

THE GLORY IN THE TENT EXODUS 40:34-38

INTRODUCTION:

What a fitting conclusion to the book of Exodus! The book began with the descendants of Jacob enslaved in Egypt. Their life was under the heavy oppression of the Egyptian Pharaoh. God takes a baby born in a Hebrew home and spends 80 years preparing him to be the deliverer for his people. When Moses is eighty years old, God commissions him to go to Egypt at the burning bush in the desert.

The struggle between the God of Jacob and the gods of Egypt is one of the most dramatic stories in all of Scripture. By ten decisive strokes, the God of Israel brought the people of Egypt to their knees. He brought the Pharaoh to the place that he was ready for Israel to leave the land and do it quickly. The slaves of the Pharaoh left Egypt bearing the riches of Egypt in their hands. The story of Exodus continues as God dramatically delivers His people again at the Red Sea, and then sustains them on their journey until they get to Mt. Sinai. There at the Mountain of God, God reveals Himself to them in a glorious display of His power and holiness. Before they leave Mt. Sinai, however, they have brought shame to their own name and provoked God to anger by bowing before a golden calf. Because of the mercy of God and the intercession of Moses, the servant of God, the people of Israel found mercy in their time of sin. God renewed His covenant with them and gave them the law with the instructions for the building of the tabernacle.

Under divine guidance, Moses selected Spirit-filled men to build the place of worship, the tabernacle. It has been almost a year since they left Egypt, when God gives the instruction for the setting up of the tabernacle. Emphasis is given several times in this chapter as to how Moses has so carefully followed the plan for the construction of the tabernacle that God had given him. He was a faithful servant and did exactly what his Heavenly Lord had instructed him to do. And then on the day when every piece of furniture was in place, the tent had been stretched, and the people were watching with expectancy, God Himself came in a cloud of glory and settled on the tent. The tent itself was enveloped in the cloud while in the Holy of Holies was the outshining of the glory of God. It was a historic and unforgettable moment. The glory of the Lord was now in the tent. The Hebrew word for glory has in it the root idea of being heavy or weighty. It is associated in a figurative sense with the impressiveness or worthiness of a person. Typically, someone honored in that ancient culture had high position and consequent of wealth. So, when we speak of the glory of God, we are speaking of the worthiness of His person.

The glory settling into the tent signified the presence of God in the midst of His people. The glory involved a self-revelation of God. God is demonstrating to His people that He is a holy and sovereign person. It also signified the active presence of God in the midst of His people. As we look at this closing paragraph in the book of Exodus, there are some basic lessons that we can learn about the glory of God.

I. THE SIGN OF THE PEOPLE OF GOD.

When Moses records, "Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle," he is reporting that God has come to dwell in the midst of His people. This is the fulfillment of a desire that was in the heart of God. He instructed Moses to build the tent so that He could dwell in the midst of His people to manifest Himself. From that day forward it has been the mark of the people of God that God dwelt in their midst. For hundreds of years it was in the tent that God dwelled. Then in the day of Solomon, it was in the temple, which was based on the pattern of the tent that God dwelled. In the day of the Lord Jesus, it was in His body that the glory of God dwelt. Beginning with the Acts of the Apostles it has been in the church, a house made out of living stones, that the glory of God has been present. But the mark of the people of God is always the presence of God in the midst of His people.

1. Indwelling

We have already considered the different ways that God has manifest Himself among the people. The thing that is basic to each of them is that God is dwelling in the midst of His people. It is the indwelling of God that sets them apart from all of the other nations of the earth.

Israel became the wonder of the ancient world because God dwelt in their midst. As long as they were obedient to the God who dwelt in their midst there was no enemy in all of the earth that could stand before them. No nation was strong enough or rich enough to withstand the nation of Israel as long as they were acting in obedience to God. It is an awesome dimension of being the people of God to have God dwelling in the midst.

This is still true unto our day. The thing that sets the church apart from all other religious organizations and benevolent causes is that the living, eternal God through the Holy Spirit is indwelling the church. The glory of the Lord is in the heart of His people.

2. Protecting

Moses reports: "In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; but if the cloud did not lift they did not set out—until the day it lifted." As we continue our reading in the Old Testament and moved through the book of Numbers and Deuteronomy and then into the historical book of Joshua, we discover that it is the presence of God as the glory cloud in the midst of His people that gives to His people strength in the battles they fight. God is their protection. In fact, when they were fleeing from Egypt, this very cloud provided protection. The cloud stood between the people of Israel and the pursuing Egyptian army to protect the people of Israel. When they were moving away from their enemies, at night the cloud was over them as a pillar of fire for their protection.

Later in the favorite Psalm David would sing, "God is the midst of her, she shall not be moved."

The reason Jesus could so confidently say of His church that the gates of hell would not prevail against it is that He knew the presence of the glory of God in the church made the church indestructible. It is an aspect of being the people of God that we must never

forget. The people of God cannot be moved as long as they have the presence of the eternal dwelling in their midst.

3. Guiding

The closing comment from Moses in this chapter is that glory became the guide for the people. When the cloud moved, they moved. When the clouds stood still, they stood still. Oh, the comfort of knowing that you have the All-wise and Eternal God as your guide through the journey of the wilderness. Israel was moving in to unexplored territory as far as they were concerned. But it was not unexplored to their guide. He directed them through the wilderness like a shepherd herding a flock of sheep through dangerous territory. The little song that says, "Our Lord knows the way through the wilderness and all we have to do is follow," is on target.

You will remember the affirmation of the Apostle Paul when he declared, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Romans 8:14). So, this distinguishing mark of the divine presence is there for the guidance and the direction of the people of God. When we ignore the cloud, we stumble off into the wilderness and die. When we follow the cloud, put ourselves under the direction of the indwelling Spirit of God, our way is safe.

It is true that the church, as we know it, is imperfect and flawed. It is also true that the church has the glory of the Lord dwelling in its midst. We need to always keep in mind

who we are and what makes us what we are. We are what we are because He dwells among us.

II. THE CONFRONTATION WITH HUMAN LIMITS.

Moses reports for us an interesting detail about what happened that day. "Moses could not enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled upon it and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle." Note that word carefully. It is a reminder to us of the limitations that are upon our humanity. Even the best of men, one of the greatest to ever live, could not move into the tabernacle as long as the glory was being manifested in the tabernacle. We need to learn from this!

1. Our humanity is not suited for living in the glory.

Moses stood there at the tent as a seasoned and mature servant of the living God. His experiences at Mt. Sinai had been so unique that they set him apart in the human family. Few who have ever lived have been privileged to see and to know what Moses knew. Yet, Moses was very much a human being. He was a "flesh and blood" person just like you. The fact that he could not walk into the glory manifestation and live is a revelation of the frailty and weakness of our human existence. Even when we are at our best, we are not capable of living in the divine glory.

In his letter to the Corinthian church the apostle Paul states this in a memorable fashion: "I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable" (I Corinthians 15:50). Our present human

condition is such that it is not suited to live in the glory. It was designed for an earthly existence. The glory is of heaven. As long as you are in your flesh, you are not suited for living in the glory. It is a fact that should keep us humble. It is a fact that reminds us of that chasm that exists between who God is and who we are. God is the eternal Holy Spirit and we are temporal flesh and blood.

2. Our sinfulness prevents entrance into the glory.

Without question in the life of Moses, we have a fine specimen of a godly man. But a godly man is not a sinless man. None of us, regardless of the level of spiritual maturity we achieve in this life, will ever be sinless in this world. So as Moses stood there under the covering of the sacrifices that had been offered for sin, he was still not prepared to enter the divine glory. Oh, that we could realize just how much our sinfulness has effected us, how deeply we are stained by it, and how it prevents our being ready to enter into the fullness of the divine glory.

Moses standing on the outside of the tent he had built and looking in with awe upon the manifestation of the glory, is a commentary on the human condition. It is a commentary on the reality of our humanity and our sinfulness that we must never forget.

III. THE HUNGER FOR THE GLORY TO COME.

There is nothing in the text about this, but I think there is something in the Scriptures about this. It must have been for Moses an unforgettable moment as he stood there watching the manifestation of His glory. It must have birthed in him a desire for a day

when he might be able to live in the glory. What would it be like to dwell right in the midst of the glory of God forever? What would it be like for the limitations that our humanity and our sinfulness have placed upon us to be banished?

It is with interest that we turn to the close of the Bible to find a people living in the glory.

1. The glory to come will be heaven.

I am not sure what your definition of heaven may be, but heaven is glory. In John's description of the new heaven and new earth that he sees, with the new Jerusalem that he sees coming down out of heaven, he says this about it, "And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, now the dwelling of God is with men. And He will live with them. They will be his people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God" (Revelation 21:3). Later in this same extended description of the New Jerusalem and heaven you read this: "I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. The glory and the honor of the nations will be brought into it." (Revelation 21:22-26). Amen!

But the revelation is not finished. John further reports, "No longer will there be any curse. The throne of God and of the Lamb will be in the city, and His servants will serve Him. They will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. There will be no more

night. They will not need the light of a lamp or the light of the sun, for the Lord God will give them light. And they will reign for ever and ever" (Revelation 22:3-5).

Do you see what John is saying? Heaven is living in the glory of God. It is one thing to have the presence of God dwelling in the midst of His people; it is another thing to dwell in the glory of God in its fullness. As long as we are here on earth, there will always be those human limitations. But when we come at last there will be no limitations.

2. The glory to come will be approachable.

In the last great scene there is no one standing on the outside looking on like Moses. Instead, John reports, "We shall see His face." There will be the most intimate entrance into the presence of God that humans have ever imagined. On this earth, we can only dream about and pray about living in the glory like that which we will know in heaven. What happened at the dedication of the tabernacle was only a foretaste of heaven to come. It was enough to create in the heart of those who know God a thirst to live in the reality of the glory.

3. The glory to come will satisfy the deep hunger of life.

John includes that wonderfully encouraging comment in his description: "And his servants will serve him." Unfortunately, after the manifestation of the glory at the dedication of the tabernacle, the people of Israel had difficulty serving God. They were up and down and off and on in their service to God. But when history has been finished, out of grateful and loving hearts every citizen of the new Jerusalem will daily and

eternally serve God. In that service to God the deepest and most abiding hungers that man has ever known will be fulfilled.

I trust that the Lord has made Himself real enough to you that it has created a hunger to know the fullness of His presence. The apostle John who penned this last book of the Bible was certainly in such a category. He had come to know God in such a way through the Lord Jesus that he longed to live in the reality of what he was able to see. This is the reason John so fervently prays as he closed this book, "Even so come quickly, Lord Jesus!" As we come to the close of the Exodus and stand in the presence of the glory in the tent, I trust that it will stir in us a longing for the day when we shall know the reality of which that was only a symbol.