

The Glory of God Revealed

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning.

I am Joan Benson, and I'm part of the North Berkeley Community Group and Women Reading Women. Today's scripture reading is from the book of Exodus, chapter 33, verses 15 to 23, and from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 3, verse 18, as printed in the liturgy.

Exodus 33, 15. Then Moses said to him, if your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here.

How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?

[1 : 22] And the Lord said to Moses, I will do the very thing you have asked because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.

Then Moses said, now show me your glory. And the Lord said, I will cause, excuse me, all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence.

I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But he said, you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.

Then the Lord said, there is a place near me where you may stand on a rock. When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand, and you will see my back, but my face bids not be seen. The grass withers, the flowers fall, but the word of God stands forever.

[2 : 40] And now a reading from Paul's second epistle to the Corinthians. Second Corinthians 3, 18. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Well, thank you for that scripture reading, Joan, and good morning, Christ Church.

My name is Andrew, and one of the pastors here. I was away last weekend on vacation with my family, but we're glad to be back. Glad to be back worshipping with our church family. Will you join me in prayer?

Lord God, we ask this morning that in the preaching of your word, you would allow us to see what you want us to see.

That you would allow us to see you, and not just see you, but behold you, oh God. One thing have I desired of the Lord.

[3 : 52] That will I seek after. That I will dwell in the house of the Lord. All the days of my life, and behold the beauty of the Lord. And inquire in his temple.

That's what we want to see, oh God. We want to behold your glory. We thank you that you are the kind of God who has revealed that glory to us. Full of grace and truth in your son, Jesus Christ.

Be honored in the preaching of your word, in the administration of the sacraments, in our fellowship here today, oh God. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. All right, so we're continuing our series here.

This mini-series in Exodus chapters 32 to 34, right? We're looking at this first great national rebellion. The infamous incident of the golden calf turned into the first great national revival in history.

All right, so now what I want to do is I want to reset where we are in the story. Remember, God has delivered his Hebrew people out of 400 years of slavery in Egypt, right? And he's brought them through the Red Sea to this holy mountain.

[4 : 53] And this mountain is called Mount Horeb, also known as Mount Sinai. Now, this is a special mountain, all right? This is the same mountain where an 80-year-old refugee and shepherd named Moses first encountered Yahweh, the living God, in an unburning bush.

You can read about that in Exodus chapter 3. So this is holy ground where we are. God has told Moses all the way back then at the unburning bush that he's heard his people's cries, right? And he tells Moses that he wants to use him to deliver his people and to unite them to himself in a covenant bond. And here we are now in Exodus chapter 33, and God has done exactly what he said he was going to do.

He's brought them back to this mountain because he wants to now ratify his covenant union with them. He wants to bring them back to this holy site, like a sacred, nostalgic wedding venue. Only this time, he's not manifesting himself in some little unburning bush. The whole mountain is on fire, and there's a dark cloud, and there's rumblings of thunder and lightning, and the presence of God here is undeniable.

[5 : 57] It's unmistakable that God is here, and the people dare not approach this mountain. So that's the scene, right? And the people dare not approach, but God invites Moses up the mountain.

And so Moses goes up the mountain, and for 40 days, God reveals to Moses his detailed vision for what he wants their union and their communion to look like as a family. He's basically saying to Moses, this is the kind of beautiful home and the kind of wonderful life and dwelling place I'm preparing for our family that I want us to enjoy.

But what happens when Moses is on the mountain after 40 days? People grow impatient, right? And at the very moment that God is detailing his plans to be intimately present with them, they seek to force his presence and harness his power amongst themselves with the golden calf idol. And God's heart breaks, and his anger burns, like with all the jealousy of a husband who's only ever had eyes for his bride.

A husband who's been excitedly making all these plans for a beautiful life together with his precious bride. And so God, he now desires to just wipe this people out, to just forsake his plan of union with them.

[7 : 09] Just give them over to their new lover, give them over to their own self-destruction. And he says, I'm just going to make a new nation out of you, Moses. But what does Moses do?

He intercedes. He pleads. He says, but God, remember your promise. And the crazy thing is, God relents. He hears Moses' prayer, and he relents.

But still, we have this problem. God does not want to dwell with this unfaithful people anymore. He says, okay, I'm still going to let you live. I'm still even going to let you go into the land flowing with milk and honey, this promised land that I promised to send you into.

But I'm not going to go with you. I'm not going to be present with you, because you are a stiff-necked people. And I might destroy you on the way. And so what happens? The people mourn, and they strip off their ornaments.

Because of this great conundrum that their greatest need, the presence of God, has now become their greatest threat at the same time. Because, like, what is the promised land apart from the presence of God?

[8 : 11] So what Moses does is he pitches a tent. He pitches a tent far outside the camp. Not among the people, but far outside the camp. And amazingly, graciously, the presence of God in a cloud descends on that tent.

And he still meets with Moses. He still meets with his people. Even says that he speaks to Moses as a friend, face to face, mouth to mouth. And as the people of God see the presence of God descend upon this tent, they are filled with worship.

Because maybe they are not doomed after all. Now it is in this tense of meeting that we find ourselves today in this passage. Where Moses continues to intercede for his people who are still at odds with God.

And Moses says, you've told me to lead these people, God. But who's going to go with me? And God says, well, I will go with you. My presence will go with you, Moses. But Moses says, no, but unless you go with us.

With all of us. What will distinguish me and your people amongst all the nations? And this is where we left off last week. In verse 17. Where God graciously says to Moses, okay.

[9 : 18] Okay, I will. He says, I will do the very thing you have asked. Because I am pleased with you. And I know you by name. Now if we don't grasp how crazy this is, we need to read this again.

This is crazy if you think about it. The intercession and pleading of Moses has brought God from going, I'm going to wipe them out. To, oh, I'm going to let them go into the promised land, but I'm not going to be with them.

To, now I'm going to be with them in my fullness and not destroy them. Isn't that incredible? That the prayers and the pleas of Moses would be heard and answered by God.

When everything that Moses asked for seemed so contrary to what his people deserved, God granted his request. Here in verse 17, the creator of the universe says to a mere mortal, I will do the very thing you have asked.

Because I am pleased with you. And I know you by name. Wow, right? Can you imagine if God said that to you? I am so pleased with you. And we have so personal a relationship that I will do the very thing you have asked.

[10 : 25] It's like a blank check from the almighty God on high. Now, if you had this many requests granted to you by God, seemingly impossible requests granted to you by this God who also just told you that he is pleased with you and he knows you by name, what would you ask for next?

What would you ask for next? If God wrote you like this blank check and your relationship with him was so deep, so personal, so full of trust and confidence, if God said to you, I would do the very thing you ask because I am pleased with you, what would you ask for next?

Instant retirement? Impeccable health? Your soulmate? The picture of perfect family, eternal life, liberty, and happiness? What would you ask for?

It's kind of hard to even imagine, right? Like the most awesome thing we could think of probably seems too small a thing to ask for with such a blank check from God, right?

But just because this question is hard to answer doesn't mean we should give up on considering whether there might be a right answer. Like what is the ultimate thing we could possibly ask of God, especially if we knew he was pleased with us and knew us by name and had just promised to be present with us.

[11 : 43] What more could we possibly ask for? This morning, I think God wants us to consider the things that our hearts presently desire. And I think God wants to show us what our hearts were made to rightly desire.

And this is so key to our understanding of revival. Revival is all about our hearts' desires and returning to the purest and highest of possible desires. Far from our culture's insistence that the heart just wants what it wants.

Revival comes when the heart wants what God wants it to want. When we pray fervently, with sincerity, thy kingdom come, thy will be done.

This is what God wants to show us today. The heart of someone with an intimate relationship with God. The heart of someone who is so convinced that God loves them, so convinced that God cares for them and listens to them and is pleased with them and will answer their prayers.

The heart of someone with a blank check from God. What we see in our passage today in the person of Moses is a man who had for 80 years lived without knowing the one true God of the universe.

[12 : 51] And yet had come to experience the surprising defeat of the greatest empire in the world, the parting of the Red Sea, manna and quail from heaven, water from a rock, affirmative answers to his impossible prayer requests, and a face-to-face conversational relationship with the living God who also says to him, I will do the very thing you have asked because I am pleased with you.

So basically here we have in Moses a man with every reason to believe that he is loved and cared for by God and every reason to believe that he has the very ear of God.

He's a man truly convinced that God is pleased with him and will do the very thing he's asked. So what does he ask for? Verse 18. Then Moses said, Now show me your glory.

Now show me your glory. Or more literally in the Hebrew, Cause me to see, Cause me to see your glory. What does this man ask for? Who's been given deliverance that he and his people don't deserve, forgiveness that they don't deserve, sustenance they don't deserve, prayer requests answered that they don't deserve, a promised land they don't deserve, God's very presence that

they don't deserve.

What do you ask for when you have it all, even the affirmation of God and his promise to answer your prayers? What do you ask of this kind of a God? You ask him for more of him.

[14:07] You ask for more of him, to see more of him, to know more of him, to experience more of him in all his inexhaustible fullness. You ask to go deeper into the bottomless well of living water for fresh experiences of him and all his goodness that are new every single morning.

That's what Moses asked for. when he asked to see the glory of God. And that is the primal plea and the burning pursuit that catalyzes every revival, a hunger and a thirst for nothing but God and God alone.

As King David said in Psalm 27, one thing have I desired of the Lord that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty, the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.

So with the rest of our time today, we're going to look more closely at Moses' bold request and God's balanced response. And the big idea is this, to see the glory of God is our greatest pursuit, our greatest problem, and our greatest privilege.

To see the glory of God is our greatest pursuit, our greatest problem, and our greatest privilege. Now maybe you're here and you're not sure you can even believe in God. Or you're not sure how to relate to this Old Testament account about Moses.

[15:34] Or maybe you identify as a Christian, but you honestly don't feel much of a hunger or much of a thirst for more of this God. And so Moses' prayer caused me to see your glory.

It kind of sounds abstract, irrelevant, and unrelatable. But I think that if we give some attention to Moses' requests here and consider what glory even is, I wonder if you might find Moses' prayer to see the glory of God more relatable than you might think.

And not only relatable, but essential. Even our greatest possible pursuit. So let's start by considering this word glory, which admittedly is a hard word to define and to describe.

Because as theologian Richard Gaffin, one of my professors at Westminster, he said, glory is preeminently a divine quality. Only God has glory. And so all other glories are only derivatives. So that makes it hard to describe and define. But still, I think we can arrive at an approximate definition. After all, God himself has revealed his glory to us that we might grasp, that we might grasp what he wants us to grasp about who he is, right?

[16:42] So let's go for it. All right, in the Hebrew, the word for glory is this word kavod. Kavod, which primarily has this sense of weightiness. Weightiness. Now first, this might sound weird.

The glory of God as the weightiness of God. But maybe another helpful word is like gravitas. Or when we talk about weighty matters or weighty subjects. These are subjects of first importance, right?

Of most ultimate priority. Things that matter the most. So when we talk about the glory of God, we're talking about the supreme weightiness of God. God as the ultimate anchor and foundation of all reality.

The ultimate reference point. The sovereign creator apart from whom nothing exists. The glory of God is the gravitas of God. Now in the Greek, the word for glory is another word.

It's doxa. Which carries this sense of honor and recognition and praiseworthiness. So to talk about glory is to talk about what is worthy of praise. What is worthy of my honor and my worship.

[17:42] The glory of God then points to the supreme worthiness of God. Worthy of all our worship and honor and praise. The only one before whom we ought to bow down in worship. And then when you put these two words together, kavod and doxa, what they have in common is that they both connote a sense of splendor and majesty, abundance and wonder.

And this is why when the glory of God is beheld throughout the scriptures, it makes people hide. It makes people turn away. It makes people fall to the ground and gaze with wonder, shock and awe. Now we could dive deeper into the many dimensions of the glory of God. But me and Jonathan's favorite theologian, Herman Bavinck, he defines the glory of God like this. The glory of the Lord is the splendor and brilliance that is inseparably associated with all of God's attributes and his self-revelation in nature and grace.

The glorious form in which he everywhere appears to his creatures. So there can really be no end to this discussion of the glory of God. But I bring up these three aspects, the weightiness of God, the praiseworthiness of God, and the splendor of God to highlight precisely why the glory of God is

our greatest possible pursuit.

Because don't you see, we're all looking for something weighty. that one thing that matters most, the heaviest of anchors, right, that will hold us fast and keep our ships from drifting and sinking under the waves of this chaotic world.

[19 : 13] We're all looking for an ultimate weighty foundation that can hold us secure amidst the shifting sentiments of public opinion, the shifting values of each new generation and every transition of power from one empire to the next.

And we're also looking for something worthy of our worship, someone to worship. As the late essayist and Pomona College professor David Foster Wallace once said, here's something else that's weird but true.

In the day-to-day trenches of adult life, there's actually no such thing as atheism. There's no such thing as not worshipping. Everybody worships. The only choice we get is what to worship.

Wallace was absolutely right. We're all looking for someone to bow down to as Lord. Something or someone of the most ultimate, far surpassing worth to devote our lives to.

Someone worthy of ordering and organizing and orienting our lives, our beliefs, our values, our commitments and our every moment of existence. Someone to rescue us from our otherwise untethered, arbitrary, meaningless, and ironically self-conscious self-worship.

[20 : 20] And not only are we looking for that which is the weightiest or the most praiseworthy, but we're looking for something with such splendor. Something so transcendently beautiful that it cannot but take our breaths away in its presence.

Something that is more than just true but something that is so compelling and captivating that it's astoundingly rapturous beyond words. This is what the glory of God is.

This is what Moses is asking to see. the most ultimate thing he could conceive of. God, cause me to see you. In all your radiance, in all your glory, in all your fullness, let me experience all of who you are, your very essence.

Reveal to me your identity and your character in an undeniable way. Moses wants to behold God's glory because he wants to know God even more. And Moses wants to know and behold God because to know God and to behold his glory is to know and behold the single most important thing, the single most profound, the single most foundational reality.

What Moses is after is what I want to call that one thing. And we all have it. That one thing, that one vision, that one encounter, that one experience, the realest, the most fundamental, most transformative, life-altering and awe-inspiring sight one could possibly behold.

[21 : 44] The glory, the gravitas, the awesomeness and splendor of God. The one thing we're all after, a single orienting reality that will anchor and inspire all of us in this otherwise chaotic, uncertain, arbitrary, and meaningless world.

The one thing to which all else is subjected. With a blank check from God, Moses asks for more of God because he's been up the mountaintop and he knows that there's no greater pursuit than to behold the glory of God.

Now based on Moses' track record of prayer requests so far, we might assume that God's like, alright, one more, Moses? Sure, I could do one more. Sure, you can see my glory.

But what we find here in verses 19 to 20 is actually neither a full yes nor a full no. It's more of, I'll tell you what I'm going to do instead. See, because as much as God loves Moses, as much as God is pleased with Moses and has graciously granted so many of his prayers already, to see the glory of God is not a small and simple thing.

To see the glory of God isn't just our greatest pursuit but it's also our greatest problem. Look at verse 19. Here's the partial yes. And the Lord said, I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence.

[23 : 14] I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. But, verse 20, and here's the partial no, but he said, you cannot see my face for no one may see me and live.

Now I imagine that for many of us, we struggle here with verse 20, this concept that people cannot see God's face and live. Maybe you're still caught up back a couple verses earlier with this notion of God's fiery anger burning against idol-worshipping Israelites and God wanting to even wipe them out as a whole entire nation for worshipping this golden calf.

And I can understand how this irritates our modern Western sensibilities that have so elevated each one of us human beings. I can see how this might trigger even some of us who have this conception of God that he's primarily a wrathful God, an angry God, mostly to be feared.

And you know, I would love to have an extended conversation with you, our elders would as well, but for the sake of time, I want to share with you some words from a book I highly recommend. It's by hip-hop artist Jackie Hill Perry.

This book is titled *Holier Than Thou, How God's Holiness Helps Us Trust Him*. Because I think she hits it right on the head in her commitment to the holiness of God and in her explanation of this interface between this God who is holy, holy, holy, and his sin-stained creatures, including you and me.

[24 : 44] Listen to what she writes. She writes, The holy, holy, holy God should never be treated as so familiar to the degree that he becomes approachable on our own terms.

I'm going to read that again. The holy, holy, holy God should never be treated as so familiar to the degree that he becomes approachable on our own terms. See, the glory, the gravitas of God demands that we acknowledge that he is God and that we are not.

That he's the creator and we're his creatures. And therefore, we must not approach him on our own artificial terms, but on his authoritative terms. And according to God's terms, his holy presence cannot abide that which is not holy.

Jackie Hill Perry, she writes, God's wrath is nothing like the anger we know of by experience. Wrath isn't a response to God's ego being bruised, nor is it that he's a sadist taking pleasure in our pain. It is quite the opposite. The wrath of God is the holy revulsion of God's being against that which is a contradiction to his holiness. God cannot be indifferent towards sin because he is too holy, holy, holy to do so.

[25 : 56] The reason we, she writes, the reason we eventually find the confidence to accuse God of injustice whenever his gavel falls too hard for our liking is because we have a ridiculously low view of sin and an equally mediocre grasp of the holiness of God.

And that is why, she writes, we can ask to see his glory, but it's either death or a cleft available to us if God allows himself to be seen.

And so when Moses asks to see the glory of God, he's not only asking for the deepest longing of his heart and for the very thing he was meant to gaze upon forever and ever into eternity, but he's also making a death wish.

And that's the conundrum for all of us. How can we dwell with a holy God? How can we dwell with a holy God? But thankfully, this isn't the end of Moses' story, nor is it the end of ours.

And that's where this cleft comes in. For to see the glory of God is not only our greatest pursuit and our greatest problem, but it's also our greatest privilege. Look with me at verse 21.

[27 : 07] Just as soon as God introduces this tension of, I will cause all of me to pass in front of you, but you cannot see my face or you will die, God also says in verse 21, there is a place near me where you may stand on a rock.

When my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back, but my face must not be seen.

And do you know what this is? This is a foreshadowing of the gospel. The good news. The good news that when we couldn't come nearer, even behold, the glory of God, the glory of God shining from the face of Jesus Christ has come near and revealed himself to us.

That when all we had was a tent far outside the camp, the eternal word, as the gospel of John puts it, the eternal word became flesh and dwelt among us, tabernacled among us, and we beheld his glory full of grace and truth.

You see, because of Christ, when even mighty Moses with whom God was pleased to answer so many of his prayer requests, what mighty Moses could only see in part in Christ, God's own son, we can see in full through his son with whom he is well pleased.

[28 : 31] And what Moses needed to shield him from the unapproachable glory of God, his greatest need and yet his greatest threat, we have in Christ.

a better rock, a permanent rock, a rock who will go with us, the ultimate cleft to Haydn, with no need to fear the awesome glory of God.

And this is the good news, that at the cross, the conundrum of our greatest pursuit being our greatest problem because of sin, at the cross, it's resolved.

In Christ, Jesus has put the problem, he's put our sin to death in his own body and if we will trust him, if we will hide ourselves in him as the ultimate cleft, we can be called the very righteousness of God, the very holiness of God, partakers in the glory that once threatened our existence as people who once so foolishly ascribed all weightiness and worthiness and wonder to created things rather than our creator.

And this is the gospel. This is the gospel, this is the heartbeat of every revival when people have caught such a glimpse of the glory of God in Jesus Christ that they humbly yet boldly seek more of him and pray along with Moses, oh God, show me your glory.

[29 : 53] And that's what we celebrate today, this Reformation Sunday when we remember Solus Christus. There is only one mediator between God and man and it is his son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We don't need a priest, we don't need to fulfill any rituals, we don't need to pay anything out of our own pockets, but solely through Christ. We can come before the throne of God's grace with confidence.

Now perhaps you're here today and you've been sitting through this revival series, right? And we're, what, nine sermons in now to this revival series and you're like, ah, shoot.

I still don't feel anything. I haven't made it to the top of the mountain. I haven't had that experience. Come on, Jonathan.

Light us up, man. Bring the fire. Lead us up the mountain. And I'm trying, man. But you know, this reminds me of a story that one of my favorite preachers, Francis Chan, loves to tell.

[31 : 03] He tells the story of this Indian pastor who is his mentor. And he's an incredibly fruitful pastor in India. He's planted like thousands of churches.

But one day, Francis Chan receives this call from this pastor and the pastor is just weeping. He's weeping because he's just found out that yet another high-profile pastor in America has fallen, has fallen, has had another moral failure.

And he's weeping because he knows what kind of effect this is going to have on the church in America. We who so love our celebrity pastors, we who are so dependent on these fiery guys on YouTube and Instagram just inspiring us and carrying us on their backs up the mountain.

And what he says to Francis Chan is, Francis, what's wrong with you guys? Don't you know you can go up the mountain yourselves?

Don't you know that you can go up the mountain yourselves and behold a glory far beyond what Moses ever could have dreamed of until he saw the transfigured Christ?

[32 : 15] Well, that's who we have now. we have the Christ. He has come. He has come. He has given himself to us to behold the good news of God's word to us today, the good news of Reformation Sunday is that in Christ and through Christ we can go up the mountain.

We can behold his glory. Will you come? Will you come and see? Will you come to Jesus? Come to this table and behold his glory and find it full of grace and truth.

Will you pray with me? and be damned in the name of the Father and the Son and who