

SHOW ME YOUR GLORY

Exodus 33:18-34:9

Let's turn to Exodus 33. That might not sound like a Christmas passage, but it really is, kind of; let me show you.

THE SETTING

The Bible is mainly a historical book. We learn who God is and who we are through the history of His dealings with sinful mankind. We all know that in the book of Genesis, Yahweh called a man named Abraham out of an idol-worshiping culture into a relationship with his Creator. We trace Abraham's descendants through Isaac and Jacob, and Genesis ends with Jacob's twelve sons and their families living in Egypt.

Exodus opens with Abraham's family – now become nation-sized – enslaved in Egypt and suffering terribly. This was all according to Yahweh's predetermined plan. At the right moment, He sent a son – Moses – to deliver them. Moses was born to Hebrew parents of the tribe of Levi but raised in the household of Pharaoh; I'll let you read Exodus 1 and 2 to get the details.

At the age of 40, Moses murdered an Egyptian who was beating a Hebrew slave and escaped into the wilderness of Midian. Forty years later, Yahweh revealed Himself to Moses and sent Him back to Egypt to deliver the Hebrews out of slavery. Moses was merely the spokesman for Yahweh; all the glory for saving the Hebrews went to God alone. The Lord brought ten powerful plagues on Egypt, ending with the death of the firstborn of all the Egyptians while sparing the Hebrews.

Moses led his people toward the Egyptian border at the Red Sea, and the power of God made a way for them to pass through the Sea on dry ground. The Egyptian army that followed drowned when the waters flooded back into the gap.

Yahweh had promised to do this from His first conversation with Moses:

19 “But I know that the king of Egypt will not give you permission to go, except by a strong hand. **20** So I will stretch out My hand and strike Egypt with all My wondrous deeds which I shall do in the

midst of it; and after that he will let you go.” (Exodus 3:19–20, 2022 LSB)

Now the Hebrews found themselves on the opposite of the Red Sea from Egypt, looking at the bodies of Egyptian soldiers floating face down in the water. God had freed them, as He promised, “with great power and an outstretched arm” (Deuteronomy 9:29).

Their suffering was over. God was on their side. Their enemies had been destroyed. This would be a faithful people, right? No. Weeks later, the multitude arrived at Mount Sinai, where Yahweh established a covenant with them. The people agreed to that covenant. Then Moses went up Mount Sinai to receive the Law of God. While he was still on the mount receiving the Law, the people at the base of the mountain were violating it. Moses went down to the camp and found it in chaos. He threw the stone tablets which held the ten commandments to the ground, shattering them, just as the people had been shattering them with their sin. God punished thousands of those who had sinned.

THE ABSENCE OF GOD

This brings us to Exodus 33. Yahweh says, “Go, go up from here, I’ll send an angel to lead you, go up, get out of here – but I’m not going with you because I would destroy you for your sin.” Israel would be known for the *absence* of God in their midst. They would be the people with whom God was *not*.

3 “Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst because you are a stiff-necked people, lest I consume you on the way.” (Exodus 33:3, 2022 LSB)

Now, Moses had a unique relationship with Yahweh.

11 Thus Yahweh used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend ... (Exodus 33:11, 2022 LSB)

MOSES INTERCEDES

And so Moses uses his intimate relationship with Yahweh to intercede for his people.

15 Then he said to Him, “If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. **16** Indeed, how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by

Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?” (Exodus 33:15–16, 2022 LSB)

There is only one thing that makes Israel different from every other people on the face of the earth, and that is the fact of Yahweh’s presence with them. If God will not go with them on the journey, then they would be no different from any other group.

The Lord answered Moses’ prayer:

17 Then Yahweh said to Moses, “I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight, and I have known you by name.” (Exodus 33:17, 2022 LSB)

Their intimate relationship made the difference. The people were no different; they hadn’t changed. By the way, are we to think that God changed His mind or let Himself be convinced to go against His own will? Not at all. Moses is not just a leader; he is a mediator. Yahweh is standing in judgment over Israel, just as one day He would stand in judgment over all humanity. Moses served as a picture of Jesus Christ, who is the one mediator between God and Man (First Timothy 2:5).

Now, I know that we have moved through this quickly, but I want you to try to put yourself in Moses’ position. You were born to slaves and raised in the royal household of Egypt. You have been called by God Almighty to deliver His people from slavery, and God did, in fact, deliver those people through you. You have been leading these people for weeks, and the power of God has been displayed through you. Yahweh God, Lord of the universe, has been privately revealing to you His will and instructions for His people. He has been speaking to you as a man speaks to a friend, face to face. He announced that He would not personally accompany His people to the promised land but agreed when you asked Him to reconsider. You have an intimacy with the Creator of the universe that no man has had since Adam sinned. God has just told you that you have His favor and that He knows your name.

MOSES ASKS THE UNTHINKABLE

18 Then Moses said, “I pray You, show me Your glory!” (Exodus 33:18, 2022 LSB)

Let’s be clear. God is not a man. The God of the Bible is not just a superhero version of good human beings. He is unique, holy, perfect, possessing all power, all glory, and all knowledge. He is sovereign over

everything in His creation, including the hearts and wills of men and women. But God is also Personal – three Persons in fact, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. I believe that He was deeply pleased with Moses’ desire to know Him intimately. And He tells Moses what will happen:

19 And He said, “I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of Yahweh before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show compassion on whom I will show compassion.” (Exodus 33:19, 2022 LSB)

But Moses’ prayer will not be answered.

20 But He said, “You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!” (Exodus 33:20, 2022 LSB)

Yahweh doesn’t say that He is unwilling to be known. He says that no man – no sinful man is the idea – can see Him and live. Sin is too great a barrier. The prophet Isaiah saw a cloud of God’s glory, and it terrified him. The Pharisee Saul on the road to Damascus and the apostle John on the island of Patmos both saw the resurrected, glorified Jesus Christ, and they fell over like dead men. It would be deadly for a sinful human being to be exposed to the unfiltered glory of God.

What Yahweh WILL do is teach Moses about Himself.

21 Then Yahweh said, “Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; **22** and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. **23** Then I will remove My hand, and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen.” (Exodus 33:21–23, 2022 LSB)

This was not demeaning for Moses; he was being accommodated. Yes, he would only see the backside of God as He passed by, but Moses would still see what no one on earth had ever seen before.

The Lord also had Moses prepare two new blank stone tablets upon which God would right the commandments again. And standing there on the mountain, holding the written Word of God in his arms, Moses would hear Yahweh declare Himself.

5 Then Yahweh descended in the cloud and stood there with him, and He [Yahweh] called upon the name of Yahweh. **6** Then Yahweh passed by in front of him and called out, “Yahweh, Yahweh God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; **7** who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He will by no means

leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.” (Exodus 34:5–7, 2022 LSB)

Consider what Yahweh revealed about Himself in these verses.

Yahweh is compassionate. That’s the love shown by a superior to an inferior.

Yahweh is gracious. He is *inclined* to bestow favors and blessings.

Yahweh is slow to anger. He is *disinclined* to be wrathful.

Yahweh is abounding in lovingkindness. What a huge word this is! It carries a sense of zeal; ardor; loyal, unfailing love; kindness; benevolence; mercy; pity; faithfulness; devotion.

Yahweh is abounding in truth. This doesn’t speak of not simple facts but truth itself, that which is firm, unchanging, and trustworthy.

Yahweh keeps lovingkindness for multitudes and yet does not ignore sin. He visits the iniquity of fathers on the children and their children’s children to the third and fourth generations. Sin gets passed from generation to generation. Faithful men and women bring blessings upon their children. What’s important for us to see is that the love and mercy of God are not in conflict with His holiness and justice. All are fulfilled according to God’s perfect will.

THE WORD MADE STONE

I said at the outset that this is a Christmas passage. It’s not very obvious, is it? Let me point it out to you.

Moses is just about the best man since Adam sinned. No one had experienced the kind of intimacy with God that Moses enjoyed. No one had heard the kinds of things that Moses heard. He had acted with tremendous faith and courage. Mankind wasn’t created until the end of creation week; how did Moses get the information found in Genesis 1 and 2? God revealed it to him.

Nevertheless, Moses could not see the face of God and live. He was a sinner, and his heart was desperately wicked. Like every other human being, Moses was inclined to sin and rebellion. We see his failings several

times in his own writings: the murder of the Egyptian, the failure to circumcise his sons, and his attempt to share in the glory of God (that attempt cost him entry into the promised land). As far as human holiness goes, though, Moses was the best mankind had to offer. But he could not see the face of God. He could not see Yahweh as He is. The cloud of glory always obscured the Lord.

Moses' sin prevented him from seeing God's glory displayed; he could only hear it proclaimed. But there was hope.

What did Moses hold in his arms as Yahweh passed by? Stone tablets upon which was carved the Law of God; perhaps we could call it the Word made stone. But about 1,500 years in the future the Word would be made flesh.

THE WORD MADE FLESH

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... **14** And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth ... **18** No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. **(John 1:1, 14, 18, 2022 LSB)**

Everything Moses wanted for himself would become available to everything through Jesus Christ. Exodus 33 tells us that we cannot see the face of God and live because of our sins. John 1 tells us that while we could not make a way to see God, He could make a way to reveal Himself to us. He did that not through a sinful, human intermediary but through His own Son, the Word of God made flesh.

Jesus revealed the Father to His disciples.

6 "I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world; they were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word. **(John 17:6, 2022 LSB)**

He said that seeing Him was equal to seeing the Father.

7 "If you have come to know Me, you will know My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." **8** Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." **9** Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all so long and have you not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'? **(John 14:7-9, 2022 LSB)**

We know Jesus today through the Word of God, which is living and active. That means that we also know the Father.

BRINGING IT HOME

During His earthly ministry, the Lord Jesus took three of His disciples, Peter, James, and John, up on a mountain, and they saw Him in His glory. They saw Moses and the prophet Elijah talking with Him. And they decided to treat them all equally: Moses the lawgiver, Elijah the prophet, and Jesus the Messiah. Peter offered to build each one a shelter.

5 While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and behold, a voice out of the cloud said, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well-pleased; listen to Him!" 6 And when the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. 7 And Jesus came to them and touched them and said, "Get up, and do not be afraid." 8 And lifting up their eyes, they saw no one except Jesus Himself alone. (Matthew 17:5-8, 2022 LSB)

Everything Moses did was fulfilled and completed in Jesus.

Everything Elijah and the prophets indicated was fulfilled and completed in Jesus.

He is the One to whom the Father commands us to listen.

In Jesus Christ, the glory of God has been manifested to us. We simply need to listen to Him through His Word, as the Spirit gives us hears to hear.

Are you listening?