

Mount Sinai was one of the most pivotal points for the Old Testament Israelites. It had already been a roller-coaster ride of emotion and drama by the time we catch up with the account here. The Lord had rumbled at them from the mountain, told no one to go near it or touch it or they would die. The people pleaded not to have to face God directly because they knew they could not stand in his presence. Moses went up to the Lord on behalf of the people. The Lord gave his law there. For roughly six weeks Moses was not heard from. The cloud of the Lord's presence lingered over the mountain, but for six weeks, no word came down, Moses did not return.

I'm sure most of us remember what happened during that time. Aaron gave in to the people's wishes and fashioned a golden calf from the people's jewelry. So quickly they gave up their God. And Moses did return, and in his fury he smashed the tablets of the law he had made. There was punishment, but there was also mercy and forgiveness. The Lord did not abandon his people and a new set of tablets was carved. During this trip, Moses asked for the blessing of seeing the Lord's glory. And the Lord passed in front of Moses proclaiming his name of grace, love, mercy and justice.

Moses returns from the mountaintop to bring the laws to God's people. This time is different. The people had not abandoned God during his absence. And Moses, unaware, had a face that shone with the glory of the Lord he had seen. The shining was not his own, it was a reflection of what he had seen, of where he had been. He had been in the presence of God Almighty and that showed to the Israelites when he returned. Certainly we'd imagine it wasn't as intense as seeing the glory of the Lord himself firsthand, but it still was a divine glory that these people were not used to seeing. And we see here how they reacted. They were afraid to even come near him.

Isn't that always the case? Don't we hear about this time and again, that when the glory of God is shown, when holiness is visible in any way to ordinary human beings, we react by nature with fear. From God walking in the garden after the fall to the angel visitors who announced the birth of the shepherds, being confronted with God himself tends to result in fear. Why? Because that is actually how we should feel by nature all the time. God has stamped our hearts with his law, he has placed in all of us a somewhat reliable standard of what is right and what is wrong. And when we've done wrong, it lets us know. It speaks up and assaults us with the guilt of our actions and the fear of the consequences. We don't actually know the consequences by nature, but we know they can't be good.

And try as we might, we can't be good enough for our conscience. It's always there accusing us of something new we did wrong or failed to do right. It's always there telling us we don't measure up. So we can't silence it by our actions, what's the alternative? To try to drown it out. We ignore it, we distract it, we turn away from listening to it just so we can have a moment's peace when we're not afraid. Human beings get pretty good at this most of the time. We drive it out of our mind with a thousand inane distractions or we just dull it to the point when it just doesn't sting anymore.

Except, that solution is only ignoring the problem. It's sticking our head in the sand so we can't see the lion about to devour us. Ignoring the conscience doesn't change that we are sinners by nature. It doesn't change the punishment that comes on us for our sin. It doesn't fix anything. The conscience isn't there to be ignored, it's there to provoke us into despairing in ourselves that we go to find a solution elsewhere, outside ourselves. The conscience bears witness to our need for God to save us. If we ignore the conscience, we never go looking for God.

And so occasionally, in mercy, God will take steps to provoke the conscience. God will take steps to reignite that fear in us so that he can come at take that fear away. We can only imagine how these Israelites felt seeing the reflected glory of the Lord in Moses' face. It wasn't that long ago that they had given up on God and made a little golden calf to be their God. The shame of what had happened, of what they had done, would hit them anew as they saw God's glory reflected in Moses' face. Sure it wouldn't be quite as powerful as staring down God himself or even one of his angels. But it would still be potent, it would still be uncomfortable and a reminder to themselves that they were not good enough.

But this fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. Seeing and understanding God and by extension our natural relationship to God is necessary to our salvation. The more fully we see our God's true glory and holiness, the more fully we understand the depth of our own sin against him. God, who only ever gives of himself to us. Who only has ever given

to us what is best for us. God who has always shown you perfect love, always modeled to you perfect love. This God is the one we have torn down in our selfishness. This God is the one we've shouted at in anger because he didn't do what we want. This God is the one we've apathetically ignored because it suited our interest and selfish pursuits that particular day. This God is the one we've defiantly told he is doing it wrong and we know better than him when he speaks.

This God not just shows our sins by contrast to his glory, he also terrifies us by his power. God almighty who called the universe into being with mere words. God who brought you to life, gave you a soul and made you who you are. God who directs the events of this world every day. God who has the power to slaughter armies and raze entire towns. Who can open the earth to swallow whole those who defy him or choose to bring the dead to life. This God, with infinite power, with no authority over him, this God is the one you've defied and angered. This is the reminder that seeing his glory in full brings us. The sharper we see that glory, the sharper we see our own failure and hopelessness.

But is that all? Yes, Aaron and the other leaders were afraid but is that all we can get from God's shining glory? Is that the reaction the disciples had on the mount of Transfiguration? No. Though certainly they didn't quite know what to make of it, the event was given to them by Jesus to be a comfort. He showed them who he really was so that in the days ahead, come what may, they could understand that everything that would happen could only happen because he was simply allowing it to happen. His arrest, his beatings, his execution, surely the God who revealed himself on the mountain could stop them anytime he willed it with the barest thought. If it was still happening, then it had to be because this is what Jesus *wanted*. Perhaps not personally for himself, but he went willingly to this dark end because of the outcome it would win. His perfect life, his innocent death would ensure that no one needed to stand terrified before God again. His holiness would cover those who trusted him. Forgiveness was given freely and eternal life was renewed to the human race.

So, what's the point of all this for us? The shining glory of the Lord can function as both Law or Gospel. It can burn us with its light by revealing our faults or it can heal us with his love, showing that this almighty God is the one who went willing to his death to save us. We don't see the Lord face to face these days, so what does any of that matter? Obviously it does or I wouldn't be spending so much time talking about it. Perhaps the Lord doesn't appear in his glory so much anymore as he did to Moses or the disciples. But he still shows himself to us through the Holy Word. And we still reflect his glory into the world just as Moses did. The longer we are exposed to him in the Scriptures regularly, the brighter that glory will shine by the Holy Spirit's power. And the effects on the people around us will be just the same.

You may not literally shine with light to the people in your lives. But you shine the Lord's glory around you whenever you choose his will over your own. When we respond with love to those who try to hurt us. When we truly do turn the other cheek to those who assault. When we try to help those who hate us. When we have compassion on those who annoy us. By our godly words and actions we shine the glory of the Lord at them and prick the conscience. We stir up in them the reminder that they don't measure up and need to seek help elsewhere. By shining the love of God at them, we remind them that they haven't done this and need help. They need a savior.

And once, but the power of that same Holy Spirit they come to know that Savior, that same shining glory reminds us of the love of God who died to save us. Our actions of love toward each other, especially when we don't deserve it or haven't earned it, those actions shine the reflected glory of the Lord and lift us up together as one in Christ.

Brothers and Sisters, a life lived for Christ is every area isn't just a nice thing to do for God as a thank you to his love. It's not just something you do to make your life better, knowing his ways are best. A life lived for Christ is the most basic way that we can shine with the reflected glory of our Lord and through those words and actions speak the law and the gospel to the world around us. Connect yourself to the Holy Spirit through his Word and through that see the glory of your Lord revealed. The Lord you are not good enough for but the Lord who has made you good by his mercy. Look at his revealed glory through his word, and reflect that glory into your lives. Amen.