

Sermon File # 683

Scripture Text: Exodus 40:33b-38

Sermon Title: *The Glorious Presence of God*

Manuscript written by Roger Roberts and sermon preached

At International Baptist Church of Brussels, Belgium

On Sunday morning 30 October 2011

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are from the New International Version.

Sources cited in this manuscript are listed at the end.

For additional information regarding this manuscript, contact Roger.Roberts@ibcbrussels.org.

All Rights Reserved.

The Glorious Presence of God

Introduction:

Open your Bibles with me to our text, as we reach the final verses in our series through Exodus, God's book of deliverance. The ending verses are "reminiscent of the way the book began" in 1:1-7 (Oswalt, *NLTSB*, 191), which locates "the sons of Israel" in Egyptian bondage as slaves, needing God's deliverance in fulfillment of his promise to Abraham to make him into a great nation (Genesis 12:2). We've traced this great drama of deliverance from the oppressive bondage of God's people, the call of Moses at the burning bush, the plagues that culminated in the night of the Passover, the crossing of the Sea, and God's provision as he led his people to Mt Sinai. There they remained for nine months in order to receive the covenant and the Ten Commandments, which they summarily broke with the golden calf; and then came God's punishment and the restoration of his promise to continue with them in their journey to the Promised Land of Canaan.

We looked last Sunday at how God gave instructions for the building of the tabernacle, which would represent his presence during the rest of the journey. And today we'll look at a phenomenon that took place one year and fourteen days after

the Exodus (Ramm, 203), the coming of his glorious presence into the tabernacle, the dwelling place of God.

Chapter 33 onward is the climax of Exodus, because it shows the fulfillment of God's purpose—to come to dwell with his people in a personal relationship. And the closing six verses of the book are “the climax of the climax,” not only to Exodus but to the first two books of the Bible. God had been seeking to re-establish his glorious presence and this personal relationship with his people since it was broken by the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Oswalt, 557).

These closing verses are “semi-poetic” and “almost hymnic” in language, describing something far above and beyond the ordinary (Durham, 500), the glorious presence of God. Follow as I read **Exodus 40:33b-38**.

I have often been surprised by the glorious presence of God. He has made his presence known in powerful ways in unlikely places. Once was in a concrete-block meeting hall at a Baptist campground, where I worked one summer as the lifeguard and maintainer of the water supply and swimming pool. Through a layman's testimony in that worship service God spoke to me about his claim upon my life to seriously answer his call to ministry.

Another time was in my college dorm room, where I received an unexpected visit from a football teammate, who with uncharacteristic concern about his soul, asked me how to be saved. That little dorm room was transformed into a dwelling place of God's glory that would portend many other settings wherein I was to be a witness to the liberating power of the gospel.

I was privileged to witness a mighty movement of the Holy Spirit during the Asbury Revival of 1970 that spread across the Midwest and the state of Kentucky, reaching even into the spiritually dry atmosphere of my seminary campus in Louisville. I saw previously spiritually cold academicians on their faces at the front of the chapel, crying out to God in repentance for his mercy.

I sensed the glorious presence of God in the makeshift worship room of the new church plant we served during our seminary and graduate school years, and on numerous occasions of ministry in times of crises as well as in corporate worship services. I've experienced the joy and wonder of the glorious presence, but also the dread and emptiness in worship services and meetings of congregations that were plagued by division and other ungodly influences. In fact, most of the occasions of worship and meeting when the Presence seemed emptiest took place in a large sanctuary that had undergone an expensive and extensive remodeling and refurbishing project. Quite frankly, for most of my nearly two decades of ministry with that particular church, it seems, particularly now with hindsight, that the glory had departed from that church.

That previous emptiness has become more evident to me since I've been privileged to serve as pastor of this church these nearly eight years now. Often, even while I'm preaching, or when praying with an individual or a small group, or singing in worship with the congregation, I sense the glorious presence of God. As we look together at this great climactic moment described in our text, we note first that the glorious presence of God...

Dwells within us (33b-35)

The cloud of God's presence, which had been with the Israelites from the beginning of the exodus (13:21) and which covered Mt Sinai (19:16), now descends upon the completed tabernacle (40:34). As did the pillar of fire, the cloud was the manifestation of the presence of God, the "shekinah glory" entering the tabernacle, the place where holy God would meet his people (Ramm, *THG*, 9-13). The glory of the Lord is his majestic presence, the weightiness and force of his character, and his infinite worth that evokes our wonder and awe and demands our reverent worship and submission. The cloud was a manifestation of God's glory (Hebrew *kabod*), his "unapproachable light" (1Timothy 6:6) which he shines forth to make himself known, but which we cannot look upon safely in our sinful condition (Hebrews 12:18ff).

By God's initiative

As soon as Moses installed the curtain at the entrance to the courtyard, having finished all the work, the cloud and the glory of God's presence descended on the tabernacle (33f). It's as though the Lord couldn't wait to come to live with his people (Motyer, 323). This is the "climax of the climax" of Exodus because for this reason the Lord God called and led his people out of bondage in Egypt.

The Bible's story is the great drama of God's redemption of fallen mankind and his calling a people into a personal relationship with himself. He called Israel to be his First Covenant people, beginning with Abraham. Now his people, delivered from Egyptian bondage, and restored after the sin of the golden calf, and having finished the work on the tabernacle, are ready to receive his presence and enter into a personal relationship with him, privileged to see his cloud of glory descend upon the tabernacle.

The presence of the Lord in this First Covenant, however, was to be replaced by a presence of greater glory in the Second, the New Covenant. To Moses God promised a greater Prophet (Deuteronomy 18:17f), and this greater Prophet would be the Messiah, the anointed of God, even the Suffering Servant of the Lord (Isaiah 52:13-53:12). And when the time came for his incarnation, the angel Gabriel announced to Joseph that his virgin fiancée would give birth to a son who would be called "Immanuel—which means, 'God with us'" (Matthew 1:23).

Jesus Christ, as John writes in his Prologue, is the eternal Word made flesh, who “made his dwelling (tabernacle) among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

The presence of the Lord in the tabernacle was glorious, but not as glorious as the Word made flesh, who came into the world by God’s initiative. Wonder of wonders is that holy God wants a personal relationship with his people, and that he has taken the initiative to make a home in our hearts. God makes his presence known and shows us his glory...

Through Christ’s intercession

When the glorious presence of God filled the tabernacle this first time, not even Moses the mediator for his people could enter. Perhaps this was because as of yet no sacrifice had been made upon the altar that would provide atonement and cleansing to allow Moses to enter the Most Holy Place (Ryken, 1160; Motyer, 324).

The Book of Hebrews was written to Jewish converts who were being pressured to abandon their faith in Jesus as the Christ, the Messiah, the only way of salvation. The writing pastor shows the superiority of Christ to angels and to Moses, and that the value of the Old Covenant is now passé (Hebrews 3:1-4:13; Enns, 602). Christ is our true High Priest who has entered the Holy of Holies through his death on the cross. His blood has paid the price and is the acceptable sacrifice for our sins. Christ is “the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (1 John 2:2). Christ Jesus alone is “able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to interceded for them” (Hebrews 7:25). Christ is our High Priest of a new and better covenant, one that establishes a personal and everlasting relationship with God. Christ is the perfect Mediator, who “died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring (us) to God” (1 Peter 3:18).

In Jesus we see the glory of God and his glorious, saving presence comes to us. As Jesus said to Philip, who asked to see the Father, “Don’t you know me, Philip, even after I have been among (tabernacled among) you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father” (John 14:8f).

In his incarnation, the visible radiance of the glory of God was hidden except from those who had eyes of faith and were willing to believe his claims and learn from his words and miracles. But even though the physical glory was veiled (except, perhaps, from the inner core, Peter, James and John, who were privileged to witness his transfiguration: Matthew 17:1-8; Mark 9:2-8; Luke 9:28-36), Jesus shows us all we need to know about God. He revealed his character in his sinless perfection and also in his perfect love (John 13:1ff).

The greatest revelation of God’s glorious love was in the cross of Christ. Although Jesus dreaded the sheer horror of his looming suffering, he surrendered to the

Father's will for the cross, which he knew would reveal the Father's glorious love and plan for the salvation of all who believe (John 12:27-29).

The cross of Christ made possible our access into God's holy presence, so when Moses prepared the first sacrifice he could then enter into the glorious presence of the cloud in the tabernacle. What a privilege we have, to enter God's holy presence, made available to us through Christ, whose shed blood has opened for us the curtain of the Most Holy Place! Now we can "draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith" (Hebrews 10:22). Our sins are forgiven, our guilt is removed, and there is no more separation between us and holy God.

And now through the Holy Spirit, God not only comes near to us but actually comes into us, as Jesus promised (John 14:15ff) and as we experience through the new birth of conversion (John 3:3-8; 1 Peter 1:3), whereby we become new creations of God, the children of God (2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 John 3:1). The Apostle Paul writes about the superior glory of the New Covenant in Christ, contrasting the transforming work of the Holy Spirit with the glory reflected on the face of Moses after being in God's presence (2 Corinthians 3:7-18). Paul says that we "reflect the Lord's glory," and "are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is Spirit" (18). Conversion is purely a work of God's grace, who has "made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ," just as he spoke into existence the light of creation (2 Corinthians 4:6).

Moses could not enter without sacrifice, but also I think this cloud of God's glorious presence says to us that God dwells with us by his initiative, through Christ's intercession and also...

For the Spirit's infilling

Moses couldn't enter the tabernacle, just as the priests later could not enter the temple (1 Kings 8:10f), simply because there wasn't enough room for them and holy God to occupy the same place. Because the presence of God increased, the presence of Moses had to decrease (John 3:30).

As we noted last Sunday, from 35:20-36:7, God is at work building his tabernacle as his dwelling place, which we know today to be his people (1 Corinthians 6:19) and his church, God's building (1 Corinthians 3:16). God's purpose is not only to gain entrance into every believer and every church, but also to fill us with his presence. We are to be so filled with the Spirit that there will be no room left for us, that is, our old sinful nature.

The presence of the Holy Spirit, Paul says, is actually Christ in us, our hope of glory (Colossians 1:27). Not only does the Holy Spirit guarantee our presence with Christ in his full and everlasting glory (Romans 8:23; 1 John 3:2), but also his presence is our hope for Christ-like character in this present mortal life, producing in us the fruit

of the Spirit (Galatians 5:16-25). Just as Moses was unable to enter the glory-filled tabernacle, there can be no room for the acts of the sinful nature if we live a Spirit-filled and Spirit-controlled life.

It's instructive that the Hebrew verb "filled" (34) may be a participle, conveying the sense of a continuous filling of the tabernacle with the glorious presence of God (Oswalt, *CBC*, 556). This same continuous infilling is expressed by the Apostle Paul, who commands the church to "be (continuously) filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18). When we live in the fullness of the Spirit, there is no room for the old sinful nature to have its way with us. The way to character formation and transformation is not through human resolve but by constant surrender to the presence of the Holy Spirit and giving him full occupancy in our lives—body, soul, mind and spirit.

As the psalmist prayed, so should we seek the Lord and his strength and his presence continually (Psalm 105:4; 119:10).

The glorious presence of God...

Goes before us (verses 36-38)

These closing three verses are a testimony to the glorious presence of God going before the Israelites on their journey toward the Promised Land of Canaan. Just as the Lord God had a plan when he called Abraham to follow him as the father of his new nation (Genesis 12:1), and just as he had a plan for the deliverance of the Israelites from Egypt, even so he would go before them, as he goes before us...

According to his perfect plan

As we noted in Chapter 33, following the sin of the golden calf in Chapter 32, the people were desperate for the presence of God. They realized what they were up against without him. The all-wise, all-knowing, all-powerful and perfectly loving God has a perfect plan for his people, both individually and as a corporate people, his church. We often think that grace is only a New Testament word, but we see in our text how the Lord God was willing to forgive and even eager to be present with his people, leading them according to his perfect plan for them.

God, who foreknew us and chose us for his saving grace even before the creation of the world (Ephesians 1:4) has a perfect plan in mind for us. He planned for our redemption and he also has a plan to lead, guide, protect and provide as we follow him in prayerful, dependent Kingdom living. Even in times when all seems to be falling apart around us and uncertain before us, we can claim the promise of Romans 8:28f, knowing he is directing the events that impact our lives day by day.

Our life may look twisted and chaotic to us, just like the back side of a lovely needlepoint tapestry. But God sees his perfect design on the right side of the

tapestry. He knows the design he has for our lives, and as we love him and are called to join his purposes, he's making something beautiful we cannot now see.

As with the Israelites, the glorious presence of God goes before us...

With his unmistakable guidance

The presence of the Lord God was with them in an unmistakable manifestation of the cloud by day and fire to illuminate the cloud by night (38). There was no way they could miss the guidance of the Lord.

The glorious presence of the Lord is with us and leads and guides us in an unmistakable way through the Spirit and the Word of God. God's written Word, the Scriptures, are a lamp to our feet and a light for our path (Psalm 119:105). In the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments we have all the instructions we need for making right, moral and God-honoring choices. Although the Bible doesn't have a direct word for us about every detail of our life, we nevertheless have in it the principles for right decisions.

And because we have the Holy Spirit in us, we also have a heavenly, Kingdom perspective (1 Corinthians 2:16). As we pray in the Spirit, he leads us to understand God's will and direction in our lives. Even though our circumstances may be confusing and bewildering and our future totally in the dark, we can trust that the Lord's guiding hand is with us and that he will not let us stray from his will or forfeit his purposes and best for our lives.

As we seek to know and do the will of God, we have his unmistakable leadership by the Spirit, who speaks to us through Scripture, prayer, circumstances and the church (Blackaby, *EG*, 1ff, and Blackaby, *HGV*, 1ff). When we trust in the Lord with all our heart and don't lean on our own understanding, he will make our paths straight/direct our paths (Proverbs 3:5f). God speaks to our hearts to give us a sense of his leading, and as his will and the rightness of a decision becomes more apparent, he gives us the peace of Christ to rule in our hearts (Colossians 3:15). Of course, circumstances can represent open and closed doors for us, and the Holy Spirit gives us the assurance that it is God and not self or human manipulation that has opened a particular door (See Paul's experience in Acts 16:6-10). God also guides us through the wise counsel of godly fellow believers, i.e. the church.

I know in our lives these days, we absolutely rely on God's guidance and pray each day that he will lead us unmistakably as we trust in him. But also, as with these Israelites, the glorious presence of God goes before us...

Demanding our obedient following

God leads and perfectly guides those who trust in and obey him and desire to follow him as his disciples, all the way to Canaan, the Promised Land. We learn that what God requires is our obedience, which is an attitude of the heart. It's our willingness

to follow the Lord Jesus in a cruciform life when we learn to die to the old life of sinful and selfish ambition. We are willing to learn what Jesus meant by losing our life that we might find his fullness of life (Matthew 10:39; Mark 8:35; John 12:25).

The glorious presence of God is with those who walk with Christ in loving obedience, who learn to turn life into prayer by making prayer a key life discipline. To walk with the Lord, even through the valley of suffering and death, is to know his joy and peace (Psalm 23).

The Israelites were to follow the glorious presence wherever God led them. And “if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out” (36). Sometimes to follow the Lord is to wait, which can sometimes be more difficult than following him into dangerous and uncharted waters.

Years ago we were nearing home on the return trip at the end of a vacation in the US. Our children then were about three and a half and five years old, and even though we were only about half an hour from home, began to beg to eat some salty snacks. Nancy warned them that these snacks would make them thirsty, and we had nothing in the car to drink and we definitely would not stop for drinks being this close to home. They would just have to wait until we arrived at home. But the kids prevailed with their entreaties, and so Nancy gave them the salty treats. As predicted, they began to beg us for something to drink, and Nancy told them they would just have to suffer until we got home. Stephanie broke the disappointed silence saying, “Mommy, I know what suffer means. It means to wait!”

To wait is often a suffering experience, when God is silent and circumstances become increasingly difficult and our trials greater. It seems at those times that God has completely forgotten about us. This complaint is raised by the psalmists (Psalms 10:11; 42:9; 77:9) and God’s silence at times is deafening to our spirits and hearts. Yet, at these times we are to wait, not passively, but with an active seeking after the Lord himself with renewed fervor (Psalm 63:1). By the grace of God, waiting can become a time of discovering greater joy in God himself. Waiting obedience can be as significant to our spiritual life as working obedience. We can become impatient and restless in spirit as we wait for the Lord in the desert, longing for the blessings of the Promised Land of Canaan. But it’s better, no, it’s absolutely essential, to remain with the Lord in the desert than to plunge ahead toward the Promised Land, seeking the good life without him, or even seeking to do good without him.

The risen Christ told the disciples to wait in the city until they would be clothed with the Holy Spirit, who would enable them to be his witnesses in their worlds (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4f). Waiting is an attitude of dependence, of gaining a sense of the presence, power and leading of the Spirit, who sends us and empowers us for our witness as missional disciples of Jesus. We are on mission with Jesus in our worlds, not seeking to get the world to come to church, but rather are taking the Word of

Christ and the Good News into the worlds where we study, work and live. Ministry and evangelism are futile, if not dangerous activities if not done in the power and wisdom of the glorious presence of God. God's work is not only to be done God's way, but also with total dependence of God. Too often his work is done our way and we ask God to bless it, almost as an afterthought (Wiersbe, 2003). But what a privilege it is to reflect and to even transmit the glorious, life-changing presence of Christ through sharing the Good News!

Conclusion:

What a privilege it is, to be blessed with the glorious presence of God, in our lives and in our church!

Just as was true for Moses and the Israelites, there are certain things we can do to prepare for his presence. When they had completed the work and done all God had instructed, the glorious presence came into the temple.

God's saving presence, Paul says, is as near as one's mouth and heart. And the only preparation needed to experience his saving grace is that you call upon him as your Lord and Savior (Romans 10:8-13). His glorious presence will come into your life to forgive your sins and to give you new and eternal life as you then begin to follow Jesus as Lord.

Some of us need a new awareness of, response to and infilling of the glorious presence. The glorious Presence is not always comforting. Some equate the Presence with uplifting and emotionally satisfying experiences, which often only provide only artificial comfort and do nothing to change us. Sometimes the Presence deeply disturbs us and shakes us from self-centered complacency and leads us to self-examination and repentance. The only appropriate response to the glorious presence of God is to confess and forsake all known sin (1 John 1:9), repent of our grieving and quenching the Spirit (Ephesians 4:30; 1 Thessalonians 5:19) and surrender our will to Christ Jesus as Lord, desiring his infilling (Ephesians 5:15-18).

The risen Christ says, "Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:19f).

Christ asks you and me to receive his presence and to enjoy the fellowship of his glorious, loving presence. Join me in seeking his fullness anew, for ourselves and for our church. When God's people throughout this spiritually dark and barren nation and continent begin to seek the fullness of God in our lives and churches, the light of God's glory will begin to shine in the darkness and bring hope to Belgium and Europe. Spiritual awakenings are most likely to come to places most aware of the

darkness and spiritual poverty and where God's people cry out to him out of our desperate need.

Forbid that we do anything to resist or offend his holy presence, and may we beg him to come and fill us with his love, power and joy as never before, all to the blessing of his kingdom and the glory of his name!

Thoughts and questions for personal reflection and/or group discussion:

1. Recall the times and places where you were most aware of the presence of God. What were the times and places when and where God seemed furthest away?
2. What has God done for us in Christ in order to be present with and within us?
3. What is necessary for someone to experience God's presence? How can we have assurance of his presence?
4. What are the conditions for receiving and experiencing the fullness of the Holy Spirit?
5. What are some verses that assure us that God has a perfect plan for our lives? Recall some times in your life when his plan seemed obvious and times when his plan seemed to be obscured or even sidetracked.
6. What are the ways that God makes his will known to us and leads us according to his will?
7. What does it mean to wait upon the Lord, and why is it important?

Sources cited in this manuscript:

Henry and Richard Blackaby, with Claude King, *Experiencing God: Knowing and Doing the Will of God*

_____, *Hearing God's Voice*

John I Durham, *Word Biblical Commentary*, Volume 3: Exodus

Peter Enns, *The NIV Application Commentary: Exodus*

J A Motyer, *The Message of Exodus* (*The Bible Speaks Today* Series, Old Testament Series Editor, J A Motyer)

John N Oswalt, *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, Genesis and Exodus, General Editor, Philip W Comfort

_____, *NLT Study Bible, New Living Translation*, Second Edition, notes on Exodus

Bernard L Ramm, *His Way Out: a Fresh Look at Exodus*

_____, *Them He Glorified: a Systematic Study of the Doctrine of Glorification*

Philip Graham Ryken, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory* (*Preaching the Word* Series, General Editor, R Kent Hughes)

Warren W Wiersbe, *Be Delivered: Exodus*

All Rights Reserved.