

# HOW TO RECOGNIZE GOD IN UNEXPECTED PLACES

## Introduction

Have you ever been in one of those situations where someone recognizes you, but you have no clue who they are? Is there a worse feeling? Recently, we went to an event, and we walked in as we did I noticed a guy standing there and he started smiling... I was like that is odd... Then he started waving big like this... Yall I had no clue in the world who this man was, so I thought, "He has to be waving to someone behind me..." And that feeling is awful to right, when you wave and you realize it wasn't a wave for you... So I did like a tiny half wave... So I finish checking in and I turn to the left and when I do, I see my wife talking to the guy... And I am like oh no... I am about to have to go speak to this man... Well as I walk up, there is another guy by him, and this guy I partially recognize, but not fully... It is one of those... I know that guy, but also I am not sure... So I am trying to discern if I am turning into my dad or not.. Anyone else got a dad like mine... He knows everyone, recognizes everyone, swears everyone knows them.. You're like dad... We are in Minnesota.. You don't know them... But as I get closer, I can tell my wife knows them... So I do the smart thing.... I start to ask leading questions.. How have you been? How is life? How has work been going? All questions aimed at learning the necessary investigative details in order to properly identify this man... Finally, I gather enough details and I realize.... I have met this man before, and I should have known him... Yet... My past experience with him did not lead to me being able to recognize him in an unexpected place..

Today, I want to speak to you about how do you recognize God in an unexpected place.. How do you recognize God as He chooses to reveal Himself not as you expected Him to reveal Himself.

The reason I want to speak to you about that is because the context of John 8 is the unexpected Messiah showing up to reveal Himself to His people, the Jews, and yet those who are the most saturated in religion, the Pharisees cannot recognize God as He reveals Himself...

Jesus claims // I am the light of the world  
The Pharisees claim // Your testimony is not valid  
They **condemn the claims** of Jesus

- Let me remind you today that this is what we are contending with in our life... We are contending against a spirit of the AntiChrist in the world that seeks to condemn the claims of Jesus.

This is not a group of random people, but a group of religious people. They have searched the scriptures, they have interpreted the scriptures. They have built a system to help them remain religiously elite. They are not cartoon characters as many people often make them out to be.. They are not these people who want to just argue with Jesus. They are people who take religious matters seriously... **And yet, in all of their studies, they have come up with an interpretation of the Messiah the demands an expectation out of Jesus.**

They expected for Him to come from biologically from a man through Davids lineage, they expected Him to come at a time when the Temple in Jerusalem was laying in ruins, so that He could defeat their enemies, purify the nation, exalt the Torah, and be unmistakable... And they definitely expected that He would not one day die on a cross.

Yet Jesus comes unexpectedly... He comes born to a virgin, He comes when the temple is still standing, He comes and instead of purifying a nation through crushing those who aren't pure, He draws near to them and heals and cleanses, He doesn't come to prop up their interpretation of Torah obedience, but He comes to reveal the reality hidden in the Torah.. Himself.. He doesn't come to condemn the world, but to be crucified sacrificially on behalf of the world.

And it is their interpretation and the expectation birthed from that interpretation that generates their rejection to Him instead of their recognition of Him.

**Hear me: We will fail to recognize God if we misinterpret Him and if we expect Him to come differently then He is.**

Let me break it down for us

This week in staff meeting we had a moment where we were talking about our Easter Connection Cards. We had an amazing Easter around here. 3000 people on campus, beautiful, had hundreds of connection cards turned in, over 80 of you said you were interested in serving on a team, and if that is you.... Please grab someone on the team, and let us help you get plugged in because the harvest is plentiful but the laborers are few. As we went through the survey cards... It was my expectation that we would follow up with those who made decisions on the connection card until we had made a connection with each of you... However, because I wasn't clear on my expectation.. It was the interpretation of the team that we were inputting the cards into a database and sending out a link... Because off a missed interpretation, in this case because of my lack of clarity, their was a frustration at a unmet expectation.

I say that to show you that interpretations and expectations are connected...

How you interpret something will lead to what you expect from something and if your expectation does not match your interpretations you will find yourself frustrated... Ok let me bring it home...

In my panic attacks... I interpreted that God's job was to remove things that made it difficult for me to believe in Him and so my expectation was to ask God to take away my panic attacks... However, they kept coming... And so since God was not meeting my expectation based off of my interpretation I could not recognize God in that unexpected place... I didn't expect to start having panic attacks at that level in my thirties as a follower of Jesus... I expected that because I followed Jesus, I didn't have to deal with that because I interpreted Jesus as the one who took away bad feelings so when I got to a place that was unexpected I started to hear the thoughts

- Jesus is not valid
  - Why did I start to believe that His claims were not valid?
    - Was it because He was far away, or was it because I failed to recognize how He was showing up in a way that was different than my expectation.

Jesus is showing up here in a way that is different than their expectation. He isn't far away, they are just failing to recognize Him...

Can I remind you today... That where you are frustrated with God... Where you are having thoughts that condemn the claims as Jesus as not valid... He is not far away..

I would say it this way

God does not have a response problem, we have a recognition problem.

- Reminds me of the story with the guy crying out to God
  - God always shows up sometimes we just can't see Him yet because we want Him to show up how we want Him to show up.

What is it inside of us that causes us to fail to recognize Jesus because of our expectation of how we believe He should work?

Jesus says in John 8:37:

"...you seek to kill me because my word finds no place in you."

This concept is speaking to the Pharisees pride.. They didn't just have an interpretation and an expectation, but they had an interpretation and an expectation of God that they were proud of.

Pride in scripture is often connected to the concept of being too full of the wrong thing. Pride is like when you go eat at Thanksgiving and you are full and someone offers you more and you say... I don't have any more room in this stomach.... I AM FULL...

That is why the saying of someone who is prideful is they are full of themselves...

The proud resist God because they don't have space for God

The humble can receive grace from God because they have space for Him.

Something that is super fascinating in this text is this:

As we mentioned last week this argument is happening in the court of women. The court of women is where the treasury is contained.

The treasury is where individuals bring a coin marked by a king to give as an offering to honor God and serve the poor.

Think about it like this // Jesus, marked by the kingdom of heaven with signs and wonders, is given as an offering to honor the Father and to serve the poor...

- Let me take one second here to preach this for a second... They claimed Jesus didn't have any witnesses...
  - But the book of John testifies, John the Baptist testified, disciples testified, signs and wonders testified, and if that isn't enough the VERY SETTING HE SITS IN WILL TESTIFY.. ALL OF CREATION TESTIFIES OF THE GLORY OF GOD.

Which is to say this // The only way to recognize and be served by Jesus is to be poor I am not talking about a depleted bank account.. I am talking about a desperate and dependent Spirit

Jesus most famous sermon on how to recognize the Kingdom of God literally begins with

**"Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."**

— Matthew 5:3

They are so full on their interpretation of how God has to show up that they cannot recognize Him, but if you want to recognize God in unexpected places then make some room!

I have mentioned this a few times I know, but this is what happened in my moment in the sauna with God... For the first time... I let go of my interpretation and my expectation and I made room to depend on Him to teach me, train me, and strengthen me..

2 main thoughts Jesus gives to these Pharisees in response to their condemnation that is rooted in His inability to meet their expectation. These two main thoughts are the two areas that ultimately allow us to recognize God.

#### 1. Knowing God

- a. Jesus says you don't know me... If you did, you would recognize me.
- b. This section of John 8 will use this greek word 13 times. That is called emphasis. This is the emphasis that Jesus is mentioning here.
  - i. Here is how I want to break it down for you

1. Back to my illustration at the beginning of not recognizing the guy at the event. Do you know why I did not recognize Him? It wasn't because I had not had the opportunity to recognize him. The truth is this: In my past experiences with him I seemed sincere, but my heart towards him was not self sacrificial love. My heart towards him was about my own superiority and not surrender. So when I say him in an unexpected place the truth came to light that had always been revealed in my heart.

a. This is what was happening to the Pharisees. Bible & Breakfast old testament readings. They seemed sincere. But the truth is, if they really loved God, when He showed up they would have known Him, they would have loved Him, they would have recognized Him. No matter how unexpected the place. Because He had their heart. I could recognize my dad from a mile away. Because He is my dad. He has my heart.

i. Let me bring it home to you... The reason I did not know God in my panic attacks was because I was demanding from God instead of depending on Him. Demands create distance in a relationship. Dependence creates intimacy.

1. When I stopped demanding. And I made room in my heart to know God in the place I never expected to need Him... He gave me the revelation of contend.

## 2. Judging Spiritually

a. Jesus says you judge incorrect because you judge with the flesh

b. Later He says You are from below. I am from above

c. The pharisees were so focused on life down here.

i. Building rules to protect rules

ii. How they were perceived in the temple

iii. How much they knew

1. They got so busy setting their mind to earthly status that they missed the kingdom of God when it showed up.

2. They got so busy being full of good ideas and good religious practices that they couldn't judge accurately.

d. C.S. Lewis said "A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you."

- i. I want to say something very pastoral really quickly. Be careful what you give your attention to. If you have a kid that gets fixated with things you know how powerful fixation can be. One of my sons gets fixated on his shoe laces and how tight they are tied. And he can get so fixated looking down at his shoes that he can miss the good life all around Him.

1. Your fixations can become your meditations

- a. Talk about the fixation with learning about people who deconstruct etc etc. Get so busy fixated on something below that all of the sudden you can't see up anymore...
- b. You want to recognize God in unexpected places let me tell you what it is going to take being a spiritual person and a spiritual person
  - i. believes
    - 1. This whole text as we talked about a few weeks ago hinges on belief.
      - a. If I believe, I receive and I set my mind on things above.
      - b. Jesus never had a carnal imagination... He had a holy imagination...
        - i. What the enemy wants to call pretend... God calls a principle. Use the principle to please God.