

Exodus Sermon Series

Glory from God

Exodus 40

Christians often speak of giving glory *to* God. At the climax of Exodus, glory comes down *from* God and fills the tabernacle, driving Moses out. The Lord promised to dwell in the midst of Israel to lead and guide them, anticipating still greater glory to come.

Overview of the Text

The Lord tells Moses to setup the tabernacle on the first day of the first month (vv1-2). This would make it a year since the Exodus (cf. Ex. 13:1, 4). Moses will place the ark in the holy of holies, then the table, lampstand, and altar of incense in the holy place (vv3-5). The altar of ascension goes outside the door of the tabernacle, and the laver of cleansing between the door and the altar (vv6-7). He will set up the curtain of the courtyard all the way around, the screen gate on the east side, and then anoint everything with oil (vv8-11). Then Aaron and his sons will be washed, vested in the holy garments, and anointed as priests (vv9-15). Moses obeys all God commanded and the work is completed (vv16-33). Then the shekinah glory cloud covers the tabernacle, His glory fills it, and Moses cannot enter (vv34-35). This cloud will lift when Israel is to journey to a new destination, and will remain if not (vv36-37). It's a visible presence by day and a burning fire by night, accompanying Israel wherever they go.

The Fullness of Time

This is a happy new year for Israel. They will celebrate the Passover in the first month, remembering their deliverance from death in Egypt. Grace is again added grace. Now But they will commemorate this new year when God first dwells in heavy glory in their midst in the tabernacle. God is the Lord of time, and He orchestrated all the events leading up to this, even going back to the courage of the midwives Shiphrah and Puah who defied Pharaoh's command to murder the baby Israelite boys (Ex. 2:17). But over the last year God has been with them in numerous remarkable ways. He heard the cries of His enslaved people (Ex. 3:7). They were protected through the ten plagues (Ex. 7-11). They kept Passover and crossed the Red Sea (Ex. 12-14). They assembled at Mount Sinai, and received the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant (Ex. 20-23). They committed idolatry at the golden calf, were forgiven, and renewed covenant with God (Ex. 32-34). They gathered materials and built the tabernacle (Ex. 25-40). *That was a good year.* "You crown the year with Your goodness, and Your paths drip with abundance" (Ps. 65:11). In His beautiful sovereignty, God weaves the events to lead to this point. This includes their disobedience, which is also part of His story, but again in this chapter we see sevenfold obedience "as the Lord had commanded" (vv17-33; cf. 39:1-41). Their obedience obviously doesn't merit God's blessing and certainly doesn't dictate His actions, but it hopes and is not disappointed (cf. Rom. 5:5). He uses their obedience and generosity to build this beautiful tabernacle at the beginning of the year.

NOTES:

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Led by the Light

The cloud that descends is a theophany, a manifestation of the presence of God: “And the cloud of the Lord was above them by day when they went out from the camp. So it was, whenever the ark set out, that Moses said: “Rise up, O Lord! Let Your enemies be scattered, and let those who hate You flee before You” (Num. 10:34-35). The cloud led them out of Egypt and stood between them and Pharaoh’s army (Ex. 14:19-20). It led them through the wilderness (16:10). It dwelt on top of Mount Sinai and later descended on the little tent where Moses met with Yahweh (19:16, 18; 33:9-10). It was terrifying to go into the desert. Besides not knowing where they were going, Israel knew there were hostile tribes on the other side. That desert can heat up to 140 degrees in the day and get down to freezing temperatures at night, so a cloud to block the sun and provide warmth at night protected the people. This was God Himself dwelling with His people, teaching them to look for a greater presence to come. “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” (Jn. 1:14). Jesus came in human flesh that we could look at directly: “Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father” (Jn. 14:9). He went to the Father in order to send the Spirit who directs in greater power (Jn. 16:13).

Filled with Glory

The glory of God descends and fills the tabernacle. This fulfills His mission highlighted throughout Exodus: “And I indeed will harden the hearts of the Egyptians, and they shall follow them. So I will gain glory over Pharaoh and over all his army, his chariots, and his horsemen. Then the Egyptians shall know that I am the Lord, when I have gained glory for Myself over Pharaoh, his chariots, and his horsemen” (Ex. 14:7-8; cf. 3:15; 7:17). The Lord got glory over Pharaoh, glory in delivering and forgiving His people, glory in blessing Israel with His law. Now they’ve built Him a glorious house and His fills it with His glory. As attractive and wonderful as God’s glory is, Moses can’t be in there (v35). It’s too much for him. Jesus is more glorious than the cloud, but He enables us by His grace to see Him: “and we *beheld* His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (Jn. 1:14; cf. Heb. 1:3). The incarnation means not only can we see the fullness of God; we are drawn to Him (Matt. 11:28; Jn. 12:32).

Conclusion

We have a hard time thinking of glory in any other way than vainglory—boasting, competition, pride and vanity. But just as it’s possible to be beautiful for a right reason as a bride is adorned for her groom, so we are to strive for the glory of God bestowed by Him. C.S. Lewis: “To please God...to be a real ingredient in the divine happiness...to be loved by God, not merely pitied, but delighted in as an artist delights in his work or a father in a son—it seems impossible, a weight or burden of glory which our thoughts can hardly sustain. But so it is.” Jesus pleased the Father, and in Him, so do you.