

Beholding the Face of Glory

Following the account of Israel's redemption from Egypt, the inspired narrative records "for our learning", the request of Moses to be shown God's Way, and Glory:

"Moses said unto Yahweh, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now therefore, I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, **shew me now thy way**, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight: and consider that this nation is thy people ... And he said, I beseech thee, **shew me thy glory**" (Ex 33:12,13,18).

And the Divine reply came from the Angel of Yahweh's Presence thus:

"I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of Yahweh before thee ... And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live. And Yahweh said, Behold, there is a place by me, and thou shalt stand upon a rock: and it shall come to pass, while my glory passeth by, that I will put thee in a clift of the rock, and will cover thee with my hand while I pass by: And I will take away mine hand, and thou shalt see my back parts: but my face shall not be seen" (Ex 33:19-23).

From this dialogue, we observe several points. Moses' request was to know the Way of Yahweh, and behold the Glory of Yahweh. But the response came that he would be permitted to see Yahweh's Goodness – from which we may conclude that both the Way and Glory of Yahweh may be seen in the qualities of His Goodness. But we also observe that this revelation of glorious Goodness which would be made to Moses was to be limited. He would only see the "back parts", and would not be permitted to see the "face" of the manifestation, a significant feature which really forms the central aspect of our article, to which we shall return shortly. So it was, that by this means, the Great Prophet Moses was permitted to behold a degree of Divine Goodness:

"And Yahweh descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of Yahweh. And Yahweh passed by before him, and proclaimed, Yahweh, Yahweh El, merciful and gracious, longsuffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and to the fourth generation" (Ex 34:5-7).

Again, we notice that whereas Moses appears to have requested to see the Glory of Israel's God, the most notable features of the Revelation which was made to him, was not so much what could be seen, but what was heard. It was the proclamation of the various facets of Divine Character which comprised the "Goodness" of Yahweh; and it is in those several attributes that the "Way" of Yahweh is seen – his "way" is for man to endeavor to follow the Pattern of His revealed Character in seeking to become like Him, and so mirror his "Image and likeness" (Gen 1:26). These then, are the key features of the Lord's revelation to Moses; a declaration of the Way and Glory of the Creator, by the spoken word proclaiming the qualities of Divine goodness. And as we noted earlier; Moses could not behold the Face of that Glory.

BEHOLDING THE FACE OF MOSES

Significantly in this regard, simply beholding the revelation, and standing in the presence of the Angel had a most dramatic effect upon Moses' own face:

"And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses' hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone; and they were afraid to come nigh him ... And till Moses had done speaking with them, he put a vail on his face. But when Moses went in before Yahweh to speak with him, he took the vail off, until he came out. And he came out, and spake unto the children of Israel that which he was commanded. And the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone: and Moses put the vail upon his face again, until he went in to speak with him" (Ex 34:29-35).

We find then, that having been in the presence of Divine Glory; when Moses descended from the mount to address the people on what had been proclaimed to him; unknown to him, “the skin of his face shone”. And as the Children of Israel beheld the shining brightness – the reflected Glory of God in Moses’ face, they became afraid, to the extent that they could not bring themselves near him. So it was that it became necessary for Moses to veil that Glory; that it could not be beheld by them. When he emerged from the Divine Presence, he placed a veil over his face, that the people could not see the brilliance of the Glory being reflected there, and he was able to speak with them. Also the fact that the veil was permanently upon Moses’ face when he was seen by the people, meant that they would not know when that Glory had faded. We will see the great significance of this shortly, but the Glory which shone in Moses’ face was a fading glory, which diminished in the duration of time he was absent from the Divine Presence – and Israel could neither behold that glory, nor perceive when it had faded away.

In these things then, we see a tremendous irony. Moses wanted to see the fulness of Yahweh’s Glory – but was prevented from seeing the Face. But the Children of Israel could behold the Face of glory; (albeit in a lesser manifestation through Moses) – yet through fear, they would not go anywhere near it; and avoided Moses, unless he prevented them from seeing it by placing a veil over his face. But what are we to make of all this? What are the Spiritual Lessons which these things are intended to convey? We are left in no doubt here, for the Spirit through Paul expounds them for our learning. In the Second Epistle to the Corinthians; we learn that the Glory which Israel had access to through Moses represented the fading Glory of the Law which God gave by him:

“Now if the dispensation of death, carved in letters of stone, came with such splendor that the Israelites could not look at Moses’ face because of it’s brightness, fading as it was, why should not the dispensation of the Spirit be attended with greater splendor? For if there was splendor in the dispensation of condemnation, the dispensation of righteousness must far exceed it in splendor. Indeed, in this case, what once had splendor has come to have no splendor at all, because of the splendor which surpasses it. For if what faded away came with splendor, what is permanent must have much more splendor. Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not see the end of the fading splendor. But their minds were hardened; for to this day, when they read the old covenant, the same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yea, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their minds” (2Cor 3:7-15, RSV).

In these words, a comparison is being made between the Glory (or “splendor” as the word is translated here) of the “dispensation of condemnation” of the Law, and the Glory of the “dispensation of righteousness”, of the New Covenant in Christ. And the point of comparison is that the Glory which came through Christ has a “greater splendor” – a greater glory which so greatly surpassed the Glory of the Old Covenant, that it makes that glory appear as nothing! And these principles, the Apostle informs us, are illustrated in the appearance of Moses’ face; for just as the glory of the Law was to fade away, being replaced by the New Covenant, even so Moses face, which shone with glory as he received the Law, faded more and more as time went on until he once again stood in the Divine Presence. The fading Glory of Moses’ face then, ought to have taught Israel that the glorious Law he brought to them would itself fade away, being replaced by something permanent and even more glorious.

But Israel could not look upon the Glory of Moses’ Face. They could not behold the Face of Divine Glory. And this, according to the inspired Apostle, parallels with the fact that they could not see the Glory of the Divine Law. That is to say, they did not recognize that within that Law, were to be found glorious Principles which could illuminate them concerning the way of Salvation in Christ. And just as because of the veil upon Moses’ face, the people could not see when the Glory had actually passed away, even so when Christ came, the veil of ignorance which lay upon the minds of the people prevented them from perceiving when the glory of the Law had faded. And such is their position today; the veil remains upon their minds, for even now the Jews fail to be illuminated as to how the Law speaks of the Lord Jesus Christ

We saw earlier that although Israel could have behold the face of Glory in Moses, if they had the courage to look; Moses was prevented from seeing the Face of Glory which passed before him. The literal reason given for this was given: “Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live” (Ex 33:20). The Glory was so intense that it could not be beheld by mortal man – he would literally die at the sight. But this was the practical circumstance of the case – how does this fit into the representative teaching of these events? That Moses would die if he saw this Glory shows how much

greater it was than the Glory which Israel saw in him. Therefore, we suggest that if the Glory of Moses spoke of the inferior glory of the Law, the Glory which passed before Moses spoke representatively of the Greater Glory in Christ.

We can see this, in that the “Way” and the “Glory” which Moses requested to see were to be seen in the qualities of Divine Goodness which were proclaimed to him. They were to be found in the Attributes of Yahweh which were spoken to Moses, but seen in fulness in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Lord Jesus is said to be “The brightness of His glory, and the express image of his person” (Heb 1:3), being also described as “God manifest in the flesh” (1 Tim 3:16), who himself declared, “I have glorified thee on the earth ... I have manifested thy name ...” (Jno 17:4,6). In him were to be found all the attributes of His Father’s Goodness, as he declared, “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (Jno 14:9).

Moses was prevented from beholding the Face. The Face of a person is the ultimate expression of Character, for it is in facial features that a persons’ mood, emotions, attentiveness, and intellect can be seen. And we saw that the only way Moses could have the Divine Attributes revealed to Him was by words – a proclamation, not a visual display. No Angel could adequately reveal the attributes and qualities of the Father, for only a Son could do this perfectly. So it was that even in Type, it was not possible for Moses to see the Face, for the full expression of Yahweh’s Attributes could not be beheld in any but His Son, who had not come as yet. Yet although the sight of this could not be shown to Moses at that time, he was to see it later, when the Son had come, and the Father’s Glory was seen in him.

In the Gospel record through Matthew, we read of the transfiguration of the Lord Jesus: “after 6 days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him ...” (Mat 17:1-3).

So it was, that just as Moses ascended into Mount Sinai to be shown Yahweh’s Glory, even so at the Transfiguration he was raised to stand upon a mountain, before the one in whom all the fulness of Divine Glory dwelt – and he saw the face. The first detail described of the Lord’s appearance, is the shining of his Face – which must surely have brought back memories for Moses of his own experience. And this change of the Lord’s countenance is styled elsewhere, “his glory” (Luke 9:32), so at last, centuries later, Moses request was finally granted to him as he was permitted to behold the Face of Glory shining in the Son. And in this, he saw the Face of Yahweh’s Goodness, as the Lord declared “he that hath seen me, hath seen the Father”.

After speaking of the fading glory of the Law in 2 Corinthians 3, the Apostle speaks in the next chapter of the Greater Glory revealed in Christ:

“If our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: in whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them ... For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ” (2Cor 4:3-6).

It is in the Lord Jesus Christ then, that we behold the fulness of Divine Glory. But notice the form by which we receive it – like Moses, not by seeing with our eyes, but through the eye of faith – through the words expressed to us. “The glorious Gospel of Christ” shines brightly into an otherwise darkened world, and is clearly visible to those who look unto it, and allow it to enter their hearts. And just as Israel could not behold the glory shining in the face of Moses, even so many today cannot receive the glorious Gospel, which believers behold in the face, the ultimate expression of character and intent, of our Lord Jesus. They are “blinded” unto it by the vail cast over their understanding, by “the god of this world” – the power of Sin.

So then, both Israel after the flesh, and all other fleshly men are alike in their ignorance of God’s Glory, as it shines in the face of Jesus Christ. But the Apostle here, in speaking of the “knowledge” thereof which the Gospel imparts, does so with reference to ancient prophecies to do with days yet future. As

Habakkuk, amongst others spake, “the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Yahweh, as the waters cover the sea” (Hab 2:14). This is a vision of that glorious age of righteousness yet to come, when all nations shall be taught of the Divine Way (Is 2:3). And in that day, the vail shall be removed from both Israel, and the nations, as it is written, “nevertheless, when it shall turn to the Lord, the vail shall be taken away” (2Cor 3:16), and again, speaking of the Mount from which the Divine Law shall go forth, “he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations” (Is 15:7).

Yet till that time comes, it behoves all who seek the ways of righteousness, not to be as Israel, who could not gaze past their own vail of ignorance to the glorious visage of Moses as the Type of the One who was to come. Let us not allow “the god of this world” to obscure our hearts to the extent that the glorious principles of the Gospel can shine there, but let us rather look to that day when the world’s idols shall be removed out of their place by the judicial brilliance of the rising of the Sun of Righteousness, when all nations shall look unto Christ, and see the wonderful attributes of Yahweh’s goodness in full manifestation through his Face.

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