

January 8, 2012
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Brentview Baptist Church
'Catching a Glimpse of God'
Vision Renewal

A number of years ago a woman walked into a Haagen-Dazs store at the Kansas City Plaza for an ice cream cone. After making her selection, she turned and found herself face to face with Paul Newman (the Brad Pitt of his day). He was in town filming a movie. Newman's blue eyes made her knees buckle. She barely was able to pay for her cone, and then left the shop, heart pounding and head spinning, for she was a great fan. When she gained her composure, she realized that she didn't have her cone. So she started back into the store to get it, when she met Newman as he was walking out. And to her surprise Newman asked 'Are you looking for you ice-cream cone?' She nodded, still unable to speak. And that is when he added 'you put it in your purse with your change'. Let me begin by asking you a simple question, when was the last time that you found your pulse quickening because you felt you were in the presence of God?

This month, as part of our Year of Impact I want us to stop and review with our hearts the overall vision for what we are all about here at Brentview. To focus again on the fact that the reason we meet together, the reason this church sits here and the reason this congregation exists is that we want to Know Jesus and Touch the World for him. In order to do that we have prepared a devotional guide that you can pick up on the way out of the sanctuary today which has personal devotional material for you to walk through and then some questions you can use in your Small Group or one on one discussion with a mentor or Christian friend. Today we want to begin by looking at a great scripture which will draw our focus to the place we always need to begin, that being a correct view of God. I say this because far too often we place ourselves and our needs at the center of the universe and then expect God to step into our world and make a difference. We are so often me/us centered, when really we need to begin with a simple idea 'There is only 1 God and we are not him'. That means we need to turn our eyes toward God and look first at who he is and then see how we need to fit into his hands in order for our lives to really make sense and good.

I. A Larger View of God

A while ago our daughter and son-in-law gave us a gift of 1 hour in a photo studio to go and take some pictures as a couple. So we had pictures taken of Kathy in a long gown, me in my blue suit, and other more casual pictures of us wearing jeans. What happened was that the photographer took different pictures from different angles in different settings to capture a picture of who we are. We have just come through Christmas and have been focusing on baby Jesus who came as Immanuel which means 'God with us'. It is this amazing snap shot of God putting on skin so that we can touch him and be touched by him. But as wonderful as that image is it is just one of the snap shots of who God is, which the bible gives us.

This morning I want to take you to some amazing scriptures that give us another picture of God that was shot from different angles. Turn to (Exodus 19) the children of Israel have just escaped from Egypt, fled across the desert and are now camped at the foot of Mt. Sinai. And God is talking to Moses in preparation for Moses' climb up the Mountain where he will receive the 10 Commandments, carved by the very finger of God himself.

(Exodus 19:9, 11, 16, 18-19) Can you imagine being there the day God came to the Mountain? First, there was the warning, if your foot even touches the base of the mountain you will die. Why? Because the very presence of God is so beyond us that to touch the mountain would be like touching a live power line, it would be fatal. That morning you would have been awoken by the crash of thunder as it rocked the valley floor. Have you ever been in a thunder storm where you felt like the world was shaking around you and there was this electric feel in the air that was almost palpable which made the hair stand up on the back of your neck?. And then this thick smoke like cloud began to cover the mountain as the Lord God descended on the mountain in the form of a raging fire. As the fire touched down on the mountain, the valley floor began to shake with the tremors of an earthquake. And then there was this blasting of a trumpet from the skies which grew louder and louder until it reached this deafening pitch.

And then Moses walks out towards the base of the mountain, stands out in this gale force wind and then fell on his face and welcomes God. That is when you hear the very voice of God booming from the top of the mountain and reverberated through the valley. That is what it is like when God walks by and allows us to be touched by a little of his glory and his power. It would be so terrifying so frightening and yet so compelling that you couldn't run away. Instead you end up standing and starrng, unable to take in all you are experiencing. You become like the Storm chasers who somehow are drawn to risk their very lives to get as close to the huge twisters in the states as possible or like standing right beside a lava river as it flows out of a volcano. You know the power could kill you in an instant but something so powerful, so beyond us draws us to stand and stare and want to somehow be touched by its power. (Exodus 20:18) 'The people trembled with fear'.

I need to begin here this morning, for somehow we forget that God with a word created this universe and with his fingers parted the light from the darkness and with a word breathed life into our world. Here in scriptures it gives us a quick look of what it is like to catch a glimpse as God walks by so that we can get something straight. We are not the center of the Universe like we so often act. That our ideas, our thoughts, our actions, our understanding, our most brilliant accomplishments pale when held up to the power, wonder and majesty of our God. This is a God who is so beyond our grandest explanations of Him that no matter how eloquent our best preachers and theologians are their words can never convey to our small flesh bound brains the wonder and glory which is his.

Now look again at (Verse 19) 'Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him'. That a God like this should want to speak to us should blow our minds. That a God like this (as we find out in the New Testament) should want to come and live among us and give his only son so we could know him should leave us speechless.

But because we have failed to see him as the great God of the universe, because we have failed to stand in our minds at the base of Mt. Sinai and hear the thunder and blaring trumpet and see the fire and smoke as his feet touch down we have failed to see that he is the center of all things. And have instead seen ourselves as being the center of our own Universe (where if we are honest, we often believe that things should revolve around us, our ideas and our needs) and have missed the truth of the situation. Our God is the one and only God of the Universe and even though he is so beyond us he desires to speak to us (as he did with Moses) and invites us to place our lives under his care and Personal, powerful and gracious care.

II. A Closer View of God

You know what happened as Moses spent the next 40 days on the Mt. Sinai in the cloud near to God? (Exodus 32) Shows us that when people catch a glimpse of God but decide to make up their own religion that they will always make a religion that meets either their darker side, helps them reach political power or has at its root a desire to appease this god they don't understand. And so they invented their own religion where they worshiped an idol of a bull, partied all night and tried to appease this god who they didn't understand because they didn't wait long enough to read what God was writing for them to follow at that exact time, higher up on the mountain. The result was that when Moses came down and saw what they were doing he lost it. He broke the tablets of the 10 Commandments, destroyed their golden idol and let them know that while God still would give them the Promised Land that 'God wouldn't be going with them, because they were a stiff necked people' (Exodus 33:3).

Let's pick up the story again, Moses is discouraged and so heads back up the mountain and part way up the mountain he stops. (Exodus 33:12-13) He begins by saying "Lord I am amazed that a God like you knows me and my personal name at all". We sing that song about how God knows our name and often forget who that God is who knows our name. He is the God of the Universe, He is the God of Mt. Sinai and yet he knows our name.

(Exodus 33:14-15) Moses is saying 'God unless you come with me, I am not going to lead these people. Once I have seen what I have just seen, the fire, the thunder, the trumpet. I would be a fool to try and do life in my own strength. And then to add that if a God like you knows my name personally, I want you to know that I can't live life without you, let alone do that job you want me to do.' Question: Are you doing life, marriage, school, work and parenting in your own strength, without God's input and direction? I think we need to learn from Moses words here. And daily as we get out of bed as we go into the meeting as we arrive home in the evening to be with our families, we need to quietly say "Lord unless you go with me, this won't work, and having seen who you are I need some of that power in these next few hours and I thank you that I can ask, for you know me personally by name. I know I can ask that because the Lord's response to Moses was (Exodus 22:17) when we give him permission, God loves walking with us in our life situations.'

Now comes the amazing part. Moses swallows twice and (Exodus 33:18) 'Lord show me your glory'. Hang on, after all he has seen and heard can there be any more? He has seen God's power but what he is asking to see is God's glory. The word used here is 'kabod' meaning the weight or the radiance of who God is.

This request is right up there with Elijah asking God to reign down fire from heaven. How did Moses get so bold? (Exodus 33:9, 11) There has been a pattern of Moses speaking with God on the Mountain then sitting with God in the tent and hearing his words until he knew that there was so much more to God than just his power, there was his heart which Moses wanted to hear from. You see the more time we spend with God the more we realize that there is more of God that we want to experience and we understand that there is more of God that He wants us to get to know.

(Exodus 33:19) God knows that Moses couldn't take a 'full on' look at him. For like a welders flash or like during an eclipse, the Dr.'s tell you not to look at the Sun with binoculars or you will damage your eyes. Just think what it would be like to look straight at the one who had the power within him to not only make our Sun, but from whom flowed the power to pulse through all the stars in our universe. That is why God's comment was that Moses' request is to see the 'glory' of God. Literally what Moses is requesting is to see the goodness of God. Last week I read about a man who was on a plane (back when smoking was allowed on airplanes). He said while sitting in the non-smoking section a man lit up a cigar in the seat across from him and the whole place began to stink. So he complained to the stewardess and when she asked the man to stop smoking.

He shook his head and then blew smoke into her face. She didn't know what to do, so she went to the back of the plane and left him to smoke. About 15 minutes later the stewardess came by with the cold drinks tray. Just as she was about to pass the cigar smoking man his drink, the plane hit a air pocket and her full tray of cold drinks went right into his lap. And then the plane hit a second air pocket, which caused the stewardess to fall right into the fist man's lap. To which he replied 'Don't tell me that God isn't good'. (Psalm 136:3-9; 23-26) God's goodness keeps flowing into our lives.

(Exodus 33:19-23) Here is the picture. Moses steps up into a cleft in a rock and God places his hand over him (to protect him). And God pulls him close for now he is in this place that is near to the heart of God. And his fear lifts for he is within the care of God himself. And Moses hears God begin to walk by and then he feels the hand begin to lift and the dazzling light begins to wash over him. And he looks as the back of God walks by and sees some of the wonder of God's goodness right there in front of him. Here is the paradox; there is a part of God that is so vast and beyond us that we will never grasp it. But there is also a part of God that we can't help but see. For we see a glimpse of God's goodness as we stand by the water at Lake Louis, we see his goodness as we hold our children, we see a glimpse of God's goodness as we see policemen or firemen put their lives on the line for someone they have never met, we see a glimpse God's goodness as we receive love from our spouse, we see a glimpse God's goodness fully as we read about Jesus feeding the 5000, we see God's goodness even more profoundly as we see him hanging on the cross. And we see God's goodness in (Exodus 33:19) when it says that God has mercy and compassion on us. For he knows us by name and the bible says he seeks us out to offers us the free gift of Jesus in our lives.

The great preacher Charles Spurgeon put it this way 'All that we can ever see of God, is what Moses called his "back parts." The words, I think, signify "regal train." You have seen kings have trains hanging behind them; and all that we can ever see of God is his train that floats behind.

The sun that burns in the heavens with all his effulgence, you think he is bright; you look upon him, and he dazzles you; but that entire splendor is but a single thread in the regal skirts of the robe of Deity. You have seen night wrapped in her sable mantle woven with gems and stars, there they shine as ornaments worked by the needle of God in that brilliant piece of tapestry which is spread over our heads and you have said, "O! How majestic! That star, that comet, that silver moon, how splendid!" They are nothing, but just a tiny portion of the skirts of God that drag in the dust.' What a picture of Moses in the hands of God near the heart of God.

III. A Closer Walk with God

Question: Why did God show this to Moses? Actually, why did God place this in scripture so we would read it?

1) God wanted us to get a fuller, grander, more glorious and truer picture of God. For our view of him is so often too small and too self centered?

2) He wanted us to know that no matter who we are if we honestly seek him there is a place of quiet rest near to the Heart of God. A place where fear, death and the situations of life can not only overwhelm us or pull us under. This last week one of our ladies named Laura Chapman passed away. As I visited with her and her husband Bill with little strength but powerful conviction said 'I have been telling everyone that I know I am about to die but I have this complete and overwhelming peace that God is with me and that it will be completely fine'. She was sitting in the hand of God near the heart of God and she felt the protection and nearness of her Lord.

3) He wanted us to remember that there will come a time in the future when we will have to face this God we have caught a glimpse of. Only at this time he will stand in his full power and wear the robe as a judge. His desire is to be able to hold you in the palm of his hands which is close to his heart just like Moses, or because he must and will allow you to spend an eternity without him. So please, as you rehearse the pictures of this day fall into the protections of his nail pieced hands.

4) He wanted us to see this wonder and power and be drawn like a moth to a flame to want to experience more of this power in our lives. Can you imagine what it would be like if God removed his hand and walked by us? Maybe I should ask the question a little differently, has there been times when you have seen some of the glory of God pass by. Have you experienced a healing in your life a time of ecstasy when you felt God's Spirit overwhelm you, a time in worship when God's promise seemed so real, for it says "when 2 or 3 of you gather together I will be in your midst", a time of need when God covered you with his hands and held you close to his heart or a time when during a sermon or reading the Bible God spoke into your life?

I hope there have been those times, if there hasn't, do what Moses did, he asked God to meet him in a special way and then he looked for times when the train of God passed by him. I believe that God is calling us to ask for more of his felt presence among us, more of his supernatural breaking into our lives, more of his signs and wonders among us, so that as vs. 16 says 'it will distinguish us as his people'.

5) He wanted us to see that the basis of a deeper walk with God finds its roots in a daily walk with him. I have been struggling this past while with how people have been so flippant with their faith. How people can tell me that they are followers of Jesus and that he is their Lord. And then they disappear for weeks, stop going to church all together, keep telling me that they know they are cranky all the time, but they never let God change them or they live one life on Sunday and another life during the week. Or we lack power, and as I look at this passage, what I see is that Moses' mountain top experience began in the tent with his regular meetings with his God.

That if we want to know God in his power and in his glory we need to regularly know him in our regular daily quiet times. That is why we have made the booklets for your daily readings and why my question to you this month is to take a devotional guide or use you bible daily so that together we can walk close enough that we will see the glory of his train pass through this place often. Please let the pictures of this morning move you to trust in the power of your God and cause you to fall into his hands and let them cover you as you walk into this next week.