

# Seeing God's Glory

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- Psalter 259:1,2,4
- Exodus 33:12-34:9
- Psalter 273:1-5
- Psalter 34:1-2
- Psalter 32: All

We call your attention to the words of Exodus 33:18, "And he said, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." Here we have Moses' prayer to see God's glory, which we shall expound as, first, a prayer circumstantially motivated, and second, a prayer wonderfully answered.

## **I. A Prayer Circumstantially Motivated**

Usually when we meet Moses in Exodus, we see him in his public work as a servant of God. Sometimes he is working miracles. Often he is proclaiming God's word or judging some particular evil. But in Exodus 33 we see Moses in the secret place as the servant of the people, speaking with God face to face in a time of great need. Let me give you some background of the circumstances under which Moses was communing with God.

The people of Israel had sinned heinously in making a golden calf. God was terribly displeased. At first He was minded to let loose His wrath against them, and destroy them all. He proposed to make a new nation of the seed of Moses. "I will make of thee a great nation" (Ex. 32:10). Moses besought the Lord to show pity and turn from such fierce wrath, and to repent of such an evil against the people, for the sake of God's honor in the eyes of the heathen, and the promise made to the fathers (vv. 11-13). So the people were spared. God now commands Moses and the people to go up unto the land of promise. He promises to send an angel before them, and to drive out the people who now dwell in that land, but He Himself would not go up in the midst of them, "for thou art a stiffnecked people: lest I consume thee in the way" (Ex. 33:1-3).

We are told that "when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned" (Ex.

33:4). As for Moses, he sees that he has more praying to do. To commune with God, Moses pitched a tent outside the camp, calling it "the Tabernacle of the congregation," and there he spoke with God.

Attended by his servant, Joshua, Moses went out to the tabernacle to meet with God. Knowing the greatness of their sin, and knowing how justly they deserved God's wrath and curse, the people looked to Moses and his priestly intercession for salvation. So they watched Moses and Joshua exit the camp. They stood in the door of their tents and saw the glory of God coming down as the pillar of cloud, and Moses going into the tabernacle to commune with God, and to plead for the people.

Exodus 33:12-23 relates some of the conversation between God and Moses. Moses, said he couldn't go on without the Lord: "If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence," he said (33:15). He yearned for God to be with His people and to be in their midst. Moses would rather die than go on without this sign of God's favor. Then he made the ultimate request: "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory":(33:18).

Moses could scarcely have asked for more. No doubt, like Peter on the Mount of Transfiguration, he little knew the magnitude of what he asked. As Charles Spurgeon said, "It was vast faith which enabled Jacob to grasp the angel; it was mighty faith which made Elijah rend the heavens, and fetch down rain; but this prayer contains a greater amount of faith than those prayers combined."

How did Moses dare to ask for such a blessing? I believe that former communion with God encouraged him to ask for greater communion. Had Moses not spent forty days in sweet communion with God? Had not the Lord spoken unto him "face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend"? Like Jacob, he had wrestled hard with God and, by grace, had prevailed.

Moreover, Moses had come with one petition after another, and God had answered them all. That made him bold. Faith doesn't retreat but gets bolder with each answered prayer. If it receives two answers, it prays for four more. Faith scales the walls of heaven,

The desire to see God's glory is the essence of Moses' prayer. It is also the highest request of every true believer. Every genuinely converted man and woman,

boy and girl, longs to see the glory of God. Moses' example encourages us to be filled with boldness in prayer. It calls us to be in constant fellowship with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ. Only intimacy with God can raise us to such levels of boldness to ask, "I beseech thee, shew me thy glory."

Most of us are too hesitant to go to God. We bring Him far too little, and our expectation is far too small. We too seldom realize that seeing the glory of God is the essence of conversion: Conversion sees the glory of God, not physically but spiritually, by faith. Only a true Christian sees the glory of God. When you see God's glory, you know that you are a Christian.

An unbeliever, of course, sees something of God in creation and acquires some knowledge of God as he moves through life. David says, "The heavens declare the glory of God and the firmament sheweth his handywork" (Ps. 19:1). Paul tells us that the world reveals enough of the power and wisdom of God to leave people without excuse for their unbelief (Rom. 1:18-21). But only a true Christian sees the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ (2 Cor. 4:6).

Most prayers, including those recorded in the Bible, rise out of circumstances. A good example of that is Jacob wrestling with the angel of God because he is afraid of meeting his brother, Esau (Gen. 32). Jacob prayed to God because of the danger of his circumstances. Consider also Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the temple (1 Kings 8:22-53), Daniel's confession of sin (Dan. 9:3-19); and Paul's prayers for the churches of Ephesus, Philippi, and Colosse (Eph. 1:15-23, 3:14-21; Phil. 1:9-11; Col. 1:9-15). All of those prayers were motivated by circumstances. So also the circumstances of our daily life motivate many of our prayers.

There were at least three circumstances that gave rise to Moses' petition "Shew me thy glory":

1. *He wanted to see more of God.* Moses had seen much of God's glory in his life, and he wanted more. All of Moses' life was one long experience of God revealing His glory to men and nations. When Moses' parents looked at him in the cradle, they knew that he was a special child. By faith they understood that this child was ordained by God to be a great man. And so it proved. At the age of forty, Moses tried to free his captive people in Egypt by slaying an Egyptian, but that didn't work, Moses had to wait another forty years.

That's when he saw the burning bush out of which God spoke to him and commissioned him to speak to Pharaoh and to free the people of Israel from slavery.

The ten plagues followed, then the exodus through the waters of the Red Sea, and then everything that happened on Mount Sinai, including meeting God and receiving the Ten Commandments. In those experiences, Moses saw the glory of God. And the more he saw of God's glory, the more he prayed, "O God, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory."

2. *He wanted assurance of God's forgiveness.* When Moses went up Mount Sinai to meet with God, Aaron was given the responsibility of leading the people. Sinai was shrouded in smoke and clouds while Moses stayed there, talking with God for forty days and nights. But while one brother was up on the mountain, receiving the Ten Commandments, the other brother was at the foot of the mountain, helping the people to break that Law. While Moses was receiving the commandment "Thou shalt not make a graven image," Aaron was melting gold trinkets to make a statue to worship in place of God. He built an altar for it, and proclaimed a feast. He had the people offer sacrifices. "The people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to play," that is, to dance before the image of the molten calf. He even had them strip off their clothes and go naked "unto their shame" (Ex, 32:25).

Now Moses and Aaron were both great men of God. But there was a great difference between the two. Moses' first concern was always the glory of God, and the honor of His Name. Aaron, by contrast, couldn't say "no" to the people, regardless of what they asked, He was more concerned about his popularity than saying "no" to sin. When Moses came down the mountain and saw what the people were doing, he was so angry that he broke the tables of stone, as a sign that they had broken their covenant with God. Shouting, "Who is on the Lord's side?" he enlisted those who stepped forward to help him slay 3,000 Israelites.

Moses, on God's behalf, applied the rod of reproof and correction. All this took its toll, however. Witnessing such gross sin and then administering such severe punishment in the name of God exhausted Moses' spirit. He

desperately needed the calm refreshment and restoration that can only be found in the presence of God.

So you see the explanation for the prayer, "O God, I beseech thee, shew me thy glory." Moses is asking, "Take my eyes off this world. Put my eyes upon that heavenly One who is the Lord of glory. Take my mind off the sorrows and trials of this present time. Let me be so taken up with heavenly things until I forget the things of earth that vex my spirit. Oh that I might see again that heavenly vision of the glory of the Lord."

3. *He needed strength for the journey.* A long journey lay before Moses and the people, and the prospect of a great conflict with the people of the land. In fact, Israel would spend the next forty years in travail, sorrow, and difficulty traveling through the wilderness to the Promised Land. Moses needed his soul fortified for that great ordeal. He needed the strength and depth of his relationship with God to carry him through.

One thing that worried Moses was how superficial the faith of God's people was at that time. God had taken the people out of Egypt. He had brought them to the foot of Mount Sinai. He had shown His glory on top of the mountain. They had cowered in terror at the trumpet, the lightning, the thunder, the fire, the smoke, and the voice of God who had commanded them, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image." And yet, only a short time later, the people lost heart when Moses failed to return and said to Aaron, "Up, make us gods, which shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we wot [know] not what is become of him" (32:1).

Moses' prayer reminds us how shallow and superficial we all are. What we need is not simply the grace of God touching the surface of our lives; we need the grace of God carving its way deep into our souls. Moses longed for depth. He was asking, in effect, "O God, we are so shallow-don't simply scratch the grace of God into our souls but carve it down deep. Show us thy glory."

The church today needs depth and strength. We desperately need communion with God. We live in a stifling, wicked world. It is difficult to

breathe in such an atmosphere, saturated as it is with sin, and still go forward. We need help from above. So let us cry, "Shew me thy glory."

## ***II. A Prayer Wonderfully Answered***

To see how wonderfully Moses' prayer was answered by God, we must first understand what is meant by the glory of God. God's glory is the splendor of His being, what He is absolutely in Himself, infinite, eternal, and unchangeable (Fisher's *Shorter Catechism Explained*, p. 14). God's glory is the radiant beauty, or brightness (Heb. 1:3) of the sum of all His attributes, His wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness, and truth. God's glory is the light in which He dwells, "the light which no man can approach unto" (1 Tim. 6:16).

Children, you know that sunlight can be broken into various colors. You take a wedge of glass, called a prism, and put it onto a stand. In a darkened room, you shine a jet of pure white light onto the prism. It will break up the light into all the different colors that make up the light: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, and violet. That's a faint illustration of what God's glory is like. It is the total splendor of His holiness, justice, truth, wisdom, power, grace, and love. Those attributes are inseparable from His glory; they are the source of His glory. What Moses asks now is, "O God, show me what manner of God Thou art. Make me stand in awe at the wonder of Thy being. Portray to my mind and soul all the wondrous truths of who Thou art."

God responds to Moses' prayer in three ways:

1. *He promises to answer it.* He doesn't shake the mountain in justice, holiness, and wrath. Rather, He promises to come to Moses in the still small voice of the gospel. "I will make all my goodness to pass before thee," God says (v. 19a).

God's goodness is the brightest diamond in His crown, for His greatest glory is that He is good. He is goodness itself; it is the essence of His every attribute as well as His every act. As Thomas Boston wrote, "All the variations of the creatures which He made were so many beams and apparitions of His goodness." He is good in creation, in providence, and above all, in redemption. He is the overflowing fountain of all good. No

wonder, then, that when Stephen Charnock wrote the great classic *The Existence and Attributes of God*, he devoted more pages to divine goodness than to any other attribute.

What a promise—all my goodness shall pass before you! Moses would no doubt witness God's sovereign goodness towards His chosen people. But herein lies the apex of God's goodness. When we see God's redemptive goodness, we see not only His goodness in our regeneration, conversion, justification, and sanctification, but we are also led back to our Savior in Gethesemane, Gabbatha, and Golgotha. From there God's goodness takes us back to eternity past, where we gaze by faith upon our election, then to eternity future, where we, by hope, anticipate dwelling in the eternal goodness of Jehovah.

God's goodness is boundless and timeless. From eternity to eternity, God is "the overflowing fountain of all good" (*Belgic Confession*, Art. 1). God "is good and doeth good unto all" (*Westminster Confession*, Ch. XXI, Para. I). Oh, that we might both hunger and thirst for His goodness, and heed the words of the psalmist, "O taste and see that the LORD is good" (Ps. 34:8). Let us be in constant awe and admiration of God's goodness.

God goes on to promise that He will also show Moses the sovereignty of His grace and mercy. "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will shew mercy on whom I will shew mercy" (v. 19b). God's glory is more fully seen when sovereignty is joined with goodness. To see God's sovereign grace and mercy, therefore, is to see God's glory, and to see it more fully. In the gospel, that glory is revealed in Christ as the brightness of God's glory (Heb. 1:3) and the Word made flesh: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

2. *He gives more than he asked.* God goes on to show Moses the entire spectrum of His glorious attributes.. We read, "And the LORD passed by before him, and proclaimed, The LORD, The LORD God, is merciful: and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by

no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation” (Ex. 34:6-7).

In essence, the answer to Moses' prayer is that the glory of God is the character of God. It is the glory of God to be what He is! Our problem is that we do not know God as He is. The more we know God as He is, the more godly ("like God") we will become. The difference between much godliness and little godliness is how much we know the glory of God. Moses longed to know that glory, and to possess a like degree of godliness.

Sometimes we say a person is unbalanced. Sadly, we are all unbalanced because sin has spoiled our character. We are prone to extremes. Not so with God! Everything in God is in perfect poise. Justice and holiness on one side are perfectly balanced with grace and love on the other. It is the glory of God's redemption work that in setting forth Christ Jesus "to be a propitiation through faith in his blood," He is most just in the punishing of sin, but also most gracious as "the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus" (Rom. 3:25-26).

We need to strive for grace to be like God, to be balanced in our character so that on the one hand we can uphold a high standard of holiness, righteousness, and justice; and on the other hand, to show kindness, mercy, and patience. Sin and the pressures of an evil world pressure us to lose that balance. We must never forget to look to God's character as the pattern for our own. Let us pray, "Lord, dig deeper; form me in accord with Thy communicable attributes. Help me to reflect Thy balanced character as a parent to my children; as an office-bearer to the congregation; as an employer to employees-yes, in every relationship of life."

That is what we need today. If we profess faith in Christ, we need to dig deeper into the character of God to understand what He is like, that we might live according to the pattern of His glorious image. God tells Moses, "I will make my goodness pass before thee." When you and I are in the right place, we will love that picture of God. We will strive to imitate what we see in it so that we may become more like God.



3. *He imposes two conditions.* In order to see God's glory, Moses must yield to two gracious limitations or conditions. First, God says, "Moses you cannot see my face, but I will pass before you and will cover you with my hand, and you will see my back parts as I go by." Second, God told Moses to hide in the cleft of a rock as God's glory passed by. As Exodus 33:20-23 says, "Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: and I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen."

God is willing to show some part of His glory to Moses but Moses is not allowed to see the whole of God's face because "No man can see me, and live." Looking upon the full glory of God is like looking at the light of the sun. If you stare at it too long, the sun will blind you. Likewise, man cannot look on God. His glory is so intense that the eye of man cannot stand it. So God set a limit, for Moses' sake, saying, "Moses, you can only see some of my glory."

God also put Moses into a safe place—"a clift of the rock," a crack or crevice in the rock Moses was to stand upon—from which he could observe "the back parts," or at least part, of God's glory. In doing so, God was teaching Moses the absolute necessity for a Savior and Mediator. He was saying that man in his sinful condition cannot live when God comes near, nor look upon even the least part of His glory, unless he has taken refuge in Christ the Mediator. Outside of Christ, without the protection of His broken body and shed blood, not Moses, and not any of us, can look upon the glory of God and live. So the Christian learns to sing from Psalter 34: stanzas 1 and 2, as we now do together:

*I love the Lord, His strength is mine;  
He is my God, I trust His grace;  
My fortress high, my shield divine,  
My Savior and my hiding place.*

## ***APPLICATION***

The well-known hymn of Augustus Toplady states:

*Rock of ages, cleft for me  
Let me hide myself in Thee.*

Moses needed that lesson. In chapter 32 he said to God, "This people have sinned a great sin." Now he says to God, "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin, and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written." Moses was offering to be the savior of the people. That was a noble sentiment but it wasn't enough. No man could bear the wrath of God. Moses offered himself as a substitute, but God said no. "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book," was God's answer. God was already preparing Someone far better than Moses to bear the sins of the world. The law would come by Moses, but grace and truth, and the complete remission of all our sins, by Jesus Christ (John 1:17).

It was good that Moses was so zealous for the glory of God. But Moses also had to learn that the Messiah to come would be the only Rock of refuge, for his own soul as well as for his fellow Israelites.

There is an important lesson here. Every true Christian should desire to see the glory of God (Ps. 63:1-2). We shall see it in the face of Jesus Christ. As Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:18: "But we all [as Christians), with open face (a reference to Moses going to the tent of meeting) beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

The "glass" or mirror in which we see the glory of the Lord is God's Word, and the preaching of God's Word. Scripture is God's witness to Christ: "They are they which testify of me" (John 5:39). Knowing God's Word is essential for salvation, and for our sanctification and growth in grace. As we see the face of Christ in Scripture, we behold the glory of God (2 Cor. 4:6). And what happens? Well, says Paul, we are changed. The Word of God changes us "into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord." That is how sanctification proceeds.

My friends, this is what we need. We need to look into this mirror of glory, the

Word of God. We need to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Then we shall be changed "from glory to glory," and come forth from God's presence with a radiant countenance. Men shall know that we have been with God. Isn't that what happened in the days of the apostles? Those ignorant, unschooled men were scoffed at by the Pharisees--initially. But those leaders began to think again when they saw the boldness and conviction of men who had been with Jesus and witnessed the glory of God (Acts 4:13). May God therefore move us to pray all our lives, and with all our hearts, "Shew me Thy glory." Amen.