

And We Beheld

His Glory

There is a very short list of things God cannot do, but everything on that list is there because God is perfect. Thus, one of the main items on that list is, God cannot tolerate sin. It would take a whole study on holiness to fully understand this issue, but the shorthand is that to be holy is to be set apart. We humans should strive to be holy, and this is a continual task. However, God is Holy, which is to say; He is not striving to be set apart and perfect - He is set apart and perfect! He has never sinned or been unjust in any way. This makes Him not only able to judge our sins but obligated! This is where our fleshly existence gives us a freedom even angels do not have. It gives us a place which can be set apart from God if it needs to be; and after man disobeyed God in taking of the fruit He told them not to, (Gen. 2:16-17, 3:1-24) it needed to be.

Some would tell you that man's fall into sin is, at the very least, useful, if not necessary, so we could experience God's grace, but this is ridiculous in light of what we lost. In sinning, we lost the ability to have what the Bible tells us is the essence of our existence, and that is the ability to directly stand before God. Essentially, God allows man to live out his physical life by not coming down and communing with man in the way He originally desired. This is why Moses had to set boundaries around Mount Sinai. God wanted to speak to the people directly, but the children of Israel could not approach too close to the physical presence of God, or they would die. When the day came, the people stood outside the boundary and God did speak to them the Ten Commandments. (Ex. 20) After the people experienced this, they were scared out of their wits. Thus, the people came to Moses and asked him to go and speak to God for them. They said whatever God told Moses, they would do. The people knew they were in no condition to stand before God's presence, and they feared further encounters would lead to their death! (Ex. 20:18-19)

What is important about this story though, is the point that Moses was able, not only to stand before the mount but go up into it! Why did he not die? He went even closer to the presence of God than the people! What made Moses special? The answer is in the fact that Moses cared about sanctifying his life continually before God. You do not come before the presence of God in the way Moses did without being invited by God; but God would only extend such an invitation to a man to whom it was continually important to walk in holiness, and had significant success in sanctifying his walk! The children of Israel could have stood at that mountain and heard the voice of God, and anyone could have been invited to go up to the mount, if they had been desirous and willing to prepare their heart and life! The problem was not that the people would die because no one can stand before God, at least for a time, in

the way He had come to that mountain. The problem was, they did not feel they could be, or they did not want to put forth the effort to be, set apart (holy) from the things of this world enough to even continue to stand as close as they were. They did not want to continually work to sanctify their lives and be prepared to stand that close. God said they had spoken well, because these facts were true. However, God would use that fear to the advantage of causing the people to believe in the statutes God was about to give! So, Moses went up and talked with God to receive the covenant the people said they would follow. (Deut. 5:23-31)

What this story shows us is, not only is it hard to stand in the presence of a perfect God, but also that it's still possible. It's possible to draw closer and closer to God. Moses did; and if we jump back in time, we find Abraham did, as well. In a lot of the stories we see in the Bible, it's kind of vague as to just how the person in the story is hearing God's voice. Is God actually speaking to them? Is it more of an inner voice they are hearing? We don't always know. However, in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah, (Gen. 18:1-19:3) it tells us three men came by Abraham's tent. What is amazing is that even at a distance, Abraham seems to know these men were no ordinary travelers just passing by. These men were on a mission, but Abraham ran to them and begged them to stop and stay for awhile. Abraham not only wanted them to stop, but he killed a calf for them and set all the wheels in motion for having quite a banquet set before them. This only happened, even in Abraham's day, even with Abraham's wealth, for very special guests; and one of these guest was special indeed! Abraham had found it so important to have these men stay because he knew one of them was God Himself! How do we know one of the men was God Himself? Simply because the story tells us it was so. Genesis 18:1 says, "And the Lord appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre:..." If you read the entire account, you find that two of the men went on to the cities, and Abraham talked with God. If three men came to Abraham's tent and only two went on to the cities, where did that third man go? The answer is, He stayed with Abraham and is the reason the story tells us, "...but Abraham stood yet before the Lord." Genesis 18:22

Abraham never asked these men who they were, nor are there any introductions. Why? Because Abraham knew he was in the presence of God, in a very special way. Abraham was one of God's sheep; and he not only knew God's voice, he recognized Him from a distance! Abraham had such a special relationship with God that God actually talked with Abraham in a form which resembled a man. Now, most people readily accept that an angel can do this, but not that God does! However, this is not unlike what Adam and Eve experienced in the garden. Genesis tells us,

even after they had taken of the fruit, "...they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day:..." Genesis 3:8 Now, I know there are many people who would disagree God ever walked on the planet in this way, especially after that Genesis story; but Abraham's story begs to differ. Of course, God was not in the flesh in the way Jesus came to this earth, and that difference is the point I am driving at here.

When Jesus came to this earth, He did not just come in the form of a man to commune with just that special one or few which could stand before Him. Jesus came in actual human flesh just as we are in flesh. This is part of the reason why He was born as a baby as opposed to just appearing as a man like the three men did in Abraham's day. Jesus came this way because it was the way for God to come directly to us and walk daily among all men, without His holiness consuming every man who was not prepared to stand before God's perfection.

Nowhere in the Bible are we commanded to celebrate the birth of Christ. Thus, there is no reason to celebrate His birth if we are not clear on the reason for His life! The reason the shepherds said that night, "Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us." Luke 2:15 The reason "...there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him." Matthew 2:1-2 The reason Jesus' coming in the flesh is cause to celebrate is because God loves us so much, He was willing to be made a little lower than the angels in order to give all men a chance to touch God in the most physical way possible and live. (Heb. 2:9)

The real proof that God coming in the flesh was God truly putting Himself on more of an equal footing with us, is the simple fact a cross and nails were able to take Jesus' life. Sure, we could have been easily stopped from killing Jesus' body; but God utilizing His power to overcome us or judge our actions, was not the point of Jesus being born in the flesh. Being vulnerable to the same kind of things we are vulnerable to was the point. This dynamic of Jesus coming in actual flesh was so powerful, it even gave God the opportunity to be tempted in the way we are tempted by sin. (Heb. 4:14-15) This is why Satan came to Jesus, after Jesus had fasted for forty days and nights, to take his best shot at getting Jesus to sin. This would have been an amazing victory for Satan. It would have been an even bigger victory than getting humans to sin, but it did not work. (Matt. 4:1-11)

Jesus was here to stand among us just as any of us stand; but being God Himself, and remaining perfect, He was offering us something very special! God was offering

Himself to physically be our King and Lord, in a way which was more tangible than even what Abraham experienced that day. The opportunity He presented to the world was astonishing! He was truly the answer to all man's problems, and this is why when the time was right, Jesus rode triumphantly into Jerusalem being proclaimed as the Son of David and, therefore, the rightful King of the Jewish nation. (Luke 19:29-48) That was on the tenth day of the first month of the Biblical calendar. However, Jesus was not here to force Himself on anyone; and by the evening of the fourteenth - which is Passover - the answer to all man's problems had willingly given His life on a cross instead.

From there, what we need to understand is that God was prepared to use the truth of Hebrews 9, where we are told in the twenty-seventh verse, "And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment..." Because Jesus lived this life in the flesh as a man, and did it in perfection, this one death and the judgment which followed was no problem. Jesus simply got up and walked away from the tomb they had laid Him in; and they did not even know it until the morning of the sixteenth - which is Firstfruits. This process is why we say Jesus has defeated death, hell and the grave.

This should change our perspective on how we walk this life, even though we physically walk this world in sinful flesh which will have to be shed someday. The question is still the same as it was in the garden. Do we desire to have access to the presence of God? Do we want to utilize that access to live for the purpose we were created to live? If our answer is no, there is no reason for us to go anywhere after this life besides a place where we will never be able to stand in the presence of God again! However, if the answer is yes, God has certainly shown He desires us to have that access!

We celebrate Jesus' birth because it is proof that God desires all men to come unto Him. (II Pet. 3:9) True believers celebrate Jesus' birth because of their desire to return to the life sin has deprived us of here, and Jesus' coming in like flesh has shown us the key. (I Cor. 15) In doing what He did, Jesus has proven the ultimate point: and that is the fact death is no problem for God! This is true even when death is presented to God Himself! He has gone through what He allows us to go through by taking us away from The Tree of Life; and He, in doing so, has proven we cannot only live again, but ultimately, God can use death as a way to lift the veil from our inability to stand continually before His presence and never fear death again!

 By Philip E. Busby