

WHAT DOES YOUR FACE SAY ABOUT YOU?

September 17, 2006 2 Corinthians 3:12-18

When you have your picture taken, **are you nervous about the results?** It's commonly said the camera doesn't lie, but you and I know better. A woman said to the photographer, ***"I hope that your camera will do me justice."*** He said to her, ***"Ma'am, you don't need justice, you need mercy."***

I found the inspiration for this sermon in some of the **writings of Fred Edwards**. He wrote a line that said, *"If you look like your passport picture, you probably need the vacation."* **You can tell a lot about somebody from their face.** I know people who have been through a **period of sorrow, or under tension and stress, and it showed on their faces.** And then I would see them later and I'd think, *"They look like a different person."* It showed. What you do with your **time**, what **you've seen**, what you've **been through**, the way you've **been living**, all make their impression.

Let's look at our text. It's taken from Paul's **second letter to the Corinthians**. We couldn't read the whole third chapter, so I need to go back to the beginning of the chapter to tell you a little bit about what Paul is saying. Paul begins the chapter by **talking about LETTERS OF RECOMMENDATION**. Paul is saying that people can read you. They can learn a lot about you, just by looking at you.

And I think Paul is also **exhibiting a little pride here**; he founded the church at Corinth and **he wants them to look good, to do well**. He's like a teacher preparing the class for the competency testing. She wants her students to test well, not only so they might pass the test, **but in this age of teacher evaluations, the student's test scores also reflect positively or negatively on the teacher**. So, Paul says, *"You are a letter of recommendation. You show that*

you are a letter from Christ delivered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the Living God, not on tablets of stone, but on the tablets of human hearts.” (2 Cor. 3:2-3)

As Paul talks about tablets, his mind must go back to **Mt. Sinai, and Moses**, and those tablets upon which were written the Ten Commandments. **On Mt. Sinai, Moses met God face to face, and it showed; it literally showed.** When he came down from the mountain, **his face was aglow with the glory of God.** The Exodus text says the people were terrified at seeing the transformed countenance of Moses. **So Moses put a veil over his face whenever he talked to the people.** Apparently, since NO ONE had ever met God face to face, **they were terrified at seeing the evidence of somebody who had.** They just kept staring at Moses. **My grandfather had particularly large ears.** I can remember as a boy just staring at them. They seemed so huge! I couldn't take my eyes off of them. And it was like that with Moses. **His face was shining, and it was so weird and distracting that they couldn't listen to what Moses was saying.** So whenever Moses spoke to the people, he put a veil over his face.

And Paul remembers that story and **interprets the story to make his point.** He says Moses has that veil across his face **to hide the fact that the splendor of the Law is already starting to fade.** He says the veil was there to hide the fact that THE LAW WHICH MOSES RECEIVED WAS JUST TEMPORARY; **its passing, its transitory.** Perhaps Paul is interpreting this story somewhat loosely, but he is trying to make a point about the Corinthian's relationship to Christ.

Paul finally gets to the end of the chapter and to our text for this morning, and to **HIS POINT**, when he says, *“And all of us have had that veil removed so that we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like Him and reflect His glory even more.”* **Paul agrees, you see, that you can**

tell a lot about somebody from their face. It's like a letter of recommendation. You can read a person's face. **BECAUSE OF THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO GOD, THERE OUGHT TO BE A GLOW ON THE CHRISTIAN'S FACE.** Do you believe that? DO YOU BELIEVE THAT IF YOU HAVE A RIGHT RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD IT SHOULD SHOW?

What Paul is talking about is JOY. He doesn't use that term here, but that's what he's talking about. Paul was always talking about joy. ***“Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.”*** (Philippians 4:4) In Paul's New Testament Letters, there are **at least 24 references to “joy.”** And there are **more than 20 references or uses of the word “rejoice.”** About forty-five times Paul mentions joy. Over and over and over again, Paul says that the **result of seeing what God has done for us in Jesus Christ is joy. SO REJOICE!** If your life is filled with joy, he says, **it will show.**

Now some will object to that, and perhaps rightly so. They will say, ***“Even if you are a Christian, how can there be joy in the life of those who have to live out their days in misery?”*** A woman's **husband runs off**, leaving her with small children to raise, no money, no job. **Where is the joy? An old man in a nursing home**, and for him it feels more like a prison. Rarely a visitor. **How can he rejoice? A woman hangs up the phone**, turns to her husband and says, ***“It's the doctor. The report is back from the lab. He wants me to come in and talk to him right away.”*** **REJOICE??** How can she rejoice? **How can she have a glow on her face?**

I'm not so presumptuous as to say that she can. All I know is, some can. And I think I know the reason why. They know something. There is something written in their hearts, as Paul said. **IT GIVES THEM JOY, IN SPITE OF THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE.**

You see, **JOY IS NOT A SURFACE EMOTION** that is dependent on the circumstances of your life. **HAPPINESS deals with circumstances, but JOY has to do with the deepest**

orientation of your life. It has to do with being **one with God**, one with **other people**, and one with **yourself**.

That's why whenever JOY is talked about in the Bible, it is usually **illustrating a concept** such as RECONCILIATION, COMING HOME, FINDING YOUR TRUE SELF, BEING REUNITED WITH GOD. For Israel it's coming **BACK FROM THE EXILE**, home to Jerusalem. That's a time of great joy. *"You shall go out in joy," says Isaiah, "and be led forth in peace. And the mountains and the hills will break into singing. Even the trees will clap their hands."* (Isaiah 55:12)

And in the New Testament, the PRODIGAL SON FINALLY COMES HOME to the father. There is **reconciliation, and there is joy**. The father throws a party. *"My son who was dead is alive again; he was lost but is not found."* (Luke 15:24) Or the SHEPHERD FINDING THE LOST SHEEP, that's joy. *"There is more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents, than over the ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent."* (Luke 15:7)

JOY is right relationship. JOY is reconciliation. And it is deep. It's in your heart. Paul says it can be written there, and it will bring joy to your life, **no matter what happens**.

Joy looks like **IMPETURBABILITY** — isn't that a great word! It is the opposite of the word **PERTURB**. Perturb means: *"to disturb greatly in mind; to throw into confusion."* **Imperturbability** means **NOT to get CONFUSED**. It means **to be composed, calm, cool, and collected in the midst of crisis**. And it is something you can see on a person's face.

John Wesley saw it on the faces of the **Moravians** — it was a glow. In 1736, Wesley was on a ship with them, **coming back to England from the Colony of Georgia**. In the North Atlantic they hit one of those terrible storms; it tossed the ship around like a toy in the bathtub, even breaking off the mast of the ship. Wesley wrote in his Journal, that he panicked. Even the crew was **PERTURBED** — **screaming and wailing, and calling on God to come and rescue**

them — ALL EXCEPT THE MORAVIANS. While others panicked, they sang hymns and prayed. They had that peace that passes understanding – an inner strength that Wesley lacked! Wesley saw it on their faces, and wanted it, and he didn't stop until he found it at a Moravian meeting in London on Aldersgate Street. He heard about how GOD LOVED HIM, even him. He heard about how GOD HAD FORGIVEN HIS SINS, even his. **And the Christian gospel moved from his head to his heart.** It moved from where the storms of life could batter and toss it about, to a place where **IT BECAME THE FOUNDATION OF HIS LIFE.** You will remember Wesley's famous words, *"I felt my heart strangely warmed."*

It's written on your heart. That's where the joy is. It has **nothing to do with the events** of your life. **It has everything to do with the ORIENTATION AND THE RELATIONSHIP of your life, and it shows.**

As people see our faces, or as we look on the faces of others, do our faces record the misery that we have known in our life, **or do our faces reveal the joy we know in our hearts?**

I've heard it said that **PEOPLE ARE LIKE CLAY**, and the **circumstances** of our lives **MAKE THEIR IMPRINT ON US.** And I would at least partly agree with that statement. I would agree that we are clay, all right. But something more. **WE ARE MADE IN THE IMAGE OF GOD. THAT MEANS WE HAVE A CHOICE.** We can choose to be **VICTIMS** and say, *"I'm only made of clay."* Or we can be what the Apostle Paul called us, we can choose to be **MORE THAN CONQUERORS** through him who **became like us, so we might become like Him.** **MAYBE WE ARE CLAY, BUT IF WE ARE, IT IS SO WE CAN BE MOLDED INTO THE IMAGE OF CHRIST.** If you believe that, **if it's written on your heart, there is JOY.** And you can see it. **Because you are a LETTER OF RECOMMENDATION, you can see it.**

The question for you to think about on the way home, the question for you to consider this

week is, *“What does my letter say?”* What does my letter of recommendation say **ABOUT ME?**

What does it say **ABOUT MY LORD?**