

God's Glory Manifested

Exodus 33

Introduction

Do you remember the 1977 Steven Spielberg movie: *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*? Richard Dreyfuss discovers a secret government project preparing to engage extraterrestrial life at the foot of a mountain in Wyoming. Scientists are gathered together to await contact with an unknown force.

This is Israel in some respects. They are gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai, waiting for contact with an extraterrestrial being. In this case, ET is not a totally unknown force. He has identified himself to Moses, and through Moses to the people, as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He has revealed himself even more fully to Moses in the burning bush, giving his name as Yahweh, the covenant-keeping God.

Furthermore, he has revealed his power in opening the Red Sea through which the people of Israel passed on dry ground. Then he destroyed the pursuing Egyptian army. His presence was manifested in the cloud which led the nation by day and the pillar of fire by night.

Moses, Aaron and the elders of Israel ate and drank in the presence of God up on the mountain. They were able to look up and see the pavement upon which God stood.

Alone on the mountain, God gave to Moses his instructions for how Israel was to worship and how the people were to live. He wrote out the requirements of the covenant – the Ten Commandments – upon two tablets of stone. God also gave instructions for a tabernacle – a place where he would dwell among his covenant people.

But while Moses was up on the mountain, the people became impatient. They gave up on their leader and pressured Aaron to make for them a representation of God. They wanted the visible, the tangible, to lead them.

God sent Moses down, telling him that his holy anger burned against the people, that he was ready to destroy this wicked, stiff-necked people. Upon seeing the revelry and immoral carrying on, Moses smashed the tablets of stone, signifying the people's breaking of God's laws. Moses summoned the Levites to put to death those who were sinning. And God sent a plague among the people because of their disobedience.

In Deuteronomy, chapter nine, Moses is retelling this tragic experience of Israel, and adds further information to the Exodus account. Coming down from the mountain, he writes:

And I looked, and behold you had sinned against the LORD your God. You had made yourselves a golden calf. You had turned aside quickly from the way that the LORD had commanded you. So I took hold of the two tablets and threw them out of my two hands and broke them before your eyes. Then I lay prostrate before the LORD as before, forty days and forty nights. I neither ate bread nor drank water, because of all the sin that you had committed, in doing what was evil in the sight of the LORD to provoke him to anger. For I was afraid of the anger and hot displeasure that the LORD bore against you, so that he was ready to destroy you. But the LORD listened to me that time also. And the LORD was so angry with Aaron that he was ready to destroy him. And I prayed for Aaron also at the same time. – *Deuteronomy 9:16-20*

Now, in Exodus 33, God gives new instructions to Moses. It is time to go, but...

I. Time to God, But... – Exodus 33:1-6

God, in his grace, tells Moses that he will still fulfill his promise of driving out their enemies in the Promised Land. But, and it is a huge “but” – “I won’t go up with you.”

This is devastating news. Back in chapter 25, God begins the instructions for the tabernacle. In verse eight, he says: “And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.”

This would be God’s presence with his people. But now he is telling them that they will be on their own; they will need to go on without him. Peter Enns writes:

The significance of this turn of events cannot be stressed too highly. The whole purpose of the Exodus was for God and his people to be together. God’s presence with them will be firmly established in the proposed tabernacle. By saying “go ahead, but you’re going without me,” the events of the previous thirty-one chapters are being undone. This is not merely a setback; it means the end of the road.

There does appear to be true repentance on the part of the people at hearing this news. And the people show evidence of their turning from their sin.

At this point the Scripture text tells us of a tent where Moses would meet with God.

II. Time with God – Exodus 33:7-11

There are several things of interest we should note from these verses. First of all, where is the location of the tent? It is outside the camp. Unlike the tabernacle which was supposed to be situated in the midst of the camp, signifying God’s presence among the people, the meeting tent is far removed – a picture of God’s separation from them.

It's an interesting thing to contemplate what the biblical record says: "Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent."

You wonder what they were thinking, how they felt. Perhaps still under the conviction of their sin, they hoped that Moses was still interceding for them, that somehow God would forgive their sin. This must have given them hope.

Then we are told an amazing thing: God would speak to Moses face to face just like we speak to each other. Now we shouldn't conclude from this that Moses is somehow seeing the face of God. God will tell Moses that no one can look upon his face and live. But in some way, Moses stood in the very presence of God and communicated with the Almighty. There was a degree of intimacy that few had known since Adam and Eve walked with God in the Garden of Eden.

We have another fascinating conversation between Moses and God recorded in the remaining verses of this chapter.

III. Time to See – Exodus 33:12-17

Moses notes that God has known him by name. John Mackay says that for God to "know someone by name" is to embrace that person in "a relationship of acceptance and friendship." Not only that, but he has found favor in God's sight.

Because of this relationship, Moses requests that God show him his ways. Moses is asking for more understanding of God – how he operates, how he works.

God responds by telling Moses that he will go with him. The "you" in verse 14 is singular. God is saying that he will go with Moses, not Israel. But Moses, the mediator, puts forth this proposition to God: "If you won't go with all of us, then we won't go." Moses says that this is what has made Israel unique, special. Philip Graham Ryken writes:

What was it that distinguished the Israelites from other nations as the people of God? It was not their land, because they didn't have any land yet. It was not their wealth, because other nations had more treasure. It was not their culture, because they had been living in slavery. It was not their righteousness, because they could not keep even the most basic commandments. The only thing the Israelites had going for them was their relationship with God. And other people would only know that he was their God if he stayed in their midst.

God responds to Moses' intercession: Verse 17.

This emboldens Moses even more. Look what he asks of God – **Exodus 33:18-23**.

Moses is not content with his experience to this point. He wants more. It is what we might call: holy discontent. “Lord, let me see your glory.” Moses has seen God’s power; he has seen his manifested presence in the burning bush, in the cloud and in the pillar of fire. But he wants to see the very glory of God. God’s glory is the radiant expression of his perfect holiness and majestic splendor.

This is what Moses asks God to show him. It says much about the relationship that Moses had with God that God didn’t just dismiss this request out of hand. There are two conditions that come with God granting Moses’ request:

- 1) He could not see the undiminished glory of God and live.
- 2) He could not think that he had God figured out, that he could get his fingers around God. God says to him, “I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion to whom I will show compassion.” It’s like he says to Moses, “You will not be able to put me in a box. You cannot fully know me.”

And God showed Moses a fleeting glimpse of his goodness. How gracious God was to this man whom he called to lead the people of Israel.

Conclusion

Let’s go back through our story and consider its meaning for us today. Three things that I want you to see that need to shape your thinking.

- 1) First is that wonderful truth that was important to Moses: God knew his name. That is, there was an intimate knowledge of and relationship between God and Moses.

God knows you by name; he knows everything about you. One of the great Psalms of David is Psalm 139 – **Psalm 139:1-6, 13-16**

David, then, continues to talk about this special relationship God has with his spiritual children – **Psalm 139:17-18**

God delights in his children. If you are a child of God this morning, that is, you have believed the Gospel and trusted in Jesus Christ, God loves you as he loves his own Son. In his prayer to the Father, recorded in John 17, Jesus says this:

I do not ask for these only (speaking of his disciples), but also for those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that you

have sent me. The glory that you have given to me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one, I in them and you in me, that they may become perfectly one, so that the world may know that you sent me and loved them even as you loved me. – *John 17:20-23*

There's a song we sing that is one of my favorites. It is titled: *He Knows My Name*. Here are the words:

I have a Maker. He formed my heart.
Before even time began, my life was in his hands.

He knows my name. He knows my every thought.
He sees each tear that falls and hears me when I call.

I have a Father, he calls me his own.
He'll never leave me, no matter where I go.

2) The second thing I want you to think about is the reason why God said he would go up with the people. It was because of Moses and, in particular, because of his standing before God as the mediator for the people of Israel. God was ready to wipe out the nation and start all over again with Moses. But Moses, interceded for the people.

W.E. Vine describes a mediator as “a go-between” – “one who mediates between two parties with a view of producing peace.” This was the role Moses was fulfilling in his intercession on behalf of the people. It would be a role given to the Levitical priests who would stand before God in the place of the people, offering sacrifices to atone for the sins of the people.

Remember in our text last week how Moses offered to God himself as the atoning sacrifice for the people of Israel? God rejected that offer. Moses could be the intercessor; he could be a mediator, but not the mediator. Moses needed mediation for his own sin; his own sin needed to be atoned for.

It would be in the fullness of time that God would send his own Son, the eternal second person of the Godhead, who would be the mediator. He would be the perfect fulfillment of all that was foreshadowed by the Levitical priests. Whereas their sacrifices were able to only cover over the sins of the people, because of Jesus' sacrifice, sins could be forever forgiven. Louis Berkhof, in his *Systematic Theology*, writes:

(Christ) intervenes between God and man, not merely to sue for peace and to persuade to it, but as armed with plentipotentiary power, to do all that is necessary to establish peace.

The Apostle Paul writes of this priestly duty in his first letter to Timothy:

For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. – *I Timothy 2:5*

He was the perfect and acceptable mediator between man and God because of the mystery of the incarnation – the God-man. He was God in the flesh, fully God, fully man. It is as Mediator that Jesus continues to intercede for you and me. The writer of the NT book of Hebrews, in chapter seven, notes:

He (that is, Christ) is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them. – *Hebrews 7:25*

Jesus Christ is continually praying for you. He advocating for you. In this crucial matter of your standing before God, the Apostle Paul lays out the ongoing work of Jesus on your behalf. In Romans, chapter eight, he writes:

What shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died – more than that, who was raised – who is the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. – *Romans 8:31-34*

Christ Jesus – our Mediator, always interceding for us before his Father.

3) Last thing this morning has to do with God's manifested glory. Moses asked to see God's glory – the manifestation of his perfections. Wouldn't it be great if God would manifest his glory today? Oh, but he has! Listen to the Apostle John, in the introduction to his Gospel account:

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth...No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known. – *John 1:14, 18*

When Jesus was gathered in the Upper Room in Jerusalem, the night in which he was betrayed, Philip asked him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus replied:

Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. – *John 14:9*

In the opening verses of the book of Hebrews, the author speaks of Jesus and says this:

He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high...– *Hebrews 1:3*

Do you want to see the glory of God in all its fullness? Learn about Jesus; study his life; listen to his words. In him, Paul writes to the Colossians, “the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.”

We can see the very glory of God through eyes of faith in Christ, our Mediator.