

Canadian Pulpit.

No. 4.

Beholding the Glory of God.

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TEXT:—Exodus xxxiii., 18.—“I beseech thee show me thy glory.” That was a bold prayer. Is it too much to call it the boldest prayer ever uttered? It is the finite asking for the infinite, the dewdrop crying for the fullness of the ocean, the heart of the creature crying for the knowledge of the Creator. We have in this experience of Moses an illustration of the truth more than once uttered by Christ “to him that hath shall be given.” Moses was the only one of all the host of Israel that dreamt of asking for such a revelation; the elders saw God on the mount and “did eat and drink.” Moses had gone into higher places with God, had seen Him as they could not see Him, had enjoyed communion that they could not understand, and his soul, thus enlarged, longed for better things still. It is ever so; we receive what we are fitted to receive, we dip from the ocean all that our vessel can hold, no more.

Moses enjoyed in answer to his prayer a fullness of blessing that he had never before experienced, he entered on a higher plane of spiritual life, and this blessing was not temporary, it was permanent. His life for the future was richer, nobler, fuller in the enjoyment of God than it had before been. We hear much in these days of a “Higher Life,” called by many names, but supposed to be a state entered by some experience apart from the ordinary current of Christian life and enjoyed only by those who have passed through this experience. I can find in Scripture only one life set before every child of God as that which he is to live—a life of whole hearted and self-forgetful devotion to our Lord; with nothing less than this is any Christian to rest satisfied. What life can be higher than this I know not. . . . That there are better things for us to enjoy than we have yet attained to is surely true, and that we may be encouraged to strive after these let us consider—

I.—THE CHARACTER OF MOSES' EXPERIENCE.

“I beseech Thee shew me Thy glory.”—This was his prayer, and in reply God said “I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee, and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious and will shew mercy to whom I will shew mercy.” Three things are here promised—a sight of God's goodness, a proclamation of God's name, and a declaration of God's sovereignty.

A Sight of God's Goodness. Who can doubt that, hidden in the cleft of the rock, Moses saw and understood as he never had before God's purposes and works of love in nature and in grace. He had always recognized God's hand in nature, but now he sees written, where he had never before suspected it, that love of God that woos man in nature and seeks to sing its way to his dull heart in the breezes of the morning, and as well in the tempest as in the zephyrs. The gates of creation were opened to him and he saw what we, slow souls, so often fail to see, God's love glistening in every dew-drop, painted on every primrose, flashing on every quivering leaf and written even in arrows of light across the black storm-cloud; through these all he saw God's love working his purposes for the world.

And so in the realms of grace; Moses saw, as he never had seen. God's purposes of love toward His people; the ceremonial so lately revealed, unfolded itself, and he saw every particular item pointing forward to God's great work of love for mankind. God's goodness shone forth everywhere and he learned what John learned so many ages after; learned it, as though in every work of God, and every commandment, and every providence he saw infinite love working for the salvation of a world. Thus he learned that God is Love.

The Proclamation of God's Goodness, i.e. the revelation of His character. “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious,” etc.—here was a fuller revelation of God's character than had yet been made; Moses saw, as it were, further into the heart of God than he had yet seen; he had known God as the mighty “I am,” he had felt the glory of having the self-existent One as his God, but now he knows God as never before; the heart of his Father is unfolded, henceforth the tenderness, the compassion, the long-suffering of God will be present in His child's conception of Him, and of the patience of God with the sinner rather than of the power of God to smite, he will love to tell.

The Declaration of God's Sovereignty.—Sovereignty, not separated from love, but joined with it. God would not be God without this; He is the Sovereign, not the subject, of man. Separate God's infinite love from His sovereignty and you have left a blind, relentless fate; separate God's sovereignty from his love and you have a powerless and purposeless compassion. Join these as God joins them in His revelation of Himself and you have God revealed in Christ Jesus, all-loving, all-powerful.

Thus the experience of Moses was no strange ecstatic condition of mind, it was a fuller knowledge of God, progress in knowing

Him, whom to know is eternal life. Blessedness for us is in the same experience; we grow in holiness as we grow in knowledge of Him who is holy.

II.—HOW WAS THIS EXPERIENCE ATTAINED?

Moses had been for forty days in the mount with God. He had been alone with his maker; here was communion. From God's presence He had come down to find the people in riotous worship around the golden calf, and after expostulation with the people he had gone back to God to plead with Him for their pardon. That pleading was more than mere prayer. You remember God's word to him, “Let me alone and I will destroy this people and will make of thee a great nation;” there was the offer of greatness for himself, but greatness at the price of deserting the people. It was the temptation that comes to every man at some time, to the politician telling him to desert his principles and accept office, to the minister telling him to forget his congregation and accept self-preference. Oh! for men like Moses who would trample on self-interest and save the world by their sacrifice. *Self-sacrifice* was the second step of preparation for this wonderful revelation. If you would know God as Moses knew him you must be willing to go aside with Him, willing to leave the pressing calls of business and the anxieties of the world in order to commune with Him through his Word and in prayer. Is it strange that we know God but slightly when we spend so little time with Him? Meditation and prayer are old-fashioned words, but they indicate duties that cannot be neglected if we would enter into the secret place of God's presence. There is not a little need in these days of conventions and pressing public calls for Christian activity to remember that a quiet time alone with God is essential to growth in grace and to a knowledge of Himself and His will.

And self-sacrifice is for us as it was for Moses, the pathway to the beholding of God's glory. When self fills the heart there is little room for God, when our eyes are set on selfish ends they cannot see his beckoning hand, when our ears are listening for sounds that will delight our selfish souls they are deaf to His voice and cannot appreciate the music of His messages. Had Moses in that crisis thought of himself he would never have seen God's glory as he saw it. He learned as Esther learned, as Paul learned, as every soul that has learned to serve self at the cost of duty has learned, that “whoso will lose his life for Christ's sake the same shall save it” for into the heart that is emptied of self Christ will come and the glory of God will fill it.

III.—THE RESULTS OF THIS EXPERIENCE.

“No man liveth to himself.” Moses' personal blessing became a blessing to the people also. Every step you take forward in the Christian life will prove a help to others. Moses gained increased influence with the people. The children of Israel “saw that Moses' face shone and they feared to come nigh him,” I doubt he lived a life in a sense apart from the people, but his voice to them was as the voice of God. The beauty of holiness, the power of holiness shone in his life. Would you have power, spiritual power with the people, power with your class, power with your friends, would you shine as a light for God in the darkness of this world? Then, my friend, get near to God, live in His presence. It is His power through you that must touch the hearts of men, and you ought never to forget that if you would do good, be good.

Humility.—Moses wist not that his face shone. Publish the words far and wide in these days of a holiness that is too often boastful and self-conscious. Others saw the effect of God's revelation upon Moses, he himself was not conscious of it. True holiness is ever humble, that which is boastful and which draws attention to itself, like the beauty that is self-conscious, is self-marred and self-murdered. You are far closer to the throne of God, eye and to the heart of God, when you sincerely call yourself the chief of sinners than when you look on yourself as the chief of saints. St. Paul, chief of the apostles, accounted himself of sinners the chief. As you grow like Christ you will grow in humility; pride in saint or sinner is of Satan, humility is of God.

Increasing love. What is Moses' first act after beholding God's glory? “He fell down and worshipped” and in his worship he again cried to God for the people. He takes a position now which he had never assumed before. He had cried to God at a former time, “If Thou canst forgive and if not blot me, I pray Thee, out of Thy book”—there was love. But now he rises higher. “O Lord,” he cried, “let my Lord go among us, and pardon our iniquity and our sin.” He identifies himself with the people, he regards their sin as his own, he assumes their guilt, as it were, though in that guilt he had no part. Holiness never makes a man censorious and narrow, it never leads a man to leave the people and in a self-satisfied sanctity to go aside into pharisaical separation from them. On the contrary it fills the heart with a deeper love for the sinner, it sends us down into the gutters to the abandoned, not to lecture the sinful on their debasement, but to take them by the hand and to say “Come, we have sinned, but God can pardon.” Increased holiness means increased love for mankind; as you grow in holiness you will grow in likeness to Him who loved the lost and who in dying prayed “Father, forgive them.”



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