EXODUS 33 to 40: The Glory of the Lord, Part 2

This morning we’re going to pick up where we left off last week talking about the “the glory of the Lord.” The glory of the Lord is mentioned throughout the Book of Exodus and it refers to the *shekinah* glory, the radiance, the brilliance and splendor of God. It’s the very real and sensed (you can see it and feel it with your physical senses) presence of holy God! In our study of Exodus over the last 2 months, God’s glory has shown up in a variety of ways – a burning bush, in fire, in smoke, in thunder and lightning, and in a cloud. Moses and the people of Israel have witnessed with their very own eyes the awesome glory of the Lord. The glory of the Lord has produced in the people of Israel an awe and fear of God, as well it should. But God is not merely a passive observer of His people on their journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. He has been actively involved in their day-to-day lives. He has been guiding them. He has protected them from their enemies. He has provided for their physical needs. And of course He continues to meet their spiritual needs. Along the way God has proven to His covenant people just how much He loves them and He has shown them that He can be trusted completely.

Moses is the man that God chose, called by name, to be the leader of the nation of Israel. God speaks to Moses and then Moses in turn relays God’s message to the people. The most amazing thing that God has revealed to Moses is His desire to dwell in the midst of His covenant people. And God has given Moses specific instructions for worship, for building a tabernacle (a portable worship center) in which God plans to take up residence with the nation of Israel. And this tabernacle, as we find out later in the Book of Numbers, is to be located in the middle of the camp.

So God has this amazing plan! But then the people of Israel blow it. They mess up big time with the whole golden calf fiasco. God’s anger burns against the people for their idolatry and He is prepared to destroy them all and start over with Moses. But Moses intercedes and reminds God of His covenant promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. God relents. He doesn’t destroy the people. But there are severe consequences for the people’s sin. Thousands die, the result of God’s judgment. The vast majority of the Israelite nation that remains alive, they repent. But while Moses is in the process of atoning for the sin of the people, God tells him something…

[Show passage from Exodus 33:1-3]

God says, “Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your offspring I will give it.’” But then God says this: “I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the [inhabitants of the land]. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.” God basically says, “Leave this place and head for the Promised Land but I’m not going with you. Yes, I’ll keep My promise. I’ll give the people the land. I will send my angel, but I will not dwell with you.” When Moses announces what God said to the people, the scripture says that they mourned. They were penitent, remorseful, truly sorry for what they had done.

So Moses seeks the Lord in the tent of meeting located outside the camp. The people watch from the camp as the glory of the Lord descends in the form of a cloud on the entrance of the tent. The scripture tells us that they worshipped God. The verse that I left off with last week was Exodus 33:11 which says, “Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.”

The kind of relationship described here that God has with Moses is the kind of relationship God wants with His people. The question that I left you with last week is this: So why is it that Moses is so close to the Lord, yet the people as a whole are not? Moses certainly is a sinner, far from perfect. Yes, he has great faith as Hebrews 11 points out, but so do some others, people like Joshua, Caleb, Bezalel and Oholiab. As for opportunity, Moses certainly was chosen by God to be the leader and as such he had a more direct access to God. But Exodus 33:7 tells us that “everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp.” So the average Israelite had the opportunity to leave the camp and go out to the tent of meeting if they chose to do so. [commend class members]

I contend that the answer to my 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, as wonderful as they are. God, we need You. We want Your presence!”

So the reason I believe that Moses has such a close relationship with God, closer than the average Israelite, is because of the longing of his heart. 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, most of the people of Israel have not yet reached that place spiritually. They grumble and complain. They forget easily what God has done. They focus on what God can give them – they seek his hand not his face. They still have a long way to go. But, with that said, look how far Moses has come since God called him from the burning bush! We can see in Moses’ prayer just how far he’s come spiritually since way back when. He’s not the same man he was. Now, Moses HAS a close relationship and fellowship with God, but he is NOT satisfied with that. He wants more. He wants to go deeper. Moses reminds me of Paul. Paul wrote to the believers at Philippi and said that what he wants more than anything is, not a spiritual high, but to know personally Jesus Christ – he says, “that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection.” Paul wasn’t satisfied with where he was spiritually and neither is Moses. Moses, like Paul, 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.” A human being can only take in so much of divine glory while in this flesh. So God gives Moses just a glimpse of His glory and we’re told in Ch 34…

READ Exodus 34:29-30

Moses face glowed from the residual of a glimpse of God’s glory! Incredible! Because of the people’s fear Moses veiled his face. Paul gives us more insight in 2 Cor 3 that this veil prevented the people from seeing the fading glory of the Lord.

Well the bottom line is that God forgives the nation. Fellowship is restored. The covenant with the people of Israel is renewed. If it hadn’t been, then the book of Exodus would have ended right here in Chapter 34. The people would leave and make their way to the land of Canaan. But Exodus doesn’t end here. There are 5 more chapters. There is work to be done.

In chapters, 35 thru 39, Moses assembles the congregation and together they put together God’s plan – everything that God had told Moses up on Mt Sinai. There are only 2 things that don’t get completed in the Book of Exodus that God told Moses to do: (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 then you come to Exodus 40 where 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, consecrate it as holy to the Lord in 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 thru 40. Everything has been carried out as God directed Moses. Exodus 40:33 says, “So Moses finished the work.”

And 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 in the way He has chosen. They have a bright future. They are looking forward to life in the Promised Land. And God dwells in their midst just as He said He would. But as wonderful an this ending is, read on. The glory of the Lord will manifest itself again and 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 a group of shepherds. We’re told, “the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear” (Luke 2). 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 the shepherds exactly 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…”
* 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,” in other words, God tabernacles, dwelling with us. This time we see the glory of God in the person of Jesus. The glory of God, however, is veiled in human flesh. Jesus said in John 14:9, “Whoever has seen Me has seen the Father…I am in the Father and the Father is in Me.”
* Jesus goes up to a high mountain accompanied by Peter, James and John and there we get a preview of Jesus’ second coming. On the mountain “He was transfigured before them, and His face shown like the sun, and His clothes became white as light” (Matt 17). He was with Moses and Elijah and Luke tells us they were discussing Jesus’ upcoming death. Then a voice came from the clouds, the voice of God the Father which said, “This is my beloved Son with whom I am well pleased, listen to Him.”
* Jesus after His death and resurrection spends some time with His disciples. He 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!
* Saul is on the road to Damascus when suddenly there’s a light from heaven and Saul fell to the ground having encountered the Lord Jesus Himself.
* When our Lord appears to John on the island of Patmos, John describes the appearance of Jesus: “His face was like the sun shining in full strength” (Rev 1:16);
* 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 on a road or in a temple or a tabernacle. John says, “I saw no temple in the city (new Jerusalem), 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 as we get to dwell in the ever-present glory of the Lord forever. And we will be able to see His glory like never before!

What song should we sing after a lesson like that? It’s fitting that we sing about God’s holiness… Holy, holy, holy.