

SERMON NOTES: THE GLORY OF THE LORD (Exodus 33:12-23)

The visible presence of God by day and by night through the pillar of cloud and pillar of fire respectively, distinguished the Israelites from others during their wilderness journey on their way to the promised land. However, by worshiping the Golden Calf (Ex. 32:1-10), the Israelites betrayed their special relationship with God. So, right after that betrayal, God indicated that he would make changes in the shape of that relationship. Instead of leading them as before, he would send one of his angels (32:34; 33:3), and he communicated this new arrangement to Moses.

What did Moses do, after God's declaration that Moses had found favour in his sight and he knew Moses by name 33:12b? He interceded on behalf of the people. He said, 'If I am special to you, let me in into your plan. Who will go with us on this journey? An angel? To some of us, that would be pretty cool, but that's not what Moses desired. They could have everything they wanted, except for his presence with them. I wonder what would happen if God said to us that we could have everything that we wanted. If all of our dreams could come true, but without him?

John Piper in his book, *Knowing God* puts it this way: "*The critical question for our generation—and for every generation—is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ were not there?*"

Moses has come a long way with God, has become familiar with God's promises and he is bold to make his requests known to Him. But before we consider his requests, let's have a flash back to his first encounter with God. **His** prayer wasn't very long: He wanted to be rid of God's presence quickly by saying "Who am I that you should think of me?" "Please look for another person to send, not me"? But after walking with God for a while, and knowing God has declared him as His friend, (33:12), we can notice growth in his walk with God, which is reflected in his prayer life, knowledge of God's promises and closeness to God.

At this point, I want us to pause and reflect on our individual journey with God, and consider where we are in relation to Jesus Christ. How is our prayer life? How acquainted are we with the promises of God to us as revealed in the Scriptures? Where do we find the strength to cope with life's pressures and challenges? Scripture does not lie in the past, but always has a present day voice which speaks to those who seek the face of the Lord.

In our text, we see how audacious Moses has become in his prayer: **I want to know your way that I may know you(vv.13). I want your partnership-your presence (vv.15). And as if that was not enough, Moses wanted more of God. Everything! He wanted to be shown God's glory (vv18). At this point, most people would be satisfied. God's friendship and God's presence would be enough. Not for Moses, though. He says: "Please show me your glory" (Exodus 33:18). This is an audacious request as God's glory is impossible to describe.**

It's as though Moses had become intoxicated with God, if there is anything like that. He really did not know what he was asking. God's glory is God's presence (Ezekiel 8:4, 9:3; 10:4,18; Rev. 21:23); It is God's power and greatness (Psalm 19:1); It is God's favour, mercy, influence, (Exodus 40:34; Deut. 5:24;) God's person (2 Peter 1:3). It is God's splendour (John 17:4,5). If you were to think of God as a person and want to stretch your imagination, let us try out Isaiah 40:12-17. It says "Who has scooped up the ocean in his two hands, or measured the sky between his thumb and little finger, who has put all the earth's dirt in one of his baskets, weighed each mountain and hill?

One would think that this man who had seen the burning bush, the plagues in Egypt, the pillar of cloud and the pillar of fire, the crossing of the red sea and defeat of Pharaoh's army to mention a few, would be satisfied with his experiences of God. But No! Not Moses. He wanted more of God so he asked, "Show me your glory" (vv.18)

Commentators have long puzzled over this passage, especially because just a few verses earlier, it says that, "the LORD used to speak with Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend" (Exodus

33:11; cf. Deuteronomy 34:10), but this actually translates to hearing his voice as though in the same room with Him.

What Moses prays for — is for God to open up to him, for God to self-disclose.

It is like asking God to put you within a mile distance from the sun! It will not only damage your eyes, it will burn you up. Moses' request is not a case of "God bless me and my family," he wanted to experience the weight, the fullness of God in his life.

And the LORD replied Moses: "My goodness will pass before you and my Name Yahweh, the I am that I am, will be pronounced, because God's character is enmeshed in His name. His justice, mercy, love, compassion, power are all aspects of his glory and goodness.

If you do not know the Lord as always good in all his dealings with humanity, you are yet to fully know him.

God also said, v.21 "There is a place where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back; but my face must not be seen."

The fact that Moses' request is not granted reminds Moses, and us, that God is still God. For all his *impudence*, even Moses cannot presume too much. Moses cannot know or comprehend God completely, he can see only God's back, the "afterglow of the effulgence of His presence," as Robert Alter describes it. It is the aftermath, the effect of his goodness passing by. You can feel the wind but you cannot see it.

This isn't the full glory of God; it's only a partial revelation. If Moses saw all of God's glory, it would destroy him. The glory of God is more than any human could bear. But it's also what we need. So what has God done?

God's glory is demonstrated in His love and goodness. He has revealed His glory to you and me through His mercy and grace ... in Jesus. The Word who was God became a human and lived among us. We saw His glory—the glory that belongs to the only Son of the Father—and he was full of grace and truth (John 1:14). And finally, Jesus said. "Didn't I tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" John 11:40. And in John 14: 8-11, Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'...? In John 17:4,5, Jesus talked about bringing glory to God by completing his task of redemption and then asked God to glorify him with the glory he had with God before the world began.

Conclusion

Now stop and think on this from a New Covenant perspective. If Moses was given such great and enduring promises from the Lord at a time when all of Israel had failed, and considering Moses' state as a mere human mediator, how much more assured should we be of the greater and more eternal promises of Christ who is our Mediator and greater than Moses in every way (Hebrews 3)? He is the God/Man who is there before the throne of His Father, interceding for us moment by moment as we fail to live up to His absolute perfection.

Our goal should be to live in ways which cannot be explained apart from Jesus resurrection power with us. To say like Paul in his old age, "I want to know Christ- Yes, to know the power of his resurrection... becoming like him (Philippians 3:10-17).

We should take time to consider God's place in our hearts and our place in His. Where do we stand today? Jesus' prayer time was a gateway into the precious company of his heavenly Father. That can be our experience too.

As we close, let us meditate on the prayer of St. Anselm: "Lord, let me seek you in my desiring; Let me desire you in my seeking. Let me find you by loving you; let me love you when I find you. Amen.