

The Glory of God

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Exodus 33:12-23 and 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Moses said, "Show me your glory, I pray."—Exodus 33:18.

That was a large request to make. He could not have asked for more: "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." (King James Version) Why, it is the greatest petition that man or woman ever asked of God. It seems to be the greatest stretch of faith that I have either heard of or read. It was great faith which made Abraham go into the plain to offer up intercession for a guilty city like Sodom. It was vast faith which enabled Jacob to grasp the angel; it was mighty faith which enabled Elijah to open up the heavens and fetch down rain from skies which had been like leaden brass; but it appears to me that this prayer contains a greater amount of faith than all the others put together. It is the greatest request that anyone, man or women, could make to God: "I beseech thee, show me thy glory." Had Moses requested a fiery chariot to whirl him up to heaven; had he asked God to smite the floodwaters and drown an entire nation; had he prayed to the Almighty to send fire from hell to consume whole armies, I could have found a parallel to his prayer; but when he offers this petition, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory," Moses stands alone, a giant among giants; a Colossus even in those days of mighty men.

Up until this point in the Book of Exodus, Moses has had what could be described as a business relationship with God. Moses had been elected by God to lead the Israelites out of Egypt to the Promised Land. He had already split the Red Sea so the Israelites could escape the Egyptians and he had led the Israelites 40 days through the wilderness negotiating with God for water and manna from heaven. He had brought the Ten Commandments to the people down from the mountain top and, as we heard last week, Moses had negotiated with God so the Israelites didn't get obliterated by God after worshipping the golden calf. But now Moses wants more. He is going for broke: "Show me your glory, I pray."

Commentators since ancient times have puzzled over what exactly is signified by "glory" in this plea. They generally agree, though, that it points to a need on the part of Moses for greater intimacy in his relationship with God. Basically, Moses

tells God, "I need more than a business relationship with you. You know me, by face, by name, in every possible way, but I don't know you and I can't see you. I want reciprocity."

Moses wants a deep, personal, intimate connection to God. What is remarkable here is Moses' desire to know more of God, and his doggedness in realizing this goal. Taking care of the business of leading the Israelites isn't enough for Moses—he wants relationship and connection with God, along with knowledge and experience of the Divine. Moses had lately been on the mountain with God, and had had as intimate communion with God as anyone anywhere and anytime, yet he still desires a deeper acquaintance. Show me thy glory — Make me to see it; make it some way or other visible, and enable me to bear the sight of it. Not that Moses was so ignorant as to think God's essence could be seen with bodily eyes, but having up until now only heard a voice out of a pillar of cloud or fire, he desired to see some representation of the divine glory, whatever that might be.

Now the question becomes what attribute is God about to show to Moses? His petition is, "Show me thy glory." Will God show Moses God's justice? Will God show him God's holiness? Will God rend the mountains and show wrath? Will God break the cedar trees and show God's almighty power? Will God help Moses remember his sins to show that God is forgiving? No, God did none of these things. Instead Moses hears, "I will make all my goodness pass before you." Ah-hah! ***The goodness of God is God's glory.*** God's greatest glory is that God is good. The brightest gem in the crown of God is that God is good. "I will make all my goodness pass before thee."

Consider the goodness of God in creation. Who could ever tell all there is to tell of God's goodness? Why, the dancing waters of a mountain creek sparkle with God's glory. Every burnt orange or crimson tree is evidence of God's glorious brilliance. God's glory is all round us when the bushy-tailed squirrels crunch through fallen leaves and feathered songsters sing the glory of God. Why, every atom, every molecule of air is full of God's goodness. God feeds the cattle on a thousand ranges; the ravens come and peck their food from God's liberal hands. The fish leap out of their element, and God supplies them with food; every insect is nourished by God. Ten thousand creatures are all fed by God. Can you tell, then, what God's goodness is? If you knew all the myriad works of God, would your life be long enough to make all God's creative goodness pass before you?

Moses yearns, he aches to see the glory of God. So the Lord satisfies Moses by putting in place an elaborate protection plan so that Moses might be both satisfied and safe. God hides him in a cleft on the mountains and further covers him with his hand. In the end Moses gets to see only the back of God passing. The fullness of the Lord's presence, what Moses in his fear and uncertainty thinks will help, is in and of itself too much for human comprehension. As one writer says, such presence 'would be coercive; faith would be turned into sight, and humankind could not but believe.' There is always some uncertainty with regard to the Lord's presence, some mystery associated with God. Otherwise, where would there be room for faith and trust?

The glory of God is constantly passing before us. But there is something even more significant in this Exodus passage. What is important is not our ability to 'see' or know God, but to recognize that we are indeed already known by God who travels with us. 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." I know you by name. As unimaginable as that sounds, beyond human comprehension, God knows each and every one of us by name. Even Paul says in this morning's letter to the Thessalonians, "For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that God has chosen you and you became imitators of the Lord because you received the joy inspired by the Holy Spirit so that you became examples to all believers."

God knows us by name, we have been infused by the Holy Spirit, and, because we are Christians, are examples of those who believe. For all of us, every one of us here, it matters how we live our lives, how we treat others, what we say, and what we do. We, our character and our actions, are the only Bible that some people will ever know. Our life as Christians is a living, breathing Bible. In Paul's language, "The word of the Lord has sounded forth from you. In every place your faith has become known." And then he goes on to say, "There is no need to speak about it."

We are not being called to stand on street corners and evangelize. We are not being asked by God to go door-to-door expounding on our faith. God is not asking us to travel overseas and convert non-believers. But the Apostle Paul *is*

nurturing faithfulness as an activity. And the activity we are called to do is to live out the glory of God, our faithfulness in our everyday lives.

We serve a living and true God; a God that calls each and every one of us by name. We serve an awe-inspiring, wondrous, fascinating, and mysterious God. So let our lives reflect God's glory. For we know, brothers and sisters beloved by God, that God has chosen you. We know this because our message of the gospel came to us not in word only, but through the power of the Holy Spirit. Let the glory of God illuminate your life! Let your life be a living example of what it means to be known and loved by God. And let us always remember Moses' prayer to the Israelites and God's prayer to us:

May the Lord bless you and keep you.
May the Lord's face shine upon you
and be gracious unto you; and,
May the Lord's glorious countenance look upon you with kindness
and give you peace.
Amen.