

**Sermon June 27, 2021 The Spirituality of the Cross Part IV The
Hiddenness of God**

Grace, mercy, and peace be unto you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Hiddenness of God

In Part III I presented how God reveals himself to us in His Word and Sacraments. Where is God? He is there. We can find him present there each and every time. It is ironic, then, how most reject God's presence in his Word and Sacrament where he says he is to be found, and then demand he show himself in other ways of their choosing. Carefully consider the pride and hubris of the "spirituality" of fallen humans. The deception is profound. Well, what's the best way forward with all this? Let's start with the Bible, where God does reveal himself, and where it says,

Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Savior. Isaiah 45:15

God is a God who hides himself. That's where we need to start if we are going to be successful looking for him. God is not absent, like some imagine. God is simply hiding from plain view. Where exactly is God hiding? He is hiding at the cross of Christ.

These days the shelves on bookstores are full of self-help books guiding us to become our own creator and make our own reality. We are also encouraged to become our own lawmaker and decide for ourselves what is right for us. Spirituality has been turned into a mere means to selfish and material ends – profit through growth in personal effectiveness and business success and a sense of well-being through meditation and positive thinking. All these same approaches have crossed into Christianity, where Jesus' life has been reduced to sales strategies, management methods, positive thinking, visualization techniques, and the gospel of prosperity. These are all the same ideas as in the secular books. They talk a lot about the importance of faith, but what they mean is you've got to believe in *yourself*. If we follow these principles, our family problems will disappear, we'll have perfect health, lots of money, we'll fix the country and grow the church. What much of this involves is manipulating God to do our bidding.

That's paganism. Being a disciple of Jesus means doing *his* bidding. And that means we will feel the weight of our cross on our shoulders. Expecting a victorious life with a perfect attitude, marriage, prosperity, and health will only reveal our imperfections and drives us to become phonies when our lives do not match our claims or beliefs. When we want success, victory, pleasure, and happiness, we will be drawn to every source that offers those things. God, however, gives us something far different. What does God give? God gives us the cross.

And he said to all, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Luke 9:23

The way of Christ is not one of self-help, but self-denial. Suffering, defeat, weakness, and dependence are not glorious ways to live. Rather than trying to make ourselves worthy of salvation through our own achievements, we realize how lost we are, cling to Jesus and his cross, and trust that he has done for us what we are not able to do for ourselves. This is the way of the spirituality of the cross.

Bearing the Cross

We all have a natural desire for self-preservation, personal gain, control over our lives, and a right to be an authority and make judgements. ANY religion or method centering on our own achievements, merit, and accomplishments is attractive and seems to fit our goals nicely. We want to be independent. It's natural. Not so, however, when we take up our cross and follow Jesus. We remember the words of God to Paul,

My power is made perfect in weakness. 2 Corinthians 12:9

When we take up our cross and bear it, as Jesus instructs, and we hold to our faith in Christ even when we suffer pain and loss, we prove ourselves to God and validate his Lordship over our lives. We even confirm our faith to ourselves.

God reveals his glory in a beautiful pink sunrise, blue skies, baby deer, and rainbows. However, those are not places where he reveals his heart. Where does God reveal his heart? In Jesus' cross where he gave his only son to suffering,

death, and hell in order to save the world. He also reveals himself in our cross, as we experience utter dependence on God and others. Like the hymn verse reads, "When every earthly prop gives way, he then is all my hope and stay." That's the idea.

Bearing our cross means that we no longer demand God justify himself for the way things are. We give up any imaginary right to judge God or any right to personal gain. Under the cross, we completely submit to God and his will and his ways for ourselves and the world.

The Law of God shatters any perceived righteousness that we imagined we had in our thoughts, words, and deeds. The cross of Christ shatters our complacent self-reliance as it brings failure, frustration, disappointment, difficulties, struggles, suffering and pain. Why does it have to be that way? It has to be that way because it is only the cross that will drive us to a deeper daily dependence on Jesus Christ who meets the agonies of our cross with the saving power of his own.

Hopefully I can go a little deeper on this hiddenness of God in next week's sermon. Until then, God bless us with the eyes of faith to see him where he hides himself, in our cross and the cross of Jesus. Amen.

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