

Glory Veiled and Unveiled
Exodus 34:29-35
3/23/2014

Many years ago when the great missionary Adoniram Judson was home on furlough, he passed through the city of Stonington, Connecticut. A young boy playing about the wharves at the time of Judson's arrival was struck by the man's appearance. Never before had he seen such a light on any human face. He ran up the street to a minister to ask if he knew who the stranger was. The minister hurried back with him, but became so absorbed in conversation with Judson that he forgot all about the impatient youngster standing near him. Many years afterward that boy—who could never get away from the influence of that wonderful face—became the famous preacher Henry Clay Trumbull. In a book of memoirs he penned a chapter entitled: "What a Boy Saw in the Face of Adoniram Judson." That lighted countenance had changed his life. Even as flowers thrive when they bend to the light, so shining, radiant faces come to those who constantly turn toward Christ! If this was true of Adoniram Judson, how much more true must it have been for Moses, who was in God's presence in as direct way as it was possible for a human to experience!

The people of Israel have been forgiven, but here is the final piece of that forgiveness. The shining face of Moses proved that God was still intending to be with His people. He would not forsake them, no matter how bone-headed we are, I mean they. Or do I? Remember that one of the biggest issues that the people of Israel faced, if you'll pardon the pun, was whether God would go with them or not. The shining face of Moses proved that God would be going with them. So, if God is going with Moses, then Moses' efforts at being a mediator must have been successful, which meant in turn that God would be going with the entire people, and had therefore forgiven them for their sin.

The shining face of Moses had another purpose and result, which was to confirm Moses' authority over the people, and as their true mediator. The shining face was God's stamp of approval, if you will. It was God shining through Moses to the people.

There is an incident earlier in the story of Exodus, of which we should be reminded when we read about Moses' shining face, and that is the story of the burning bush. If you will recall, what Moses saw there was a bush burning with God's glory, and yet not being consumed. When we looked at that passage, we saw that it was an expression of God's grace: God intended to go with the people in such a way that the Israelites would not be burned up by God's holiness. In the burning bush, the message was originally just for Moses. But here and now with Moses, the message is for all Israel: God will be with His people in such a way that they will not be consumed. Moses will act like a buffer between God and the people. That is what the true mediator does.

Of course, the people don't get the message right away, do they? The people were afraid of Moses when he appeared with his shining face. As Charles Simeon says, their fear came from their sense of guilt. This is always what happens when sinful humanity comes into the presence of the holy God. The most obvious example of this is Isaiah, of course. When confronted with the presence of the holy God, he immediately knew how unholy he himself was.

Now, Moses himself did not know that his face was shining. He might very well have wondered why it was that the people were slowly backing away from him. They were afraid to come near him at all. At some point, though (we don't know when!), Moses must have realized what was going on, or someone might have told him about his face. Moses called to the people to tell them about God's grace. Verse 31 is very important, because it is a

description of God's grace given to the people. Though they had sinned a terrible sin, they were forgiven, and they were brought near by the Word of the Lord, given through Moses, the mediator.

From verses 34-35 we learn that Moses' shining face was a regular occurrence. Whenever Moses went into the tabernacle to talk with God, he would speak with God face to face, with no veil. Whenever he came out to speak with the people about what God had said, he would cover his face. The text seems to indicate that after a while the glow would fade, sort of like old batteries, and when Moses went back into the tabernacle, the batteries would get recharged.

There are a few passages in the Old Testament that become the basis for an entire passage in the New Testament. This is one of them, and so we will need to turn to Paul in 2 Corinthians in order to see the full meaning of what our text says. All of 2 Corinthians 3 has the story of Moses in mind, whether it is the tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written, or the story of the glowing face of Moses, and the veil that Moses needed to put over his face. Listen now to the words of 2 Corinthians 3:

Do we begin again to commend ourselves? Or do we need, as some *others*, epistles of commendation to you or *letters* of commendation from you? You are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read by all men; clearly *you are* an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone but on tablets of flesh, *that is*, of the heart. And we have such trust through Christ toward God. Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as *being* from ourselves, but our sufficiency *is* from God, who also made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life. But if the ministry of death, written *and* engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which *glory* was passing away, how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? For if the ministry of condemnation *had* glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. For if what is passing away *was* glorious, what remains *is* much more glorious. Therefore, since we have such hope, we use great boldness of speech—unlike Moses, *who* put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away. But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the *veil* is taken away in Christ. But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord *is*, there *is* liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

There are several important things about this chapter we need to notice. First of all, the people of God are compared to the tablets of stone. God writes on our hearts the gospel of Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit is the Author, and He writes on our hearts the truths of the gospel. That changes us mightily. Benjamin Franklin expressed some of this when as a young man he wrote his own epitaph:

The body of B. Franklin, Printer (Like the Cover of an Old Book Its Contents torn Out And Stript of its Lettering and Gilding) Lies Here, Food for Worms. But the Work shall not be Lost; For it will (as he Believ'd) Appear once More In a New and More Elegant Edition Revised and Corrected By the Author.

God the author of our lives, and of our new lives in Christ, will also be the author of the new

heavens and the new earth along with our resurrected bodies. As Paul says in verse 4, "And we have such trust through Christ toward God."

Secondly, notice that Paul portrays the glory of the new covenant as being far greater than that of the old covenant. He calls Moses' ministry "the ministry of death." That is a direct contrast with "the ministry of the Spirit," which is obviously a ministry of life. This contrast deepens in verses 10-11. There Paul says that the glory of the ministry of the Spirit is so much greater than the ministry of Moses, that the ministry of Moses suffers greatly by comparison, to the point where Moses seems to have no glory at all, when compared with the ministry of the Spirit. The ministry of the Spirit is permanent, whereas the ministry of Moses was temporary.

Thirdly, notice that Paul has a very particular interpretation of the veil that Moses put over his face. He interprets Moses' action of putting on the veil as being an action of weakness. Our hope makes us bold. But Moses and Israel did not see that hope so clearly. It was much more vague and shadowy for them. Then Paul tells us that the veil that Moses put over his face is a metaphor for the blindness that the Jews have whenever they read Moses, because they do not see Jesus in the books of Moses. Only in Christ is that veil taken away. This states quite clearly that if we read Moses and do not come up with Jesus Christ, then there is a veil over our faces.

Fourthly, Paul compares us to Moses, and tells us that we have far greater privileges than Moses had. We have unveiled faces. We can see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. As Paul will go on to say in chapter 4: "For God, who said, 'Let light shine out of darkness,' has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Paul tells us in verse 18 that we are being transformed from one degree of glory to another, and are thereby becoming more and more like Jesus Christ.

So, has the Lord removed the veil over your heart? Do you rejoice to see Jesus in the Old Testament? Do you rejoice when you look to the author and finisher of your faith? Do you see Him (with your eyes of faith) in heaven itself in great glory? Does that give you a thrill of recognition? Or do you react with "ho-hum?" Sometimes even when the Lord has removed that veil as a whole, there might still be tatters of that veil that still have the power to blind us. It is really an issue of our hearts. Our hearts need to be enlightened by the Holy Spirit so that we can see clearly. And so we need to pray that the veil (or any tattered remains of the veil!) be taken away.

Secondly, do not be afraid to come to God. We often have the fear that God will not receive us, because our sin is too great. We think that God could not possibly forgive the sin that we committed this week. Has the arm of the Lord grown short? Has the blood of Christ lost any of its power, even after 2000 years? Has the Spirit of the Lord lost His power? Has God suddenly become a different God than He was before? The people feared even to come to Moses, but Moses told them to come to him. Our mediator Jesus Christ tells us to come unto Him, and not to be afraid. Come as you are, and know that God will not only receive you, but He will also change you. He will not leave you as you are. But you will change from glory into glory. Do not be afraid to come to God.

Thirdly, when you talk with God, know that real communication with God is a glorious thing. Moses had a shining face whenever he talked with God. Now, it won't happen for us quite in the same way. It will not appear in us as a physical glow. However, remember what Henry Clay Trumbull saw in the face of Adoniram Judson. There is something that you can often see in the face of a believer. You can see the light of joy peeking through, maybe not all the time, but sometimes. We should not try to create that artificially by trying to look a certain way. Rather, we should focus on communicating with God through prayer, and paying attention to His communication with us in the Word. One of the central benefits of prayer is

that it changes us from glory into glory, as Paul would say. Prayer is the tool God uses to help us to see a situation as He sees it. So, don't pursue that glowing face directly. It comes indirectly when we communicate with God through prayer, and then when He communicates to us in the Word by the Spirit.

Lastly, live this life with the future glory in view. Have a heavenly perspective on life. This helps us to have the right priorities. If our vision is too short-sighted, then we will not see the glory to be revealed, nor will we want it. And so, we will cling to the gilded toys of dust that this world offers. However, if we look forward to the new heavens and the new earth, we will see something worth waiting for.

I will close with this illustration, one that I mentioned Monday night in the men's Bible study. In Pilgrim's Progress, John Bunyan relates the following incident in the walk of Christian:

I saw, moreover, in my dream, that the Interpreter took him by the hand, and had him into a little room, where sat two little children, each one in his chair. The name of the elder was Passion, and the name of the other Patience. Passion seemed to be much discontented; but Patience was very quiet. Then Christian asked, What is the reason of the discontent of Passion? The Interpreter answered, The Governor of them would have him stay for his best things till the beginning of the next year; but he will have all now; but patience is willing to wait. Then I saw that one came to Passion, and brought him a bag of treasure, and poured it down at his feet, the which he took up and rejoiced therein, and withal laughed Patience to scorn. But I beheld but a while, and he had lavished all away, and had nothing left him but rags.

CHR. Then said Christian to the Interpreter, Expound this matter more fully to me.

INTER. So He said, These two lads are figures: Passion, of the men of this world; and Patience, of the men of that which is to come; for, as here thou seest, Passion will have all now this year, that is to say, in this world; so are the men of this world: they must have all their good things now, they cannot stay till next year, that is, until the next world, for their portion of good. That proverb, "A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush," is of more authority with them than are all the Divine testimonies of the good of the world to come. But as thou sawest that he had quickly lavished all away, and had presently left him nothing but rags; so will it be with all such men at the end of this world.

CHR. Then said Christian, Now I see that Patience has the best wisdom, and that upon many accounts. First, Because he stays for the best things. Second, And also because he will have the glory of his, when the other has nothing but rags.

INTER. Nay, you may add another, to wit, the glory of the next world will never wear out; but these are suddenly gone. Therefore Passion had not so much reason to laugh at Patience, because he had his good things first, as Patience will have to laugh at Passion, because he had his best things last; for first must give place to last, because last must have his time to come; but last gives place to nothing; for there is not another to succeed. He, therefore, that hath his portion first, must needs have a time to spend it; but he that hath his portion last, must have it lastingly; therefore it is said of Dives, "Thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented" (Luke 16:25).

CHR. Then I perceive it is not best to covet things that are now, but to wait for things to come.

Paul tells us that the things we see are temporary, but the unseen things are eternal. Let us set those priorities in our lives first and foremost. And God will turn glory into more glory.

