

2nd Sun. after Christmas
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The Hidden God Revealed

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John 1:14-18

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Ben Stein asked famous atheist Richard Dawkins, “What if after you died, you ran into God and He said to you, ‘what have you been doing Richard?’”

Richard Dawkins answered, “Bertrand Russell had that point put to him and he said something like, ‘Sir, why did you take such pains to hide yourself?’”

Richard Dawkins believes there is no God. Why does he believe there is no God? The reason is simple. He hasn’t seen God. He hasn’t seen direct evidence of God. He believes there is no God because God is hidden.

What would you say to Mr. Dawkins? Would you say, “No, sir, you are wrong! God is not hidden! God is evident!” Well, you might. If you said that, you might be thinking ways God’s existence seems to be self-evident. We look at the beautiful world we live in, and the unfathomable complexity of life... any life. We look at how nearly all life forms live in a symbiotic, interdependent relationship. Nature simply shouts: “There is a designer! Someone intelligent is behind this!” In that way, we might be inclined to think God is not hidden. And it’s true to an extent.

Or maybe we look at the human conscience and we conclude that God is not hidden. Everyone has that voice inside telling us when we have done wrong. It makes us feel bad. We inherently know that we are accountable. Our conscience troubles us when we do wrong, even when no one is hurt by our actions, and even if no one will ever find out about it. We know Someone does know and that we are accountable. So because of conscience we might say to Mr. Dawkins, “God is not hidden! Your conscience is shouting at you about God’s existence and how you have done evil in his sight!”

While these points are true, I’ll be honest. I think I have to side with the atheist on this issued. God truly is hidden. In fact, right in the Bible it says this! Isaiah 45:15 “**Truly you are a God who hides himself, O God and Savior of Israel.**” And we might rightly ask with Mr. Dawkins, “God, why have you taken such pains to hide yourself?!”

Have you ever thought, “God, why don’t you just appear to the people of the world and make your presence known and indisputable?! Or at least some newsworthy miracles on a regular basis. Show your power. Display your glory! God... let loose! Be God!” Have such thoughts gone through your mind? So why does God hide himself?

What we’ll see today is that God hides himself in the ways *we* think he should reveals himself. And he shows himself in ways that we totally do not expect. So truth is God is not completely hidden. He has revealed himself. It’s just not in a place or in a way that most people notice.

So, first of all, why does God not reveal himself as we think he should: In glory and power... in dominion and might... in miracles and majesty? The short and simple answer is this: God is holy, pure and just. He doesn’t reveal himself because of his holiness and glory.

Not satisfied with that answer? Let’s look at it closer. When Adam and Eve first fell into sin in the Garden of Eden, what did they do when they heard God walking in the Garden? They

hid from God, didn't they? Why did they hide from God? It was because they had sinned. They had directly disobeyed the holy, glorious Creator. They knew they had crossed the Almighty, and they deserved swift and lethal punishment. God's holiness scared them to death, so they did not want God to find them.

So although we have talked about God hiding himself from us, the truth is, the human being that really and truly understands his or her sinfulness and it's horrible, eternal consequences, will naturally want to hide from God. That person will not want to see God. They wish that God would just forget about them... because to fall into the hands of holy God is a terrifying thing.

Although every sinful person ought to have this desire to hide from God, not all do. Man is so blind and so arrogant about the nature and severity of his rebellion that he arrogantly seeks out God and challenges him. "Where is this God?! Let him show his face and I will tell him a thing or two!" This is exactly the attitude of the atheist, Mr. Dawkins.

But God does not show himself. He hides himself from us. Why? Isaiah 59:2 tells us, **"But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear."** Because of our sin, we *should* want to hide ourselves from God... but we don't always. But because of sin, God *always* hides himself from us. Because of our sin, God will not let us be directly in his holy presence. To do so would mean instant destruction. God is light. Our sin... which resides in deep in our hearts and is a part of our very nature... is darkness. If God appeared before us in all his brilliance, we would have to be destroyed. When you turn on a light in a dark room, the darkness is gone.

If someone says to you, "I wish God would just appear to me once... face to face... and I'd tell him a thing or two." You can answer, "What? Do you have a death wish? You would be dead so quickly you wouldn't have time to utter a word!"

There are many times in the Bible where God allowed man a small, incomplete glimpse of his holiness and glory. Moses wanted to see God's glory. Instead God put Moses in a crag on a cliff and covered his face as he passed by. Moses only got a glimpse of God's back as he left. When Moses returned to the people, his face was glowing from being in the presence of God. *And the people were terrified.* Did you get that? The people saw the remnants of God's partial glory shining on Moses face after Moses only got a glimpse of God's backside... and they were too terrified to look at Moses! He had to put on a veil when he was out and about in public.

Through out the Bible, when God speaks, when God appears, when God sends a messenger, an angel, when God even appears in a dream... there is fear and terror. Is this how God wants us to know him? Does God want us to be afraid of him? Does he want us to cringe at his presence? No! So God hides himself from us sinful creatures.

Second quick point: Why does God hide himself? Let's understand that this doesn't just mean that he hides himself visibly from us. He is also hidden from us as far as our understanding is concerned. God, his essence, his works and his ways are so far beyond us... we can't possibly comprehend. God is God, and we are not.

Job, in the midst of his sufferings, wanted to see God and say a thing or two to him. God came down hard on Job and reminded him that Job was a limited human being... limited in understanding and limited in lifespan. God is holy, eternal, and the creator of the universe. God essentially says to Job, "Really? You dare to questions me? Who are you, Job? Who are you? You are in no position."

Job got the point and said, Job 42:2 **“Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know.”** God is hidden simply because he is God and we are not. We cannot fully comprehend his essence, his attributes, his reasons or his ways. God is hidden because of his nature and because of our nature... because he is God and we are not.

So, quick recap: Is God hidden... does God hide himself? Yes. Is this a good thing? Because of his holiness and we would die in presence... yes. Is he beyond our understanding? Yes. So, where does this leave us? Is there ultimately a difference between the atheist and the believer? The atheist says there is no God. The believer must say there is a God who is hidden, unseeable and unknowable. Doesn't that sort of leave us in the same spot?

Actually, it would have left us in the same spot... except God decided to do something. He chose to reveal himself. God chose to reveal himself in a way that does not terrify nor destroy. God revealed to us something we can comprehend... in a way that gives us hope, peace and eternal joy. God reveals himself, his nature, and more importantly his feeling and intents when it comes to you and me. Listen again to God revealed in John 1:14-18:

John 1:14-18 The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. John testifies concerning him. He cries out, saying, “This was he of whom I said, ‘He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.’” From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another. For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.

Do these words shock you? These verses may be familiar to you. Their content surely is. Perhaps so much so that you're not shocked at what it says. The Word who is Jesus Christ became flesh and made his dwelling among us! He didn't come in power and might. His appearance didn't terrify. He didn't come to subject us and demand our worship. He came from the Father full of grace and truth. He came full of the Father's kindness... intending to shower us with God's love through acts of kindness undeserved by us. He came full of truth. He came to tell us the true nature about God and his true feelings about us, his creation.

“From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.” If God had revealed himself directly to us in all his power, glory and holiness, we would have concluded, “From the fullness of his holiness we must receive curses and destruction.” But in Christ Jesus, God reveals the fullness of his kindness to us and showers one blessing after another on us.

“No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father’s side, has made him known.” We cannot see God and live. But Jesus Christ, true God, has seen the Father and he makes him known to us.

One time a disciple of Jesus, Philip, asked Jesus the very same thing Richard Dawkins has asked of God. And it's the same thing we may have asked in our hearts at times. Philip said this: (John 14:8-14) **“Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us.” Jesus answered: “Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Don't you believe that I am in the Father, and that the Father is in me? The**

words I say to you are not just my own. Rather, it is the Father, living in me, who is doing his work. Believe me when I say that I am in the Father and the Father is in me; or at least believe on the evidence of the miracles themselves.”

When we know and see Jesus through the eyes of faith, the Father, almighty God in heaven, is revealed to us. In Christ Jesus, then, God reveals three things to us:

- 1) Jesus reveals the heart of God. Namely, that in the heart of God we find love for you and me... people who are by nature unlovable. Our conscience tells us God couldn't love us. If we were confronted by God's glory and holiness, we would reach the terrifying conclusion that God couldn't love us. We are sinful, rebellious, disobedient.

But in Christ Jesus, the heart of God is revealed. God actually loves us. He loves us so much he sent his one and only Son to take on human flesh and to live among us. The Infinite became an infant. Philippians 2:6-8 expresses the importance of God's own Son, Jesus, coming. A new translation of the Bible called The Message puts it this way: **“He had equal status with God but didn't think so much of himself that he had to cling to the advantages of that status no matter what. Not at all. When the time came, he set aside the privileges of deity and took on the status of a slave, became human! Having become human, he stayed human. It was an incredibly humbling process. He didn't claim special privileges. Instead, he lived a selfless, obedient life and then died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion.”**

Like us, he was hungry and thirsty, felt pain, got tired, and was hurt by others. How humbling for the Creator of the Universe! **Unlike** us, he remained holy and pure all the days of his life. Because God's heart is filled with love for us, he allowed his Son to take his place among us, to live under the Law of God, to fulfill that law as our substitute. The obedience and holiness we lack, Jesus has. And God makes it ours by faith in Jesus.

But that wasn't the full extent of God's love. Our crimes against God could not go by unpunished. And so Jesus **“died a selfless, obedient death—and the worst kind of death at that: a crucifixion.”** For our crimes against the Almighty, Jesus took the blame. For our guilt, Jesus was punished. Through faith in Christ Jesus, our payment for sin is complete!

- 2) And this leads into the second thing revealed by God through Christ Jesus: He **reveals the need of people**. God could have come to crush the world because of sin. Instead he came to be crushed for our sin. The one who said that everyone who sinned would die, came to the world to die in our place. He pronounced the judgment and took the judgment himself. We didn't even understand the danger we were in. But God did.

We don't understand how great our need is, and how dire sins consequences... until... we look at the cross and see God's own Son bleeding and dying, isolated from the Father, hanging in darkness for your sin and mine. We now understand the great need for salvation which was accomplished by Jesus Christ.

- 3) And the third thing revealed by Christ: **the mystery of God's plan of salvation**. Who could have guessed God would save us by sacrificing his Son? Who would have guessed that God's love for us is so great that he would go to great lengths and great pains (literally) to do all that was necessary to ensure that eternal life with him would happen? Take a look at the world religions and you'll find that no human being has thought up a similar plan of salvation. Buddha does not give himself as a sacrifice for the sins of the world. Neither does Mohammed. You will not find a similar story in any religion of the world of God loving man

so much to take the full burden... the whole responsibility for our rescue and salvation. We never could have guessed it! So God revealed it to us in the words and works of Jesus Christ.

So what should we say to the vocal atheists of the world? What do we say to a Richard Dawkins? Why has God hidden himself so well? The simple answer: Love.

Soren Kierkegaard, a Danish theologian of another century, tells the story of a prince who was running an errand for his father one day in the local village. As he did so, he passed through a very poor section of the town. Looking through the window of his carriage, he saw a beautiful young peasant girl walking along the street. He could not get her off his heart. He continued to come to the town, day after day, just to see her and to feel as though he was near her. His heart yearned for her, but there was a problem. How could he develop a relationship with her? He could order her to marry him. It was in his power to do so. But he wanted this girl to love him from the heart, willingly. He could put on his royal garments and impress her with his regal entourage, and drive up to her front door with soldiers and a carriage drawn by six horses. But if he did this he would never be certain that the girl loved him or was simply overwhelmed with his power, position and wealth. The prince came up with another solution. As you may have guessed, he gave up his kingly robe and symbols of power and privilege. He moved into the village dressed only as a peasant. Hiding himself in peasant clothes, he lived among the people, shared their interests and concerns, and talked their language. In time, the young peasant girl grew to know him, and then to love him.

Your God loved you so much, he hid from you his glory and holiness... and then revealed himself through his one and only Son, Jesus Christ, who became fully human. He lived among us, served us, obeyed the Father for us, died in our place... all to remove our sin and guilt. He invites us to know the Father's love through him. He has gently wooed us with his love and asked our hand in eternal marriage. Through the faith created in us by the Holy Spirit, we are bound to Christ for eternity. And the hidden God is revealed! Amen.