship with you that is real and personal.
3. God invites you to become involved with Him in His work.
4. God speaks by the Holy Spirit in various ways.
5. God's invitation into your life often leads to a crisis of belief requiring faith and action.
6. God's invitation often calls for major adjustments in our life that we may join in His work.
7. God is known by us, experientially, as we obey Him and He does His work through us.

I'd like to invite you to join me in reflecting on these statements over the next seven weeks. Beginning with that first one -

God is always at work around you.

Can you see that?

Do you believe it?

Sometimes it's very hard to believe that.

It was very hard for the long time paralytic by Bethzada's poolside to believe it.

I'm sure you can appreciate that difficulty.

He was, for one, in a rather dismal place.

This pool was at a lower level of the city, down under the temple area. The helpless of society lay there. Pain, poverty and disease filled the place. Proper people avoided it - a. because it was uncomfortable, and b. there was a significant likelihood that going there would cause you to violate one of the ritual purity laws.

Jesus, however, does **NOT** avoid this place. He walks right in. And in that setting Jesus encounters the lonely paralytic. Can you imagine 38 years all by yourself in this dark place? I've visited people stuck in a hospital bed for months. A terribly frustrating, disheartening experience. Can't imagine how they make it through - except for the grace of God. That's months.

- Here it has been **thirty eight years!!**

Wonder what would have gone through his mind -

Perhaps the same question that many media outlets have been circulating in the wake of the Asian tsunami: *Where is God? How can He let this happen? Couldn't He do something?*

It's the question of the disheartened soul.

It's the cry of one who feels abandoned and alone.

God, don't you see?

God, don't you care?

Interestingly enough, Deuteronomy 2:14 tells us that the nation of Israel also spent 38 years wandering in the desert between Kadesh to the brook Zared. And during their 38 years in the desert, they **TOO** experienced many occasions of flinging up questions of hopeless despair -

God, don't you see?

God, don't you care?

Well, the paralytic wasn't even asking that any more. He had given up.

No God.

No action.

No hope.

He quit.

Till that day.

That amazing day.

That unexpected, unforgettable day when God's power changed everything.

Apparently, the paralytic is not the only one who didn't expect God's power to show up. Neither did the authorities. All they see is some fellow carrying around a bed roll, which was against their Mishnaic code that they had developed to support their understanding of God's principle of Sabbath rest given in Exodus 31. You could scarcely breath on the Sabbath if you were Jewish. Walking around with a backpack and bedroll was certainly out. No work allowed.

To which Jesus responds in verse 17 -

My Father is still working, and I also am working.

God continues to work positively in creation on the Sabbath - as He does all through the week. He never rests, never ceases from His creative, restoring, redeeming, saving work. As that work continues, the work of His representative on earth, His Son, also continues.

Which really yanks the authorities' chain.

For one they can't abide the breaking of their rules.

For another, they can't abide Jesus linking Himself so closely to God.

Subsequent verses show us that Jesus doesn't quit.

In fact, He ups the ante. Notice verse 19 - one of the twenty-five places in the gospel of John where Jesus uses the phrase "*Very truly I tell you...*" Literally that is, "*Amen, Amen, I tell you...*"

What follows is of great importance, and it is this:

1. Jesus does **nothing** on His own. Rather, He joins in the work of the Father.

The Son can do nothing on His own, but only what He sees the Father doing...

(v.19)

2. The Father, in His love, shows Jesus what He is doing and what He will be doing. He doesn't leave Jesus "out of the loop", so to speak.

The Father loves the Son and shows Him all that He himself is doing... (v.20)

3. The work that the Father does will be reflected and continued in the work that Jesus does.

...just as the Father.... so also the Son.... (v.21)

4. That work is the action of bringing life where there is death

...just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wishes. (v.21)

There's the greatest work of God -

to bring life where death has spoken

where peoples' lives are being destroyed, rebuilding them;

to shatter the chains that Satan uses to hold people captive.

"Watch for that," says Jesus.

Watch for that.

Watch for God being at work.

Watch for that, you former paralytic. Because there is more to come.

Watch for that, you authorities so worried about rules and regulations. Because there is far more yet to come.

Watch for that, worshippers at Calvin Christian Reformed Church.

Watch for the work of God.

Friends, we are in the church season known as *Epiphany*.

Epiphany is a word that means, *sudden appearance or revelation of someone or something*.

It is the season that follows Christmas, the celebration of Christ's birth.

We celebrate the appearance or revelation of Jesus into the world.

Jesus shows up.

He shows up in the world.

He shows up in peoples' lives.

Like He did here in John 5, where he showed up

in the sad, forlorn life of the paralytic

in the safe, rule-directed and static lives of the authorities.

Jesus shows up. Epiphany.

Get this, friends:

When Jesus shows up, it is not merely for some photo op.

He never just shows up in order to be seen.

When Jesus shows up it is to **DO** something.

His presence is **active**, not passive.

He comes as a powerful, working Saviour.

He comes bringing the power of God,

the power that did things far greater, yet, than healing a paralytic;

the power that defeated death.

Do you believe that?

Do you believe that Jesus still comes?

that He comes bringing the work of God the Father
the work that the Father revealed to His holy Son;
the work that the Son carries on for the Father?

Do you believe that Jesus still comes bringing the life-restoring power of God,
the power greater than death -

- that he does an Epiphany into our lives with that power?

Do you believe that?

Do you **expect** that power to be at work?

Do you **watch** to see signs of it within your life;
signs of the active work of God around you?

It is very easy to miss it.

In fact, without the miracle of faith opening our eyes to see it, we will miss the work of God's power. We won't see it.

For all intents we will be like the paralytic and Israel in the desert -

God is gone.

God is silent.

God's off duty.

Yes, it is easy to miss the power of God at work.

Those in the know tell us that we miss most of what goes on around us.

Which makes sense.

We hear talk of information overload - with the flurry of email and internet and cell phones and blackberry devices - we get swamped with information and most of it goes across our desk and pitched; in one ear and out the other; from the mailbox straight to the blue box. We can't absorb it all. Don't even want to.

It's not just with info. There is so much sensory data that comes our way. We never could assimilate it all. With couples in premarital counselling I make use of something called the Myers-Briggs personality inventory. It's a very rough and basic tool to help us understand ourselves. One of the things it does it help us understand what small slice we absorb of all the information and sensory data that streams our way. 'Cause that's all we grasp - a very small slice.

It's very easy, then,

if you're not tuned in

to not notice the active work of God that is going on around and within your life.

It's **very** easy to miss it.

So - question for the morning:

Do **you** see it working in your life?

St. Paul offered a prayer for his friends in the Church of Ephesus. It was a prayer that God would, through the miracle gift of faith, open their minds and hearts to see and appreciate the power of God at work around and within them.

That prayer went like this -

Ephesians 1:15-23 p.192

Paul prays for a spirit of wisdom and revelation to be given to those who have come to know the Lord; who have surrendered their lives to Jesus Christ.

He prays that this Spirit would open their eyes – in other words, tune in their various senses to be able to absorb and appreciate God's power pulsing and working all around them.

What power?

The same power that raised Jesus from the dead.

The life-giving power.

Hey!

That's the same power that made the paralytic walk.

The power - Amen, Amen.... Very truly!! - that flowed through Jesus, who:

1. did nothing on His own;
2. was shown, by the Father, what HE was doing;
3. reflected and continued the work of the Father;
4. brought life where there is death.

May God grant you a Spirit of wisdom and revelation so that you can be tuned in to this power.

That's Paul's prayer.

And friends, that's my prayer for each one of us at Calvin CRC this year.

I hope and pray that you already are in the zone where you can sense and appreciate, from time to time,

perhaps some times in big ways

perhaps some times in little ways

but that you can sense and appreciate the power of God at work around you and in your life.

My hope is that this ability to sense and appreciate that will grow even broader and deeper in 2005.

I hope that happens for me.

I hope that happens for each of you individually.

And

Oh, how I hope and pray that this happens for us as a congregation.

Did you catch the last few words of the prayer?

Tell me,

what does the last verse of Ephesians 1 tell us about who is at the centre of understanding and appreciating and experiencing the flow of God's saving, life-giving power?

which group?

which institution?

What does the Bible tell us?

It's the Church!

Doesn't mean - by NO means should we say - that God never works anywhere else!! Don't leave here thinking that is what the Bible teaches.

What it **DOES** say is that the gathered community of people who believe and surrender to God through Jesus Christ

the family of God

which is what the Church is in all its shapes and forms

is where the experience and perception and understanding and appreciation of God's working power will be centred.

It is,

more than anywhere else in creation

where you and I can come to understand it

learn to recognize it

and

learn to follow in the footsteps of Jesus and work through it.

For:

Just as Jesus was sent by the Father to do His work

SO

You and I are sent by Jesus to continue **his** work.

As the Father has sent me, so now do I send you. (John 20:21)

Meaning that the four principles of Jesus' work, shown to us in John 5, apply equally to us:

1. We do **nothing** on our own. Instead, we join in the work of Jesus.
2. We are shown, by Christ, what He is doing and what He will be doing.
3. The work that Jesus does will be reflected and continued in our work.
4. It will be the work of bringing life where there is death

I will unpack more of that for you in the weeks to come as we continue this series, *Experiencing God*.

For this first week I'd like you simply to go away from here thinking about what the power of God might look like if it showed up in your life;

or in the life of your family;

or in the office or classroom where you work;

or here in this church.

Do you believe God still is active?

That He works in those places?

May I encourage you to think about it?

Watch for it.

You may be amazed at what you see.

