

Moses drawing near to God

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Date: 01 January 2000

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[0 : 00] May I direct your thoughts to the chapter we read together, the book of Exodus, chapter 20, and we may again read verse 21.

And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was.

And we shall attempt particularly to focus our thoughts upon the last part of that verse.

Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was. One thinks that perhaps it is a very useful exercise to remind ourselves of who God is.

Sometimes when we look at things from the surface, we incline to think that God somehow needs our help and our prompting.

[1 : 27] And it would seem that we cherish the fear that the world and its inhabitants was increasingly spinning out of control, and that somehow we have something to do along with God.

But when we look at Scripture, I think we see there that we are approaching the revelation of God in a way that Scripture does not allow us.

And the first thing that perhaps we might remind ourselves this evening of the impenetrable nature of the ways of God.

Take, for example, the children of Israel here, the Hebrews. They were chosen for a very special purpose, that they might be a blessing to all the nations of the earth.

You remember the promise to Isaac, the son of Abraham, in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.

[2 : 57] But what we find in reality here is a situation where these people are in collision with one of the nations, and one of the nations that had played host to them over many years.

And we also see that the children of Israel were totally misunderstood by the Egyptians.

And it was in that misunderstanding that at last the time came when we see as if everything moving into a chaotic situation.

We ask ourselves, was God mistaken in the promise that he gave? Surely not.

Surely we are bound to sit down again and look at the situation and see what area of manoeuvring scripture will allow us to entertain right thoughts, as we should about God.

[4 : 29] Now this nature of God and the ways in which he worked, was problematic to the people of the Bible, just as it is to us in our own day.

We see, for example, the psalmist, we sang it together, Psalm 18, where he says, He, that is God, made darkness his secret place.

His pavilion round about him were dark waters and thick cloud of the skies. We hear the prophet Isaiah calling, Verily, thou art a God that hidest thyself, O God of Israel, thy saviour.

That would almost seem to be a contradiction. A God who hides himself, and yet a God who is a saviour.

How can the two thoughts be compatible? We read in Proverbs that it is the glory of God to conceal a thing, but the honour of kings is to search out a matter.

[5 : 45] Let us then, for a little while this evening, look at the words before us, and perhaps we might divide it into three ways.

We will first look at darkness, and then again at the, what is meant by within the darkness.

Within the darkness where God is. And last of all, we shall look at the treasure of darkness. Well then, we think of darkness, and the dark areas of life.

And if we confine ourselves, meanwhile, to the bondage of the Hebrews in Egypt, we see that it was broken, and Egypt's proud horsemen perished in the waters.

But it was not the end of bondage for the Hebrews, who had been delivered. They had to move from slavery to mastery.

[7 : 12] And the discipline of this change almost broke them. It almost proved to be too severe.

Somewhat like the Christian, who begins in his early days with all encouragement, with respect, to what God has promised to be to him or to her throughout the whole of life.

But it is a different matter. when, as life moves on, and people are plunged into experiences where they know not how to respond to these situations, and they look to God in ways that reflect their own troubled and a difficult situation, they look at it without realizing how are they going to come out of it.

I'm sure often that many of the Bible people must have thought that what was happening to them was the beginning of the end.

We certainly see it in King David's life. After having again and again experienced what God could do with a young shepherd man, how he was able again and again to sally out as he fought the enemies of Israel.

[9 : 03] And as the women folks sang when returned from the wars, Saul has killed his thousands, David his ten thousands. But after a time when the fires of jealousy had all but eaten up the soul of Saul, we see David isolated in the wilderness, at last coming to the gloomy prediction, someday I will fall into the hands of Saul someday.

It was as if the promises of God weren't real or at least that they were not equal to the danger and threats that were all around.

Well, we see as the Hebrew people entered into the wilderness of Sinai that they entered into uncharted areas.

And obviously they required more of God and less of self. They had to move from distrust to trust and Moses himself had to go through thick darkness as he struggled with his own ideas while implementing the will of God.

He had to let go his own plans and trust himself to the will of God. Reality proved that his ideas of his relationship with God had to be modified, had to be changed.

[10 : 55] he was to be reassured not of his own adequacy but only of the adequacy of God. And it was because Moses himself had gone into the darkness where God is that he was enabled to give the leadership at this time.

It wasn't because Moses was better or greater than those he was leading. It was because he had been prepared precisely for the role he was to play.

We often make much and it is quite correct that we should recognize part of that preparation. For example how he was educated in the Egyptian way of things and how he was accustomed to discuss and to consider and to handle these things that fall upon the shoulders of administrators.

years. He was also a man with great vision. God somehow had made it clear to Moses that in his life there was going to be a clear indication of the working of God to a particular end.

Just like Joseph before him he was aware while he was still very young that he would have a key position in the development of the things of God with respect to his people the Hebrew people but we see that when Moses himself tried to push these things at a pace that would not allow them to develop properly that he was compelled to leave the Hebrew people and to go to the wilderness away from all that seemed so obvious to him at an early stage and it is important

[13 : 47] I think that we should realize that when Moses spent 40 years in that situation and when God asked him to go and lead his people out of Egypt Moses refused and the reason for his refusal was that he could not see how he would be able to fulfil a function that was well beyond him and it was only when God commanded him that he went but the point that we see very clearly in connection with how Moses was brought into the darkness was that his own self confidence was completely whittled away but his confidence in

God grew as his own self confidence declined you will always see in the accounts that we have of great revivals that the people who were used on these occasions were people that were always conscious that it was a manifestation of the power of the Spirit of God if we read of Burns or of Macchaine or of some of the other movements in the various parts of the United Kingdom we see how the emphasis was upon what was happening to be of quite a supernatural nature and when the Spirit of God is working in this way anybody can preach a sermon anybody can pray the very stones cry out the power of

God is throbbing in the very proclamation so that the words of scripture come alive they are like thousands of arrows striking home to the conscience and people who would not listen and were quite resistant to the pleas and the overtures of the gospel become all ears they are full of attention and somehow for them the whole situation has taken on a very different scene well we see here when we talk of darkness that within that darkness God was working you remember the occasion with Abraham when he was told some 400 years before the bondage of the

Hebrew people in Egypt was brought to an end how he was told about this God made promise a promise gave a promise he said to Abraham look now toward heaven and number the stars if thou be able to number them and he told him that his seed would be as numerous as the stars that they could not be counted and also Abraham was told that he would be given Canaan for a possession and Abraham asked how whereby shall I know that I shall inherit it and God told Abraham to prepare a sacrifice he was to take an heifer a she goat a ram a turtle dove and a young pigeon he remember that graphic description as

Abraham was waiting over the carcasses that were prepared how the fowls came down and they were trying to snatch away at the animals that were prepared for sacrifice and Abraham was driving them away and then scripture goes on to say when the sun was going down a deep sleep fell upon Abraham and lo and horror of great darkness fell upon him God said to him know of assuredly that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land that is not theirs and shall serve them and they shall afflict them four hundred years and afterward shall they come out with great substance how was Abraham going to rationalize what

[19 : 12] God was saying to him he was telling him that his people were going to multiply in a land where that overlords would become their oppressors they would be reduced to slavery but afterwards they would come out of that nation with great substance it was a wonderful promise a golden promise but it was also going to be a severe trial and let us never forget that it is through much tribulation the Bible tells us that believers at last attain to heaven and I don't think that we should confine ourselves to areas where there is fierce physical violent persecution of a certain kind it is very easy to think of our own covenanting times in

Scotland and think with compassion upon what the believers had to endure because of their faith and we say to ourselves we in Scotland today don't know what it means to live like that and neither we do we would be quite horrified if tonight we were told that we had to get out of our homes that all that we possessed was to be taken from us that we were to be penniless that our children were to be marked out they were to be harassed kept out of all positions of advantage where they could better themselves we would be quite horrified if that were to be true in our case but that was true concerning them and concerning many others but having said that let us remember that there are other ways in which the believer has to fight against sin against the subtlety of sin against the subtlety of the powers of darkness sometimes when you visit institutions where people have such problems that they need help for a little while you will meet there with young men who are strong and who are capable various kinds but somehow the pressures of life have come at them in such a way that for a time at any rate it has unbalanced them and the same powers that press on people in that way affect people whose health is lost ordinarily when you go into a hospital you may meet with somebody who once was a very strong person very athletic full of the joys of living and you look at the person he must receive assistance if he is going to sit up in bed weakness has affected him to the extent that there seems to be no strength left it is the same in the spiritual world and if we are children of

God we will know something of the conflict the inner conflict which causes the believer to grow the groanings that are unutterable we don't know the pressures that people come under but we do know that wherever believers are that Satan is coming in order to work at their own corruption and in order to take them into a condition of despair to enable to make them break away from the faith that they have in Christ well within that darkness we see how God was there who would have thought away from the grain flats the well cultivated plains of

Egypt in that uncivilized barren wilderness and particularly in that part of Sinai that there away in the out of the sight of the vast majority of the thousands of Hebrews that were in their tents that God was and who would have thought that the God the possessor of all the earth was bringing his people along this tortuous way bringing them out of the land of Egypt into what proved to be a fiery furnace there they had to go through the different experiences that was knocking again and again at their own self confidence at their own way of thinking and bringing them increasingly to our trust and to our belief in

God and to see at last that without the presence of God there was no future for them can God provide food in the wilderness can God provide water in the wilderness these were the questions they were relevant questions and the answer was that God can provide bread in the wilderness he can provide water in the wilderness it sometimes happens that a young Christian mother receives her call to be with her Lord it's a desperate situation she is leaving a young family and her husband who is not adequate to the task of providing for the children as she could but the strangest thing happens that mother dying has no objection to the will of

[26 : 41] God for her she loves her children perhaps she never loved them more she loves her husband perhaps she never loved him more but she loves Christ still more to be with Christ she is quite reconciled and in that darkness there is manifested this tremendous holding grip that faith has something like what Job in other circumstances said though he slay me I will put my trust in him well tomorrow God willing those of us who belong or who will be present in the congregation we hope to remember the Lord's death until he comes and in a preeminent way we see

Christ in the darkness where God is and it is strange to see him there it is strange to hear him call if it be possible let this cup pass from me nevertheless not my will but thy will be done and one cannot be but constrained to feel that there is something happening to Jesus which far which goes far beyond any pain inflicted upon him by the coarseness and the brutality of his detractors yes they spat on him they mocked him they crowned him with a crown of thorns they did all that they could to taunt him and yet what comes uppermost in the cry of

Jesus is a sense of isolation but not to the extent that he is not aware that God the father is his God as he in the particular situation that he was in trusted in his father as he set himself to the task involved why did these things happen well of course we know something of the reason why they happened but we don't know it all why is it that the healing of the power of the cross is not right through the nations of the world last century many outstanding missionaries were quite optimistic that India and the Arab world would be on fire with the gospel as they took part in various works of translating the scriptures for certain parts of these lands wherein they served it didn't happen that way their optimism at least on the short term was not to become what they had expected it rather for it said in his own day words I think like this that the day would come that the truth would ride the crown of the causeway yet and there were great days in

Scotland wonderful days when you look back to the Kirchhoff shots and the Cambyslan revivals and other great movements of God among the Scottish people but what has been the result which way are we moving today and why is it this way is it because there is no physician in Gilead and I don't think we can explain it by talking about the responsibility of man man certainly was made a responsible creature but surely there is much more to the story than we are able to read presently what are the treasures of darkness you remember how Isaiah put it I will give thee the treasures of darkness and hidden riches of secret places that thou mayst know that I the Lord which call thee by thy name and the

God of Israel this is the paradox of life God is light and in him is no darkness at all or as we read in Psalm 139 the darkness and the light are both alike to thee or as in the darkness so is the light when you recall that Galilean storm when the disciples labouring to get to the other side still dark and suddenly in the midst of what was threatening to engulf them they see a miracle that brings them almost to the place of incredulity they don't believe that it can't be Christ they think it's a spirit but coming walking upon the waters to the disciples into the boat and immediately they moved to the other side what have we to say about death being conquered within its own territory oh death where is thy sting oh grave where is thy victory it's all within the revelation of God as it comes to us in Christ and it is this wonderful

[33 : 30] Christ of God whose death we hope to celebrate and to remember tomorrow and if we love the Lord surely our cry to God is to prepare us that in faith we may receive the symbols of the broken body and the shed blood it's a wonderful wonderful privilege and let us not forget that we must not conclude that the darkness is impenetrable because it is so to us but there are so many things that we don't understand about God about ourselves and about his ways let us seek to put our hand in the hand of God that is what he's inviting us to do he's a mighty saviour able to save unto the uttermost and may we with comfort sit at his table on the morrow and receive the symbols of that wonderful love let us pray gracious

Lord we would wish to praise thee world without end we know that so much of the suffering that seems so distressing to us is thoroughly meaningful as thou art working things to thine own destined and wise ends help us Lord to put our trust in thee and if there are any here this evening of the congregation who may be thinking for the first time of sitting at thy table give them Lord to look at thyself and to what thou hast done and to move away from what they are in themselves and we pray for thy people who have professed thy name for many many years that thou will comfort them and that they will be enabled with joy to receive thy great gospel provision

Lord have mercy upon us for Jesus sake Amen