

The Amazing Glory Of God Revealed In His Word.

Text: Exodus 34:4-8

1) God Is Glorious In The Word Of His Grace

Suggested Hymns:

2) God Is Glorious In The Word Of His Judgment

37, 270, 271, 294, 273

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

The text for our sermon today is Exodus 34:4-8, *⁴ So he cut two tablets of stone like the first ones. Then Moses rose early in the morning and went up Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him; and he took in his hand the two tablets of stone. ⁵ Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD.*

⁶ And the LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, ⁷ "keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

⁸ So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped. (NKJV)

Lord God, heavenly Father, sanctify us through Your truth. Your Word is truth. Amen.

Dear friends in Christ,

Hollywood publicity agents like to use such words as "spectacular," "breathtaking," and "glorious" in their descriptions of movie pictures. Some of them do have spectacular and breathtaking scenes. It is amazing what some producers have been able to put on the screen.

But if we marvel over some of the stirring scenes and demonstrations we have witnessed at the movies or on television, much more should we marvel over the far more glorious productions of Almighty God.

Have you had the experience of flying across the various mountain ranges on a clear winter day, seeing the spectacular beauty of the landscape in all directions? Have you seen the snow-capped mountain peaks glittering in the sun? Scattered about are fertile valleys, towns and cities, lakes and inlets. It is a breathtaking sight. A fellow traveller on the plane had never seen anything like it. “Simply amazing! and Spectacular!” he exclaimed.

Or have you ever sat on an ocean beach in the evening and watched the sun go down, the whole western sky ablaze with a glory that words cannot describe?

As the evening draws on, the darkening sky becomes transformed with a new kind of glory. A bright moon surrounded by myriads of stars takes on the appearance of a shepherd among his flocks.

The sound of the surf and the crackling of the bonfire become the accompaniment for the psalmist’s hymn, *The heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.*¹

Many of you could recall and tell about spectacular sights and breathtaking experiences in which you have shared, whether it was a visit to the Grand Canyon, a trip to the Holy Land, or something much closer to home. No doubt you have at times used such descriptive words as “spectacular,” “breathtaking,” and “glorious.”

Isn’t it remarkable, that in this weary world, so hurt and scarred by sin, there is yet so much of the glorious handiwork of God to be seen? A person must be blind if he cannot see the glory of God all around him.

But there is another revelation of God even more wonderful than that which is seen in nature. At different times and in various ways God has chosen to reveal Himself to man in a more personal manner.

He revealed Himself to Jacob, who saw God at the top of a great stairway leading into heaven. That vision meant so much to Jacob. God revealed Himself to Isaiah, who was given a vision of Him on His heavenly throne. That prophet never forgot it.

There are many other similar revelations of God in His glory recorded in Scripture, but in every instance it was not just what people were permitted to see

that thrilled them; it was what they were permitted to hear that proved so wonderful.

God is glorious in the works of His hand but even more glorious in the words of His mouth. Put the two together and you really have something breathtaking and glorious. Such a revelation of God is presented to us in our text. Let us pray for the blessing of the Holy Spirit that He may give us eyes to see and ears to hear of the amazing Glory of God revealed in His Word. May the Lord bless our meditation on this transfiguration Sunday.

1. God Is Glorious In The Word Of His Grace

Since our text is from Exodus, this immediately suggests the story of Moses and the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Chapters 33 and 34 focus our attention on an impressive event that followed the giving of the Law on Mount Sinai.

The people of Israel, instead of reverently preparing themselves to receive God's Law, engaged in blasphemous idolatry, worshipping a golden calf. Because of this God said He would destroy the people in His wrath, but Moses prayed to God for Israel and pleaded that the Lord would again forgive them.

The Lord listened to this pastoral prayer of Moses and promised to have mercy. Immediately Moses prayed, *"Please, show me Your glory."*² Moses longed for a more personal revelation of God than he had had before. In reply the Lord called Moses back up into the mountain again, and the event recorded in our text took place.

Try to picture this impressive scene as I read verse 5 again, ***Now the LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD.*** No movie director will ever be able to do justice to that scene. It was an experience simply out of this world. The preceding chapter fills us in on some important details. The Lord had said to Moses that no mortal man can look upon the face of the holy God and live.

He told Moses He would place him in the cleft of a rock — perhaps it was a cave — and that in some visible manner God would then pass by. Moses would be permitted to see only His "back parts."³ And this is exactly what happened. But even that sight, which did not include a vision of God's face, left such a mark on Moses that when he went down the mountain again he had to cover himself with a veil so that his people would not be blinded when they looked at him.

Why did Moses ask for this revelation of God?

As I studied this text, the question kept arising, *Why did Moses so earnestly ask to see God's glory, and why did God agree to reveal Himself in this glorious manner?* Surely Moses had been aware of God's presence before. God had appeared to him in the burning bush. He had revealed Himself in a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. He had spoken to Moses in the midst of thunderings, lightnings, and a thick cloud at the first giving of the Law. *Why, then, did Moses ask for another revelation of His glory?*

The Lord does not need to give us an explanation for His actions, but I think we can understand Moses' request. He had shouldered so much responsibility as God's appointed leader for the nation of Israel. He had been, as it were, God's right-hand man in the great liberation of this enslaved people.

His heart had been heavy when the people stubbornly resisted him and openly sinned against God. Moses needed strength and encouragement. He longed for a fuller revelation of this great and wonderful God who had time for such unworthy little people. God granted his request so that Moses might be comforted and strengthened for the trying times ahead.

Do you ever long for some vision of God?

Surely it would be wonderful if now and then we were given opportunities to see something of the glory of God's person. Such desires are sometimes expressed in Bible studies or in the conversation of one Christian with another. *"I wish I could see God as Moses and Elijah saw Him."* *"I wish I might see Jesus in His glory as Peter, James, and John saw Him on the Mount of Transfiguration."* We know we shall see Him face to face in the glory of the heavenly kingdom, but now and then our hearts long to see Him this side of eternity. But what was it that really made this vision of God which Moses saw so glorious?

Moses' vision was glorious because of the Word of God's Grace

It was not only what Moses saw from his crevice in the rock that thrilled him, but it was especially what he heard. The sight of God in His majesty would have unnerved this poor sinful man if it were not for the comforting words which the Lord spoke, *"The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious,*

longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, ⁷ “keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.”

This is what warmed the heart of Moses and gave him such a lift. The glorious God would continue to be a God of grace and mercy in spite of the wickedness of His people. It was this Word of grace that made this vision of God so precious.

God is glorious in His Word of Grace today

This is true also for you and me. It is not likely that we will be given a vision such as Moses had, but we do have the same Word. In fact, God has given us an even better Word than He gave to Moses. He has given us the Word made flesh in the person of Jesus Christ. We know that the Son of God has come. We not only have words of promise; we have words of fulfilment.

Jesus said, ¹⁶ *“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”*⁴ He said, ¹¹ *“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.”*⁵ We have His prayer, *“Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You.”*⁶ Then He went willingly to His death on the cross and in so doing paid the full price that redeemed the whole world from the curse and power of sin.

This same Word of grace says, ¹³ *Christ has redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.*⁷

Again, *Our Savior Jesus Christ, ... has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*⁸ The whole New Testament unfolds with the rich proclamations of God’s grace and mercy through Jesus Christ to everyone who believes. God was never more glorious than in the proclamation of the Word of His grace. The vision which Moses had would have been of little value to him if God had not spoken His Word of grace and mercy.

This Word of grace we possess in the Holy Scriptures are taught and preached among us. There is no famine of the Word of God unless we deprive ourselves of it by our own neglect. This Word of grace has possessed us in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism, whereby the regenerating Holy Spirit made us His dwelling place.

This Word of grace encompasses the bread and wine of the Lord's Supper and makes them the very body and blood of our Saviour by which we were redeemed. Yes, the greater glory of God is found in His Word. This Word of grace made the vision of Moses so glorious, and this same Word of grace is our precious possession.

2. God Is Glorious In The Word Of His Judgment

While we rejoice that our God is glorious in the Word of His grace, we dare not overlook that He is also glorious in the Word of His judgment. Although our Lord desires to reveal His glory by being gracious and forgiving, this does not alter the truth that upon the impenitent and unbelieving He comes as the avenging Judge.

This is stated in the text, *“The LORD, the LORD God, ... by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.”*

Who are these guilty ones of whom the Lord is speaking? Are not all people guilty before the Lord? Indeed, all mankind is guilty, but by God's grace in His Son Jesus Christ the guilty sinner is made whole. He is healed from sin. By faith in the Saviour the guilty sinner becomes a saint.

The guilty referred to in the text are the people who reject the grace of God. They are the ones who remain aloof from the forgiveness offered to them by their gracious and merciful God. They neglect and despise the good news of salvation and continue in their sin. By their example they teach their children and their children's children to do likewise. They do not rejoice in the glory of God made manifest in the Word of His grace.

Does this mean, then, that these impenitent, unbelieving, guilty ones can indefinitely ignore the glorious God and go on living without Him? Is God glorious only to His own faithful people, and can He command no respect from the disobedient?

This text makes it plain that He is a glorious God also to the ungodly. He passes His just judgment, and no man can dispute Him. In His glorious majesty He punishes the sins of the fathers as well as the sins of the children and the grandchildren who walk in the unholy paths of their elders. If man will not have God in His glorious grace, he must have God in His glorious wrath and

judgment. Only for a time are impudent people permitted to defy the Lord or ignore Him.

What happened to the ungodly in the days of Noah? They perished in the flood when God's glorious and spectacular wrath was revealed. What happened to many in Israel when they defied God in the days of Moses, Samuel, Isaiah, or Jeremiah? They perished in God's glorious wrath over sin. What happened to Jerusalem after it had stoned the prophets and crucified the Son of God? It was utterly destroyed in God's glorious wrath over sin.

What will surely happen to this ungodly and unbelieving world when the Saviour returns in judgment on the Last Day? It will perish in that day when He comes in His glory, and He will say to the unbelieving from the throne of His glory, *'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'*⁹

In other words, if man will not have God when He is eager to come to him in the glorious Word of His grace, then he must have God when He comes in the glorious Word of His judgment.

St. Paul describes it this way in Philippians 2:10-11, *at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth,*¹¹ *and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

That means that even the devil and his demons in hell, along with all who are condemned, must acknowledge the glory of God in His just judgment over sin. There is no escaping God. But what a difference between seeing God in His grace and seeing Him in His wrath and judgment!

The Epiphany of God's Glory continues

The spirit of this Epiphany season is that God continues to make known and to manifest abroad by the preaching and teaching of His Word the great glory which is His. In this mountaintop experience of Moses we may also share.

As we become more familiar with the Word of God and see the comforting wonders of His grace in the Gospel of Jesus as well as the terrifying wonders of His judgments in the Law, we will surely agree that there are no adequate words

in our language to describe either the amazing glory of His grace or the glory of His just judgment.

There is nothing in all the world so tremendous, so spectacular, so breathtaking as the amazing glory of God revealed in His Word. Hollywood's glory is make-believe, but here is a glory that is real.

As our God reveals His glory to us again today through this portion of His Word, may we respond by joining with Moses and all the saints in giving glory and worship to our glorious God.

The last verse of this text tells us, ⁸ *So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped.* Surely this is what we also want to do. Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, will keep our hearts and minds, in Christ Jesus. Amen.

¹ Psalm 19:1

² Exodus 33:18

³ Exodus 33: 19-23

⁴ John 3:16

⁵ John 10:11

⁶ John 17:1

⁷ Galatians 3:13

⁸ 2 Timothy 1:10

⁹ Matthew 25:41