

Title: Show me your Glory – pt.3  
Text: Exodus 33.20-23

The important things in life bring with them great risk and great reward. If you want the reward, you have to take the risk. The reward of relationship carries the risk of rejection. The reward of success carries the risk of failure. The reward of making the team carries the risk of getting cut. The reward of being the hero carries the risk of being the one who loses the game. I was talking with my dental hygienist who, along with her husband are expecting their first child. I told her what I try to tell many of you. Children are gifts from God to be treasured and trained. Yes, there is risk of struggles and adversity, but there is the reward of love, learning, maturing, accomplishments and satisfaction. Our greatest hurts come from our greatest risks. But, our greatest rewards come from our greatest risks as well. Some of you are held in such slavery by your fear of failure that you take very few risks at all. If your life was a painting, your portrait would be a dull gray. Why would you settle for gray, when God offers you an entire spectrum?

I know, some of you are sitting here and thinking that you are too old and set in your ways to change now. You have been combing your hair the same way for 40 years. Guys when you shave, you always start in the same place, on the same side of your face with the same motion, every day. And I can relate to much of that. If I go to Coney Island, I get a hani sandwich and fries. I have a sport coat that I wear that is 32 years old. Cathi says, “why do you get the same thing?” I tell her that sameness has its advantages. I come home to the same woman every night too. I point that out, because of two things that are important to remember as part of the background to this text. Moses, is now well over 80 years of age. He was at a place in life where he could have wrapped things up, taken it easy and no one would have blamed him. Here he is, leading an entire nation through open and treacherous terrain, with no logical means to feed them, no obvious way to consistently provide them with water and no proven way to protect them. Are you out of your mind? And while that may seem like a huge risk, the greatest risk that Moses ever took is right here in this text, when he asks God, “Show me your glory.”

Moses did not fully understand what he was asking for because no mortal is capable of grasping all that the glory of God means. But I think that Moses understood a whole lot more than any of us. I believe that there are several OT events that help us understand different aspects of this. 1,000 years later, a beautiful young Jewish girl would risk all that she knew, including the loss of her position as queen and her very life by approaching the king uninvited and unannounced. Esther’s risk was rewarded in the rescue of her people from the evil plots of Haman. But Esther was a mortal going before another mortal, who, at the most could only take away her life. Moses was asking to be in the presence of God! What happens when a mortal is in the presence of the immortal? We are given a taste of that in Isaiah 6. The prophet Isaiah was given a vision of the glory of God and was so overwhelmed with the absolute holiness of God that Isaiah cried out saying, “Woe to me.” The actual word that Isaiah used was a cry of anguish that came from his gut. It is the Hebrew word, “Oy”, that occurs 22 times in the OT, and is associated with destruction. It is an onomonopia (i.e. a word that sounds like its meaning). It is not as much a word as it is a sound, or a reaction of fear. Isaiah’s guttural

cry of despair indicates that because of what he saw, he expected to be violently destroyed right there. And based on what Isaiah says, he probably feared for more than just his life. He cried! He cried in fear because he had seen the glory of God, and this is what Moses is asking to see. Why? Why does Moses want to see God?

People have always been fascinated with the sacred. There is much mystery in the sacred. Conversations about God never end because he is inexhaustible. But I think that much of our desire to know the mysteries of the sacred are due to the fact that if we know something that someone else doesn't know then, we will have power over them. We will be respected and revered. Besides, things that we do not understand or cannot control fascinate us. We are so curious about powers that we cannot see. Filmmakers use this to their advantage when they combine demonic themes in horror movies. It used to be enough to have an axe-wielding maniac chasing people in the woods on a dark night. That is now so predictable and boring. So, we have to come up with something more creative and tantalizing. What is more tantalizing than the supernatural? Horror movies now are full of the demonic and the world Satanism. They play with a power they want to use to make movies even more edgy. They have no idea of what they are really messing with. But what is so intriguing about the supernatural world?

The truth is, we are made in the image of God and part of the fingerprint of God upon your life is seen in your desire, and interest and longing for the sacred. The image of God in you was marred by sin, but it is still there. The longing for the sacred, fundamentally affected by sin is what drives people to create their own god. We desperately need God, but we predictably worship other things. But those other things never satisfy. They cannot. They are bound for destruction and those who worship them will become like them.

This week, I prayed for Becky Martin and for the believers in Nepal because earlier this week the festival, honoring the Hindi goddess Gadhimai began, during which 250,000 animals will be slaughtered. It is a huge festival. Behind the butchery is idolatry and behind every idol is a demon. This is what drives the senseless waste of many animals, and keeps people believing the lie that this festival will bring them all that they want. Manoj Shah, is a 45-year old taxi driver in Nepal who has been attending the event since he was six. He said, "If we want anything, and we come here with an offering to the goddess, within five years all our dreams will be fulfilled." This comes from a man who lives in one of the poorest countries on earth (176 out of 194). You see, every one of us runs to something to believe in for ultimate security. Can, what you believe in, save you?

The gods that we make are so incredibly inferior to God himself. But that is part of why we are attracted to them. God's glory is so pure and his beauty so brilliant, his goodness so intense and his presence so awesome that unless he protects you, you cannot stand in his presence. And yet, the very thing that we long for, the very thing that we need, the very thing that we were made for, the very thing that satisfies us and thrills us and captures us and encourages us, and motivates us and will keep us for all eternity is his presence. The very question that Moses asks, is the question that God loves to answer.

He wants you to see him, at least as much as you can handle, so that you will know him and be satisfied by him and will look like him.

So, in his mercy he protects us from being destroyed by the intense purity of his goodness. In his mercy, he provides a way for us to be able to live in his presence without him denying himself. In his mercy, he invites Moses to come back to where he is, so that Moses can hear much and see a little, knowing that even what Moses sees will change him. Let's look at what God said now a little more closely.

1. **You have to be near God to be protected by God.** (21-23)

Remember that what Moses does here is the exact opposite of many of the children of Israel. While Moses was on the mountain receiving the law of God, the people were in the camp breaking the law of God. So, what we have before us is the story of what happens to people who follow God versus people who follow their own gods. You become what you worship, because you become bound to it and will share its fate. That will either be for your restoration or your destruction. Here in chapter 32 the people tried to run from God in that they tried to get rid of God and replace him with another god. But you never just run from the true God. Whenever you run from God it is always because you are running to another god. But, when you run away from God, you put yourself into a position of where he is coming after you, instead of you being near his heart and under his wing, or, as it is in this case, protected in the cleft by his hand. If you want the protection of God, you have to be near him. You cannot be holding on to your sin, or your own ways if you are going to be near him. You cannot be near him on your terms. In fact this entire scene reveals how absolutely dependent we are upon God. He has what we need – life! But his righteousness bars us from coming to him. And we cannot do anything about that. We are left without a means by which we can resolve this dilemma. We have to have God. If we don't have God, we die. We want to be near God. We were made by God and we are empty people unless we are known by him, loved by him and enjoyed him and thrilled by him. But, we can't get close to God or we die. The truth is we can't handle his perfection. We need him and resent him all at the same time. Why is it that we are so quick to question God and so quick to believe ourselves? I think it comes down to this. We need this awesome God, but resent the fact that we are completely dependent upon him. In our twisted way of thinking we think that we have some kind of right to be angry with God when things do not go as we want, when the truth is, if there ever really was a flaw in God, we would never have any hope.

God is at once the most terrifying, the most demanding, the most awesome and the most compassionate, merciful and protecting being – ever. He is so glorious and we are in such need of him, that in our heart of hearts, we really want to see him and we really want to and need to be with him. Never settle for anything else, but nothing else will do.

So, God has provided a place for Moses to come and be near him. God has found a cleft; perhaps it is a cave that has an opening that God covers. Many years later, Elijah came back to this same mountain, and God appeared to him, while Elijah was in a cave. I wonder if it was not the same place. But the greatest protection that Moses had was not

from the walls of rock but from the hand of God. Rock walls cannot protect you from the power of God's glory. Only God himself can shield you from that and he does. Moses had a good and righteous desire, but he could not carry it out without God's help. The same God who calls you to come near, protects you so that you are not destroyed. Now, that is initially a very difficult truth to grasp.

Beloved, God is awesome and to consider the vastness of his power is overwhelming. How can you conceive of a God who with the breath of his power makes oceans that hold 361,200,000,000,000,000 gallons of water? If you add that to the rest of matter in the earth, it is estimated that our world weighs 13,170,000,000,000,000,000,000 pounds. This is just what is here on this earth. Our earth is not that big and our sun is a very average, that is it is a medium sized star and there are billions of stars! God spoke the universe into being! So, on the one hand we are attracted to power. We are awed by that which we cannot conceive. Again, that is part of the image of God in us. We were made to be wowed by God. But, God is more than sheer power. He is pure power. He is purely righteous. And he makes the laws. So, this power that attracts us is within a being who gives us laws. And that is our tension. God tells Moses that you cannot see my glory, but I will let you be near me. I will let you see where I have been after my glorious presence passes by. Think about that. Moses was so close to the One who made everything and controls everything and knows everything and determines everything!

In fact, we are tempted to see how awesome and demanding and holy God is, that we think, "you know, I don't want a God who is quite so perfect, how 'bout I look for one who can still give me heaven, still give me peace and warm thoughts, but let's me have my own life, I mean, after all, you gotta live a little – don't you? Isn't that reasonable? I'm not trying to completely go my own way, I just don't want all that accountability and confinement."

It is true that no mortal can stand in the unveiled presence of God and live. However, he provides protection on his terms. It is true that God demands your complete loyalty, trust, love, worship and joy. It is true that he will not share his rightful position in your heart with anyone else or anything else and will never bless his competition. All of these things are true. God demands your all, because he is worth it. Initially that seems hard, but here is what I pray that you will see. Everything that he demands from you, he provides. Yes, he demands your love, trust, worship and joy, and your very life. But, when you give it to him, he gives it back, but what you get back is not what you gave. What you get back is so much more. And what he gives back is satisfying and meaningful because it is real and forever.

Every other way seems so much easier, and initially it is. But what other gods take, they cannot give back. What your idols take, they keep, and then they keep on taking. It is like a corrupt business deal, that keeps telling you that if you give just a little more, just a little more, the deal will work. Just a little more of your heart; just a little more of your desires, just a little more of your time, and one day you realize that you have given yourself away, and all of those promised pleasures are the chains that now have you in bondage. The gods of anger, lust, chemical usage, laziness, materialism, food, drink,

appearance, reputation are never satisfied. The initial thrill is long gone, the only thing left is the hollow shell of a burned out life. Not so with God. He demands your all right up front. And long after that initial challenge, you are given so much back in joy and pleasure with him, that it is no sacrifice at all, because He provides what he demands that you give. You have to be near him, but you cannot do that, so he protects you so that you can.

And so, as we will see in chapter 34, Moses' request is granted in a way. He ascends the mountain, and God hides him in the rock, and then God in some localized and intense expression of his glorious presence walks by that place, and then let's Moses look.

Moses doesn't realize it, but it changes him. His face glows. (34:29) In a finite way, this mortal now reflected the immortal. So, there you have it. Down in the camp, the people who worshiped a cow looked like cows. They acted like animals and were no different that day than the nations around them. Moses, on the other hand, was near God. He worshiped God and now, he reflected God. He appeared to be from out of this world.

There is a sense in which the tension that drove Moses to intercede for the people is not resolved at this point. The question is still hanging. How can a holy God dwell with a people who just keep on sinning? The answer is given in Leviticus, but the problem is not solved until Christ. In every sermon that is preached, every lesson that is taught, every Bible study that is presented, you need to ask – what does this have to do with Christ? This text is completely immersed in Christ isn't it?

## **2. It all points to Christ.**

In John 14.8, Philip asks for a similar experience. He says to Christ, "Show us the Father and that will be enough for us." That is our desire, we want to see God. We need to see God, but we can't see him and live. Even in his despair, Job had this hope and held to it when he said, "in my flesh I will see God." David reflected the same thing in Psalm 17.15. Here is the beautiful truth. God sent himself in the likeness of a human. We will sing this season, "Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see; Hail the incarnate Deity, pleased as man with man to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel." God revealed himself in such a way that we could see him. Jesus said to his disciples, if you have seen me, you have seen the Father. Colossians says that he (Christ) is the exact representation of God. The very thing that we long for, the earth was given a chance to have and to see. But what they saw, they did not like. So, they killed him, though in reality, if he had not laid down his life, they could never have taken it. But in his death, he took upon himself the holy wrath of God against our sin. So, now standing at Mt. Calvary, we look back at Mt. Sinai and say – "I get it!" We realize what God was doing for Moses was a picture of what was to come. Christ is the covering that protects you, that covers you, that hides you and perfectly shields you from the wrath of God. Christ is the rock on which you stand and the hand that is so big and so strong that we can live with no fear in life and no fear in death, for this is the power of Christ in me, from life's first cry, to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny. And now, no power of hell, no scheme of man, can ever pluck me from his hand, for he covers me and forever, he will cover me.

Now, we look through a mirror darkly, then face to face. Someday we will see him.  
Until that day, stay close to the only one who can protect you. Come to Christ and live.

How much of God do you really want?