

Light, Knowledge, and Glory in the Face of Jesus Christ

2 Corinthians 4:6

In the fullness of time, says Paul to the Galatians, God sent his son. What did “the fullness of time” look like? Ecclesiastes tells us there is nothing new under the sun, so it's no surprise that 1st Century Rome didn't look a lot different from our day: It was multicultural with most of the different groups seeking to gain advantage one another. There was a collision of cultures brought to heel and submission under the Romans.

First, the Jews were a relatively small conquered people, but continued in their long journey of seeking light. Light, illumination, spiritual insight, knowledge of God's word was the highest value. We see it written in into the Scriptures: The unfolding of your words gives light, Psalm 119 tells us. They read their Bibles, if you will. They lived in a dark world, sure enough, but knew their God promised that those walking in darkness would see great light. So they longed for light to come.

The second major 1st century culture were the Greeks. They posited that the darkness of a broken and futile world was as much intellectual as spiritual. Knowledge was their pursuit. Much of western education is rooted in Greek philosophy as they tried to overcome a broken world by learning and understand things around them. Intellectual development and education are the keys to improvement and a better world.

Then of course we have the Romans. Conquerors, tacticians, smart, glorious rulers and state builders. They were smart enough to commandeer the strengths of conquered civilizations and strong enough to keep them in subjection, all for the glory of the Rome. It was glory they sought.

Well, civilizations are larger expressions of individual desires and longings. Rome would not have been a thing without Romans. The Hebrew nation wouldn't have been a thing without Jews. So pursuing light, knowledge, and glory on a cultural or national scale was the collective pursuit of individuals, who were influenced both by their heritage and their hearts, to pursue light that overcomes the darkness of an obviously broken world, and knowledge to know how make the place better, and glory and power to keep it whatever way I want.

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The driving force behind all this pursuing and seeking is the human heart. Though our hearts are created for communion and intimacy with God, they are warped and distorted by sin — so warped that God's intent was ruined. Rather than knowing God and being satisfied in him, we are hostile to, and estranged from holy God. Sin separates from our God. Always has, always will. And we rebelliously embraced that separation, rejecting his life-giving rule and reign. But that hardwired hunger be satisfied with God — to know him at the soul level — to live in the light of goodness was not snuffed out. God made us for himself and we are only satisfied in him.

So the pursuit of light is a hunger for God. The pursuit of knowledge is a hunger to know God. The pursuit of glory and rule and reign is a hunger for God's good kingdom.

Jesus talked this hunger, this issue of the heart's pursuit of satisfaction in Matthew 6 when addressed the basic nuts and bolts of daily existence: "... do not be anxious, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the Gentiles seek after all these things... But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. (Matthew 6:31–33)

700 before the birthday of the incarnate Christ the prophet Isaiah dealt with this hunger in Isaiah 55: "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live..." (Isaiah 55:1-3a) God clearly calls us to himself because he created us to be satisfied in him, as repeated in Jeremiah 31, "For I will satisfy the weary soul, and every languishing soul I will replenish."

400 years after Christ walked the earth **Augustine** captured this fundamental hunger and pursuit of God, saying, "Thou hast made us for thyself, and our souls are restless until they rest in Thee.

1200 years after Augustine, **Blaise Pascal** wrote about the God-shaped hole in the human soul, "What else does this craving, and this helplessness, proclaim but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace? This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are,

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though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object; in other words by God himself.” (Blaise Pascal, Pensées)

In our day, we remain thirsty for peace and satisfaction. Our generation’s quest for light, knowledge, glory looks like cultural, racial, and moral upheaval — a throwing off of all the things that didn't satisfy in the last generation for an intellectual and cultural reset that still won't satisfy in the next generation. Why won't it satisfy? Because as Pascal said, our hunger is infinite, not rooted in passing political and cultural identities. An infinite hunger can only be filled by an infinite being, and there is only one Infinite Being, having the power of self-existence. That person is God.

At Christmas, eternal God the Son, the second person of the Holy trinity, comes to dwell with us and satisfy our souls. He made us for communion with him, so he comes to end the chase, the pursuit of things that cannot satisfy. And so he says to the woman at the well, “If you knew the gift of God, and who it is that is saying to you, ‘Give me a drink,’ you would have asked him, and he would have given you living water. ... Everyone who drinks of this [well] water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.” (John 4:10, 13-14)

To those whose stomachs were empty and came seeking him because they liked the sandwiches he made, Jesus said, whoever **believes** [in me] has eternal life. I am the Bread of life. (John 6:47-48)

We may struggle to grasp the incarnation — God in flesh, wrapped in swaddling cloths, a babe in a hay trough... The Apostle Paul puts it all together for us in a single statement that explains how it is that Christ alone can satisfy the soul. In our imaginations now, and asking the question, "Who can satisfy my soul?" let's draw near with the shepherds and look down on the face of that baby and hear the words of God from **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.

The light -- Jews, are you listening?

Of the knowledge -- Greeks, here's your answer

Of the glory -- Romans, here's the righteous ruler

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The light of the knowledge of the glory of God is found in Christ alone. And he is come. He is here, God with us, Emmanuel. All your searching, all your longing, all your hunger is satisfied here in Christ.

What are you seeking? There is no question that you are seeking... something. You may not know what you seeking. But you know your soul is thirsty. There is no greater pursuit because there is no greater hunger. But whatever we are trying to cram in that God-shaped void, it won't do it because it can't do it. Light, knowledge, glory, power, companionship, pleasure, self-identity, self-worship -- I am my own god. If you were your own God why can't you satisfy yourself? End the search. The one you seek is here. To all who believe on his name he gives the right to become sons of God. (John 1:12)

PRAY:

Lord, help us to find you, to draw near to you, and be satisfied in you. With the Psalmist in Psalm 42, let us say, As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. You have come to overcome the separation of sin, and you did it on a cruel cross. Now communion is restored in you and through atoning work. Thank you. Let us drink deeply of your love and be satisfied in you alone. You have made peace. Our darkness is shattered by the Light of the World. Glory to God!