

The Glory of God

Rom. 3: 23.

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The path of the glory through scripture may be easily tracked, and has much moral value for us connected with it.

Exodus 13. It commences its journey in the cloud, on the deliverance of Israel from Egypt, when the paschal blood, in the grace of the God of their fathers, had sheltered them.

Exodus 14. In the moment of the great crisis it stood, separating between Israel and Egypt, or between judgment and salvation.

Exodus 16. It resented the murmurings of the camp.

Exodus 24. It connected itself with Mount Sinai, and was as devouring fire in the sight of the people.

Exodus 40. It leaves that Mount for the tabernacle, the witness of mercy rejoicing against judgment, resuming also in the cloud its gracious services toward the camp.

Leviticus 9. The priest being consecrated and his services in the tabernacle being discharged, it shows itself to the people to their exceeding joy.

Numbers 9. Resuming their journey in company with the tabernacle, the congregation enjoy the guidance of the cloud, which now attends the tabernacle, while the glory fills it.

Numbers 16. In the hour of full apostasy it shows itself in judicial terror in the sight of the rebellious people.

Deuteronomy 31. In the cause of Joshua, an elect and faithful vessel, it reappears in the cloud.

2 Chronicles 5. On the temple being built, a new witness of grace, the glory and the cloud reappear to the joy of Israel, as of old.

Ezekiel 1 - 11. Again, in another hour of full apostasy, the glory, taking wings and wheels to itself, as it were, leaves the temple.

Acts 7. Stephen, an earth-rejected man, sees it in heaven in company with Jesus.

Revelation 21: 9. In millennial days it descends from heaven in its new habitation, the holy Jerusalem, "the Lamb's wife," resting above in the air, from whence it shades and illumines the dwellings of Israel again (Isaiah 4: 5), as it once did from the cloud in the wilderness, or enters the second temple, the temple of the millennium. (Ezek. 43; Hag. 2.)

Such is the path of the glory, the symbol of the divine presence. Its history, as thus traced, tells us that, if man be in company with grace, he can rejoice in it; but that it is devouring fire to all who stand under Mount Sinai. It tells us also that, while it cheers and guides them on their way, it resents the evil and withdraws from the apostasy of God's professing people.

It is very instructive and comforting to note these things in the history of the glory, which was the symbol of the divine presence. And if that presence displayed itself in other forms, the same lessons

are still taught us. The most eminent of the sons of men were unable to brook it in themselves; but in Christ all, high and low, unnamed and distinguished ones, could not only bear it but rejoice in it.

Adam fled from the presence of God. But the moment he listened to the promise of Christ, believing it he came forth into that presence again with fullest and nearest confidence.

Moses, favoured as he was, could not abide it save in Christ, the Rock, the riven rock of salvation. (Exodus 33.)

Isaiah, chief among the prophets, dies at the sight of the glory, till a coal from the altar, the symbol of Christ in His work for sinners, purges his sin away. (Isa. 6.)

Ezekiel and Daniel, companions with him in the prophetic office, with him also fail utterly in the divine presence, and are able afterwards to stand it only through the gracious interference of the Son of man. (Ezek. 3; Dan. 10.)

John, the beloved disciple, the honoured apostle, even in the very place and time of his suffering for Jesus, takes the sentence of death into himself at the sight of the glorified Jesus till He who lived and died and lived again spoke to him and gave him peace and assurance. (Rev. 1.)

These distinguished ones cannot measure the divine presence by anything but the simple virtue of what Christ is to them and for them. In that virtue they abide it at peace; and so, with them, does the most distant and unnamed one of the camp witness a scene already referred to. (Lev. 9.) There, all who stood at the door of the tabernacle beholding the consecration and services of the priest, the typical Christ, triumph in the presence of the glory; as also in another scene referred to (2 Chr. 5.), when the ark, another type of Christ, is brought into the house of God.

Sin and righteousness account for all this.

Sin is attended by this, as its necessary consequence — a coming short of the glory of God. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." This has been illustrated in the cases or in the histories I have been tracing. Sin incapacitates us to stand the force of the divine presence. It is too much for a sinner. But there is full relief. For if sin and incapacity to brook the presence or glory of God be morally one, so is righteousness and a return to that presence.

Sin implies a condition or state of being; and so does righteousness. And as sin is incapacity to come up to God's glory, righteousness is that which measures God's glory. It is capacity to stand in the fullest brightness of it; as those histories also illustrate. For in Christ, through the provisions of grace, or set in the righteousness of God by faith, all those whom we have looked at, whether great or small, found themselves at ease in the divine presence.

We experience all this toward our fellow-creatures. If we have wronged a person, we instinctively "come short" of his presence; we are uneasy at it, and seek to avoid it. But if we receive a pardon from him, sealed with the full purpose and love of his heart, we return to his presence with confidence. And how much more so, I may say, if we saw that he was pressing that pardon upon us with all the skill and diligence of love, and at the same time telling us that all the wrong we had done him had been infinitely repaired, and that he himself had good reason to rejoice in the wrong because of the repairing? Surely all this would form a ground, and be our warrant, for regaining his presence with more assurance and liberty than ever.

Now, such is the gospel. It warrants the sinner to entertain all these thoughts with full certainty. The wrong we had committed, the offence which Adam did against the love, the truth, and the majesty of God, has all been gloriously repaired by Christ. God is more honoured in the satisfaction than He

would have been, had the wrong never been done. All His rights are provided for in their fullest demands and to their highest point of praise. He is "just and the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus."

Faith assumes this, and the believer, therefore, does not come short of the glory of God, though as a sinner he once did. Faith receives "the righteousness of God;" and the righteousness of God can and does measure the glory of God. In His righteousness we can stand before His glory. And that it can in this sense measure His glory — that faith in the gospel, or in the ministry of righteousness, can set us with liberty, or open face in presence of the glory of God — is taught in 2 Corinthians 3, 4; yea, indeed, that the expression of that glory can be had only in the ministry of righteousness, the full glory only "in the face of Jesus Christ."