EXODUS 13 to 40: The Glory of the Lord

Imagine coming to church this morning and driving into the parking lot. What you see surprises you. Everyone, including our pastor, is standing outside the church building and nobody will go inside. So you get out of your car and you walk over and ask someone, “What’s going on?” They reply, “We can’t go inside because the glory of the Lord has filled the church!” Today we’re going to talk about the glory of the Lord.

First of all let me define what the glory of the Lord means and we’ll see it in the passages that we will look at this morning… The “glory of the Lord” refers to the *shekinah* glory, the supernatural emanating from God. It is God’s manifest presence. It shows up in a variety of ways, all of which we can see and feel with our physical senses – as brightness and splendor, an intense light or fire, a cloud. We can see it. We can feel it. The most common reaction to it by humans is fear and trembling. So the glory of the Lord is the very real and sensed presence of a holy and awesome God!

The first place the glory of the Lord is specifically mentioned in the Book of Exodus is in Chapter 16…

READ Exodus 16:9-10

So we see the glory of the Lord in “the cloud.” What cloud is that? Well, we need to go back to Exodus Chapter 13…

READ Exodus 13:21-22

The people of Israel can see God guiding them on their journey in a pillar of cloud and a pillar of fire. But not only does the Lord guide them, but we see in Exodus 14 that He protects them…

READ Exodus 14:19-20

God puts a barrier between His people and the Egyptian army. Moses parts the sea and the people walk across on dry land. At some point the barrier is lifted and the Egyptians pursue the people.

READ Exodus 14:24-25

In this passage we’re told that God is in the pillar of fire and cloud. And even those pagan Egyptians know it’s Him – “the Lord fights for them!” Of course you know the rest of the story. It doesn’t end well for the Egyptian army. So we see that God in the pillar of fire and pillar of cloud not only guides, but He protects His people.

Well the next place we see the glory of the Lord is at Mt. Sinai…

READ Exodus 19:16-18

Later in Deut 4 Moses described how “the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud and gloom” and how the Lord spoke to the people “out of the midst of the fire.” Just like God had spoken to Moses out of the midst of a fire. So I guess you could say that the glory of the Lord was in the burning bush back in Exodus Chapter 3!

God speaks to the people in an audible, thunderous voice and gives them the 10 commandments. And their reaction to this is in Exodus 20…

READ Exodus 20:18-21

The people are afraid. They think they’re going to die. This is their reaction to the awesome presence of God. For the next few chapters Moses goes up and down the mountain as God gives him various instructions and laws. The glory of the Lord shows up again in Exodus 24…

READ Exodus 24:15-18

This is basically the same description that we saw in Ch 19. The glory of the Lord is manifested in a cloud and smoke and fire on top of Mt. Sinai. The people can physically see it. It represents the presence of the Lord. So Moses goes up into the cloud, into the presence of the Lord for 40 days. During this time God gives Moses specific instructions related to worship and to the construction of a portable worship center, a sanctuary, a tabernacle. And God tells Moses something quite significant.

READ Exodus 25:8-9

God expresses His desire to dwell in the midst of His covenant people! Now, we all know that one of God’s divine attributes is His omni-presence. God is everywhere. So when He talks here about dwelling in the midst of His people what He’s saying is that He wants to make His presence very real to His people, to be felt, to be seen, to be experienced in a way that is unique to them. It has to do with relationship – Israel having a personal relationship with Yahweh, the one true and living God. That’s God’s desire.

But before He can dwell in their midst there are some things that have to be accomplished first, some preparation…

Ch 25 instructions are given to take up voluntary contributions from the people for the tabernacle; God gives specific instructions for building the ark of the covenant, the table for bread and the golden lampstand.

Ch 26 God gives Moses detailed plans for the tabernacle itself.

Ch 27 God gives instructions for the bronze altar and the rectangular courtyard of the tabernacle.

Ch 28 God gives Moses directions regarding the priests’ garments.

Ch 29 God tells Moses how to consecrate Aaron and his sons as priests.

Ch 30 God gives Moses instructions for building an altar of incense; for implementing a census tax to be used in the service of the tabernacle; instructions for a bronze basin, bronze stand, anointing oil and incense.

Ch 31 God tells Moses that He has specifically chosen 2 craftsmen for the task at hand, to do all this work. Their names are Bezalel and Oholiab.

God tells Moses… READ Exodus 31:2-6

God not only tells Moses what to build, but He also designates and empowers craftsman to carry out the details.

Finally in Ch 31 God reiterates the 4th commandment, to keep the Sabbath, a day of solemn rest, holy to the Lord.

So you have this amazing plan that God reveals to Moses. It’s God’s plan whereby He will dwell in the midst of His people, in a close relationship that He desires.

But all that gets derailed in Ch 32, the whole golden calf fiasco (last week’s lesson). God gets very angry and He’s ready to destroy the whole nation. He’s prepared to start over again with Moses. But Moses intercedes on behalf of the people and reminds God of His covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God, in His mercy, relents. He doesn’t destroy the people. Moses makes his way down the mountain to deal with the nation’s sin. Thousands die as a direct result of God’s judgment on their idolatry. Those who remain alive, the vast majority of the people, repent. Which takes us to Ch 33…

READ Exodus 33:1-3

It says when the people heard this terrible news, they mourned. They were truly sorry for what they had done. But even though the people have repented of their sin, God basically tells Moses, “What I said before about dwelling with you, forget it. I’m not going with you. Yes, I’ll keep My promise. I’ll give the people the land. But the relationship with this people, it’s been severely damaged by their stubborn pride and idolatry.”

So Moses seeks the Lord in the tent of meeting. Notice that it is far removed from the camp. The tabernacle was intended to be located in the midst of the people, in the camp, but here we see Moses meeting with God far away from the camp…

READ Exodus 33:7-11

The kind of relationship described here that God has with Moses is the kind of relationship God wants with His people. So, why is it that Moses is so close to the Lord, yet the people are not? Moses certainly is a sinner. He’s far from perfect as we’ve seen before and will see later. The answer to that question lies in Moses’ intercession for the people at the end of Ch 33. For the sake of time, let me paraphrase Moses’ prayer this way: “Lord, You have to go with us. These are Your people. Your presence is what makes this nation distinct from all the others. It’s not enough for us to just to have Your blessings. God, we need Your presence!”

So why is it that Moses had such a close relationship with God? Because he longs to be with God. Moses wants to know more about God. He’s committed to following God. His goal is to please God and to glorify Him. Frankly, the people Israel have not yet reached that place spiritually. They have a long way to go. And you can see in Moses’ prayer just how far he’s come spiritually since God called him from the burning bush. He’s not the same man he was back then. Now, Moses may have a close fellowship with God, but he isn’t satisfied with that. He wants more. He wants to go deeper. He wants to know God intimately, fully – He prays, “Show me Your glory.” It’s not that Moses wants to have some great spiritual experience. He wants to know God… fully. God tells him, “I’ll show you what I can. I can’t show you all of my glory or you’ll die.” So God gives Moses just a glimpse of His glory and we’re told in Ch 34…

READ Exodus 34:29-30

Moses face shown just from a glimpse of God’s glory!

Well the bottom line is that forgiveness of the nation takes place, fellowship is restored and the covenant with the people of Israel is renewed. If it hadn’t been the book of Exodus would have ended right here in Chapter 34. The people would travel on to the land of Canaan. But Exodus doesn’t end here. You have 5 more chapters.

In those chapters, 35 thru 39, Moses assembles the congregation and they begin to put together God’s plan – everything that God told Moses up on Mt Sinai. There are only 2 things that don’t get completed in Exodus, (1) the census tax of the people, which is carried out in Numbers 1-4 and (2) the consecration of Aaron and the priests, which is done in Lev 8. Per Exo 32:29 the priestly service is extended to the entire tribe of Levi. It’s worth noting that Moses himself offers the burnt offerings and grain offerings (Exo 40:29) because Aaron and the priests have not yet been ordained for priestly service. Once everything is constructed, Exodus 40, some assembly is required…

READ Exodus 40:1-3

The tabernacle is portable. It’s designed to be assembled in one day. The people do this. They put in the ark and all of the furnishings (the altar for incense, table, lampstand, basin, etc). They set it all up in v 1-8 and then they set it apart, v 9…

READ Exodus 40:9

Everything is in place and ready for the Lord. The people have followed God’s specifications exactly… the phrases, “All that the Lord had commanded Moses” or “Just as the Lord had commanded Moses” are repeated 19 times from Exodus 38 - 40. Everything has been carried out as God directed Moses. Exodus 40:33 says, “So Moses finished the work.”

Now for the grand climax of the Book of Exodus…

READ Exodus 40:34-38

The glory of God fills the tabernacle! His glory is so overwhelming that not even Moses himself (who had been with God on the top of Mt Sinai) cannot go into the tabernacle.

The Book of Exodus began with God’s people oppressed, enslaved in a foreign land, no hope of escape and God seemingly far away from them. The book ends on a high note. God’s people are free, their free to serve God. They have a bright future looking forward to living in the Promised Land. And God dwells in their midst. But as wonderful an ending as this is, read on. The glory of the Lord will manifest itself again as the story of the Bible unfolds.

* The glory of the Lord fills [Solomon’s] temple. The priests cannot enter the house of the Lord, because the glory of the Lord fills the Lord’s house. (2 Chron 7:1-2) Sadly, later in Ezekiel Chapters 9-10 God’s glory gradually departs His temple because of Judah’s sins.
* Isaiah sees a vision of God’s glory. He says, “I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and the train of his robe filled the temple…the house was filled with smoke and I said, ‘Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips…my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!” (Isa 6:1-5)
* On a hillside near Bethlehem an angel appears to some shepherds. We’re told, “the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear.” The angel says, “Don’t be afraid for I have good news for all the people.” The angel announces the birth of a Savior, Jesus, and he tells them where they can find Him. So exciting is this news that heaven cannot contain itself and suddenly the one angel is joined by a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, “Glory to God in the highest…” (Luke 2)
* Jesus leaves the glory of heaven and He comes to earth. He lives among us in human flesh. John says, “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen His glory, glory as of the only [begotten] Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.” (John 1:14)
* Emmanuel, God with us, God tabernacling with us. We see in Jesus the glory of God, though veiled in human flesh.
* Jesus ascends back to heaven and soon afterward He sends the Holy Spirit. “When the day of Pentecost arrived they were all together in one place. And suddenly a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And tongues of fire appeared to them and rested on each of them. And they were filled with the Holy Spirit…” (Acts 2:1-4). God with us. And now He dwells in us!
* Revelation tells us that one day Jesus will return to earth with the armies of heaven as “King of kings and Lord of lords.” (Rev 19) He’ll reign on earth for 1000 years. Satan will be defeated. There will be the Great White Throne judgment. And then there will be a new heaven and a new earth.

The grand finale of the Bible describes the glory of the Lord, but this time it’s not up on a mountain or in a temple or a tabernacle. John says, “I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb.” (Rev 21:22-23) We can only imagine what that’s going to be like!