

BEHOLDING GOD'S GLORY!
by Max Frazier, Jr.

BEHOLDING GOD'S GLORY: AN INTRODUCTION: Exodus 33:17-23

Christmas - what is this special season anyway? How would you describe it to someone who had never heard of it before? Perhaps you would use words like these: Mary, Joseph, a baby, shepherds, magi, angels, Bethlehem. Or maybe you would include these words in your description: love, joy, fear, responsibilities, incarnation, gifts. But the one word which you might easily overlook is the word "glory."

Christmas is a revelation of God's glory. The carol writers have captured that thought. Listen to the following words:

"Sing, choirs of angels, sing in exultation! O sing, all ye citizens of heav'n above; Glory to God, all glory in the highest; O come, let us adore Him, Christ the Lord."

"Gloria in excelsis Deo."

"It came upon the midnight clear, That glorious song of old."

"Hark! The herald angels sing, Glory to the newborn King."

"Silent night! Holy night! Shepherds quake at the sight, Glories stream from heaven afar, Heavenly hosts sing Alleluia. Christ the Savior is born."

We will be studying several portions of Scripture which describe the various aspects of God's glory. But we begin today by asking ourselves: Just what is God's glory? For an answer we turn to a man who was an authority on God's glory: Moses.

Our great text is found in Exodus 33, verses 17-23. Let us set the background for this great text. Moses had spent 40 days upon Mount Sinai receiving the Law from God. While he was absent, the leaders of Israel persuaded Aaron to build an idol for them to worship. Aaron complied with their wishes and formed a golden calf and Israel began its orgiastic rituals around it. God's anger was aroused and Moses left God's presence and returned to camp. Seething with anger at what he saw, Moses smashed the stone tablets given to him by God and rendered judgment upon the people. With the judgment accomplished, Moses returned to God to ask for 2 things: (1) that God would forgive his people, and (2) that God's presence would continue to go with them. God answered both requests.

Verse 18 records Moses' request. Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory." This request came as a result of God's previous answers to his prayers. Moses was not content with just his present relationship with God. He hungered for an even deeper relationship. He wanted to witness God's glory.

This request of Moses spoke to my own heart. How hungry and thirsting am I for more of God? Perhaps I have become satisfied with what I have of God now! Yes,

God has been so good to me. I have a healthy family that loves and cares for each other. I have a comfortable home with sufficient food and clothing. I have a job which I enjoy doing among a group of people whom I love.

Need I dare to ask God for more? Of things which God can give, No! But oh how I need to ask for a deeper experience with him. How I need to pray as did the Apostle Paul in Philippians 3:10, I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death."

Dear Village Friends, Will you join with me today in praying that God would draw us deeper into himself; that we might experience the reality of his glory?

THOUGHT FOR THE DAY: God wants us to be victors, not victims; to grow, not grovel; to soar, not sink; to overcome, not to be overwhelmed. (William A. Ward)

BEHOLDING GOD'S GLORY: DEFINED: Exodus 33:17-23

In our last time together, we began to give consideration to this great word, "glory." We considered Moses great request, voiced in verse 18 of Exodus 33: That he might see God's glory. His heart hungered for more of God as should our hearts.

How can we define God's glory? I believe that God shares a partial definition with us in his response to Moses in verse 19: And the Lord said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence."

Theodore Epp, the late founder of Back to the Bible Ministries, said, "God's glory is seen in His goodness or it could be said that His glory is His goodness." So, if God's glory is what God is in himself, then how can we discover that glory? I believe that God reveals his glory to us in at least four ways.

First, God's glory is seen in his name. That is what God told Moses in the verse we have just read: I will proclaim my name, the Lord, in your presence. Time will not permit us today to share all that is revealed in God's name. But we can highlight just a few. God's name, the Lord, means that he is the eternal, self-existent one. God is ruler over all. He is the God above all gods.

He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the ending. He is the Resurrection and the Life. He is the Wonderful Counselor. He is the Mighty God. He is the Everlasting Father. He is the Prince of Peace. He is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. We can sing with the hymnwriter: "Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Second, God's glory is seen in what he does. Listen to these words from Exodus 34, verses 6 and 7: And he 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." God forgives our sins. God is full of lovingkindness and truth. God is slow to anger. God is compassionate and gracious. Whatever God does on your behalf, on my behalf, he does as an extension of his glory.

One of my favorite Christmas songs asks the question, "What child is this who laid to rest at Mary's lap is sleeping? Whom angels greet with anthems sweet, while shepherds watch are keeping?" Then comes that tremendous refrain which literally shouts out that great truth: "This, this is Christ the King whom shepherds guard and angels sing; This, this is Christ the King, the babe, the son of Mary."

May each of us rejoice this day in the glory of the name of the Lord. Take a few moments just to praise God for his wonderful name. I know your heart will be blessed.

BEHOLDING GOD'S GLORY: A FURTHER DEFINITION: Exodus 33:17-23

We have been asking ourselves the question, Just what is God's glory. We began to consider in our last meeting together, that God's glory is what is in himself. And we began to examine four ways in which God's glory was revealed. The first two were these: God's glory as seen in his name and in what he has done. Today let us consider two other ways in which our text in Exodus 33 states that God's glory is revealed.

Third, God's glory is seen in his mercy. Exodus 33:19 states, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." Mercy is God's seeing man in his pitiful condition and doing something to deliver him. God had acted with mercy toward the nation of Israel following their sin with the golden calf. They deserved his wrath and punishment, but he delivered them instead. He provided the means for their renewal with him.

Christmas is a time of God's showing us his mercy. He looked upon us in our desperate need and because of his mercy and love, he acted to meet that great need. Jesus Christ came to offer to us God's mercy. He himself was to be the penalty for the sins of mankind.

Fourth, God's glory is seen in his grace. The word "compassion" in Exodus 33:19 could also refer to God's grace. Now grace is God's unmerited favor bestowed upon us in spite of the fact that we deserved God's punishment. You might remember all the ways God showed his grace to Israel while they were in the wilderness: His guidance by the pillar and the cloud. His feeding them with manna and quail. He supplying water for them from the rock. His granting them victory over their enemies. Did Israel deserve all this? Absolutely not! They continually grumbled and complained. They constantly abused God's grace.

Think, as the holidays approach, of how God has been gracious to you.

Christmas is a time for reflecting upon God's glory. The glory of his grace and the glory of his mercy. It is a time for us to dare to ask God to draw us closer to him in a deeper relationship.

Perhaps it is time to sit down right now and prayerfully ask God to show you how you can show his mercy and grace to someone else this holiday season. It could be sharing a bag of groceries with a neighbor, or sharing a friendly visit with a lonely resident of a nursing home, or just sending a cheerful greeting card to someone who needs encouragement. As we do these small things, we, too, share in God's glory.

BEHOLDING GOD'S GLORY: IT'S EFFECT UPON ME: Isaiah 6:1-8

One of the magnificent choruses in Handel's classic oratorio, THE MESSIAH, echoes the words of the prophet Isaiah, And the glory of the Lord will be revealed, and all mankind will see it. For the mouth of the Lord has spoken (Isaiah 40:5).

When was this glory revealed? The Apostle John, speaking of Jesus, said, The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth (John 1:14). There is no better season of the year for us to ponder God's glory and its effect upon us as during the Christmas season.

You remember from our last study that God's glory is all that God is and is manifest through his grace and mercy toward us. God's glory: What affect should it have upon me?

Let's pause and wonder about our state of affairs if God would peel back the heavens and allow us to see his glory. I wonder what would happen. But there is no need to wonder. We can examine the experiences of a man to whom that very thing happened. His name: Isaiah. And his story is found in chapter 6 of the book he has written.

Isaiah was in mourning. The great King of Judah, Uzziah, had died. He had been a good king. Under his reign the nation had prospered and God had been given a proper place in the affairs of government. But with his death there seemed to be some uncertainty. So, it was with sorrow and despair, that Isaiah approached the altar of God. The song writer best captures what happened to him there with these words, "And I saw the Lord - He was high and lifted up and rightfully adored; and I saw the Lord - and He saw me!"

Two things immediately happened to Isaiah. First, he had an awareness of God's holiness. Even though the King had died, Isaiah saw that God was still on the throne. God had not abdicated because of Uzziah's death. God was still in charge!

I believe that this is a message we need to proclaim with more enthusiasm and authority today than at any other time in our generation: God is still on the throne. There is continued unrest around the world. We have witnessed men arming themselves for war with families being separated and people thinking of the very real possibilities of death. Our message: "Fear not! God is still on the throne!"

Immorality and even amorality are running rampant. Pornography is being legitimized with the new NC-17 theater rating. The National Endowment for the Arts is confused about what is worthy to be called art. Homosexuality has reached the point where it has been legitimized and accepted as an alternative lifestyle. Our message: "Fear not! God is still on the throne!"

Economic uncertainty still hides in the shadows, even in the midst of a bullish market. Fears of inflation are always present. We have witnessed many of the stock markets around the world teeter on the brink of disaster. Our message: "Fear not! God is still on the throne!"

The average man on the street, who reads the headlines of the daily newspaper with fear, needs to be assured that God is still on the throne. God has not abdicated in favor of anyone else. Village Friends, you and I are the only ones who can reassure them. Because you and I are the ones who have seen God in his glory and have witnessed that He is still in control and on the throne. What a powerful message to share!

BEHOLDING GOD'S GLORY: A GLORY IN HIS HOLINESS: Isaiah 6:1-8

In our last study we began to focus our attention upon the impact a revelation of God's glory would have in our lives. The desire to know the significance of its impact led us to the account of Isaiah's being in the temple at the time of the death of King Uzziah. As we noticed in our last study, there he had an encounter with a God who was still on the throne.

And there he saw God in the glory of His holiness. The word "holy" is defined as "being perfect, pure in heart, without sin." Have you ever witnessed anything that was absolutely pure? Oh, there are many things that purport to be that way: We have "pure gold", only it is not pure because pure gold is transparent like that of the gold on the streets of the new Jerusalem. We have "pure water", only it is not absolutely pure because it still has some contamination remaining within it. Even Ivory soap can only claim to be 99 and 44/100 per cent pure.

Friends, God is absolutely pure. There are no flaws with God. There are no blemishes with God. There are no skeletons in God's closets. God has NO SIN. A.W. Tozer, that great and gifted Bible expositor from earlier in our century wrote: "Such holiness had an impact upon Isaiah and it should have upon us as well. The longer Isaiah stood in the presence of God, the more uncomfortable he became. Why? Because he became aware that he was not fit to stand before God. The

longer he studied God in his holiness, the more aware Isaiah became of his own sins. And God did not have to say one word to remind Isaiah of his condition."

Isaiah could not camouflage his sins. He could not make them just blend in with the decor or the background. Isaiah was exposed for who he really was: A sinner in need of God's cleansing.

One of the great dangers of the Christmas Season is that we tend to masquerade our sins. We put on the masks of smiles and happiness and go around singing, "God, rest ye merry, gentlemen" and "We wish you a Merry Christmas." We speak those words to people we harbor resentments toward: We really don't want them to be merry, but would hope they might get the proverbial "lump of coal" in their Christmas stocking. We speak those words in spite of having been angry with a husband, a wife, a son, or a daughter.

We are very proficient at masking our sins and our weaknesses to conform to the standards of mirth and joy this season brings. "Tis the season to be jolly." But at what price? We conceal our loneliness, our guilt, our depression and despair.

Oh to stand before the GLORY of God and to see ourselves as God does. I believe that we too would cry out as Isaiah did, "God, I am full of sin and I stand condemned."

Can we dare to stand before a glorious God in the midst of this joyous season and proclaim to God: "I am full of fears about tomorrow." "God, my life is full of hurt and no one seems to care." "God, I am harboring resentments toward my neighbor or toward my family."

It was not until Isaiah shouted out before God his need that he experienced the cleansing and healing that this glorious God could give to him. The glory of God does have an affect upon me! A realization of that glory can help me to prepare my heart for the real celebration of Christmas.

A RESPONSE TO GOD'S GLORY: Luke 2:1-20

The focus of our Village Line studies these few days before Christmas has been that of God's glory. We have learned not only what it is, but also of its impact upon our lives. For these next couple of studies, we will journey back to the fields surrounding that little village known as Bethlehem, the city of David. We will join the shepherds on those hillsides and experience with them the privilege of being surrounded by God's glory.

It is an interesting study to discover within the Bible the numerous things with which God surrounds His people. Let me just relate a few:

1. We are surrounded by a group of witnesses in our race called the Christian life.

Hebrews 12:1 states, "Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangled, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us."

2. We are surrounded by the protection of God. David proclaims in Psalm 32:7, "You are my hiding place; you will protect me from trouble and surround me with songs of deliverance."

3. We are surrounded by the lovingkindness of God. In that same Psalm 32 and verse 10, David exclaims, "Many are the woes of the wicked, but the Lord's unfailing love surrounds the man who trusts in Him."

4. We are also surrounded by God's people to give us aid in time of need. Psalm 142:7 relates "Set me free from my prison, that I may praise your name. Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me."

Our text, in Luke 2, describes for us another surrounding. We read in verse 9, An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

We do not know what time it was that evening when this great event occurred. Nor do we know the precise number of shepherds who were involved in this dramatic happening. But we do know the following facts from the evidence of the text:

1. There was more than one shepherd involved. Verses 8 and 9 use the plural pronouns, "their" and "them", and verse 15 refers to them as "shepherds".

2. They were working in the vicinity of Bethlehem, for verse 8 states that they were in the "same region" as those events of the birth of Christ which had just been described in verses 1-7.

3. The shepherds were together in one location. Verse 15 relates that the shepherds conferred with one another after the announcement given to them by the angel had been given. As was the custom, the sheep had been gathered into one common arena where they were more easily observed and protected from the evils of the nighttime hours.

4. Finally, there was no prelude to this event. There was no hint as to what was to occur. It just happened suddenly, as described in verse 9.

But more important than the event itself was their response to being surrounded by the very glory of God. It is with that response that we shall begin our next study together.

SURROUNDED BY GOD'S GLORY: Luke 2:1-20

In our last study we stated our intentions to join with those shepherds there on those hillsides outside of Bethlehem on the night in which Jesus was born. We are there, joining them in relating the stories of the day's events with our flocks, when suddenly, out of nowhere, there is this bright light which surrounds us, an angel addresses us followed by a choir of angels who sing for us. In all of our years of keeping sheep, we had never observed this before.

How are we going to respond to these events? The Bible states that the shepherds were terrified. The Phillips translations says, "They were terror-stricken."

Now there are many things in life which cause us to respond with fear:

Threatening weather

Severe chest pains or cancer's warning signals

Snakes

Large dogs (I am affected here, but that is another story)

Being alone on a darkened street in a strange town

But I truly believe that each of these fears would pale when compared with that fear if we could see God in His glory. The brilliance of the light would blind us. The authority of the Voice would buckle our knees. Yes, I think it would be safe to assume that we would be afraid!

Friends, it would do each of us good this Christmas Season if we could stand before God with fear in our hearts. Such a fear would better prepare us for the proper worship of the One who is called Jesus.

But wait! Are not our lives still surrounded by God's glory? Listen to these verses:

1 Peter 4:14 - "If you are insulted because of the name of Christ, you are blessed, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you."

John 17:22 - "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one."

Psalm 84:11 - "For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord will give grace and glory; no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. "

Because the very presence of God indwells us, we are filled with His glory. As the shepherds were surrounded physically with God's glory, so you and I, as believers in Jesus Christ, are surrounded inwardly with God's glory. Therefore, it behooves us to approach God with fear and trembling.

SURROUNDED BY GOD'S GLORY: PART 2: Luke 2:1-20

You might remember that in our previous two studies, we had joined with those shepherds on the hillsides outside of Bethlehem. We have witnessed the presence of the glory of God manifested through the angelic hosts which have announced to us the birth of Jesus, the Savior of the world. In our last study we stated that our initial reaction would be one of fear.

But praise God, the shepherds did not stop with fear. They responded with obedience. We read in verses 15 and 16, When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

After the angels had left them, the shepherds faced a decision of crucial importance. They had heard a stirring announcement with earth-shaking consequences. They had been encouraged in that message to investigate the facts for themselves. What were they to do?

Their struggle is mankind's struggle. It was your struggle. It was my struggle. We had heard the message of salvation through Jesus Christ, but what were we going to do about it? Our parents many have told us. Our Sunday school teachers may have told us. The pastor at our church may have told us. Someone had shared with us the story of Jesus. And now we had to act on that message.

Friends, many have heard the message of "unto you is born a Savior" and have responded with rejection. They do not want to be liberated from their sins. They do not want to be set free from bondage. Others have heard and responded with delay. They want time to consider all other options before investigating this glorious announcement. Still, countless others have responded as the shepherds did, and as I have done, and as you have done. They have gone and they have found the Savior and they have experienced the marvelous joys of salvation.

But, not only did they go, they also told. We read, in verses 17 and 18, "When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them."

Here is where the shepherds put many of us to shame. They received by faith the message told them by the angels. They believed that the little baby which they had seen in the manger in Bethlehem was the Savior of the world. And they told everyone who would listen to them about it.

Friends, many of us have friends and family who are not going to be won to Christ unless we tell them. Paul proclaimed in Romans 10:17, so faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of Christ. Is life-style evangelism important? Yes! It is urgent that our daily lives reflect our beliefs which we hold dear. This is going to be more critically important as the years go by and our world seeks to discover a real Christian.

But the problem has been that we have used life-style evangelism as an option for not verbally sharing our faith with others. There is an old hymn which states, "We've a story to tell to the nations that shall turn their hearts to the right." Yes, it is a story to tell and not just a lifestyle to live that wins people to Jesus.

Many of us will be celebrating this Christmas Season with family and friends who have not yet accepted the Christ of Christmas. Why not pray that God would provide an open door so you might proclaim Him before them. Their coming to know Jesus would be the greatest Christmas gift you could ever experience.

A DEPARTED GLORY: Ezekiel 11:22-25

Friends, as we meet once again today over the Village Line, let me ask you a very unusual question: What is the worst possible thing that could happen to you? What is the worst possible scenario?

You might answer in any of a number of ways. Some of these possible answers might include: going bankrupt; having your home destroyed by fire; being told that you had a terminal illness and not long to live; being informed that your unmarried daughter was pregnant.

I would agree that those are potentially nightmarish situations. But as bad as they might appear, they do not present the worst thing that could happen. Let me share with you the following true story of a young lady.

This young woman's husband, a leader in the community, was known for his extortion and for his many affairs with other women. She had witnessed how her husband had scorned the reproving rebuke from his father and continued in his lustful immoral practices. Pregnant herself, and nearing the end of that pregnancy, she was informed that her husband had been killed in a battle with a neighboring enemy; also that her father-in-law had died in an accident that same day. After receiving this traumatic news, she soon gave birth to a son, and then was told that she would not recover from childbirth - she, too, would die. And yet her last words were not words of pity for herself, but words that, I believe, echo the greatest possible disaster in life: "The glory has departed."

The greatest danger is the departure of the presence of the power of God in our lives. The greatest danger is that God would leave us to our own devices.

Let me share some verses from a great text in Ezekiel 11, verses 22 through 25: "Then the cherubim, with the wheels beside them, spread their wings, and the glory of the God of Israel was above them. The glory of the Lord went up from within the city and stopped above the mountain east of it. The Spirit lifted me up and brought me to the exiles in Babylonia in the vision given by the Spirit of God. Then the vision I had seen went up from me, and I told the exiles everything the Lord had shown me." Here, in this text, is the picture of God walking away from Jerusalem. It is God removing His glory and presence from the Temple. It is a picture of a departed glory.

Why would God's glory depart from the city He had chosen to set His name upon?

As one studies the words of this great prophet, there are three basic reasons why this occurred. First, there was a moral failure within the land. Israel, at this time, had become morally bankrupt. Violence had almost become a byword. Murders abounded. Sexual immorality was rampant: men with men, women with women, men with women who were not their wives; women with men who were not their husbands. Welfare abuse was common. Men looked after their own needs rather than the needs of the widows and orphans.

Secondly, there was political failure. The leadership within the nation had failed to acknowledge the leadership of God. Thirdly, there was spiritual failure. Israel's religious leaders were more concerned about themselves and their own welfare than about the spiritual welfare of their people. They uttered false prophecies and gave people a false hope of their future that everything was going to get better and better.

A departed glory. What are the lessons we must learn from this text? That will be the focus in our last study in this series.

A DEPARTED GLORY: LESSONS TO BE LEARNED: Ezekiel 11:22-25

In our last study, we stated that the greatest danger we could ever experience would be the departure of the presence of the power of God in our lives; to know that the glory of God had departed.

And yet, this text in Ezekiel 11 describes just such an event. God removes His glory and His presence from Jerusalem because of the presence of unrepented sin in the lives of the people. I am reminded of a verse from Isaiah 59 which states, "But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear." (Isaiah 59:2) There is no such thing as a "passive sin." All sin destroys something - it might destroy someone else, but it will ultimately destroy us. In the life of the believer, the most damaging consequence of unrepented sin occurs in our relationship with God.

Unrepented sin results in the lack of power in our lives. Exhibit number one for this point is Samson. There is an old adage, "If you play with fire often enough, you will get burned." So it is with sin. Samson should have left Delilah's house after the very first temptation. But he didn't. He presumed on the power of God and was foolishly neglectful of the power of sin. The result was a broken, crushed man. We read in Judges 16:20, "Then she called, 'Samson, the Philistines are upon you!' He awoke from his sleep and thought, 'I'll go out as before and shake myself free.' But he did not know that the Lord had left him."

Friends, if you are experiencing more defeats than victories in your life right now, then perhaps you are camping too near and too often to the doorway of sin. It is time to do as Joseph did: leave your coat and flee.

Unrepented sin also results in a lack of joy in our salvation. David pled with God, as recorded in Psalm 51:12, "Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me." I don't believe that God intended for His people to be "sourpuss Christians." Instead, we are to make a "joyful noise unto the Lord."

Too often, we get owly and out of sorts. We crab and complain. We criticize and gripe. I think this is characteristic that there is something seriously wrong with our Christian life. We have come under the influence of sin. It is time to draw near to God, to implore His forgiveness, and to be restored into the joys of our salvation.

Unrepented sin results in the lack of our prayers being answered. It was David who wrote, "If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened" (Psalm 66:18). One of the greatest scenes in all of the Bible is recorded in 1 Kings 18. It is the great contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal upon Mount Carmel. I would encourage you to read the story. It is a gripping one. Now I know that the false prophets prayed to a wrong god, but I believe that even if they had prayed to Elijah's God, they still would not have had their prayers answered. The reason was because of the presence of sin in their lives.

Friends, if you feel that your prayers are getting no higher than the ceiling, then maybe you had better take a time out to check your "sin quotient" before God.

God's glory. He desires that our lives be enveloped with His glory. He desires that His glory be revealed in our lives so that others will see it and come to know Him as Savior and Lord. May your final Christmas of this century be one filled with His glory. And may His glory radiate through you every day of the coming year.