



GOD IN OUR MIDST

EXODUS 33:18-23, 34:4B-9, 29-35, 2 COR 3:18

^{33:13} 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.”

^{34:4b} 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.”

^{34:29} When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. ³⁰ Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. ³² Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the Lord had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. ³³ And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

³⁴ Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, ³⁵ the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses’ face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

(2 Cor 3:18)

⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

DAY 1

EXODUS 33:18-23, 34:2,3

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."

^{34:2} 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."

I am not much of an artist, but I do remember from my elementary school days my art teacher teaching us about contrast as a way to express our art. Contrasting colors, shades, or themes can provide the "pop" needed to get your artistic point across. Throughout God's self-revelation in Exodus 33 and 34, we will see the compassion, mercy, and steadfast love of the Lord. These are the words he uses to describe who he is. But they are highlighted when we understand his holiness, which is where we look today.

The idea of God's holiness already has been coloring our Exodus story. We remember the fear of the Israelites as they came to Mt. Sinai and trembled at the thunder and the lightnings (Ex. 19). God has already responded to the sin of the Israelites in judgment from a place of transgressed holiness (Ex. 32). YHWH warned Moses that he could not go in the midst of the Israelites because his holiness would not allow it (Ex. 33). Here we see that God responds to Moses's request to see him by warning him that no man can see his face and live, and not to let anyone on the mountain when Moses comes, not even animals grazing opposite the mountain.

But how do these large brushstrokes of holiness help fill in the picture of knowing God? Let me make the following observations. First, this is absolutely part of who God is. If we do not have holiness-that-can-kill as part of our conception of who God is, we do not have the God of the Scriptures. Unfortunately, this may be the case for many in our current culture, even within our churches. But second, we see how this brushstroke

of holiness serves as the contrast needed to help the compassion and mercy of God explode off the canvas! Surely when we realize that God is holy, we realize the beauty of the mercy that he extends to his people, like a diamond glittering against a black backdrop. This work of art is ultimately made clear at the cross. For it is at the cross that God's holiness meets his mercy. Through Jesus we see the face of God and find life.

For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. For they could not endure the order that was given, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned." Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I tremble with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Hebrews 12:18-24

DAY 2

EXODUS 33:19, 34:5-7

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.”

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.”

This passage in Exodus is remarkable for many reasons. Moses experiences God, again. The LORD defines his character, revealing all his goodness. Yet the phrase that God proclaims to Moses on the outset—“I will make all my goodness pass before you” (33:19)—is worth thinking on a bit more. You see, God doesn’t just do good, which of course he does (Psalm 145:9), but God is good. It’s his character; it’s a necessary part of him. Consider how Israel would proclaim these things throughout the story of the Old Testament and how the New Testament describes him:

Oh give thanks to the LORD, for he is good; for his steadfast love endures forever!
(1 Chronicles 16:34)

And they sang responsively, praising and giving thanks to the LORD: “For he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever toward Israel.” (Ezra 3:11)

Good and upright is the LORD. (Psalm 25:8)

No one is good except God alone. (Mark 10:18)

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change. (James 1:17)

The Bible is full of examples of God’s goodness. This is a fact. It’s not something that theologians, pastors, and authors generally debate, though skeptics would like us to believe that God is only wrathful and unworthy of following. In doing so, they take one of his characteristics—“not clearing the guilty,” which speaks of God’s justice—and make it a larger rock than his goodness, mercy, and kindness. Yet it’s universally accepted that God is good.

- How do God's self-proclaiming characteristics in this passage shine in your life? For example, can you see how his goodness has impacted you to this day? His mercy? His justice?
- What aspects of God's character do you readily see in our world? What are hard to see?
- How might God be calling you to live in light of who he is today? Is he leading you to live with more goodness toward people?

The beauty of God's goodness is that we can see, feel, and experience it daily through a relationship with Jesus. The Bible clearly says that "no one does good" (Romans 3:9-18; Psalm 14:1). Yet God has given us the gift of his Son. In his goodness, he has provided for you and me a relationship with our King who forgives us for the times we mess up, sin against God and other people, and are otherwise "not good." Today, pray Exodus 34:6-7 back to God. Recognize the goodness in his character and the goodness that exists within each one of his sons and daughters through his good and perfect gift of Jesus.

PRAYER

Father, you are slow to anger, merciful, just, abounding in steadfast love. You forgive the iniquities of thousands and otherwise reveal your goodness to your creation. We praise you that you saw a need in your people and you provided for us Jesus, the good and perfect gift. Strengthen us today so that we might see and rely on your goodness in our lives. Help us to live out this goodness as we seek to follow you. In Jesus's name, we pray. Amen.

DAY 3

EXODUS 34:8-9

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." ...

When Job heard the staggering news of monumental personal losses, he fell to the ground and worshiped. When Abram was encountered by Almighty God with promises of an everlasting

covenant, he fell on his face. When Moses stood with God on Mt. Sinai hearing God proclaim his Name—merciful, gracious, long-suffering, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, yet holy and just—Moses bowed his head to the earth and worshiped.

Each of these OT saints was responding to the truth of who God is. Each was responding to God on his terms, as he had revealed himself. Each of them saw God as Sovereign and Supreme, unchanged by circumstances or human response, the Highest Good. So Job could bless God and refrain from charging him with any wrong.

When we define God on our terms, our worship is unacceptable. The Israelites dancing before the golden calf thought/felt they were honoring God, but soon learned what God thought about their worship. Their hearts were not bowed before the powerful, gracious God who had just delivered them from slavery in Egypt, but before an imaginary god who would satisfy their cravings. God knows how easily our worship is adulterated, not by a deliberate determination to refuse him, but because we love something else. Acceptable worship is contingent on a true knowledge of God and a humble, pure heart.

Moses's first personal encounter with God came when God called his name from a bush that burned without being consumed. God warned him not to come near, to remove his sandals. He first revealed his holiness before identifying himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of the Covenant. Moses hid his face, afraid to look. Now after years of following God, of seeing and hearing God on his terms, of experiencing his friendship as well as his lordship, Moses bows but does not hide. He bows to worship a God he knows, loves, and trusts. He asks big things because he serves a big God. Moses has developed into a mature worshiper.

Centuries after Moses, Jesus encountered a Samaritan outcast at a well, and invited her to become a worshiper. He told her the truth about who he was and introduced her to his seeking Father who saw her and loved her. Her life was transformed when she saw his worth and received his gift. We too have been transformed by the Spirit of God into worshipers who reflect his glory as we submit ourselves to him day by day, week by week, individually and together.

PRAYER

Holy, holy, holy . . . merciful and mighty God, we need you every hour! We bless you for promising never to leave us, never to forsake us. We can feel overwhelmed by the darkness and deceptions around us. Lord Jesus, you are Light and Truth; you are the glory Moses longed to see. You are worthy, and we worship you today! Amen.

DAY 4

EXODUS 34:29-35

²⁹ When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. ³⁰ Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. ³² Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the Lord had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. ³³ And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

³⁴ Whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, ³⁵ the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

After Moses spent time in the presence of the glory of the LORD his face was shining! He didn't know it, but everyone who saw him did. The people were all afraid to go near him because of his radiance, but he beckoned them, and the leaders and then everyone came near. He shared what God had spoken, and when he was done he veiled his face. Whenever he would go into God's presence in the future he would take the veil off and put it back on when he went out.

This idea of people spending time in the glory of the LORD carries over to the New Testament. Jesus makes this possible. In John 1:14 we read:

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.

Jesus continues the theme of light, glory, and truth when he talks about the difference between John the Baptist and himself. In John 5:33, 35-36a we read:

You sent to John, and he has borne witness to the truth. . . . He was a burning and shining lamp, and you were willing to rejoice for a while in his light. But the testimony that I have is greater than that of John.

On Friday we'll look at verses from II Corinthians 3 that directly refer back to our Exodus passages of this week:

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. II Cor. 3:12-13

Finally, let's consider Matthew 5:14-15:

"You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven."

When we are near God's glory, other people can see it. We don't have to do anything a certain way or say something the right way--we will shine. Moses shone; John the Baptist was a burning and shining lamp; Jesus describes his followers as being the light of the world.

These passages compare both the fading reflection of Moses, who was carrying the law tablets in his hands, and the finite lamp of John the Baptist, whose light was enjoyed only for a time with the greater testimony of Jesus, whose never-ending glory is full of grace and truth.

We, whom Jesus calls the light of the world, are reflecting that never-ending glory of Jesus. We can remember we simply receive the splendor of Jesus when we spend time with him and it shows itself whether we know it or not. So we can encourage each other to go to the place Jesus reveals himself: in his Word, in the community of the saints. How can we help each other not hide our light under a bushel basket? We can have courage to live transparently in the circles we have: sharing our pain, our joys, our struggles. Expressing our joy at how God has met us in his Word.

What a wonder! We are God's tabernacle, being knit together with his glory to dwell within us. This is real, and good, and frightening, and everlasting.

PRAYER

O God, you are full of glory and we reflect your light. Lift our faces to you today. May we see your splendor in ourselves and in each other. Fill us at Christ Church with your glory. Amen.

DAY 5

2 CORINTHIANS 3:12-18

¹² Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, ¹³ not like Moses, who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. ¹⁴ But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. ¹⁵ Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. ¹⁶ But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. ¹⁷ Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

The Jews of the first century had a hard time understanding that their old way of understanding their faith had been replaced by a new way. A new covenant was established in Christ that rendered their old covenant obsolete. Think how Paul did everything he could to prevent the new way from taking hold in the lives of Jews before his conversion. He was singularly devoted to what he saw as the right way, which was the way of Moses. Before his encounter with Jesus on the Damascus Road, he was one of those whose mind was hardened and covered by a veil that blinded him to the truth of who Christ was and what he had done. In that encounter, he had a dramatic breakthrough with the presence of the Lord. It knocked him to the ground and blinded him until he saw the light of Jesus and what he had done. In his letters to the churches, we see how that experience shaped the rest of his life.

Moses's experience with God took place over years as he encountered YHWH and led the people out of Egypt and then established the new nation of Israel. What is common about the experience of the two men is the centrality of the presence of the Lord in their lives. They got to a common point through different experiences and on a different timeline, but their ministries ended up at much the same point. They both had big hearts for their people. They were willing to give their lives for the people they led. They both spent the majority of their lives helping people understand who God was and what He had done. They both developed keen ears for understanding what God wanted of them and the people they served. They both saw their ministries as bringing the light of God to darkness.

But perhaps most importantly, their lives were both infused with the presence of the Lord. They both had an intimate relationship with God that included a deep prayer life. They both came to be comfortable putting their whole trust in God no matter what their circumstances. They knew without question how God had accompanied them throughout their earthly journey in life and in death.

We don't often compare these two saints, but there is much to be learned by doing so. There's a pattern in their lives to understand and emulate. Relationship is the number one thing in that pattern. God's glory and presence played a central role, letting the light shine on their hearts and minds. They would have agreed with C.S. Lewis in his famous statement, "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else."

PRAYER

Lord, we may not have the dramatic encounters with you that these men had, but we still want our relationship with you to lead to the same place. Help us to see, know, and experience your presence. Help us to follow the light you shine on our paths. Give us the faith to follow you anywhere you lead us.