

# POWER

"... the gospel ... is the power of God unto salvation ..." (Romans 1:16)

## FACE TO FACE, FRIEND TO FRIEND (PART 2) *by Mike Vestal*

**N**o attribute or quality of God is accentuated more frequently in the Bible than the fact of His holiness. Scripture twice declares God to be, "Holy, holy, holy" (Isa. 6:3; Rev. 4:8). The Father is called holy (John 17:11). The Son is called holy (Luke 1:35; Acts 4:27-30). And the Holy Spirit is holy as well (cf. 1 Cor. 2:10-13). God is glorious in holiness (Exod. 15:11). "No one is holy like the Lord" (1 Sam. 2:2). "Holy and awesome is His name" (Psa. 111:9). God is holy and true (Rev. 3:7). A holy God calls His people to holy living (1 Pet. 1:15-16; 2 Cor. 7:1). It is inconceivable that it should be otherwise.

Holiness is the habit of being of one mind with God. What health is to the human heart, holiness is to the immortal soul. Holiness is not merely applied like make-up to the outside of our personalities but comes from an inner transformation (Rom. 12:1-2). What is meant by saying that God is holy? Simply stated, God's holiness has to do with His pure and absolute hatred of sin (Hab. 1:13; Isa. 59:1-2) along with His pure and absolute love of what is righteous and good. Holiness for God's people means that we seek to love purely and absolutely what is good and hate what is evil (Psa. 97:10; Amos 5:15).

In no place in the Old Testament is the holiness of God more obvious than in the giving of the Law to Moses on Mount Sinai (cf. Exod. 19:10-23). Everything linked with the occasion stressed the holiness and awesomeness of God. First, the children of Israel were to be "sanctified" and "washed" (Exod.

19:10-11; Exod. 19:14). Second, boundaries were to be set to keep the people from going beyond God's prescribed limits and touching the mountain. If the boundaries were trespassed, the guilty were to be put to death (Exod. 19:12-13). There is a triple emphasis in Exodus 19 on making sure these boundaries were respected (Exod. 19:12-13; Exod. 19:21-22; Exod. 19:25). Oh, the danger of rushing thoughtlessly and presumptuously into the presence of God! Third, there was witnessed an impressive display of cosmic disruptions: thunder and lightning (Exod. 19:16), an exceedingly loud trumpet blast (Exod. 19:16; Exod. 19:19) and the smoke that covered the entire mountain while it violently trembled as God descended upon it in fire (Exod. 19:18). "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" (Exod. 24:17). The people of Israel were to understand that they were in the presence of the glorious majesty of the Holy God, and that He was revealing something of His Person and character in the giving of the Law. According to Hebrews 12:21, "And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, 'I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.'" Even the greatest and godliest of men tremble with profound humility in recognition of the awesome nature of the Lord's holiness!

Moses already had learned much about God and His holiness over the years. However, being on the mountain for forty days and receiving

the Law from the Lord had to have been an amazing crash course on holiness (Exod. 24:18). It is fitting to ask, "How did this experience of God's holiness bless the life of Moses?" For one thing, he learned that the very people who experience something of God's holiness may still behave in ways that are terribly sinful (cf. Exod. 32:1-6). While Moses was receiving the Law, the children of Israel were guilty of "a great sin" by making and worshiping the golden calf (Exod. 32:21; Exod. 32:30-31). For another thing, from his time on the mountain with God, it was re-emphasized to Moses just how much God in His holiness hates sin (Exod. 32:7-10). The wrath of God is revealed against all unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18).

Moses also learned even more about the need for intercession while up on that mountain with God (Exod. 32:11-18; Exod. 32: 30-35). His time with God helped better prepare him to deal with the problems that would arise while dealing with people. The intensity and selflessness of his intercession grew out of his closeness to God. He not only refused to profit personally at the expense of God's destruction of the children of Israel, but he was willing to be blotted out of God's book for them to be spared (Exod. 32:32). Those closest to God truly see the necessity of interceding for others. Again, his time with God helped Moses to rebuke sin plainly and powerfully and to do so with the proper spirit (Exod. 32:19-24). Finally, Moses was reminded that

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nothing is more important than being on the Lord's side (Exod. 32:26-29; cf. Josh. 24:15; 1 Kings 18:21). God is worthy of our trust and obedience, even when those we love and are closest to on earth go astray. In the case of this "great sin" Moses' own brother, Aaron, was especially involved. The heart of Moses was broken over Israel's sin, but even more, his heart was broken because God's heart was broken over that sin. Throughout his mountaintop experience with the Lord, and for the rest of his life afterward, Moses sang of God's holiness in the key of E flat major (the "E" standing in this case for **Exalted**). The title of the hymn had to be "**Holy, Holy, Holy!**"

## **The Greatness Of His Graciousness and Goodness**

Moses had a face to face, friend to friend relationship with God because he sincerely longed to find grace in God's sight. It is highly significant that the desire of Moses to find "favor" or "grace" before God occurs five times in Exodus 33:12-17, a passage dealing with the aftermath of Israel's sin in the golden calf incident. For example, "Show me now Your way, that I may know You, and that I may find grace in Your sight" (Exod. 33:13). The repetition is there for a reason: it reveals much about the character of Moses and what mattered most to him. The same immediate context speaks of the presence of God (Exod. 33:14), the goodness of God (Exod. 33:19) and the glory of God (Exod. 33:18; Exod. 33:22). God's attributes do not exist in isolation from each another. God responds to the desire of Moses for grace with three comforting words of assurance: (1) "I will give you rest" (Exod. 33:14); (2) "I will be present with you" (Exod. 33:15-17); and (3) "I know you by name" (Exod. 33:17).

What a way to describe grace!

"Please, show me Your glory" are the words of Moses in Exodus 33:18. Moses wants to "see" more fully something of God's glory. God again offers words of assurance. He says, (1) "I will make all My goodness pass before you" (Exod. 33:19); (2) "I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you" (Exod. 33:19); (3) "I will be gracious" (Exod. 33:19); (4) "I will have compassion" (Exod. 33:19); and, (5) "I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you by My hand, while I pass by" (Exod. 33:22). God graciously assures Moses that He will grant his request as much as possible, with the stipulation that no one could see His face and live (Exod. 33:20; Exod. 33:23). Moses would be allowed to see something of God's "back" (Exod. 30:23). How fitting that Moses would experience the Lord Who was his Rock (Deut. 32:4) while standing on the rock! (Exod. 33:21-22).

"And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin' (Exod. 34:6-7). Moses got to "see" and hear that God is a God of overwhelming graciousness, abundant goodness, and steadfast, incomprehensible love. When Moses came down from the mountain with the two tablets, he "did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him" (Exod. 34:29). "Seeing" and hearing of God's great grace and goodness had caused Moses' face to glow! He had seen a glimpse of God's glory. He did not realize at first that he had "absorbed" some of that glory and that he was reflecting it to others (Exod. 34:30-35). Moses did not see or sense

the glory of his own face because he was so focused on the glorious grace and goodness of God!

What of us today? We should surely see that Christianity stands or falls on the themes of God's grace and goodness. New Testament Christianity is distinct from all of the religions of the world in that the gospel is a message of God's grace and goodness (Acts 20:24; Rom. 2:4). The Gospel reveals that God is gracious in His very character or nature (cf. 1 Pet. 2:3; 1 Pet. 5:10). The Gospel reveals that Jesus Christ is the supreme revelation of God's grace and goodness (John 1:17; 2 Cor. 8:9; Heb. 2:9). How we need to tell people of what God did in Christ **before** we tell them how to respond to the gospel! The Gospel declares that we are saved by grace (Acts 15:11). We can and must joyfully declare salvation to be by God's grace and goodness without falling into the trap of teaching salvation by "grace alone" (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 2:8-10). The Gospel reveals that the grace and goodness of God should empower Christian living (Tit. 2:11-14; 2 Thess. 2:16). What draws sinners to God in the first place should be powerful motivation to keep people growing in the faith (Col. 1:27; 2 Cor. 3:18).

Moses got a glimpse of God's graciousness and goodness. We have been blessed not merely with a glimpse but with a perfect picture. We have been blessed with Jesus, "God manifested in the flesh" (1 Tim. 3:16). One suspects a day never went by when Moses did not think of "seeing" something of God's great grace and goodness while up on that mountain. The more he contemplated the thought, the more he longed for

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communion with the true God who is the embodiment of all that is good and gracious. But also, the more he thought about the experience, the more he simply had to lift his voice up to God in praise. One cannot know the exact words of the tune Moses sang, but it likely sounded a great deal like "**O Thou Fount of Every Blessing.**"

## **The Greatness Of His Gloriousnes**

One great experience of God that Moses had took place literally hundreds of years after he had died. This particular experience occurred at the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt. 16:28-17:9; Mark 9:1-9; Luke 9:27-36) and had to do with the glory of God. "I am the Lord, that is My Name; and My glory I will not give to another" (Isa. 42:8). In Isaiah 48:11, God states, "I will not give My glory to another." We were created for God's glory (Isa. 43:7). God's glory can be defined or described in a couple of different ways. First, God's glory has to do with His honor and excellence. Second, God's glory has to do with the brightness or brilliance that surrounds His revelation of Himself. In this second sense, God's glory can refer to the sum total of all His attributes.

In one sense, glory is intrinsic to God. In another sense, it can be ascribed. While God's intrinsic glory is who He is and the making known of His attributes to us, ascribed glory is the glory (declaring His honor and excellence) that we give God based upon His identity and perfection. Scripture speaks of God as the King of glory (Psa. 24:7-10). He is called the Lord of glory (1 Cor. 2:8). He is referred to as Excellent or Majestic Glory in 2 Peter 1:17. The apostle Peter spoke of the Transfiguration when he penned, "For we did not

follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty" (2 Pet. 1:16). At the Transfiguration, more light would be shed on a truth about which the Apostle John would later write: "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" (John 1:14; John 17:5; Phil. 2:5-11).

The Transfiguration shows that the glory of Jesus surpasses all human expression because He is fully God. Briefly let us notice several particulars regarding the glory of Jesus that may be seen from this incident, along with the effect it would have had on Moses. There was a **glorious attestation**. According to Matthew 17:2, Jesus was "transfigured." Divine glory radiated from His face and even illumined His garments. The face of Jesus "shone like the sun, and His clothes became

as white as light." According to Mark's account, "His clothes became shining, exceedingly white, like snow, such as no launderer on earth can whiten them" (Mark 9:3). Those present on the occasion were privileged to see something of Christ's pre-incarnate glory and the glory that would again be His after the crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension. Second Peter 1:17 says regarding this occasion: "For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: 'This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.'"

There also is a **glorious clarification and confirmation**. Jesus is not Moses or Elijah, for both of these prophets appear and talk with Him (Matt. 17:3). Moses was the type for the Prophet who would come (Deut. 18:18; Deut. 18:20) and Elijah for the forerunner, John the Baptizer (Mal. 4:5-6; Matt. 11:7-11; Matt. 17:10-13). Both prophets had

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Deuteronomy 5:32

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experienced a vision of God's glory, one at Mount Sinai (Exod. 33:18) and the other at Mount Horeb (1 Kings 19:8ff). Together they summarize well the Law and the Prophets. The emphasis in the entire account is that Jesus is superior to both Moses and Elijah and that He supersedes them (Matt. 17:5; Matt. 17:8).

In the Transfiguration we see a **glorious demonstration**. Luke 9:31 says that Moses and Elijah "spoke of His decease which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem." They were speaking to Jesus concerning His "exodus." They were discussing the divine plan for man's salvation, a plan which involved the death and resurrection of Jesus. Going to the Cross for our sins was not merely an afterthought or part of some alternative plan. It was a crucial aspect of "the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11).

In the words of the Father at the Transfiguration we see a **glorious identification**. Out of a bright cloud, strikingly similar to the pillar of cloud in Exodus 13:21, a voice said, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 17:5). In its context, this verse places Jesus above Moses and Elijah. The Father apparently blends two Old Testament prophecies, Psalm 2:7 and Isaiah 42:1, to speak of Jesus as both His Son and as His Servant in whom He delights. The Son of God is "the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person" (Heb. 1:3).

In this narrative we also see a **glorious application**. This is seen in the Father's emphatic words, "Hear Him!" (Matt. 17:5). We hear and listen to so many things in life, but one wonders if we really hear Jesus enough! The message of Jesus needs to fill our hearts, minds, and lives (Col. 3:16; Psalms 19:11). How we need to hear and to build our lives wisely upon the Savior's words (Matt. 7:24-27; James 1:21-22).

What a blessing it must have been for Moses to have this experience of God's greatness! He was able to see the glory of Jesus and to discuss with Him something of the eternal plan that would lead to the salvation of men. Moses saw in Jesus both the Cross and the Crown! Moses unquestionably left the scene with a song in his heart. How could it be otherwise? While we do not know the actual lyrics, the hymn of praise must have sounded much like "**When I Survey the Wondrous Cross.**"

You and I are at this very moment as close to God as we have chosen to be. Do we, like Moses, have an insatiable desire to know, love, and serve God? Is this our greatest longing? Is this our most compelling pursuit? Do we yearn to know God in a "face to face, friend to friend" way? The greatest and sweetest of all relationships is at stake. And so is a heavenly home with our glorious God.

### Works Cited

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