

Are You Seeking God's Presence or His Glory?

A group of people had just finished a worship service. As they exited the sanctuary where they had gathered, I overheard their comments. I heard one person say, "G-D surely was here today." Another said, "I totally felt the Spirit moving." One more said, "There was a special move of G-D this morning."

I had been in the service, and I was in full agreement with each comment. The worship service was exciting and moving, and the sermon was equally powerful. It seemed that everyone who attended the service felt the same way: G-D had shown up and His people had worshipped him. The experience and the conversation made me think about a series of verses from Exodus 33:

"After Moses entered, the pillar of cloud descended, stood at the door, and He would speak with Moses. When all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the Tent, they all rose up and worshipped, every man at the entrance of his own tent" (Ex. 33:9-10, TLV).

In these verses, Moses and all the people of Israel had gathered at the Tent of Meeting and the visible presence of G-D descended as a pillar of cloud in the sight of all the people. Everyone rose up and worshipped together. What a powerful moment that must have been. Just imagine the sight of that cloud lowering in front of the Tabernacle. It would be nearly impossible for someone not to enter into deep, meaningful worship.

For most of us, when we gather together to worship, this is the type of experience we are seeking. An experience in which we see or feel the presence of G-D in our midst. A powerful experience where we know that G-D was there with us. When we

have this kind of worship service, we all leave feeling as if we have had successful worship and communion with the Spirit of G-D. Some would say about a service like this that “We saw the glory of G-D.”

Yet when we read just a few verses down, Moses is having a conversation with G-D in which he is pleading with G-D in Exodus 33:15:

“But then he said to Him, ‘If Your presence does not go with me, don’t let us go up from here!’”

Then in Exodus 33:18, we read the following words: “Then he said, ‘Please, show me Your glory!’”

Notice that Moses clearly understood there was a difference between the presence of G-D and the glory of G-D. Please remember that this conversation between Moses and G-D is taking place directly after Moses and the people of Israel saw the Spirit of G-D appear as a visible cloud in front of them. Moses had just seen the visible presence of G-D and was pleading with G-D not to remove His presence from Israel. At that moment Moses says, “Please show me Your glory.”

While we today tend to use the presence of G-D and the glory of G-D as synonyms, Moses understood that you could be in the very presence of G-D and not be seeing His glory.

We see the response to Moses’ request to see G-D’s glory in Exodus 33:19:

“So He said, ‘I will cause all My goodness to pass before you, and call out the Name of Adonai before you. I will be gracious toward whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy on whom I will be merciful.’”

Notice that G-D connects His goodness with His graciousness and His mercy. But that doesn’t tell the whole story. Because when we read verse 19 we see that G-D’s goodness is within His

judgment of who He will be gracious and merciful to. You may be asking, "So what does G-D's goodness, graciousness and mercy have to do with His glory?"

The answer is in Exodus 33:22: "While My glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and cover you with My hand, until I have passed by."

G-D tells Moses that His glory exists not in His presence but in His grace and mercy—grace and mercy based completely upon His judgment or His choice. He will have grace, and He will have mercy toward whom He will.

You see, many of our congregations are totally satisfied when our services are over, and we feel as if we experienced the presence of G-D. In other words, we are happy when the cloud falls in front of us. But we need to become more like Moses who, while blessed by the presence of G-D, asked G-D to please not remove His presence.

Moses was not satisfied with just G-D's presence. He wanted to see G-D's glory, a glory that is represented by an outpouring of grace and mercy. In other words, too many of us are focused totally on our experiencing G-D's presence when we need to be more focused on an outpouring of G-D's glory, which is focused not on ourselves but on those who are experiencing G-D's grace and mercy.

In other words, our worship services are successful not when we know G-D showed up for those of us who are born again, but when G-D shows His grace and mercy so others are born again.
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