

**Sermon—II Corinthians, 4:6**  
**“The Face of Jesus Christ” (slightly modified from the original)**

This sermon was found in the archives of Christ Presbyterian Church (Canton, OH) and is believed to have been written by Rev. O.B. Milligan, pastor 1895-1907. It was transcribed by Dr. Sarah Pozderac-Chenevey and then modified slightly from the original and preached by Rev. Michael Wallace on June 6, 2021.

In almost every home is a collection of portraits representing the friends and companions of the various members of the family. These are always highly prized by their owners. Some of these portraits look down upon us from the walls, others grace the mantle, while the large majority are safely preserved in the family album. The custom of collecting and preserving the photographs of friends and dear ones is prompted by love and respect... We love to exhibit them and delight in talking of those whose faces are so familiar to us.

Nor are these portraits uninteresting to those who may be unacquainted with their originals. Faces reveal character, and we all love to contemplate character, hence the study of the pictures of those with whom we are not even acquainted may be, and is both entertaining and profitable.

The House of God is not without its Album. The Bible has preserved for our observation and study many different faces. It is true, some of these cannot be claimed as friends of the household of faith, but all have, to some extent, been instrumental in shaping the destiny of the Church, and, in proportion as their influence has been exerted, for the weal or woe of the Church, they excite our admiration and love, or awaken in us feelings of contempt and execration. Each face however, in the Sacred Album has been, by divine authority, assigned to its place in the world's most famous Gallery. Each is of importance to afford us opportunity to study character in all its phases. Each serves a gracious purpose either as a warning or as an example.

Not infrequently we find on the same page grouped together faces that are remarkable in the contrast which they present. Some are kind, gentle and loving, others are stern, harsh and cruel. Turning hastily the pages of this Album we see prominent among the portraits which we do not admire the face of **Cain**, the fratricide; of **Esau**, the disappointed and revengeful brother; of **Saul**, the ambitious and jealous king; of **Absalom**, the unnatural son; of **Jezebel**, the crafty and inhuman queen; and of **Balaam**, the irresolute prophet.

However, in bold contrast with these, appear the faces of those we know only to admire and love. Here is **Miriam**, the watchful sister, and **Moses**, the faithful statesman and leader. Here is **Hannah** the devoted and praying mother. **Jephthah**, the zealous patriot. **Deborah**, the courageous prophetess. **Esther** the noble queen, and **Job**, the patient sufferer. Time would fail me to single out the noble judges and warriors, kings and prophets whose portraits have been traced indelibly on the pages

of this Album of Life. Here we might profitably linger for awhile and study this galaxy until an immortal image of each had been impressed upon the mind.

...But among these [faces], and, in fact, the center of this great group of worthies we now behold, is one far more attractive than all the rest, and to it we are especially drawn. It is a face of wondrous character, and of intense power. A face, sad yet beautiful, strongly marked with the characteristics of determination and courage, but relieved by the sublime expressions of tenderness and sympathy. A face human in contours yet outrivaling humanity by the untarnished image of Divinity that reveals the personality of the Son of Man, the Son of God. None can fail to recognize that face. None, who once looks upon it thoughtfully, can ever forget it. It is the face of Jesus Christ.

Many are the portraits of this face to be found in the Divine Album, all of which are deserving of our most earnest and reverent study. However, I can only ... select a few that bring out prominently the leading characteristics of that face which it will be the delight of every redeemed soul to gaze upon with earnestness, and to search into with reverence throughout eternity.

#### I. The first portrait presents a face compassionate and tear stained.

We search the gallery in vain for a likeness of Christ in His infancy and youth. Aside from the statement of His birth, His circumcision when 8 days old, at which time **Simeon** rejoiced over Him and **Anna** the Prophetess blessed Him, and the brief glimpse we have of the boy in the Temple at 12 years of age, astonishing the learned Jewish Doctors of the Law with His questions and answers, we know absolutely nothing of the life and character of Jesus, save the statement recorded in **Luke's** Gospel that "He increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man."

The first view presented to us of the face of Jesus Christ was taken at the instant of His entrance upon His public work. He is, for the moment, attending upon the ministry of **John**, who was preaching and baptizing on the banks of the river Jordan. Unattended by any one, He mingles with the multitude that throng about John... But He cannot long remain unrecognized. That kindly compassionate face attracts the eye of John. He stops in the midst of his work. His face lights up with joy... And as their eyes meet, John, inspired by the tenderness and sympathy of that face, is constrained to introduce Him as the "Lamb of God." Meek, gentle, easy to be entreated. The tender compassion beaming from the face of Jesus Christ is a characteristic too prominent to be overlooked; too deeply marked to ever be effaced. In the presence of unrepentant sinners, of fierce and cruel opponents, of proud and self-righteous Pharisees, it may for a moment be overshadowed by the expression of sternness which accompanies His rebuke because of the hardness of heart and unbelief of those who beheld His mighty works, but it never wholly disappeared. And with the darker shadows for a background, Christ's compassion beams forth the more brightly as His eyes turn toward the sin-confessing Publican, the poor, the afflicted,

and the sorrowing. Moreover it is the same characteristic, though greatly intensified, that we discern in the face of Jesus as we behold Him weeping as He approaches the grave of Lazarus.

Brethren, look upon this face! Have you trials and sorrows, cares and troubles? Do you seek a friend who will truly sympathize with you, and help you to bear your burdens? The compassionate, tear-stained face of Jesus will draw you to Him, will assure you a welcome, will not fail to afford you comfort and relief.

## II. Again we have a portrait of the face firm and resolute.

The first characteristic of the face already considered—its divine compassion—was the most familiar during the months and years of Christ’s earthly ministry, but the remaining presented in our Album were all taken during the closing events of His life. No one acquainted with Christ, and familiar with the various events occurring around Him, can, for a moment, imagine that His face during all that time was without other characteristics than that of tenderness. When meekness could be shown He showed it; but when the circumstances demanded He was as stern as commonly He was gentle. The expression of face we are now considering gives evidence of an element in His nature or character that was many times called into activity, and without which His work could not have been so successfully performed. It was needed to meet and defeat the temptation of the devil after that fast of 40 days in the wilderness... [He would not have] been able to rally and hold together the little band of Disciples had He not been endowed with firmness and resolution to a remarkable degree.

As the last crisis of life approached, these characteristics of a stern will showed more prominently in the face of Jesus Christ. The line of battle had been drawn; He was going up to Jerusalem for the last time to attend the Passover; He could no longer pass openly from village to village, for the eyes of His enemies were everywhere, and they had successfully aroused opposition to Him and were determined on His destruction. Jesus well knew what that journey meant. He had counted the cost. He had told his Disciples that the “Son of Man should be betrayed into the hands of His enemies and be put to death.” Yet He was deaf alike to the threats of enemies and the entreaties of friends. He came not to do His own Will—Jesus, knowing all things that should come to pass, is nevertheless firm and resolute in His purpose to finish the work committed to Him by His Father. The hour was at hand, when that great work was to be completed. The agonies to be endured were all well known, but He hesitates not to face them. Not only the actions but the face bespeaks the determination. The Disciples beheld the expression on Christ’s face at this time with mingled feelings of alarm and admiration. Luke, the Evangelist, takes a mental photograph of the face under these circumstances, and we find it in the Album—“He steadfastly set His face to Go to Jerusalem” (Luke 9:51)... To those who may be faltering... Behold that face, and the expression of firm and resolute determination will impart fresh courage to

you. It will give you new confidence as you press forward under His leadership, and a boldness that will surmount all difficulties, and overcomes all opposition.

### III. Another portrait shows the face sorrowful and agonized.

This view of Christ's face was taken in the Garden of Gethsemane... Enjoining upon His Disciples to watch and pray, [Jesus] withdrew from them to hold personal communion with His Father.

Now watch that face as Jesus began to be exceeding[ly] sorrowful even unto death. Alone, in the silence and gloom of mid-night, He wrestled with His God. "And being in an agony He prayed more earnestly and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground." Words cannot portray the sorrow and agony that gathered on the Savior's face in that terrible hour. There He thrice repeated the prayer, "If it be possible, let this cup pass from me. Not my will but thine be done." Look reverently on that face and remember, with shame and contrition, that this indescribable grief was occasioned because of the Cup of Divine Wrath which Christ was compelled to drain to its bitter dregs to secure for us redemption from Sin. As you pity that sufferer whose face is marked with sorrow and agony, learn to despise, so as to repent of the sins that brought this grief into His life, and you will not have looked in vain upon that countenance, distorted with grief and anguish.

### IV. On another page of the Album we find the face polluted and smitten.

Betrayed by a kiss, Jesus was a prisoner in the hands of a howling mob. The mock trial begins and ends and the unjust sentence is pronounced upon Him, and the Son of God is delivered over to the will of the Jews. The next view we have of His face is in the Praetorium. The crown of thorns is cruelly pressed down upon His brow. His head is bruised by the reed with which He is struck. His eyes are blindfolded, His face shows the mark[s] of those who struck Him with their hands, saying, "Prophecy, who is he that smote thee," and as a last act of indignity, the hellish malignity of His fierce captors being unrestrained, they add insult to injury, and spit in his face. Thus we see that face polluted and smitten. The sight is a strange one, an awful one to behold. It reveals the terrible possibilities of sin. The depths of diabolism to which it will sink men, who were created in the image of God and endowed with the finer sensibilities that distinguish them from the brute creation, and it fulfills that prophecy of Isaiah which says, "Many were astonished at thee. His face was so marred more than any man's, and His form more than the sons of men."

### V. Now we come on a group of portraits which reveal the face on the Cross.

It is not simply one, but many expressions of the face that are here portrayed. The great heart of the Son of God is beating rapidly and will soon be still in death, and the appearance of the face changes so quickly from one expression to another that no one of the Evangelists can take an impression of all the varied looks that

passed over it! As the cross is raised from the ground and settles in its position we look upon the face of Christ and see it all aglow with benign pardon. His enemies have shamefully entreated Him, but His first words when lifted up on the Cross were

1. "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do."

A moment later, disregarding the derision and mockery cast up into His face by the rulers and the Roman soldiers, with grace beaming in His countenance, He turns his eyes upon the repentant thief and gives him that promise that helped him to die in peace,

2. "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise."

Strange scenes are transpiring at the foot of the cross. In keeping with the coarse jests of the soldiers, and the insulting remarks of the Jewish rulers, is the conduct of those who are dividing Christ's garments among themselves and casting lots for His coat. But there are others near the Cross who form no part of that blasphemous multitude. On these Jesus looks and for a moment His face lights up with thoughtful concern for one who had peculiar claims upon His love. His words are,

3. "Woman, behold thy son,"

addressed to His mother, and then to the disciple whom He loved,

4. "Behold thy mother."

Oh how that reveals the sense of filial love and duty that blazed in the heart of Jesus to the last moment of His life. Then darkness began to settle over all the land... The God of the universe would veil His face from One who was bearing the sins of the world; and realizing that He must tread the winepress of God's wrath alone, terror gathers in the face of Jesus Christ, and He cries out,

5. "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me."

But this is only for a moment. Quickly the features relax, the dark lines of terror disappear and the face is radiant with the flush of victory as He cries out with a loud voice,

6. "It is finished."

And then with face beaming with child-like trust and confidence, with His eyes raised towards heaven, He declares,

7. "Father into Thy hands I commit my spirit,"

and gives up the Ghost. The face on the Cross is now calm and peaceful in death. The quiet of sleep follows the uproar of battle, and the Victor is at rest. The lines of doubt, of fear, of sorrow, of anguish, and anxious concern for God, for Himself, and for a world lying in wickedness, have all disappeared. The last pulsation of that great heart of love, of pity and forgiveness threw upon that face a look of undisturbed tranquility.

#### VI. A final view shows the face ablaze with glory.

Our last look must not be upon a dead Savior. However, our hearts may beat with admiration and love for one who would lay down His life for us, we cannot resist

the chill and depression which fall upon our spirits in the presence of death. Christ died that He might taste death for everyone, but He rose again that He might become the first fruits of them that sleep.

We need to look once more on the face of the living Christ who has triumphed over death, that we may catch an inspiration for the work before us, that we may be the stronger to resist temptation...

We look then into the face of the living Christ and behold it, not simply as it was seen by the Disciples after His resurrection, and before His Ascension, but as it appears to-day after His Exaltation to the right hand of the Throne of the Universe. As we behold it now we see it as it was seen by the Disciples on the Mount of Transfiguration when His face did shine as the Sun, and His raiment was white as the light. We see it, as **Stephen** beheld it, when He saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on His right hand; or as **Paul**, falling to the earth before the great light that shone from heaven, and the voice which declared, "I am Jesus of Nazareth." Glorious beyond all description, it can only be symbolized by the blinding rays of the Sun, shining in Meridian splendor, which can only be seen through a glass darkly. We must therefore withdraw our gaze, and humbly adoring and worshipping the exalted and glorified Son of God, we should wait patiently His appearing. Then with the spiritual eyes of our resurrected and immortal bodies we can discern the glory and gaze throughout eternity upon the divine brightness and incomparable splendor appearing in the face [of] Christ Jesus, our God, our King and our Savior, to whom we ascribe dominion and power and glory forever and ever for He is worthy.

How such portraits lead us into a saving knowledge of the life and character of Jesus Christ! How the heart loves to feast on the revelations they bring us of the one altogether lovely, the chiefest among ten thousand, the fairest among the sons of men! ...What is there in the character of God to be adored that does not appear in the face of Jesus Christ? Now that you have looked upon Him in this series of portraits in the Picture Gallery of the Ages as they were drawn by the pen of God, what think **ye** of Him? Does He not answer the prophetic descriptions of the wrapt seers and prophets who, standing on the Old Testament mounts of vision and looking across the mists of ages, saw Him as the Messiah, the Savior of Israel? Does He not meet and satisfy your highest conceptions of the character the Savior must wear to command your love, your reverence, your trust, and to fill your hearts with peace in the confident assurance that He is able and willing to save you with an everlasting salvation? Loose the bands with which you have bound your hearts and, at once, they will break forth in strains of gladness, singing with the Psalmist, "Lord, whom have I in heaven but thee, and there is none on earth that I desire besides thee," and living a life consistent with such a heart profession of faith in Jesus, you will come at the end of the day to the inheritance of the saints and abide in the light of the face of Jesus Christ forevermore.