

## *To God Alone Be The Glory*

Can any of us fully appreciate what it's like to be a slave? Try to put yourself in the sandals of the children of Israel while they were held captive in Egypt as slaves. Up every day before dawn. Work hard all day. Go home exhausted. Sleep a few hours. Get up and do it all over again tomorrow. Perhaps some of you think I'm describing your life. But there's a difference: you have choices. The Israelites didn't. They were forced to make bricks for Pharaoh.

It was so bad that they cried out to the Lord for rescue. Through the ten plagues the Lord forced Pharaoh to let Israel go. After miraculously crossing the Red Sea on dry ground, Israel followed the Lord to Mt. Sinai. That's where the Lord appeared to Israel: the glory of the Lord descended to the top of Mt. Sinai. And there was thunder and lightning and a dense cloud and the sound of a loud trumpet getting louder.

The people were impressed! ...scared out of their wits, but thoroughly impressed. The Lord laid out the basics of his covenant with them. He reminded them how he had just rescued them from Egypt, and he promised to send his angel ahead of them into the land where they were going. They promised to obey everything the Lord said, **all** his commands. So Moses went up onto Mt. Sinai. For the next 40 days and 40 nights the Lord gave them the Ten Commandments and the

plans for the people to build the tabernacle, that moveable worship facility which the Israelites took with them wherever they went. But the people got impatient waiting for Moses to come back down the mountain. So they asked Aaron, Moses' brother and the High Priest of Israel, to make them a god. I know, I know: it's unbelievable! The Lord had just said, "*You shall have no other gods before me,*" and, "*Don't make for yourselves an idol in the form of anything on earth.*" The Israelites could turn their heads and look at Mt. Sinai, which was still blazing and smoking and clouded over—all signs of the Lord's glory and his presence. And yet they still said, "*Come, Aaron, make us a god who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him*" (Exodus 32:1).

Those Israelites are just like God's people today, ourselves included. We still fall into grievous sins despite copious evidence of the Lord's goodness to us and his clear teaching on what is right and wrong. Will the Lord rescue Israel from this pickle, or will he give up on them and let them have what they deserve? Let's find out.

Aaron did what the people asked. They gave him their gold earrings. Aaron melted the earrings and shaped the gold into a calf, which the people promptly proclaimed to be their god, the very god who had brought them up out of Egypt. And they celebrated with a wild party.

When Moses came down from Mt. Sinai and saw what was happening, he smashed the two stone tablets on which the Lord had written the covenant. Moses ground up that golden calf into powder, scattered it on the water, and made the Israelites drink it. Not a very powerful god after all, was it? Because of their wickedness, many of the people died that day.

After Moses went back up the mountain and confessed the sins of the people to the Lord, the Lord forgave his people. He had mercy on them, especially for the sake of His own reputation among the nations nearby, whom He also wanted to believe in Him and so be saved. Then while the Lord was promising to accompany Israel to the Promised Land, Moses piped up with an audacious request: *“Now show me your glory.” 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... 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’”* (Exodus 33:18-23).

And that’s just what the Lord does. He has Moses bring two more stone tablets to the mountain top so He can write down the terms of the covenant again. And when Moses arrives at the top of Mt. Sinai, the Lord passes in front of Moses

proclaiming His name. Do you know what the Lord’s name is? It’s more than just a label. It’s who he is. It’s his reputation. Are you ready to hear the Lord’s name? Here it is: *“The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation”* (Exodus 34:5-7). That’s quite a name! In fact, it’s more than a name—it’s a message, a good message, good news! No need to guess what the true God is all about. You can tell by his name.

After proclaiming his name, the Lord repeats the terms of the covenant he made with the children of Israel and writes them down on the two stone tablets. This time the Israelites wait the full 40 days for Moses to return.

Before Moses comes back down from the mountain, let’s pause for a question. What was more important: that Moses got to see the Lord, or that Moses got to hear the Lord’s name proclaimed in full? Which would you rather experience? Unfortunately, most people would rather see God than hear his name, his message. They would rather see something spectacular than hear the Good News of free forgiveness from our gracious God. But they’ve got it all backwards. Jesus

never said, “Blessed are those who see God.” He said, “*Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and obey it*” (Luke 11:28). To Thomas he said, “*Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed*” (John 20:29). In other words, blessed are those who believe God’s Word when they hear it!

Now we’re ready for Moses to walk back into the camp, but listen for God’s opinion about which is more important: seeing God or hearing God’s Word. <sup>29</sup>*When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the Testimony in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the LORD. Because he had what? seen the Lord? No, because he had spoken with the Lord. Ah! Verbiage is more important than sight-iage.*

That’s significant because we aren’t likely to see God face to face until we die or until Jesus returns, whichever comes first. Yet we have the very same Word of God that Moses had. Although earthly blessings are important, neither your job nor your hobby nor your spouse nor your children nor your income makes you important and gives your life meaning. No, the Word of God makes you important: it makes you one of God’s heirs. The Word of God gives your life meaning: it teaches that serving Christ and your fellowman gives your life meaning. **GOD’S WORD MAKES YOU RADIANT**, similar to Moses. It makes

you shine with God’s glory. How? By conveying to you all the blessings Jesus purchased for you through his living as your Substitute and dying in your place on the cross. God’s Word makes you holy in God’s sight. Now, since that’s true, **Listen to the Lord**. That’s the same message God the Father spoke when Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration: Listen to him. Listen to God’s Word. Believe the Good News that you are fully forgiven of all your sins for Jesus’ sake before you lift a finger to help. Since that’s true, show your appreciation to the Lord by obeying everything Jesus commands. That’s the Christian life: be forgiven, believe, then do.

There was a problem when Moses got back to camp. <sup>30</sup>*When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, his face was radiant, and they were afraid to come near him.* Yeah, that’s a problem. Aaron and the people were probably remembering all they had done wrong in the golden calf incident. When people know their sins, they are afraid to come near those who represent the Lord. This has happened to me a number of times at various community functions. When some folks find out that I’m a pastor, they clam up and find a reason to go talk to someone else. **GOD’S WORD MAKES YOU RADIANT**. If you’re letting your light shine at work or in your neighborhood, you may have noticed a few people trying to get away from you too, just like the Israelites ran away from Moses. What’s a person to do? Just love them. And pray

for them. And try what Moses did.

<sup>31</sup>*Moses called to them; so Aaron and all the leaders of the community came back to him, and he spoke to them. <sup>32</sup>Afterward all the Israelites came near him, and he gave them all the commands the LORD had given him on Mount Sinai.* Those laws are all fulfilled now, but we can still share God's New Testament commands and promises with people. We want God's Word to make them radiant too.

The story goes on: <sup>33</sup>*When Moses finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face. <sup>34</sup>But whenever he entered the LORD's presence to speak with Him, he removed the veil until he came out. And when he came out and told the Israelites what he had been commanded, <sup>35</sup>they saw that his face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil back over his face until he went in to speak with the LORD.* What shall we take home from these verses of God's Word? Shall we put a veil over our lives so people cannot see God's glory shining through us? Shall we hide the fact that we love Jesus for suffering our penalties? That's what Moses did, right? He veiled his face so the people couldn't see his face shining, right? No! Look closely. He covered his face when he was finished talking to them. Every time he talked with the Lord, he would first let the people see God's radiance reflecting from his face because of the message he was bringing them. And then he covered his face. The apostle Paul tells us why in 2 Corinthians 3:13. Moses veiled "*his face to keep the Israelites from gazing at it*

*while the radiance was fading away.*" Do you understand? The radiance on Moses' face was fading because the covenant the Lord had just made with his people Israel was temporary. Moses didn't want the people to realize this because the old covenant would be in force for the next 1400 years, that is, only until the Savior would be born. The old covenant of laws and regulations, where the people had one end of the bargain to keep up, would be superseded by the new covenant in Jesus' blood, the one that says, "You do nothing. Here is the free gift from God. Go ahead; open it up. It's forgiveness through Jesus' blood. He died for you, and now he lives to bring you into his eternal kingdom. God did it all. You didn't help. But you can share these truths with others."

Do you see the point, dear friends? There's no need for us to veil our faith or our message. The glory of the new covenant never fades. It has lasted already 600 years longer than the old covenant. It will stand until Jesus returns, and beyond. And you are a part of the new covenant. **GOD'S WORD HAS MADE YOU RADIANT. Take off the veil.** Let others see what Jesus has done for you. Let others see what Jesus did for them. God wants his Word to make them radiant too. God is glorious and wants to share his glory with everyone. Take off the veil.