

Equipping The Saints

“...For the equipping of the saints for the work of service...” ~ Ephesians 4:12

November 29, 2015

1.22

“We Beheld His Glory”

(By David McClister)

God’s presence is an indescribable glory. In Biblical scenes where God appeared to men, the word “*glory*” usually pops up in the Biblical text. When Israel complained about food, Moses told them **“in the morning you will see the glory of the Lord,”** which is exactly what happened: **“they looked toward the wilderness, and behold, the glory of the Lord appeared in the cloud”** (Exodus 16:7, 10). One of the best descriptions of it comes in Exodus 24, where Moses described what he saw on Mt. Sinai: **“The glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it for six days; and on the seventh day He called to Moses from the midst of the cloud. And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the mountain top”** (vss. 16-17). While the word “*glory*” does not appear in the story of the burning bush (Exodus 3), it is clear that Moses had seen the same thing there.

Perhaps the closest anyone came to seeing God in his glory in the Old Testament was Moses. You remember the famous scene: after Moses had been near God on Mt. Sinai, Moses asked to see God’s glory. God replied: **“You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!”** Then the Lord said, **‘Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock;**

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. Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen” (Exodus 33:20-23). In a similar scene, when Solomon’s temple was finished and dedicated, the Bible reports that **“the priests could not stand to minister because of the cloud, for the glory of the Lord filled the house of God”** (2 Chronicles 5:14). God’s glory was a fearful and overpowering thing, and yet it was also strangely attractive.

As impressive as those experiences must have been, none of these people saw anything near the fullness of God’s glory. But God spoke of the day when his people would see his glory in an unprecedented way. The prophet Haggai said **“The latter glory of this house will be greater than the former”** (2:9). Isaiah predicted that the wilderness (a metaphor for God’s people in this context) **“will blossom profusely and rejoice with rejoicing and shout of joy. The glory of Lebanon will be given to it, the majesty of Carmel and Sharon. They will see the glory of the Lord, the majesty of our God”** (35:2).

When we come to the New Testament, John plainly tells us **“the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father”** (John 1:14). The apostle Paul, using language borrowed from the Biblical creation account, said a similar thing about Jesus in 2 Corinthians 4:6: **“For God, who said, ‘Light shall shine out of darkness,’ is the One who has shone in our hearts to give the Light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.”**

Just exactly what about Jesus was so glorious? His words? His actions? Was John referring to what he saw at Jesus' transfiguration? The answer lies in the statements of Jesus himself. As the time for His death drew near, He said **"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit."** Clearly, Jesus was speaking about his death. In John 13:31, on the way to Gethsemane where he would be taken into custody by his enemies, he said **"Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him."** Furthermore, Jesus said **"if I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to myself"** (John 12:32). The *"lifting up"* of which Jesus there spoke was not his ascension to heaven, but his being lifted up on the cross. Like the burning bush of Exodus 3, Jesus' death would be a spectacle full of the glory of God that would attract people to it.

So what was the glory of God that was so visible in Jesus? What was so glorious about his death? It was God's love, which was fully displayed in the death of Jesus on the cross. Jesus died because of God's love for us (John 3:16). That great display of God's love, mercy, and grace is designed to touch our hearts and draw us to God. It fulfills God's words in Jeremiah 31:3: **"I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore I have drawn you with lovingkindness."** Like Moses at the burning bush, when we see the outpouring of God's love on the cross of Jesus, it is supposed to get our attention and make us want to go near and understand it more perfectly. The gospel story is the story of how God loves us and sent Jesus to die for us. This is why Paul calls it **"the glorious gospel"** (1 Timothy 1.11; cf. 2 Corinthians 4.4).

When John says, therefore, that **“we saw his glory,”** John meant that he had seen, above all, the death of Jesus and had come to understand that it was a proclamation of God’s great love. The death of Jesus, announced in the gospel, was the fulfillment of Isaiah’s prediction that people would see the glory of the Lord. John also added that the glory he saw in the death of Jesus was **“full of grace and truth.”** This is exactly what God tried to convey to Moses. You remember that scene where Moses asked to see the glory of God? This was God’s first response to that request: **“I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the Lord before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion”** (Exodus 33:19). In other words, God was saying to Moses, *“The most glorious thing about me is my love, mercy, grace, goodness, and compassion.”* And that is what was on full display in the cross of Jesus. *[originally published on focusmagazine.com, Nov. 23, 2015]*

Notes:

AM Lesson:

The Gospel Message

PM Lesson:

5th Sunday Singing

“Go therefore and make disciples...” (Matthew 28:19-20)