

# Revelation

Adapted from a sermon entitled "God, Give Me New Eyes" by Matt Sprenger

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In his book *Living in the Spirit*, he describes going into the Sistine Chapel in Rome, Italy, for the first time. He's never been there before, but he knows the story. He's a bit of an historian so his excitement is palpable. The Sistine Chapel is home to some of the most famous artistry of Michelangelo. The entire chapel is stunning. If you survey the chapel you see artwork covering different aspects of the stories of Creation and the Fall, of the Flood and giant portraits of different prophets heralding the coming of Jesus. Michelangelo painted over 5,000 square feet of frescoes over the course of more than 4 years. That's a painting about the size of the square footage of two typical American homes, but stretched over and around the architecture of the Chapel. For comparison DaVinci's *Mona Lisa*, probably the most widely known painting in the world is just over 4 square feet. It is absolutely incredible. So when Dr. Wood walks in, his expectation is to be completely awestruck. Instead he is completely and profoundly underwhelmed. It's just not that impressive. It's dark and difficult to make out. He really didn't understand why everyone was so excited. Sure, it was a lot of painting, but the colors weren't brilliant. Things were difficult to see.

After leaving and doing some investigation, Dr. Wood came to realize what had happened. Four centuries of time, of touch-ups (by sometimes non-experts), and of burning candles in the chapel had obstructed and layered over the original.

I wonder what it would have been like for Michelangelo to walk in 4 centuries later beside Dr. Wood in his tour group. You can picture him explaining and describing details. You can see him talking about having built a framework of scaffolding so mass could still be held while he and his crew painted. I wonder what his response would have been? I wonder what he would have tried to say to Dr. Wood? I wonder what he would have wanted to be done? I wonder how much he would have lamented what Dr. Wood could not see.

It took a lot of work, but the Sistine Chapel has been restored. Michelangelo's original work can be seen again. The layers of smoke and touch-up paint have been removed.

I didn't grow up as a Christian, but somehow I still developed a portrait of Jesus in my head - what He looked like (long flowing hair, well-manicured beard and skin, blond hair, blue eyes) and what He acted like (tender teacher, gentle with all, meek and mild). After serving the Lord for 22 years and being in full-time ministry for the last 8 I still find that God is helping me to realize where the picture is incomplete, where it has been layered over by my misconceptions, by outside sources, by the effects of others, and by the "touch-ups" people have been compelled to make on Jesus. So, when I read the Bible I find it is awe-inspiring, convicting and humbling to have Jesus reveal something about Himself that I did not realize or know. C.S. Lewis said that "God is the great iconoclast." The images we paint of Him in our heads, when not representing reality, He loves to shatter. Lewis says in his book *A Grief Observed*, "*My idea of God is not a divine idea. It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it himself. He is the great iconoclast. Could we not almost say that this shattering is one of the marks of his presence?*"

On this same note, something that C.S. Lewis would pray to begin a prayer was, "God, would the real me, pray to the real You."

Isn't this the case of all of us? Don't we want to really know God as He really is? Don't we want to see Him as He is? We don't want a false picture in our heads of God's nature or character. We don't want to perceive Him differently from He is, because that affects everything about us. We need God the Iconoclast to strike and shatter our wrong images of Him. God, give us new eyes. God, give me new eyes.

Just 3 days prior to Easter morning, Jesus celebrated the Passover with His disciples for the last time, painting a deeper picture of who He was. He washed their feet, he taught them of love, He explained the coming of the Holy Spirit, He prays the longest recorded prayer we have of Him in the Bible. He invited them to worship and then to pray in Gethsemane. And then all hell breaks loose. One of the 12 comes and betrays Jesus. Judas calls Him, "Rabbi", and betrays Him with a kiss. Jesus is arrested. Everyone flees. Peter, who made his bold statement of willingness to die with Jesus, that every other disciple echoed, denies Jesus 3 times, cursing himself as the last denial comes out and he makes eye contact with Jesus.

He is rushed from kangaroo court to kangaroo court. People falsely accused Him and condemned Him with their votes and their words. He eventually was carried away to the Roman ruler Pilate. There He is condemned by many of the same people that hailed Him as a king just days earlier when He rode into Jerusalem on a donkey. "Crucify Him!" they yelled. The soldiers mocked and beat Him. He was spat upon. A crown of thorns was cruelly and viciously shoved down onto His head. He was jeered by the Jewish leaders. He was flogged and whipped and scourged, and, really, it should have killed Him. The soldiers mock-worshipped and honored Him; they put a kingly robe on Him as they made fun of Him. He was made to carry His own Cross as His chosen people, the Jews, stood by.

He's taken outside the city of Jerusalem to be executed, because scum isn't killed inside the holy city. Nails are driven into His hands and feet. Pilate's sign laughs at Him, "King of the Jews", letting everyone know that this is how Rome treats Jewish kings. The mocking and jeering continues. Isaiah prophesied and painted the picture so clearly:

"He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by mankind, a man of suffering, and familiar with pain. Like one from whom people hide their faces he was despised, and we held him in low esteem." (Isaiah 53:2b,3 NIV)

People hide their faces when they don't want to see reality...when they don't want to see truth.

Even the criminals crucified on either side of Jesus join in. Matthew 27:44 records, "In the same way the rebels who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him."

And unseen to every person is that every one of their sins is laid on His back. Everything that everyone has done to Jesus and said to Jesus and said about Jesus covers Jesus now and, in many ways, obscures who He really is and what He is really doing. It's like the blood and sweat and thorns and words are layers of paint and smoke hiding the true Jesus beneath. Layer upon layer of their words and actions and sin, the junk flung upon Him, paint brushstroke and brushstroke and brushstroke over the Masterpiece. How can anyone have eyes to see Him?

Jesus is up there covered in blood and wounds and a crown of thorns with nails through his

hands and feet just like these criminals and somehow, some way, in the midst of all of this...revelation - God whispers to an unlikely & undeserving soul...Luke 23:39-43 tells us: One of the criminals who hung there hurled insults at him: "Aren't you the Messiah? Save yourself and us!" But the other criminal rebuked him. "Don't you fear God," he said, "since you are under the same sentence? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise."

Think about what just happened. Think about what is going on! Don't let familiarity with this event cloud and paint over the reality of what has happened. We can't turn our heads like Isaiah prophesied! This man who minutes or hours before heaped insults on Jesus makes a complete 180. Think about what He is doing and saying. He is looking at a man beaten beyond recognition. "There is nothing in his appearance that we should desire him." And what does he say? "Remember me when you come into your kingdom." What kingdom? Jesus is nailed to a cross and dying. He has been executed by the greatest authorities of the day - both religious and civil. Everyone who had a say had painted him as a liar against God, as a blasphemer, as worthless. What kingdom does a dying criminal have? How in the world did the thief's words and heart change so dramatically?

The great iconoclast struck and God gave that one thief new eyes. It's like God cleaned off every layer of paint and every smudge mark of smoke from Jesus for the sake of this thief. God revealed the nature of His Son to this thief. We have no idea what this thief understood other than that, "This guy is a King and I should be in His kingdom." Who takes credit for this? Who puts this thief in their trophy case? No one, except God Himself. This is direct revelation from God into this poor man's heart.

At one point in the Gospels Jesus asked the disciples a question. It's a profound question that all of us need to answer. Jesus asked simply, "Who do people say I am?" They responded and told Him. Then He asked them, "Who do you say that I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ (the Anointed One of God that has come to save us), the Son of the Living God." Jesus responded to Him saying, "No man revealed this to you (dude, you're not that smart), but God the Father did."

Oh, God, would I have new eyes? Do you long for God to give you new eyes?

We are thieves that too often by our actions and, at times, by our words, betray this King. May God give us new eyes. May God bring a revelation of Himself to you that no person can take credit for.

It's astounding that as Jesus suffers for all humanity for all time (for us) on the Cross, He takes time to open the eyes of someone lost and blind. Whose view should be more obscured than an evil man whose death is imminent and moments before is cursing the king? This is insane. That is the hope of the Gospel. That is the power of the Cross. That is the beauty of our Lord. He is minutes from dying. He is moments from crying out to the Father, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Father, I can't see you, or feel you - their sin is in the way." This is imminent, but He has time for another. No one - I don't care who you are - is out of the reach of the revelation of God about His Son, Jesus. God, give me new eyes.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. Why is it important that we have a clear view of Jesus? What are the consequences of

having a smudged picture?

2. What layers of paint and smudges of smoke obscure our view of Jesus? What misperceptions of His nature and His character are you holding onto that limit your right view of Jesus? What are you not willing to see? What do you need to know?

3. Or even scarier, what do I paint on top of Jesus that obscures the right view of someone else who desperately needs to see Him?

4. What is it about your idea of God that is not a divine idea? "It has to be shattered time after time. He shatters it himself. He is the great iconoclast. Could we not almost say that this shattering is one of the marks of his presence?"

**Points of Prayer:**

1. Invite Jesus to reveal Himself to you, to wipe the layers of smoke, and smudge and paint and to see Him truly as His Word declares. Ask Jesus for new eyes. Once you do, there will probably be a step to take or a statement to make, do it or make it. Share it with someone.

2. What would happen to our Life Group, to our fellowship, to our families, and our friends, and our campus if we had eyes that really see and hearts that were willing to say to this King, "I'm all in for you, even when I don't understand everything. I see you Jesus and I'm all in." Who is it that you know needs new eyes? Who do you find yourself wanting to pray for? Pray for them.