

Sunday January 23, 2022  
 Lesson 8: Beholding God's Glory  
 Scripture: Exodus 34: 29-35

**Context:**

The winter Adult Bible Studies Curriculum continues its focus on engaging the world with the unit entitled "Wonder." This set of lessons in the season of Epiphany will focus on how we are called to a sense of wonder in our faith. As we look to the glory of God, we are transformed and can engage in the world in new ways as disciples of Jesus. Today we learn to strengthen our resolve to make listening to God a priority.

In some ways our lesson goes backwards as last week we focused on the Transfiguration and the moment where Jesus met with Moses and Elijah, all glowing and being transformed. We discussed how there were echoes of theophanie from earlier text such as Moses at Mt. Sinai as he conversed with God.

Today's lesson focuses on one of those occurrences in Exodus, a book found in the Old Testament. Like most of the theophanies in scripture, the event takes place on a mountain. Yet in this case, something happens to Moses. When he comes down the mountain carrying the two covenant tablets, the skin of Moses shines brightly because he has been talking with God. This description has actually been translated as "horned," leading to many renderings of Moses possessing horns as found in works of art by Michelangelo and Chagall.<sup>1</sup> Either way, either the shining or the horns, terrified the people and they would not come near him.

Even still, Moses invited the people to gather and listen to him as he relayed what the Lord God had told Moses. After he finished speaking to them, he put a veil over his face until he goes to the Lord again. This became a pattern for him over and over.

There are many different scholarly opinions about the shining, yet there are two different themes connected with its importance. The first is it gives a prominence to the mediator of the word of God in the community of faith.<sup>2</sup> The second is how the shining conveys something of the nature and significance of the word of God being communicated.<sup>3</sup> There are implications for the people who hear the word, and they must obey the word given unto them.

While the lesson may focus on our call to listen to God, the shining shows us the importance of God's presence in their lives. Moses' shining face anticipate the divine glory in the tabernacle and the radiance it will bring.<sup>4</sup> God's word will constantly shine into their lives and illuminate their paths.

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<sup>1</sup>Fretheim, Terence E. "Exodus." *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 2010), 310.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

### **Application**

What was not included in this lesson was how this was a repeat event for the Israelites. If you follow the story of Moses with the Israelites, you note how the first time Moses goes down the mountain with the word of the Lord, he finds the people of God worshipping a golden calf and forgetting the covenant. In a fit of sorrow and anger, Moses throws down the tablets and breaks them. What follows is an account where the people learn a valuable lesson about playing and partying while Moses is away.

In this story, the people of God are given another chance to learn. This new set of tablets is meant to come alive in their hearts and they are called to listen to the word of the Lord coming through Moses. Whatever they may feel towards him and his leadership, this is the mouthpiece through God will speak and now is the time to get it together and listen lest they want to continue wandering in the desert and miss the signs to the Promised Land.

There is no doubt Moses has his moments where he was not his best and yet he was called by God to lead the people of God. Of all the call stories and individuals most seminaries encourage students to study and examine, Moses is the one who is probably the most discussed and dissected. He is also a favorite for those who want to study leadership and the dynamics of family systems theory. Most of this interest probably centers around how Moses persisted in leadership even when the cards were stacked against him.

In this case, we learn how those listening to Moses were convicted by the light shining around him. The light may not have told them what they wanted to hear or made them feel good; yet the light shining told them this was God speaking to them and they were called to listen. The partying, rebelling, and complaining were not going to get them anywhere anymore. God had a word for them and now was the time for them to listen and to change.

As we read this text we are hopefully convicted by the fact of how scripture and sermons may not always tell us what we want to hear. I once learned a phrase from a church member about how sometimes “our toes need to get stepped on,” when it comes to the Word being proclaimed in corporate worship. It is not a compliment to the preacher or their homiletical ability. It is about the people of God hearing how the Word of the Lord does not care about our opinions, our popularity, or our divided loyalty between God and the world. Having our toes stepped on helps us to see how we are missing the mark and how God is calling us to resolve to listen more closely and more deeply.

If we are all honest, we can hopefully admit to how “we’ve had our toes being stepped on.” While it may hurt initially, it can also help us to grow. There are times when I will have an ugly thought about someone only to open up the Word and seeing the numerous times God calls for me to love this person, even pray for them. The Holy Spirit doesn’t mind asking us to check ourselves.

The same goes for those who sermons. While not every sermon will be perfect and at times preachers may not deliver “a home run,” I’ve found there is always some way the Holy Spirit is speaking through a person to reach out to me. We look to the Word and not the person for where God wants to speak into our lives. Any time you begin to criticize or attack a preacher, remember to ask yourself where the energy is really coming from. Is it because they are you inviting to think, and you don’t want to do so? Or is it because they’ve hit a nerve and you know there’s some transforming or surrendering you

need to do? And if you persist in going after them, I sure hope you're praying for them and loving them and remembering how they are a human just like you.

All of us are called to listen to God. And all of us are called to grow in God's grace and mercy. God invites all of us to come and be transformed in God's light.

How has having your "toes stepped on" helped you to grow as a disciple? When are the times the proclaimed Word has helped you to see God's call on your life a little more clearly? If you're laity, how do you pray and support your preacher as they prepare for preaching and leading in worship? If you're clergy, how do you spend time in God's Word and pray for the people to whom you preach and lead? What ways do you listen to God daily for direction and guidance?

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