

EXODUS 34:29-35

REAL SHINE !

Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses' hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him [God]. So when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him.

Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned to him; and Moses talked with them. Afterward all the children of Israel came near, and he gave them as commandments all that the LORD had spoken with him on Mount Sinai.

And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face. But whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with Him, he would take the veil off until he came out; and he would come out and speak to the children of Israel whatever he had been commanded.

And whenever the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone, then Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with Him.

Something shiny is eye-catching, isn't it? A shiny apple, shiny shoes, a shiny new or a shiny old car, shiny gold jewelry, etc. Sometimes things that shine are mysterious. Foxfire, for example. Have you ever seen foxfire? It's damp wood that has a certain type of fungus on it, which glows in the dark! It can be intriguing or disconcerting during the dark of night to see something glowing on the ground.

In our text Moses' face was shining! He had been on Mt Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments for the second time. The first time he had smashed the tablets of stone, because the Children of Israel were worshiping a golden calf! The LORD was angry. He threatened to destroy the people. From the camp Moses pleaded with God to forgive, take back the people. The Lord relented. He instructed Moses to come back up the mountain with two new tablets of stone. God again gave His covenant. Moses came back down from the mountain with the Ten Commandments a second time.

His face was shining; he did not know it. Aaron and the people were afraid. They were reluctant to come near. They knew they had done evil. But Moses encouraged them.

Why was Moses' face shining? Consider, Moses had just been with God, had talked with God, had seen the glory of God—not face to face lest he die—but saw the glory of God from the back as God was passing by the niche in the rock where He had placed him, covering him with His hand until Moses could see Him moving away.

Is there any other incident in the Bible where someone's face was shining with the glory of God? When Jesus was transfigured on the mountain in view of disciples Peter, James, and John, "*His face shone like the sun, and His clothing became as white as the light*" (Matthew 17:2). God's glory! Or think of Stephen on trial before being stoned to death, "*All who sat in the council, looking steadfastly at him, saw his face as the face of an angel!*" (Acts 6:15). Again, God's glory!

With Jesus and Stephen, the incidents are easy enough to figure out, but what was behind this event with Moses? ---- God was letting His people know that He was not to be trifled with. He was to be honored and held in high regard, not cheaply discarded for a calf of gold. He was the LORD Who had mightily brought them out of Egypt against all the odds. How could an enslaved, oppressed, and untrained people be able to leave Egypt as conquerors and walk away from the Egyptian army lying dead on the seashore? It was an act of almighty God. He is the shiny One, not one to be trifled with! He made Moses' face shine.

Do you view God with the same understanding? God is not to be trifled with. He has given you your body and life. Do you care for your body and life faithfully? Or do you abuse your body with eating and drinking, with chemicals that cause harm? Do you harm your body which God has given you, by lack of work, by overwork, lack of sleep, poor nutrition? Is your schedule so full that your mind and psyche are stressed beyond good limits, all because of things that are of your own making? Do you think you run your life, and God is maybe just a crutch to give a little help here and there? Do you waste the blessings God has given you? Or do you put those blessings ahead of God? Do you treat poorly the nearest and dearest people God has put into your life?

The Children of Israel made the calf of gold their god—talk about foolish! But God was not one to be trifled with. He is supreme, over everything in life. Moses' face was shining because had been with God.

Moses' shining face was also God's way of saying, "My messenger and prophet is not to be disdained or ignored. I have sent him to you, I have enabled him to serve you, I have spoken with him, and as he faithfully relays my message, it is I speaking with you." In the New Testament, Jesus said to His disciples, "*He that hears you hears Me; and he that despises you despises Me; and he that despises Me despises Him that sent Me*" (Luke 10:16). To despise spiritual shepherds whom God sends is to trifle with God.

The people were afraid. Moses encouraged them to come to him. They did. He relayed to them all the commandments of God for a second time. When Moses finished, he covered his face with a veil. Whenever Moses went back to speak with God, he took the veil off. When Moses would return to speak with the people again, His face would be shining again. When he finished speaking, he again covered his face.

His shining face was certainly an impressive and ongoing display of God's shine and glory. But why did he cover it up again? Maybe, if the Israelites continually saw Moses' shining face, it would have been too much of a good thing. Perhaps it would become so commonplace for them that they would have lost special respect for the Lord and his messenger. Perhaps.

A specific reason for this veil comes to us in the epistle reading today from 2 Corinthians 3. Moses covered his face because its glory was fading! Its glory did not endure. (The Jewish people must have been acquainted with that fact, although not stated in the Old Testament.) The whole Old Testament and its Law were not an end in themselves. Their point was to keep the people on track until the coming of the Savior. The Old Testament rules and commands demanded a 100%-toe-the-mark-or-else perfection! It showed the people their great need for a Savior who under God's mercy would do away with all their guilt.

The Old Testament or the Old Covenant, when rightly understood, brought despair to people's hearts. Many, however, misused it in self-pride and self-confidence, thinking, "We can make ourselves good with God." They were looking for comfort in clinging to the demands and rituals of the Old Testament, rather than seeing their failures and sins against God, and thus their need for Christ.

Perhaps we could compare their situation to people on a long and difficult trip to visit a loved one, refusing the free plane tickets offered. The trip involves many struggles—rough roads, sharp turns, steep grades, foot travel through thick jungle type undergrowth, fierce predators, unscrupulous by-standers, in real facts a journey that can not be made successfully. They become so wrapped up in their efforts to make the trip a success on their own, that they forgot the whole goal—visiting the dear loved one.

Using the Old Testament to get to heaven was impossible. It would lead only to failure and death, not to peace with God. Moses' shining face was nothing to focus on. The ministry of Christ—of the Holy Spirit proclaiming Christ and turning hearts to Christ—is a glory that lasts and a glory that far surpasses.

In Exodus 32-35, we see what led up to Moses' shining face. What was different about this case from the first time he received the Ten Commandments and his face didn't shine? Both situations were basically the same, weren't they? No. The second giving of the Old Covenant came after God's extreme anger for Israel's idol worship. God in His indescribable mercy and love forgave the people—this forgiveness to be brought about in the Savior to come. On the mountain He assured Moses of the forgiveness for such stiff-necked people. The LORD even proclaimed His "Name," His "Reputation," and essence to Moses, "*The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin*" (Exodus 3:6-7). Having such unheard of mercy to announce to God's people, Moses came down from the Mount, God making his face shine. He could instruct them to live under the Old Covenant, pointing them ahead to the New.

He covered his face when done talking with the people, because this shining would not last. The Old Covenant which they had just been given for a second time was not the "real deal." This covenant pointed the hearts to the need for a greater Savior, the One to Come, who would keep every command of God perfectly for man and then even take the punishment for all man's offenses.

The Old Covenant like shiny apples, shoes, cars, or even foxfire, would lose its luster. Jesus is the Real Shine! In Him, the Lord "*makes His face shine upon you and be gracious unto you*" (Numbers 6:25). It's not in Moses or any efforts of your own.

Amen! So be it!

Pastor Kanzenbach---