

LifeGroups

GROWING TOGETHER IN THE GOSPEL

Growth Sheet

Encountering God: The Glory of God in the Face of Jesus Christ

2 Corinthians 4:6

Can This Really Happen Today?

Our sermon series has taken us through fifteen episodes of humans' encountering God. Each episode has featured something miraculous—from Abraham's smoking firepot to Moses' burning bush, from Isaiah's exalted vision of Yahweh to Paul's blinding light from heaven.

In light of these ancient and miraculous encounters with God, someone might raise their hand and object: "But these kinds of things happened in antiquated Bible times. Can we really have such life-changing encounters with God *today*?"

Many people would say *no*. Such experiences, they say, are a thing of the past (if they ever happened), and these stories serve only to inspire or amuse us. Others would say *yes*, it is possible. But they hunt for such divine encounters in the extreme fringes of human experience—visions, religious ecstasies, or high pitches of emotional fervor.

The New Testament, however, presents a different answer. Yes, we *can* have such life-changing encounters with God. And we *can* behold God's glory in a way that is no less transformative than the experience of Samuel, Elijah, Peter, or Paul. But we do not expect this to come through visions, voices, or ecstatic experiences.

So how *do* we encounter God today?

The answer is found throughout the New Testament, and is stated clearly in 2 Corinthians 4:6, "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." In other words, the only way for us to have a life-changing encounter with God is through faith in Jesus Christ.

Recall the three themes that have recurred throughout this series—that when people encounter God, they (1) see God for who he is, (2) see themselves for who they are, and (3) receive an offer of God's grace. All three themes converge in view of who Jesus is and what he has done for us.

1. Only in Christ can we see God for who he is.

Apart from Christ, we can never have a right view of God. If God is perfectly righteous, how can he let sin go unpunished? On the other hand, if he lets sin go unpunished, how can he be a perfectly righteous judge? In Christ, we see the solution. He took the penalty of sin *for sinners* so that God's righteous justice and merciful grace are perfectly displayed. As Paul writes, "God put forward [Christ] as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. . . . It was to show his



righteousness at the present time, so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus” (Romans 3:25).

2. Only in Christ can we see ourselves for who we are.

Apart from Christ, we can never have a right view of ourselves. Do we have some good in us that makes us worthy of God’s favor? Or are we so deeply broken that we can never be mended? Again, in Christ, we see the solution. “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8). We are broken beyond even our imagination, but our sin can be forgiven and overcome by his grace. “Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more” (Romans 5:20). Like Isaiah, then, we can move from crying “Woe is me!” to saying, “Here I am!”

3. Only in Christ do we receive the offer of God’s grace.

When God reveals himself as he is, and when we see ourselves for who we are, we also receive an offer of transforming grace. After Paul writes that we can gain “the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ,” he explained that “we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us” (2 Corinthians 4:6-7). Knowing God in this way allows us to endure difficult trials without being cast down, “so that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our bodies” (4:10).

Discussion and Application

1. What do you think typically comes to people’s minds when they think of an “encounter with God?” Why is it important to have a clear understanding—from the Bible—of what it means to “encounter God”?
2. Read Hebrews 1:1-4. Suppose someone thinks they understand who God is, but doesn’t believe that he reveals himself through Jesus Christ (as Hebrews 1:3 teaches). What aspects of God’s nature is that person missing? See also John 1:14-18.
3. Suppose someone knows only about God as a God of justice, but doesn’t understand the mercy shown in Christ’s work on the cross. What kind of attitudes and emotions might that person live with?
4. Read 2 Corinthians 4:4-18. Based on these verses, describe the attitude and mindset of people who have “this treasure in jars of clay” (in other words, who consistently encounter the glory of God as revealed in Christ).
5. Encountering God through Jesus Christ is something that begins at the moment of conversion, but continues throughout our lives. Second Corinthians 3:18 says, “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” What daily practices can we have to remind us of who God is, and what he has done for us in Christ? What are some practical ways we can encourage each other in these things?