

Show Me Your Glory, August 29, 2004

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Exodus 33:12-23; 34:29

(2 Corinthians 3:7-18; John 1:14-18)

Intro:

Last Sunday, we stood with Moses as he confronted the two greatest questions of life: Who am I? And, who is God? He had been asking these questions down in the depths of himself, somewhere below consciousness, ever since he was confronted with his own irreconcilable past: born a Hebrew slave, but raised a prince of Egypt. We saw how he tried to answer those most basic questions through his own strength and wisdom, apart from God, and how he brought upon himself nothing but banishment and further alienation.

Years passed, as he lived out his life on the backside of the desert, tending his father-in-law's sheep. Memories of his humble birth, and of the glories of the king's palace where he was raised, grew dimmer every year. His grand dreams of liberating his people had vanished years before. He seldom thought of them. Yet the great questions seethed just below

the surface, finally bursting forth and finding voice in the moment when he stood before the bush that burned but was not consumed. His story calls us to realize, in those words we quoted from Elizabeth Barrett Browning, "Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God; but only those who see take off their shoes."

We left last week with the challenge to seek to live with eyes wide open to God's majestic presence, to turn aside, take off our shoes, and kneel before his glory. But that raises a question that comes clearer in this morning's readings. How are we to see what the Scripture says is always all around us: the heavens telling the glory of God and the skies proclaiming the work of his hands (Psa 19).

In the Exodus readings, we stand again with Moses on the mountain of the Lord, only this time Moses is the redeemer of God's people. He has led them out of Egypt to the place where God first met him in the burning bush. He has received from God the commandments by which Israel and all people are to order their lives. But at this peak moment of human history, God tells Moses that the people have not

waited below in patient obedience, but have rebelled against God by making idols for worship and by indulging in immoral revelry at the foot of the mountain. God threatens to destroy them and to give to Moses another people to lead, an obedient and faithful people who will follow him without the bitter complaining that has marked the children of Israel since leaving Egypt.

It is Moses' response that reveals his greatness as a man of God, and God's response to Moses that reveals the majesty of his mercy and grace. In the ensuing conversations between Moses and the Lord, we begin to sense the shape of things unseen, and to realize what is required of those who would see God's glory burning all around them, as well as what one might expect to see and hear if one is granted a glimpse of the outskirts of God's glory

Body:

1. What kind of person is granted a vision of God's glory?

One who is willing to risk all for the sake of God's reputation (32:13). Moses has been criticized and second-guessed by the people ever since they crossed the sea and entered the desert. He must have thought repeatedly how good it would be to lead a different group, a mature, grateful, God-fearing group of people, rather than this mob of whiners and complainers. But when God offers him a new congregation, he declines, primarily because of his passion for God's glory. "What will the nations say?" he asks. "The Egyptians will say that you were unable to finish what you started, that you brought Israel out here with evil intent" (see Gen 32:9f). His burden is for God's reputation among the nations.

He even puts his own life on the line: "If you will, forgive their sin – but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written" (32:32). Moses is prepared to lay down his life for these rebels whom God has entrusted to him, even as One greater than Moses would one day bear the consequences of our rebellion in his own flesh, and be "wounded for our transgressions and crushed for our iniquities" (Isa 53:5).

It is those who care more for God's reputation than they do for their own, more for God's glory among the nations than they do for their own lives, whose eyes are opened to the fire of God burning and blazing around them in all that he has made.

One who is willing to risk all for the sake of God's presence (33:15). If Moses cared deeply about God's reputation among the nations, he cared even more deeply about God's presence among his people. This goes to the very heart of his God-given identity. When Moses had stood before the burning bush and asked, "Who am I?" God had answered, "I will be with you." God's continuing presence formed Moses' core of meaning and was the bedrock of his confidence in leading God's people.

Now, God says, "Behold, my angel shall go before you" (32:34), "but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people" (33:3). Now, for most of us in leadership, the promise of a shining messenger from the very presence of God to lead us on our way would be beyond our wildest hopes. But for those who

understand what God offers us of his continuing presence and personal guidance, an angel is not nearly enough.

So Moses calls the people to mourn their sin, and he erects a tent outside the camp where he goes to seek God's face in daily prayer for the people. He is calling Israel to repent and to cry out to God for revival (see 33:4-11). Moses pleads with the Lord for the people, reminding God that these are his people, and that he has made great promises of his presence to Moses. God is pleased with Moses' intercession, and says, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." Moses responds, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here" (33:14,15).

Then Moses asks God for what every lover desires: "Please show me your glory" (33:18). He is asking God to slip off the garment that covers him, and to let Moses gaze upon his beauty, which is the source of all that is good and true and beautiful. This is the mystic vision sought by all who hunger and thirst for God, as well as the longing of philosopher and poet, of artist and social activist, of all who long to see things as they were meant to be in justice, truth and loveliness.

Do we begin to grasp the significance of this? Moses was a man of flesh and blood like you and me, and he pleased God by wrestling in prayer for God's glory among the nations and his glory in the midst of his people. He puts everything on the line: "If you will not forgive your people and take them where you have promised to take them, then destroy my life, for I do not want to live in a world that does not recognize that you alone are God, and that you are faithful to your promises." And again, "If you will not go up in our midst, then don't send us. No matter how splendid the land of promise, no matter how lovely it is with its vineyards and orchards, its lakes and villages, it is no better than this wilderness if you are not with us." Do we burn with passion for God's reputation and presence? The vision of God's glory is granted to those who do.

2. What happens when God's glory passes by?

One sees God's goodness (33:19a). When Moses asks to see God's glory, God warns him that he cannot yet bear the full frontal blaze of his glory, but he tells him, "I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I

have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face you shall not see" (33:22,23). But what happens when God's glory passes by? What phenomena accompany it? Is it simply an ineffable, indescribable experience, or can we speak of it? Here we have God's own description of such a moment, and God tells Moses what will happen in this moment when his glory passes by unveiled.

God says, "I will make all my goodness pass before you" (33:19a). When God comes in revival, we are overwhelmed by the vision of his goodness, his mercy and tender-kindness to the people like us. We who have grumbled and asked why life can be so hard and so full of disappointment suddenly realize that God is working out his glorious purposes through all the broken and disparate pieces of our lives and is accomplishing through human history something gloriously beyond anything that we could ever imagine. God is good, and his goodness is everlasting. Those who finally see this will now trust God in ways that they never did before, and will

be willing to follow him wherever he leads, not matter what the obstacles may be.

This is the vision that the church in our day must seek to recapture: that our hope is not in comfort or the pleasure of our circumstances, but in the sheer goodness of God alone.

One hears God's name (33:19b). And, God says, "I will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (33:19b). In other words, God reminds Moses of his covenant name, "I AM WHO I AM," and he spells out the implications: "It is my prerogative to be gracious and to show mercy. I owe it to no one, but graciously show it to those who are mine.

The name of God represents the sum of his attributes, the fullness of who he is and of all that he does. This is not only seen, but is heard, as he reveals himself to us in his Word. Those who long to see him listen to his voice by studying his Word patiently, faithfully, and diligently.

What of you? Are you giving yourself to this exercise of listening as you read? Are you seeking a series of theological propositions that you can arrange into a system, or are you seeking the voice of the living God beckoning you to follow him to that cleft in the rock where he will shield you as his glory sweeps by? Do you long for such things?

Conclusion:

There is much talk these days of revival. People are claiming revival wherever large crowds gather and loud music is energetically sung. But true revival looks like this: it flows from a passion for God's glory, from a longing to see him acknowledged by the nations and worshiped by his people. It burns in the hearts of those who long to see the Lord, and who know that when we see him, it will be more than worth the journey.

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