

What Did Moses See?

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[0 : 00] This morning, we asked the question, where is God? And we looked at these two true answers. God is everywhere.

There is no place where God is not. We also saw the Bible tells us that God is in heaven. And we reminded ourselves, of course, that that is something that is beyond our understanding.

But one day, it will become a reality for all of us who trust in Jesus. Just let's make sure that we are going there.

And we know that there's only one. The Bible says there's only one way that we can be assured of going to heaven where God is. And that is by believing in Jesus Christ.

He is the way and the truth and the life. Now, we're going to go back and we're going to follow the same theme on where is God.

[1 : 03] And we're going to look at this passage here in which Moses, as the leader of the two million children of Israel, they're making their way from Egypt to the promised land.

And they're going through the desert land. And it's only a short time. It's been about a year or so since they were delivered from Egypt, from the slavery and the misery that they suffered there.

And they are at the foot. They're camped surrounding Mount Zinai. And something catastrophic has taken place.

Because while Moses was up on the top of the mountain and he spent a large number of days speaking and meeting with God, the people of Israel had acted unfaithfully and rebelliously towards God.

They had, in fact, turned away from God and they had begun to worship an idol, the golden calf. They had done exactly what God commanded them not to do.

[2 : 07] God had commanded that they must not build an image of anything that's in heaven above or earth beneath. That's exactly what they chose to do. So, by the time that Moses came down the mountain again, it was carnage.

It was chaos. And this resulted in death. It resulted in sickness. It resulted in condemnation for the people. So, this was a time of misery.

It was a time of carnage in the camp of Israel. And it was also a time of huge disappointment. And that's the context behind this conversation between Moses and God, which culminates in this great request, this great prayer that Moses brought to God.

And this is what the prayer was. Lord, show me your glory. Verse 18. That's where we're going to be looking this evening. Moses said, now show me your glory.

And I want to ask five questions about that prayer. Very briefly, five questions about that prayer. Number one is the question, why did Moses ask God to show him his glory?

[3 : 28] Why did Moses ask God to show him his glory? I think you would have to go back into the background that I've just tried to summarize for you.

You would have to try and imagine the sheer disappointment that Moses must have felt when the entire children of Israel, all two million of them, and there were two, can you imagine two million people all in one place in this massive campsite?

They're all God's people. They're there because God has delivered them out of Egypt, and he is taking them, leading them personally, on their way to the promised land, the land of Canaan.

And on that journey, God is making himself known to them. He's reminding them that they're not an ordinary people at all. They're not just random.

And it's not for no reason that they're there in the desert. They belong to God. They are God's chosen people. They are in special relationship with him.

[4 : 34] Out of all the nations and cultures and languages in the world, they are totally unique in their relationship to God. He has chosen them by name.

He did this hundreds of years ago when he chose Abraham, their forefather. And now he's fulfilling his promise, and he has delivered them from slavery in Egypt, and he's bringing them.

But on the way, he's teaching them about himself. And in so doing, he's teaching them about themselves. But instead of listening to him on this occasion, instead of remaining faithful to him, they go their own way.

They decide they're going to worship their own God. They're going to create their own God. It's always easier to create your own God than to listen to the living and true God, because the one you create is never going to tell you what you don't want to do.

The one that you create is always going to say, that's okay, you do whatever you like, you live as you want, and nobody's going to challenge you. But that's because the God you create, the God we create, is a God of our own making, and a God who's not a God at all.

[5 : 50] So you can see how easily the children of Israel slipped into idolatry. That's what idolatry is. It's when we decide to go our own way, instead of listening to the voice of the living and the true God.

And so the result of all this was that within days of promising, if you read back in Exodus, all the people promised in one voice, we will do what you say.

We will serve you. And that's not because they felt they were forced to do that. It's because they were so relieved and so happy that God had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. Nobody forced them into obeying God.

They willingly submitted themselves to what God wanted them to do. But within days, they had turned away, and they were worshipping something else, a God of their own making.

So you can imagine how Moses felt when he came down the mountain, and he was utterly disappointed, and he felt his whole world had collapsed around him. In a way, it had.

[6 : 59] With all the death and the misery, you can read about it yourself. We don't have time to read about it. You can go back into Exodus chapter 32 and everything that preceded it.

It was awful. It was a dread. It was a scene of utter carnage. And what's more, it was, Moses, you can imagine Moses is like, well, where do we go from here?

If so soon, these people are just going to forsake God, then what hope is there for the future? So it completely dented his confidence. He didn't know what future there was.

And so what he's doing is, he's taking refuge in God. Right? Let me say that again. He is taking refuge in God at a time of uncertainty, a time of pain, a time when he doesn't know what's around the corner.

He doesn't understand what's going on. This should not be happening. If they're God's people, they're the most privileged people in the world, they should be lovingly and willingly obedient to him.

[8 : 11] He's not asking them the unreasonable. He's giving them the joy of knowing that they belong to him. And now they're worshiping a golden calf. What are they doing?

It doesn't make sense. It's absurd. So you can understand how Moses, the devastation that he feels, he doesn't know, he's speechless.

He doesn't know what to do. He doesn't want to say. So he turns to God. You know, there are times like that. as Christians, times when the only place we can turn to is God.

Take refuge in God. It might be happening right now with you. It's maybe not exactly like this, but there are times of carnage, times of uncertainty, times when you don't know what the future is going to hold and where your whole world is collapsing.

Perhaps you've been betrayed. Moses was betrayed by the people. He was betrayed by his own brother, the very person who he should have been able to trust. He was betrayed by him. And if ever there was a time when Moses rediscovered the untrustworthiness of the people around him, it was at that moment.

[9 : 42] And I'm sure that many of us here have discovered something similar. We live in a fallen world, a world in which sometimes we're left, we don't even know what to say.

And that's where we take refuge. Well, we should be taking refuge in God anyway, shouldn't we? Even in times of joy and prosperity and when things are going well, we should be taking refuge anyway in God.

But sometimes it takes times like this for God to draw us into a particular place of intimacy with him.

And that's what's happening here. Now, I suppose Moses could have prayed for the people. He could have prayed for the future. He's already done that. I mean, he's run out of words.

He's run out of prayers. But he wants now to take refuge in God because God is the only reliable being that there is.

[10 : 53] In God, he knows that there is someone he can trust who never changes and who is a constantly listening ear to his prayer.

Moses discovered that a long time ago. You know, the whole of Exodus is about Moses' relationship with God from the very beginning when he met him in the burning bush in the desert.

You remember when God met with him in the burning bush. And from that moment, Moses was drawn into a relationship with God that continued all the way until he died.

In fact, the Bible tells us that there was no one in all the world like Moses who knew God face to face. He knew God face to face.

In fact, this chapter tells us about a special construction that Moses made. It was a tent. It wasn't the tabernacle. It was another tent. It was the tent of meeting.

[12 : 01] And this was the place where he went specifically to meet with God. When he went in there, the glory of God came down and filled the tent. He was able to have a conversation with God.

And maybe you're saying right now, well, wouldn't that be absolutely marvelous? I wish I had that closeness to God. I wish I could have a conversation with God like that.

I mean, what a privilege that is to be able to converse with the creator of heaven and earth. Do you know something?

That's exactly the privilege you do have in Jesus. The problem is we don't make the most of it. We neglect it. We fail to see the privilege that we do have.

We have exactly the same as Moses had. It's called prayer. Prayer is when we come face to face with God.

[12 : 58] Do you ever remind yourself when you pray? I don't know when you pray. Some people like to pray in the morning. Some people like to pray at night. Some people like to pray, they make a habit of praying twice. I hope it's sometime, and I hope it's regular, and I hope that prayer plays a major, the major part in your life.

I hope it's the foundation of who you are. Sometimes our prayer is not what it should be. Sometimes our prayer is so distracted, and sometimes we can't find the words, and sometimes we get confused.

Sometimes we just kind of bring, you know, these, the Bible calls them groanings. But that's still prayer, even when you can't find the words.

And you're still coming face to face with God in prayer. Let's rediscover that this evening. Let's rediscover what prayer is.

Here is a man who built a construction. He built this tent because that was the place where he went, where's your tent? Where's your tent of meeting? Where is that place that you go to?

[14 : 18] Do you have a place? It doesn't have to be the same place, but please let there be a place.

It's a reminder, isn't it, of how precious our relationship is with God. So why did Moses ask God to show him his glory? Because this was the place where he delighted in God and where he took refuge in God and where he put his trust again in the Lord who he had trusted a long time ago.

Now, second question is this. Why did God show Moses his glory? Remember the prayer? Show me your glory. And does God answer that prayer?

Well, actually the answer to that is yes and no. Yes and no. Because the simple fact was that there was a level of that prayer that could not be answered because if he had answered it, Moses would have died.

No one, God says, no one can see my face and live. So, in one respect, the answer to Moses' prayer was no.

[15 : 48] And in another respect, it was answered because God did reveal. And, you know, when you come to a prayer like this, that's the kind of prayer that God will always answer. Sometimes God does not give us the answer to the prayer as we pray.

And that's always for a good reason. God knows always what is best for us. So, don't be discouraged when you pray for something and God answers in a different way or he doesn't answer in the way.

But when you do pray, do you pray specifically? I hope you do. I hope you pray for real things, not just generalities. I hope you pray for real things.

But the real things ought not to be just the things that we think of that we think we need. What we should be praying for, more importantly, is that the Lord will show us more of himself, that we will discover more and more of our Savior.

Are you just as keen that God will show you himself as you are to, I don't know, whatever you're praying for at the current moment?

[17 : 05] Are you eager to discover more about who God is? Let this be an opportunity tonight for us to reorient our prayer and reprioritize our prayer so that our prayers are not all about us.

Is it not true that very often we're so consumed with what we want and what we need that our priorities are all wrong? Let this be an opportunity where we say, right, I'm going to reprioritize and I really want God to show me more of himself.

I want my prayer from now on to be God-centered and not only about me. I'm not saying don't pray about yourself. Of course you have needs. Of course.

And God expects us to be honest about these and God expects us to take everything to him in prayer. And yet, very often, it does revolve around us, doesn't it?

Let's begin. Remember the Lord's Prayer? Remember how it begins? Remember how it's structured? There's a deliberateness about the structure of the Lord's Prayer where Jesus said, Jesus' disciples come to him and they say, teach us to pray and he says, this is how we should pray.

[18 : 24] Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your... Do you notice that? How it starts? It starts with God, God's glory, God's holiness, hallowed be your name, God's name.

Heaven. We're starting off where God is. We're starting off and our prayer's revolving around who he is rather than what.

And as you come down, your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as... It's still about God. And it's only later on that we begin to focus on ourselves.

Give us what we need, our daily bread, and forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors. So, our prayer, it begins with...

In fact, it ends there as well. And when we do, when our prayer is God-centered, God will answer that prayer.

[19 : 29] And you notice that when Moses asked for this particular request, it was given to him. Show me your glory. I hope...

Honestly, I really hope that this evening every one of us will pray that prayer. Lord, show me your glory. Now, that does not mean that God is going to appear in some blinding light.

If he did, we wouldn't survive. But he will answer that prayer. For sure. Third question, what did Moses not see?

God says, in answer to his prayer, I will cause my goodness to pass in front of you. I'll proclaim my name. But, he says, you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live.

What does God mean when he says, my face? My face. Now, here's where I'm going to use a big word.

[20 : 37] And most of you, of course, if not all of you, will know this word. Because it's a word we use in other contexts as well. But it's particularly useful when we're trying to understand God. And that is the word anthropomorphism.

Right? It's where God describes himself in human terms. So, here, he talks about his face. He also talks about his back.

Verse 23, then I will remove my hand and you will see my back. Now, here's another feature of God that we perhaps didn't mention this morning.

God doesn't have a body. He is invisible. He doesn't have eyes or ears or a head or a central nervous system or a skeleton or feet or what.

And yet, he chooses to describe himself in these terms. Remember the verse we quoted this morning, Genesis chapter 3, the Lord God came into the garden in the cool of the day.

[21 : 39] He walked in the garden. Now, God doesn't have legs. He doesn't have feet. So, how can he walk? Because he's using an anthropomorphism.

He's describing himself in human terms. Now, I'm going to tell you something. I'm going to share with you a personal gripe I have in the theological world, which I listen to very often and all the arguments that go on within the theological world.

But I want to share this with you because we have these debates and they're very important because some people think, ah, yes, this is an anthropomorphism.

And there's a kind of arrogance among some theologians that think, well, he doesn't really mean that. God doesn't really mean that because he doesn't have a face.

He doesn't really mean what he says because we know that God is invisible and God is just using anthropomorphic terms. So, he doesn't, yes, he does mean it.

[22 : 44] And it's the height of arrogance for us to read a verse like this and say, ah, yes, but I know what it means. What it means is what it says.

You cannot see my face, but you will see my back. Whatever, whatever Moses saw, and actually, you're going to be disappointed because we don't know what Moses saw. But whatever Moses saw, this is the way God describes himself.

And so, instead of thinking that we are somehow in the elite academic sense, we're able to, we know what's best and we can tell God, well, yeah, we know more about you and we know that you don't have a face.

What we should be saying is we should be humbly submitting ourselves to the Word of God and saying, well, how does the Bible help us to understand what this does actually mean?

And I believe it means this, God's face is the unveiled majesty and splendor and glory of God that can only be seen if we are made perfect.

[23 : 58] It's the majesty of God that can only be seen in heaven. We said this morning that we don't understand heaven, we don't understand where it is, but one day God promises that we will be there if we believe in Jesus Christ as our Savior.

But meanwhile, here in this world, it is impossible to see God's face, His unveiled splendor. And that's because we are sinners and God is perfect.

And even although that barrier has been removed as we saw this morning, yet we cannot see but what is really exciting is this, the promise in the Bible is that one day we will.

Look what Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 13 and verse 12, now he says we see in a poor reflection as in a mirror, then we shall see face to face.

number four, what did Moses see? What did Moses see?

[25 : 21] Well, first answer to that is what God Himself tells us. The Lord said, verse 19, I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence.

I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. God's goodness is God Himself. It's God's revelation of Himself.

So, Moses saw something of the grace and the mercy and the goodness of God. God's grace and the grace and the grace and the grace and the grace and the grace and the grace you're probably asking by now, this would have been so marvelous.

This would have been, I wish, I wish I could have been there. I wish I could have seen what Moses saw. Well, let me tell you something.

We have seen something even greater than Moses saw. Whatever he saw, however splendid it was, we have seen something greater.

[26 : 33] Because in Jesus Christ, God has made Himself known in a spectacular way, in a breathtaking way, glory.

All you, as we saw this morning, all you need to do if you want to see God is to read the Gospels that describe the kind of person that Jesus was.

Because He was none other than God and man. And that's why John said, we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

And when it tells us, when God says in verse 23, then I will remove my hand and you will see my back, what I believe that means is that that is God showing Moses what can be seen of God.

We have the same thing in the Gospels. In the Gospels, this is what can be seen of God. And that's why Jesus said to His disciples, He who has seen Me has seen the Father.

[27 : 51] In other words, he who has seen Me has seen God. All you need to do, it's very simple, you open the pages of your Bible and you see what God is like.

And when you see what God is like, you've seen God. I wonder, this is a bit of speculation. I wonder if it's at all possible that whatever Moses saw, that God showed him something of what he was one day going to do in the person of Jesus Christ.

Did he perhaps see the baby in the manger? That would have been an answer to his prayer, wouldn't it? Show me your glory.

We tend to think of glory as something spectacular. What's more spectacular than the baby in the manger? What's more spectacular than Jesus walking on the water, feeding the 5,000?

I can't think of anything more spectacular than that. What's more spectacular than Jesus, the Son of God himself, dying on the cross at Calvary?

[29 : 11] I wonder if Moses, if that's what he saw. I know I'm speculating, but I can't think of anything more glorious. That's how Jesus described it.

Remember what I read in John chapter 13? Now is the Son of Man glorified. What was he talking about? He was talking about his death. How is the death of the Son of God glorious?

Because it is at that moment that God demonstrates his love for lost, helpless, bankrupt sinners like us, and where he becomes sin for them, for us, so that we might be rescued, so that we might be forgiven.

That moment was the most glorious, the most spectacular in the whole of human history. What's more glorious than the empty tomb?

I wonder if that's what Moses saw. The cave outside of Jerusalem where they had put his body, where they placed his body after wrapping it in linen cloths. Three days later, when the women went to anoint the body, they found it empty, and the angel who said, he is not here, he is risen, come and see the place where he lay.

[30 : 35] And we know all that, don't we? We've seen it because we've read it and we've heard it, we've heard the news, and by hearing the gospel we've seen the glory of God.

Now here's the last question, with this I finish, what did Moses hear? Whatever Moses saw, we don't know. It wasn't described, there was nobody there to tell us exactly what he saw, we have to leave it to mystery.

In other words, whatever Moses saw, it's not for us, it was between him and God, but what is for us is what Moses heard, because that was written down.

Now here's what Moses heard, and I want to suggest to you this evening that this is the most glorious message in all the world. Verse 6 in chapter 34, God passed in front of Moses proclaiming 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.

Now, when we read that, did any of you feel a little bit strange? You should do. Because there's something kind of contradictory about these two statements, or it appears that way, doesn't it?

[32 : 09] Here's God, and he's describing himself, right? And here's what he says about himself, the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

But it doesn't stop there. Yet, here's the other side. He does not leave the guilty unpunished. Now, how can these two things be true?

Surely, he's either compassionate and loving and forgiving, or he's a God of justice who condemns the whole world.

Surely, the two things cannot be true. Well, yes, they can. Because the same God of love and compassion and forgiveness is the God of perfect justice who must perfectly punish sin wherever it's found.

How do these two truths come together? The God who is perfect in justice and the God who is perfect in love and compassion. Where do they come together?

[33 : 27] Well, you know the answer, don't you? And if you don't, let me tell you. I really want to say this. This is the final, ultimate point. They come together at the cross where the God of justice, he makes his son guilty with our sin.

He places the guilt of our filthiness, our shame on his son, his own pure, spotless son.

And that son pays the ultimate price, the death on the cross as the punishment for our sin. And he was willing to do that out of his love and his compassion and his forgiveness.

It was because God was determined to transform you and me that Jesus went to the cross and that these two truths came together.

The justice of God and the love of God. You can't separate them. And it was that transaction, that moment that was the most glorious moment that this world has ever seen in all of its history and the most glorious moment that this world will ever see.

[35 : 13] That's why the cross of Jesus Christ is central to what we believe, who we are, what we preach, this church, you and me, and it's the one thing that we must take away with us this evening.

This is the glory of God, the God who became one of us and was willing to die as the punishment for our sin.

Have you discovered that? I would love to think that there was somebody in here tonight who's never heard that before. I would so love that, to tell you that the first time.

I'd love to think there was somebody watching online and it's the first time you say, I've never heard this before. Oh, that's so marvelous. Please think about it and ask God to bring home his truth to you as never before because this is the most marvelous message in all the world.

It's what the world needs to hear. it's what can transform the world. It's what can change us. It's what can bring hope and joy and forgiveness and liberty and newness of life.

[36 : 30] God is willing to give that liberty, that newness of life to you if you ask. All you need to do is ask. Jesus says, ask and you will receive.

Knock and it will be open to you. Seek and you will find. So I hope this evening has been a revelation. And I don't mean a visible revelation.

I hope that you've seen something this evening about what God really is and what he did for us in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And I hope that by hearing that he becomes more real to you than you've ever, ever, than he's ever been before as we come to worship him and to thank him for all that he has done.

We're going to bring things to a close then this evening by singing. ■■■ standing to me. At he to going to AM■ to