

WHEN GOD TORE THE CURTAIN

Posted on December 21, 2021



To be a Christian is to see behind the veil—to see the face of God. Advent—the arrival of Jesus Christ on earth—was, is—the apotheosis of human history—when

the Lord tore through the veil of time that separates now and always.

Category: [Essay](#)

Tags: [Advent](#), [Christianity](#)

In June I had to pin down my two-year old daughter on a hospital bed, blood gushing from her chin, while a doctor sewed up her wound. Because she was too young to understand what was happening to her she thrashed and contorted her body, drawing out the process even longer.

“At this rate it’s gonna take all night,” the doctor said, exasperated. In my daughter’s eyes were fear, confusion, and what I hoped was very little pain. She was behind a veil. There was nothing I could do so that it would lift.

...

In her last days my Prussian grandmother confused me for my father. She started speaking to me in German, a language I couldn’t speak but my father did. She didn’t want her caretaker to understand what she was saying, because she didn’t trust her.

At some point her eyes seemed to only ever open halfway, as if her level of cognizance were reflected in them. She had reverted to her mother tongue. She would tell me President Trump had called her and that people were selling drugs in her backyard. She was living behind the veil. She couldn’t see through it to the other side.

...

Sometimes, in a paroxysm of endorphins, I order three or four books on one subject,

convinced that through them I will pierce the veil—that I will tear the curtain and reveal the inner workings of a concept to a large and grateful readership.

He figured out something nobody knew before. The time spent as a wistful freelance writer will have been redeemed.

...

A month or two into a dry spell of reading and writing—when I haven't found much inspiration in either, and my credentials as a published writer begin to languish, I happen upon the Bible readings sent to my inbox for the weekday morning masses I never attend. Sometimes the verses stick. Sometimes they don't. This time they do:

*On this mountain he will destroy
the veil that veils all peoples,
The web that is woven over all
Nations. (Isaiah 26:7)*

The following verse drops like a hammer:

"He will destroy death forever." (26:8).

But what is the relationship between the veil and death? The veil, I learned from a quick Google search, was also a sign of mourning (2 Samuel 19:4), so to lift the veil, as it were, is to remove the signs of mourning in a world in which death has been conquered.

...

When I was in seventh grade, my neighbor down the street picked me up every day for school in his restored Mustang. In many ways he was like the car—a throwback to another era. He was clean-cut, with an all-American smile. He broke track and football records. He had to get a special letter of recommendation from a congressman to apply to the Navy. He didn't drink or smoke. He died on a rooftop in Fallujah in the Fall of 2004. A Marine vet at my college took me out for a pint, and we left one for my neighbor on the table and asked the bartender not to clear it.

That night I dreamt my neighbor was throwing footballs on the field. The passes soared and floated, soared and floated, while he smiled. It's not unusual, in the Bible, for God to communicate through dreams. *He will destroy death forever.*

...

The veil is mentioned again in 2 Corinthians:

To this day, in fact, whenever Moses is read, a veil lies over their hearts, but whenever a person turns to the Lord the veil is removed. All of us, gazing with unveiled face on the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image.
(2 Cor: 14-18)

To tear the veil is to see the face of God. To see Jesus Christ. Under the old covenant, the face of God had been hidden. The veil remained.

To be a Christian is to see behind the veil—to see the face of God. Advent—the arrival of Jesus Christ on earth—was, is—the apotheosis of human history—when the Lord tore through the veil of time that separates now and always.

...

In my dreams God tears the curtain. He removes the veil. My grandparents host parties. Their hips aren't broken and they have no caregivers. They walk with ease. They are completely cognizant. Their gaze is piercing, unmistakable. Not dull. They are fully themselves, only more so.

...

Every time the peace of God comes upon me, it feels the same: When the last stitch on my daughter's chin is sewn; when the sunrise lifts from behind the San Jacinto Mountains and lifts the veil of night from the estuary and the ocean and I see Southern California as it once was; when I see the face of Christ in someone who has been transformed by him—*transformed into the same image*; when the dead come back to me, at peace, in my dreams.

...

"Thanks for sending me that verse from Isaiah," my evangelical Christian colleague tells me. Without malice he shows me that he knows the Bible better than I do, by connecting the verse from Isaiah to a verse from the Gospel of Mark:

"Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed his last. The veil of the sanctuary was torn in two from top to bottom." (Mark 15: 37-38)

Again, God tore the curtain—but only after he died on the Cross. Only through death, once we are past it, can we glimpse behind the curtain for good. Jesus tears the curtain and calls us back. Then the curtain closes. Even the few who glimpsed him saw him die.

Only through him, and with him, and in him, can we ever hope to see behind the curtain.

Jesus, our Redeemer, let me gaze upon your unveiled face. Amen.