

The Presence of God's Glory

Exodus 40:34-40

Rather recently, I treated my family to the circus. The greatest show on earth. The Ringling Brothers, Barnum and Bailey Circus. It was a delightful day.

We went to the morning matinee and took our place among the numerous groups of school children on a day's field trip. We arrived early, and when we took our seat for the show to begin, it was obvious that a lot of buses were still arriving and unloading. There were large groups of empty seats everyone, including the section of rows immediately in front of us. Several minutes into the show that group started arriving, and one of the adult chaperones stood prominently at the end of the aisle waiving on group after group of students from her school. As she continued to stand there looking over her lists, she blocked most of our vision of the show which was by then well under way. She realized her rudeness only when we asked her to sit down, which she did somewhat apologetically.

Rather recently, I also treated my wife to a night at the symphony. It was over our wedding anniversary, and we got a hotel room in downtown Atlanta near Symphony Hall. We got all dressed up. We enjoyed a nice dinner out, and walked across the street to the concert. It was a delightful evening, and a marvelous performance. As musicians ourselves, we appreciated the consistently high quality of music performed by the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra.

I also appreciated the signs noting that the symphony doesn't allow patrons to enter once the concert begins. When the doors are closed, out of respect for the orchestra and with a recognition of the dignity of the event, late-comers may not enter. During

breaks between songs, ushers might be able to show late arrivals to empty seats near the edges of the auditorium, but the concert itself is not disrupted. No one was standing in front of us when this performance began.

Considering those two experiences, I want you to think about which one is the more appropriate model for the corporate worship of God's people today. The circus or the symphony. The constant motion, constant activity, constant playfulness and informality of the circus. Or the deeply respectful and reverent setting of the symphony orchestra?

As I said, for my family, both events were extremely enjoyable. But they were very different. I suspect that many, many people in our day and time would MUCH prefer the informality of the circus. Informality is what's popular, and formality too often means dull, even lifeless. But when we consider the whole subject of worship, I believe the context of the symphony concert is, by far, the more appropriate.

Don't get me wrong. The concert audience was not subdued and passive. It was a very good concert, and well appreciated. It was far from lifeless. But the performance in symphony hall demanded a certain decorum that magnified the dignity of the whole event. The symphony members were not dressed in multi-colored clown suits. Rather, they wore black tuxedos and long black dresses. And the audience as well was, by and large, dressed in a way that reflected a genuine respect for those professional musicians.

I fear that we are losing our sense of dignity and decorum in our culture today. We are losing the sense of propriety and the meaningfulness of such expressions of formality. And never is that more apparent than in the church. In the worship services of

the church.

What is corporate worship? I fear that few Christians today could really articulate the full and proper answer to that question. What is important in worship? What makes a worship service “good” and what makes it “bad?” What criteria should we use to evaluate our worship?

I know the most common answer to that question in our day. What is popular. What is important? That which is the most popular with the most people. What makes a worship service good? Why, how popular it is with the people. After all, the goal of worship is to get the most people to come, isn't it? The goal of worship to attract people so that they will come, and keep coming. The goal, therefore, is excitement. Movement. Motivation. Accessibility.

With that goal in mind, the church of our day clamors for informality. The call of the day is comfortability, familiarity, spontaneity. The demand is for what is casual, extemporaneous, unscripted. After all, we are told all too often, that's where sincerity dwells. Within the halls of informality. Thus anything that has the feel of formality must of necessity be dry, insincere, devoid of life and vitality. So gone are the pulpits. Gone are the hymnbooks. Gone are any vestiges of traditional architecture. Gone is any resemblance to the historical liturgy of the church. Gone is the reverent sobriety that has characterized so much of Christian worship for centuries.

Something else is also lost in that whole process. Namely, the fullness of the sense of the glory of God. And so it is our focus in this conference to study something of that glory, and in particular, what the glory of God means for the worship of God's people today.

There is one very obvious and easy to identify reason why there is so little emphasis upon the glory of God today, and that is because there such an obvious and easy to identify absence of emphasis upon the study of the Old Testament, especially in relationship to our corporate worship. We don't study the Old Testament because, after all, it is old. It is outdated. It has passed away. We belong to the New Testament church.

Now, if you are referring to the ceremonial regulations of Old Testament worship, that's true. We no longer offer animal sacrifices. We no longer shed the blood of animals and sprinkle that blood upon the altar and upon the worshipers. And we no longer have a priest who worships in the presence of God for us, entering a temple whose building was explicitly prescribed by God. The place of our worship is no longer prescribed by God, for we worship now in every place. The temple no longer the focus of our worship, as we read in,

Acts 17:24 “God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth, does not dwell in temples made with hands. 25 “Nor is He worshiped with men's hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.”

So now we worship here, in this place. But we worship the same God as the God who filled the Old Testament temple with his glory, and, therefore, there is much to learn from the richness of the Old Testament revelation of that glory of God. That will be our focus this weekend, and so the very starting point tonight is simple. It is,

I. THE GLORY OF THE LORD.

Let me read a few references. And please follow along in your

Bibles if you want to.

Ex. 24:12 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Come up to Me on the mountain and be there; and I will give you tablets of stone, and the law and commandments which I have written, that you may teach them." 13 So Moses arose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up to the mountain of God. 14 And he said to the elders, "Wait here for us until we come back to you. Indeed Aaron and Hur are with you. If any man has a difficulty, let him go to them." 15 Then Moses went up into the mountain, and a cloud covered the mountain. 16 Now the glory of the LORD rested on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. 17 The sight of the glory of the LORD was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel. 18 So Moses went into the midst of the cloud and went up into the mountain. And Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights."

A consuming fire! A cloud of glory! To understand the significance of that, look back at,

Ex. 19:9 And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever." So Moses told the words of the people to the LORD. 10 Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. 11 "And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12 "You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. 13 'Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow;

whether man or beast, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain." 14 So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and sanctified the people, and they washed their clothes. 15 And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not come near your wives." 16 Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunderings and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. 17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. 19 And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice. 20 Then the LORD came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. 21 And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at the LORD, and many of them perish. 22 "Also let the priests who come near the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them."

Given all of that, what is,

A. The meaning of glory.

What is represented? What is its importance? Simply this, that the glory is the very presence of God. The glory is the evidence and manifestation of God himself. Dear friends, that is what matters when it comes to our worship.

People today tend to judge the presence of God in worship by their own experiences. By their own emotions. By how they feel. By their own subjective impressions. And so we tend to judge our

worship experiences subjectively. But in the Old Testament, it was the very objective presence of God's glory that defined the experience of worship, and God himself made that presence known. And known abundantly.

Ex. 29:43 "And there I will meet with the children of Israel, and the tabernacle shall be sanctified by My glory. 44 "So I will consecrate the tabernacle of meeting and the altar. I will also consecrate both Aaron and his sons to minister to Me as priests. 45 "I will dwell among the children of Israel and will be their God. 46 "And they shall know that I am the LORD their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, that I may dwell among them. I am the LORD their God."

That's the essence of God's covenant with his people. I will be your God. And further, more personally, I will dwell among you. That's the meaning of God's glory, that he dwells among us.

Now, surely, God is everywhere. God is omnipresent. He was in the Old Testament as well, but still there is this repeated emphasis upon the presence of his glory. And what takes place when the glory of God is made evident is a meeting of God with his people. That's what worship is. A meeting of God and his covenant people.

That's the meaning of glory. It is the manifestation of the presence of God, particularly as the people of God are assembled together to worship. In the Old Covenant, that meant animal sacrifices. But the broader principle of worship, still the distinctive measure of our worship today, is the presence of God's glory.

Lev. 9:1 "It came to pass on the eighth day that Moses called Aaron and his sons and the elders of Israel. 2 And he said to

Aaron, "Take for yourself a young bull as a sin offering and a ram as a burnt offering, without blemish, and offer them before the LORD. 3 "And to the children of Israel you shall speak, saying, 'Take a kid of the goats as a sin offering, and a calf and a lamb, both of the first year, without blemish, as a burnt offering, 4 'also a bull and a ram as peace offerings, to sacrifice before the LORD, and a grain offering mixed with oil; for today the LORD will appear to you.'" 5 So they brought what Moses commanded before the tabernacle of meeting. And all the congregation drew near and stood before the LORD. 6 Then Moses said, "This is the thing which the LORD commanded you to do, and the glory of the LORD will appear to you."

That's the definition of worship. The glory of the Lord will appear to you. And the response?

Lev. 9:23 And Moses and Aaron went into the tabernacle of meeting, and came out and blessed the people. Then the glory of the LORD appeared to all the people, 24 and fire came out from before the LORD and consumed the burnt offering and the fat on the altar. When all the people saw it, they shouted and fell on their faces."

So what is glory? The word itself means something heavy. Something, or someone, important. Weighty. Honorable. Impressive. Worthy of respect. And God alone is worthy of such a description. God alone is defined by glory, and when that glory is revealed, when the people of God see it, "they shouted and fell on their faces."

That is what was so important in Exodus 40.

v.34

Consider for just a moment the whole history of the book of

Exodus. God's people were in bondage, enslaved in Egypt. God promised to redeem them.

Ex. 6:2 And God spoke to Moses and said to him: "I am the LORD. 3 "I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as God Almighty, but by My name LORD I was not known to them. 4 "I have also established My covenant with them, to give them the land of Canaan, the land of their pilgrimage, in which they were strangers. 5 "And I have also heard the groaning of the children of Israel whom the Egyptians keep in bondage, and I have remembered My covenant. 6 "Therefore say to the children of Israel: 'I am the LORD; I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, I will rescue you from their bondage, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great judgments. 7 'I will take you as My people, and I will be your God. Then you shall know that I am the LORD your God who brings you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. 8 'And I will bring you into the land which I swore to give to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob; and I will give it to you as a heritage: I am the LORD.'"

God was faithful. We read of the plagues, by which God freed the people from Pharaoh. We read of the exodus itself, when the people escaped and Pharaoh's armies were drowned. Then the people come to Mt. Sinai, and God establishes his covenant with them. All of that took 24 chapters, Exodus 1-24. The remaining 16 chapters of the book describe one thing, and one thing alone. The building of the tabernacle. Finally, it was completed.

Ex. 40:33 "And he raised up the court all around the tabernacle and the altar, and hung up the screen of the court gate. So Moses finished the work."

In the context of the Old Testament, it is finished. The work was finished. Then what? The glory came.

B. The presence of glory.

It was the presence of God. God came to live in His house. God came to dwell with his people.
v.34

God's presence was established with his people, and that's what worship is all about. The presence of the glory of God. The glory of the presence of God. The dwelling of God with his people.

Similarly, look at the prayer Moses offered when the Ark of the Covenant was finally brought to the temple, representing the presence of God among his people,

1 Kings 8:22 Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the assembly of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven; 23 and he said: "LORD God of Israel, there is no God in heaven above or on earth below like You, who keep Your covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their hearts...27 "But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built! 28 "Yet regard the prayer of Your servant and his supplication, O LORD my God, and listen to the cry and the prayer which Your servant is praying before You today: 29 "that Your eyes may be open toward this temple night and day, toward the place of which You said, 'My name shall be there,' that You may hear the prayer which Your servant makes toward this place. 30 "And may You hear the supplication of Your servant and of Your people Israel, when they pray toward this place. Hear in heaven Your dwelling place; and when You hear, forgive."

Now, let me ask a very significant question. What does that

have to do with us today? What does the glory of God mean for the worship of God's people today? What do all these passages from Exodus and Leviticus have to do with our worship services in the year 2010? Many people would say, "Nothing." That's all Old Covenant stuff. That's the God of the Old Testament. That's the ceremonial regulations of the Old Testament. All of that is before Christ, and Jesus put an end to it.

That's why so much worship today is so informal, so irreverent, and so casual. Because there is no attention given to the glory of the Lord as it was in the Old Covenant. I propose to you that we should give much more attention to the whole concept of glory. Indeed, we must. The last 16 chapters of Exodus are given to us to teach us how to worship. The book of Leviticus is given to us to show us what worship is all about. And though Jesus inaugurates a new covenant, you will not understand that covenant unless you understand the meaning and purpose of the presence of the glory of God among his people.

Turn with me please to,
Heb. 12:18 "For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, 19 and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. 20 (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow." 21 And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.") [That's the difference in the New Covenant.] 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to

the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel. [But the same God is the Lord, and the nature of worship is the same as well. God meeting with his people.] 25 See that you do not refuse Him who speaks. For if they did not escape who refused Him who spoke on earth, much more shall we not escape if we turn away from Him who speaks from heaven, 26 whose voice then shook the earth; but now He has promised, saying, "Yet once more I shake not only the earth, but also heaven." 27 Now this, "Yet once more," indicates the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. 28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. 29 For our God is a consuming fire."

Where did that language come from? Our God is a consuming fire. It is the language of glory. It is the language of the glory of God revealed in the Old Testament. It is the language of the presence of God among his people, as so we are to worship Him "acceptably with reverence and awe. For our God is a consuming fire."

That's what you take from Exodus 40. Our God is a consuming fire, and our worship of him must be characterized by reverence and awe. As it was in the Old Covenant. Not with the fear and terror of rejection, for that was removed in Christ, but with the honor due to his name nonetheless.

What, then, is,

II. THE EFFECT OF THE GLORY.

Look at our text,

v.34b "...the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 35 And Moses was not able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the cloud rested above it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle."

Let me address briefly this idea of,

A. The fullness of the God's glory.

God's glory in that place was so full that Moses was not able to enter. We see the same thing when the permanent temple was finally completed under Moses' leadership,

1 Kings 8:10 "And it came to pass, when the priests came out of the holy place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, 11 so that the priests could not continue ministering because of the cloud; for the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD. 12 Then Solomon spoke: "The LORD said He would dwell in the dark cloud. 13 I have surely built You an exalted house, And a place for You to dwell in forever."

When God is present, when God's glory is present, the place is filled. So great is his majesty. So great is his presence, and that is what all this has to do with our worship today. These Old Testament examples show us what worship is all about, they define for us the activity we call corporate worship. The defining experience is the demonstration of the presence of God. Men become unimportant, and what God does, when his fullness fills the place in which we worship, is that he accepts the sacrifices of worship we offer to him.

Consider,

2 Chron. 7:1 "When Solomon had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices; and the glory of the LORD filled the temple. 2 And the

priests could not enter the house of the LORD, because the glory of the LORD had filled the LORD'S house. 3 When all the children of Israel saw how the fire came down, and the glory of the LORD on the temple, they bowed their faces to the ground on the pavement, and worshiped and praised the LORD, saying: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever."

God accepts our sacrifices. That is what is represented by the fullness of the glory of his presence. He consumes the burnt offering. He takes pleasure in what we offer. And so great is that experience that the priests of the Old Covenant couldn't even enter.

In that context, we can observe how trivial so much of modern worship really is. Little or no sense of God's glory. No sense of the glory of his pleasure receiving what we offer to him, but too often its more like fun and games. Let's enjoy ourselves. Let's satisfy our needs. Let's stir up our own emotions and create a mood ourselves. Come casually. Come informally. Come late, it doesn't matter. Leave early. Get up and walk around. Visit with one another. No need for reverence or dignity. And all of that misses the point. The point of the presence of the glory of God filling the temple in which we have gathered to offer him sacrifices.

And remember, we are all fallen men, sinful creatures. And so we ought to see also,

B. The effect of God's glory upon fallen men.

v.35

Moses couldn't enter. The priests couldn't enter. And why not? Because of sin. The presence of the glory of God means that there must be a confession of sin. That will be our focus

tomorrow night, but turn again to Solomon's prayer in,

1 Kings 8:46 "When they sin against You (for there is no one who does not sin), and You become angry with them and deliver them to the enemy, and they take them captive to the land of the enemy, far or near; 47 "yet when they come to themselves in the land where they were carried captive, and repent, and make supplication to You in the land of those who took them captive, saying, 'We have sinned and done wrong, we have committed wickedness'; 48 "and when they return to You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies who led them away captive, and pray to You toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen and the temple which I have built for Your name: 49 "then hear in heaven Your dwelling place their prayer and their supplication, and maintain their cause, 50 "and forgive Your people who have sinned against You, and all their transgressions which they have transgressed against You; and grant them compassion before those who took them captive, that they may have compassion on them 51 "(for they are Your people and Your inheritance, whom You brought out of Egypt, out of the iron furnace), 52 "that Your eyes may be open to the supplication of Your servant and the supplication of Your people Israel, to listen to them whenever they call to You. 53 "For You separated them from among all the peoples of the earth to be Your inheritance, as You spoke by Your servant Moses, when You brought our fathers out of Egypt, O Lord GOD."

And the goal? The effect upon the people of God who had assembled to worship?

1 Kings 8:60 "...that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no other. 61 "Let your heart therefore be loyal to the LORD our God, to walk in His statutes and keep His commandments, as at this day."

That's the goal of worship. That's the objective of worship. That's the measure of worship, and the definition of it. "...that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no other."

It's not about you and your importance. It's not about your glory. It's about God's glory, that you may know that the Lord is God and that there is no other. And, therefore, that you might be loyal to him in the daily living of your lives.

And so this presence of the glory of God that you experience in worship ought to be the guide and direction for the whole of your life. As we see here,

III. THE GUIDANCE OF GLORY.

The awareness of the presence of the glory of God was the guide by which the nations of Israel was to live.

v.36-38

Why study all of this? Why focus upon the Old Testament experiences of worship? What does all this have to do with our lives today? Simply this, to recognize,

A. The necessity of God's glory in the pilgrimage of our lives.

The necessity. So when the cloud moved, the children of Israel would move. And if it didn't move, neither would they. The presence of the glory of God determined and defined their duty, and to follow God, to obey God, meant to follow the cloud. So we read in,

Num. 9:18 "At the command of the LORD the children of Israel would journey, and at the command of the LORD they

would camp; as long as the cloud stayed above the tabernacle they remained encamped.”

People of God, the crying need of our day is to reclaim and recapture this sense of being guided by the presence of God’s glory. For we are so self-absorbed. So self-focused and self-determined. So committed to our own comforts, our own convenience, our own enjoyments and pleasures. We measure so many things by ourselves, and by our own judgments, when in simple, principal form, that which is to guide the paths of your lives is nothing less than the awareness of God himself, the God of infinite glory. And that which is of absolute necessity in that guidance is the presence of God. The cloud by day and fire by night.

v.38

As it was for them, so it is for us.

B. The leadership of God’s glory in the pilgrimage of our lives.

The cloud by day and the fire by night. That’s what you need when you seek direction for your own life. That’s what you need every day you live. That’s what you need as you consider your future. And that’s what you need as you live your life as strangers and pilgrims in this world, looking for the promised land which God himself has promised to his covenant people. As you and I wander in the wilderness of our lives in this age, represented by the forty years of Israel’s wanderings, that which will sustain you is nothing less than that which sustained the people of Israel. The presence of God’s glory.

That’s what gives meaning to your life, and ultimately, that alone. That’s what brings happiness to your life. That’s what brings purpose and satisfaction. That’s what brings confidence

and hope. The presence of God’s glory.

What a great privilege we have now, with the fullness of God’s glory revealed in the flesh, in the person of Jesus Christ, the God-man.

John 1:14 “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”

So our worship is offered in Jesus’ name.

And the presence of God’s glory is what brings our corporate worship to center stage in our lives. It is what makes our corporate worship the most important activity of our lives, and gives it the highest priority. It is as we worship, as we enter into the presence of God in so particular a way, that we are able to participate in this glorious experience, of being found in the presence of the glory of God.

Therefore, it is not a circus. It’s not a casual or informal gathering. But rather it is the highest honor and highest privilege a creature could ever possibly receive, that at God’s own invitation we might behold His glory, that His glory might fill this place where we gather together in Jesus’ name.

As his covenant people today,

Heb. 12:28 “Let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, 29 for our God is a consuming fire.”