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Glory: The Character of God / God's Mercy; Grace; Glory; Glory of God / Exodus 34:1–9
In today's lesson, we learn that the glory of God shows us that he is merciful and gracious.

Introduction

I am beginning a new series of sermons that I am calling, “Glory: The Character of God.” In this five-week-long series, I plan to explore God’s self-revelation of himself to Moses in [Exodus 34:6-7](#).

You recall that the people of God lived in Egypt for over four centuries. They eventually became slaves to the Egyptians. They cried out to God for deliverance. God sent them Moses, and through Moses God delivered the people from Egypt.

The Israelites saw God do spectacular miracles, such as the Ten Plagues and the parting of the Red Sea so that they could cross it on dry land. When the Egyptian army pursued them, the sea closed up and drowned Pharaoh’s entire army.

God provided water for the people in the desert. God provided bread from heaven in the wilderness.

God enabled the Israelites to defeat their enemies.

And then God called Moses to come up to Mount Sinai where he gave Moses the Ten Commandments along with many other instructions for the welfare of his people. Moses was on Mount Sinai for forty days and nights ([Exodus 24:18](#)).

I cannot imagine what it must have been like to be one of those people who saw God at work in incredibly powerful and amazingly demonstrable ways.

“When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, ‘Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him’ ” ([Exodus 32:1](#)).

That is astonishing! The people quickly forgot all that they had seen God do and now they wanted other gods to go before them.

Sadly, Aaron complied. He got the people to bring him their gold ornaments and fashioned a golden calf for the people to worship.

Then God told Moses to go down to the people who had corrupted themselves. God's anger was burning hot against the people. Moses begged God not to act in wrath against his people. And God relented.

When Moses went down Mount Sinai and saw what was going on in the camp, he smashed the tablets that contained the Ten Commandments and broke them.

Moses ordered that the sinners be disciplined.

Then he went back to the Lord and begged God to destroy him rather than the people of God. God said that he would only punish those who had sinned.

This brings us to the text I would like to read today. It is a long text but it will help us to understand the glory of God.

Scripture

Let us read [Exodus 33:1-34:9](#):

¹ The LORD said to Moses, "Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your offspring I will give it.' ² I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ³ Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people."

⁴ When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. ⁵ For the LORD had said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you.' " ⁶ Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

⁷ Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. ⁸ 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. ⁹ When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. ¹⁰ And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. ¹¹ Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

¹² Moses said to the LORD, “See, you say 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 therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.” ¹⁴ And 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 with me, do not bring us up from here. ¹⁶ For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?”

¹⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, “This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.” ¹⁸ Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” ¹⁹ And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my 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 man shall not see me and live.” ²¹ And the LORD said, “Behold, 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.”

¹ The LORD said to Moses, “Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which

you broke.² Be ready by the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain.³ No one shall come up with you, and let no one be seen throughout all the mountain. Let no flocks or herds graze opposite that mountain.”⁴ So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone.⁵ The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD.⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,⁷ keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”⁸ And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.⁹ And he said, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.”

Lesson

In today’s lesson, we learn that the glory of God shows us that he is merciful and gracious.

Let’s use the following outline:

1. The Importance of God’s Glory
2. The Gift of God’s Glory

I. The Importance of God’s Glory

First, let’s look at the importance of God’s glory.

When Moses was on Mount Sinai where God gave him the Ten Commandments, God also gave Moses instructions for constructing a Tabernacle. The Tabernacle was a tent and it was the place where God dwelt on the earth. It was to be located amid the people of God. All the tribes were to have God at the center of their lives, as it were. They were to live their lives in relationship to God.

Then [Exodus 33](#) opens with the Lord telling Moses that the people of God were to leave Mount Sinai and travel to the Promised Land, the land that God had promised to give to Abraham and his offspring.

Let me paraphrase what God said to Moses, “Moses, I am not going to go with you to the Promised Land. Instead, I am going to send my angel to go with you. I will make you economically, politically, and militarily successful. But I will not go with you.”

One commentator says that God offered Israel the religion that most average Americans want. He paraphrases God as saying:

“You can have peace and prosperity. You can have success. You can have military, political, and economic success, but you won’t have to have a tabernacle. You won’t have to have a temple because my presence will not go with you. You won’t have all the maintenance of confessing and sacrifices and offerings and all that sort of thing. I’ll give you all of the benefits of the existence of God and none of the maintenance costs” (Timothy J. Keller, *The Timothy Keller Sermon Archive* [New York City: Redeemer Presbyterian Church, 2013]).

Don’t you agree that is where most people are in our culture today? If they want religion at all, they are happy for God to bless and prosper them. But they have no interest in organizing their lives with God at the very center of their lives.

But Moses would have none of that. [Exodus 33:7](#) says that “Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting.” This was not the Tabernacle. This was a different tent. Moses went away from the people to meet with God.

Moses was so in touch with God that when he went into the tent of meeting, “the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses.” ([Exodus 33:9](#)). The pillar of cloud represented the presence of God. It is also known as the glory of God.

In verse 15, Moses said an astonishing thing to God. He said, “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.”

What was Moses saying? Moses was saying that if God did not go with Moses and the people of God, they might as well die. They were nothing without God. If God did not go with them, they were no different than any other people.

You see, Moses believed that there was a difference between knowing God in general and knowing God personally. He knew that other nations had a sense of the existence of God. They knew that there was a God but they did not know him personally.

That is why they were religious. They worshiped gods of their imaginations.

But the Israelites were different. God had revealed himself to them. He had shown himself powerful again and again in the Ten Plagues and the Exodus and the miracles that he had provided all along the way to the Promised Land. His presence was with his people. His face was with his people. His glory was with his people.

Moses knew that without God the people were nothing. They had no reason for living apart from God.

I think that Moses anticipated the first question and answer of *The Westminster Shorter Catechism*. The First Question asks, “What is the chief end of man?” And the answer is, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.”

Moses was saying that life was not worth living without the presence of God. Life was not worth living without the glory of God.

Do you see that kind of commitment to the glory of God today? A. W. Tozer wrote this:

The glory of God has not been revealed to this generation of men. The God of contemporary Christianity is only slightly superior to the gods of Greece and Rome, if indeed he is not actually inferior to them in that he is weak and helpless while they at least had power (A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 13).

That was Tozer’s observation about two generations ago, and our generation today is easily worse off.

Let me ask you, “What is your chief end, that is, your chief purpose in life?” Do you live for the glory of God? Or are you just interested in showing up at a worship service once in a while so that you can pay your respects to God?

II. The Gift of God’s Glory

And second, let’s look at the gift of God’s glory.

Moses continued his conversation with God. He said to God in the tent of meeting, “Please show me your glory” ([Exodus 33:18](#)). What an astonishing request!

“But,” God said to Moses, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live” ([Exodus 33:20](#)).

The Hebrew words for “glory” (*kabowd*) and “face” (*paniym*) are synonyms.

The Hebrew word for “glory” means “weight.” It also means “substance” and “matter.” The word “glory” carries the idea of “gravitas.”

When George W. Bush was running for the office of President of the United States, he was seen as a lightweight. But as soon as he chose Dick Cheney as his running mate, people said that Mr. Cheney brought gravitas to the ticket.

Well, God does not need a running mate. He has supreme weight and substance and matter and gravitas.

The Hebrew word for “face” means “relationship.” When you meet a dear friend—especially after you have been apart for a long time—you don’t look at your friend’s belly button. What do you look at? You look at your friend’s face. You want to see your friend’s smile and glimmer in the eye.

Why do you do that? Because a person’s face is the relational gate. A face expresses emotions of joy or delight or sorrow or sadness.

You don’t get that when you talk with a person on the phone. And even though you can see a person on Zoom or FaceTime, you cannot experience the nuances of expression that are there when you are with someone in person.

God also said to Moses in [Exodus 33:19](#), “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.”

How do you sense the glory of God? It is when you get a sense of the face of God. You read your Bible and you sense that these are not just letters on a page but these words are describing the beauty and weightiness and substance and gravitas of a glorious God.

You may have read in the past about the mercy of God but now God’s mercy takes on weightiness. Or you may have read of the graciousness of God but now God’s grace is personal to you. You feel the mercy and grace of God in your life. It is no longer an abstract concept but an experiential reality for you.

How does the glory of God become a gift for you?

Well, what did Moses do? He did not want to go anywhere unless God went with them. Why? Moses said in [Exodus 33:16b](#), “Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?”

Do you see what Moses was saying? He was saying, “God, I want your glory in my life. I want your presence in my life and the life of our community. I want your glory to be reflected in us and through us. I want the people around us to see that there is something different about us. I don’t want to argue with other people about who you are. I want them to see you in us!”

When Moses asked to see the glory of God, God said, “I will show you my goodness” ([Exodus 33:19](#)). He said to Moses in [Exodus 33:21-23](#), “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, 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. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”

In the morning, Moses went to meet with the Lord. We read these marvelous words in [Exodus 34:5-7](#), “The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. The Lord passed before him and proclaimed, ‘The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no

means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation.' ”

God gave Moses a declaration. Moses did not see a blazing light. He did not see anything visible. God in essence said that the glory of God is summarized in the attributes of God.

R. C. Sproul stated it succinctly when he said, “The glory of God refers to who God is, not what he does.”

Conclusion

Let us be thankful for the mercy and grace that God gives to sinners like us.

Warren Wiersbe once said, “There is a difference between *grace* and *mercy*. God in his mercy does not give us what we do deserve, and God in his grace gives us what we don't deserve.”

All of us deserve to be punished by God for our rebellion against him. We deserve to go to hell for all eternity. But God is merciful. So, he does not give us what we do deserve.

On the other hand, not one of us deserves to go to heaven. Not one of us deserves an eternity of joy and delight. But God is gracious. So, he gives us what we don't deserve.

How do you experience the mercy and grace of God?

John wrote of Jesus Christ in [John 1:14](#), “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.” Moses could not see the face of God but in Jesus, we get to see the face of God.

However, when Jesus went to the cross, do you remember what one of the things was that he said? He said, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” ([Matthew 27:46](#)). Why could Jesus no longer see the face of God? He could not see the face of God because he was experiencing the punishment that you and I deserve. God accepted Jesus' punishment in our place.

So, how do you experience the mercy and grace of God? By turning to Jesus. You ask Jesus to pay the penalty for all your sin. You repent of your sin. And you believe that all of Jesus' perfect obedience will be credited to you.

If you have never done so, I urge you to do so today.

And if you have turned to Jesus in faith and repentance, be thankful for the mercy and grace that God gives to sinners like us. Amen.