

How God Sees the Cosmos

John 3:1-17 | 3/11/2017

What does God see when God looks at the world? Perhaps what just came to your mind was one of those pictures of our planet taken from space that makes it look like a blue marble hanging in space. Problem is, such pictures cannot completely encompass the divine view because the Bible describes God as being intimately involved in the lives of humankind. The blue marble perspective is just too distant.

But perhaps there is a better “God’s-eye” view. It’s called “Google Earth.” It’s a program you can download to your computer, and it’s described as a “virtual globe” application. Its inventors have created a three-dimensional map of the earth by superimposing satellite images, aerial photographs and other geographic information onto maps to create full-color views such as you might see if you were hovering over locations of your choice in some sort of aircraft that allowed you to quickly zoom down toward the ground or up toward the sky to change your perspective.

Even if you don’t own a computer, you’ve probably seen the professional version in action on TV news without knowing what it was. If, for example, the news anchor is introducing a story from Kirkuk, Iraq, the TV screen might switch to what looks like a satellite image of the Mideast, but then it zeros in, first to Iraq, then to Kirkuk, where you can actually see the grid of the city streets, and finally to where you can even make out individual buildings.

Google Earth can be fun, too. The first location many of us looked at after we downloaded the program was our own home. If you type in your street address, city and state, Google Earth’s global map will “revolve” in front of your eyes and quickly focus down on your neighborhood and finally, your house — or your neighbor’s house. You’ll notice that Barb and Jeff up the street have added a barbecue pit in their backyard you didn’t know about.

But, according to the Bible, even the perspective of this three-dimensional program *does not allow us to see the world as God sees it*. The way God sees the world, the Bible says, is *through the lens of love*. Sounds simplistic, but let’s unpack this a bit.

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son ...” says John 3:16, the most well-known verse from the whole Bible. It has been called the “gospel in miniature,” and indeed, it does convey the heart of the gospel message.

“God so loved the *world*,” the verse says, but in our minds, we may too often think of that as, “God so loved *the people who inhabit the planet Earth*.” But if John meant only “the people who inhabit the planet Earth,” why didn’t any one of the several Bible translations available today translate this verse that way? They all simply say “world,” which is a rendering of the original Greek word John used, *kosmos*.

The *first* definition of that word is not “people,” but “orderly arrangement.” Our English word “cosmos” comes from that Greek word, and it’s used to mean the universe regarded as an orderly, harmonious whole, as opposed to being chaotic.

As it happens, the Greek of John’s day included another word that can also mean “world” but specifically refers to the part of the earth that is inhabited. That word is *oikoumene*, but John didn’t use it in this verse.

There’s no doubt a reason he chose *kosmos* instead. In fact, he may have had two reasons:

One is that in John used *kosmos* because he wanted to be clear that *no one anywhere and nothing in all creation was outside the realm of God’s love*.

The second possible reason that John used *kosmos* is that John actually meant that God wants harmony and order and not chaos.

The point is that order, the state where things work out as *God* wants them to, is the existence he also wants for all of us. God loves us so much that he sent his Son to save us from the chaos of sin, the chaos that ultimately causes us to perish. God sent his Son to restore the righteous, orderly arrangement of life for us, the way that leads to eternal life.

No matter how good Google Earth is, the truth is that we cannot see the world as God sees it. We're incapable of loving the whole world. Martin Luther certainly knew that, for he wrote, "If I were as our Lord God, and these vile people were as disobedient as they now be, I would knock the world to pieces." The best we can do is to try to love the folks in our small corner of influence.

Only God has the unlimited love version of Google Cosmos. We can receive the limited version, which allows us to love our neighbor and maybe even sometimes our enemy, but only God is capable of the wide field of love that allows him to embrace the whole world. Fortunately, God has yet another view of the world, a view that focuses his love on us one by one.

An old preacher once said that the best way to hear the gospel in John 3:16 is to substitute your own name for "world." Try it with me, using your name: "For God so loved [YOUR NAME] that he gave his only Son, so that if [YOUR NAME] believes in him, [YOUR NAME] may not perish but may have eternal life."

Well, that's great for you and me. But what about the people that we don't like much and really would prefer that God didn't love so much?

The truth is, God, loves us even when we are a mess, when we are guilty of disorderly conduct, when we are in emotional or spiritual disarray. God loves the very worst people in the world, so I can trust that God loves ordinary, and even ornery me, even or especially at my most scared and petty and mean and obsessive. Loves me; *chooses* me. And if he loves me and chooses me, that also means he loves you and chooses you.

God loves us and wants us to have the orderliness and righteousness that he himself enjoys. It's possible for us to reject God's love. But because God loves us, God doesn't easily let us go. That's why God sent his Son, and that's why God follows us through our unfaithfulness, our meanness to one other, our self-centeredness and our unholy messes.

God loves us through our up-heavings and down-turnings, through our in-fightings and out-castings, through our high-handings and low-standings, through our front-loadings and back-slidings, through our foot-stompings and side-steppings. And God gave us his Son to save us from all that.

Why would God do that? Because of the way God really sees the cosmos. God sees it not only as it is, but also as God created it to be, and how it will be when it is redeemed and recreated.

God sees the cosmos, the universe, creation and us through the lens of love.

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