

“Glory Revealed”

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Exodus 33:12-22

Moses said to the LORD, “See, you have said to me, ‘Bring up this people’; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’ ¹³ Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.” ¹⁴ He said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” ¹⁵ And he said to him, “If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. ¹⁶ For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth.”

¹⁷ The LORD said to Moses, “I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” ¹⁸ Moses said, “Show me your glory, I pray.” ¹⁹ And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the name, ‘The LORD’; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. ²⁰ But,” he said, “you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live.” ²¹ And the LORD continued, “See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; ²² and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; ²³ then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen.”

SOMETHING ABOUT THAT NAME

A Jewish person liked what I had to say a while back so she wrote on Twitter,
“G_d bless Frank Allen.”

I loved that.

I can take all the blessings I can get...even Twitter blessings!

But, I noticed something unusual about how she wrote God. She left out the "o" and replaced it with an underline mark. I don't know, but I think it was her way of adhering to Jewish tradition.

The name of God is sacred, and should not be spoken (or in this case written) without a sense of reverence or awe.

In order to keep from saying God's name out loud, God's people said "Adoni" or "Lord" instead.

There was something about that name.

It was as if the name itself contained "glory". That name was too sacred to speak or even see in its entirety. That name itself revealed the divine.

EXODUS AND THE NAME OF GOD

In fact the book of Exodus is sort of organized around the ever unfolding name of God.

This pattern begins at the burning bush. God reveals Himself to Moses as the God of his ancestors. He is the God of his father and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. (Exodus 3:6)

This name for God reminds Moses of God's faithfulness in the past. God has been with Moses' family for a long time. God can be trusted to save His people.

But, Moses was not so sure that this would be enough to get his people to follow him out of Egypt. He asked, "When I tell my people that the God of their ancestors has sent me to lead them out of Egypt, they will surely ask,

'What is this God's Name?'
What shall I say when they ask this?"

And God reveals His sacred Name to Moses.

This is the sacred name that is not to be spoken.

God told Moses,
“Tell the people that I AM WHO I AM” or “I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE sent you.” (Exodus 3:14)

There was power in that Name above all names.
There was glory in that Name.

God is not relegated to the past.
This name suggests that God is active in the present, and God leads His people into the future.

God does more than just exist.
God is involved.
God is with and for His people ... now and forever.

The rest of the book of Exodus illustrates this.
The more God’s people learn about the Lord;
the more they appreciate the power and sacred nature of His Name.

MORE GLORY PLEASE

And yet, no matter how many times He saves His people,
no matter how many times God’s people see His mighty works
...there is a yearning to see more.

When God’s people were in the valley,
they need to be reassured that God was still with them and for them.

Sometimes we are sure that God is with us and for us.
And sometimes we feel all alone.

Sometimes we are on the mountaintop.
And sometimes we are in the valley of despair.

When we’re in the valley we want reassurance.
We want to see more glory.

This was true for Moses as well.

Moses was always searching for more glory.

Moses experienced the power and glory of God more than most...
He saw the burning bush,
He defeated Pharaoh and led the Exodus from Egypt.

He saw how God cared for His people in the wilderness.
He went to the mountaintop and received God's law.

In fact it was said that Moses was so close to God that he could talk to the Almighty like a friend.
Moses got so close to God's glory that his face reflected the divine presence
... it would shine like the sun.

GLORY HIDDEN BY SIN

But, sometimes that close relationship was broken by sin.

In particular, when Moses was on the mountaintop receiving the Ten Commandments,
the people were in the valley worshipping the Golden Calf.

This created a crisis.
Due to their sin, the presence of God would be a constant source of judgment instead of salvation.

And so God came up with a solution.
He told Moses,

"Take your people to the Promised Land.
I'll send an angel to guide you, but I'm not going to be with you, not like I was before."

MOSES' PLEA FOR GOD'S PRESENCE

But, Moses was not interested in a second hand experience of God.
He had been to the mountaintop.
He had seen glory.

And Moses wanted more of God...not less.

So, Moses once again did something incredible.
He argued with God.

He told the Lord, the Almighty,
the Creator of Heaven and Earth,

“I can’t do this.
I can’t settle for an angel.
I can’t settle for just entering the Promised Land.

I need You.
And my people need You too.

If you love us, go with us to the Promised Land.
We can’t make it without Your Presence.”

GOD CHANGES HIS MIND

And what happens?

God changes His mind!
God tells Moses,
“Okay, okay. Don’t sweat it.
I’ll go with you.”

You would think that Moses would say something like,
“Whew! I’m glad you won’t be leaving us.”

But, oh now, Moses presses the Almighty further.
He said in essence,

“Now Lord don’t be kidding me on this.
I mean it.

We don’t need an angel in the wilderness.
We need You.

If we don’t have You with us,

we'll be no different from any other nation.
We need You!

And furthermore, if You're not going with us,
we're not going anywhere... angel of no angel.
We're not budging!"

Who talks to God like this?
Apparently Moses.

Once again the Lord tried to reassure his reluctant prophet.
"Okay. I like you Moses.
I'm going with you and your people."

I KNOW YOUR NAME

And the Lord said something else that's very interesting.
He told Moses,
"Remember.
I know your name."

God had given Moses His sacred name at the burning bush.

But, before that, God knew Moses' name.
God knew all about Moses...the good and the bad.

God knew that Moses wasn't a good public speaker.
God knew that Moses had a temper that led him to kill an Egyptian in a fit of anger.
God knew that Moses had his doubts and often wanted to run from problems instead of facing them head on.

God knew his name.

But, God called him anyway.
And God was still with him.
And God would remain with Moses until the journey's end.

So, the Lord promised to be with Moses and the people of Israel as they traveled through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

GLORY REVEALED; GLORY HIDDEN

But, even that was not enough for Moses.
He wanted more.
He wanted to actually see the “glory” of God.

What is the essence of God’s glory?
How would you characterize the presence of God?
In this passage glory is defined by grace and mercy.

The Lord told Moses,
“I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you
the name, ‘The LORD’; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious,
and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.”

The Name that should not be spoken aloud,
the Name that is above all names,
that name will be spoken in the presence of Moses.

And that name will be for Moses the sound of grace and mercy.

Yet, there is one thing that God cannot do for Moses.
He cannot show Moses His glory face to face.

Why?
Simple.
No one can see the Lord’s face and live.

However, the Lord can show Moses His glory indirectly.
He will hide Moses in the cleft of a rock,
and Moses will be able to get a glimpse of glory.

Moses will be able to see God’s back as God passes by.
And that will be all the glory Moses can handle.
At least for now.

MORE GLORY TO COME

But, this encounter will not spell the end of God’s self revelation
...far from it.

It is just the beginning.
There is more glory to come.

And there will be some who will see the glory of God face to face
...and live to tell about it.

The prophet Isaiah talked about a “virgin” who would bear a son who would be named Immanuel which means “God is with us”. (Isaiah 7:14)

Later in the gospel of Matthew (1:23) this verse is used to refer to the birth of Jesus.

The glory of God, the presence of God is uniquely present in the birth of Jesus.

John’s gospel seems to reflect on our passage for today.
Speaking about Jesus John wrote,

“And the Word became flesh and lived among us,
and we have seen his glory,
the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)

So in the person of Jesus, we see what Moses could not see.
We see the Divine face to face.

THE TRANSFIGURATION

The gospels make this clear in the story of the transfiguration.
You’ll remember that Jesus and some of his disciples went up a high mountain.

And on the mountaintop Jesus was transfigured before them.
His face shone like the sun, and his clothes became dazzling white.
(Matthew 17:2; cf. Mark 9:2; Luke 9:29)

What was that story about?
It was about the glory of God being revealed in Jesus.

And do you remember who was with Jesus on the mountaintop?
Moses and Elijah.

Moses who sought to see more of God's glory all his life now stands in the presence of the one who reflects that glory.

He no longer needs to view the glory of God from the safe space...the cleft of the rock.

In Jesus he has met the rock.

And, according to John's gospel, instead of death he finds grace and truth.

CONFUSED DISCIPLES

The disciples (and in particular Peter) do not understand this.

Peter doesn't know what to say, but like so many of us he speaks anyway.

And the voice from heaven proclaims, "Talk less and listen to Jesus more!"

That brings the disciples to their knees in fear.

This was too much glory for them to behold.

But, this divine scene all of sudden turns into a very human one.

The disciples look up and see only the face of Jesus.

And Jesus tells these frightened disciples, "Get up and don't be afraid."

In Jesus the glory of God is not something to be feared.

The glory of God is not something that kills us.

The glory of God lifts us up and leads toward a greater salvation.

The more we learn about God's glory;

the more we realize this wonderful truth;

God is not out to get us.

God is out to save us.

God lovingly placed Moses in the cleft of the rock.

And in the same way God brings salvation to us as well.

SALVATION AND THE ROCK

This connection is expressed by a couple of old gospel hymns.

For example, in the hymn, Rock of Ages we sing,

"Rock of Ages, cleft for me.

Let me hide myself in thee..."

Or as another hymn puts it,

“He hideth my soul in the cleft of the rock
That shadows a dry thirsty land;
He hideth my life with the depths of his love,
and covers me there with his hand...”

The cleft of the rock is not the place where we hide from God.
The cleft of the rock is the place of protection and care.

And the rock?
It is the rock is the rock of our salvation.

When all is said and done,
the glory of God that brings us to our knees
also lifts us up and leads us on.

To paraphrase another hymn,
Grace teaches our hearts to fear.
And grace those fears relieve.

SIN HIDES GOD’S GLORY

Moses spent his life on a quest for the glory of God.
At first I thought Moses’ demand to see the glory of God demonstrated a
lack of faith.

After all, God had done so much for Israel.
Why couldn’t Moses just believe?
Why couldn’t Moses just trust the fact that God was with them and for
them?

But, then I realized that Moses’ continuing quest to see the glory of God
wasn’t about God’s willingness to save and protect his people.

His quest was due to the fact that the sins of his people
and his own sins separated him from God.

Like Adam and Eve who were cast out of the garden because of idolatry,
the story was the same with Moses and God’s people.

Remember the context of this story.

It was the idolatry of the golden calf that separated Moses and God's people from the glory of God.

The reason God's people stayed in the wilderness so long was because of their idolatrous ways. And the reason we stay in the wilderness so long is because of our idolatrous ways.

The reason we feel alienated from God is not because we have a lack of revelation.

We have seen the grace and truth of God in Jesus.

The reason we feel alienated from God is our own idolatry.

If a voice from heaven would speak to us today,
we would hear the same message that the disciples heard long ago,

"Jesus is my Son.
Don't just talk about him. Listen to him."

Jesus is full of grace and truth.
But, sometimes I wonder if that's true of us.

Take a look at our politics.
Politics more than anything else reflect the true nature of a society.

And what do our politics reveal?
Not much grace and truth there.

I wonder.
Are we like the ancient Israelites?
Do we go worship gold and the golden calf instead of seeking the glory of God?

I would suggest that we seek glory in the cleft of the rock.

You know the rock I'm talking about.

It was a grave carved out long ago by those who sought to silence the voice of Jesus.

A large stone was rolled in front of that grave.

But, the glory of God rolled the stone away.

And the glory of that empty tomb has been bringing us hope in our wilderness ever since.

Glory continues to be revealed.

And this glory does not kill us.

This glory promises life that is eternal.

Amen.