

# MOSES: The Servant of God

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## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### THE VISION OF GOD AND ITS EFFECT

**“And it came to pass, when Moses came down from mount Sinai with the two tables of testimony in Moses’ hand, when he came down from the mount, that Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him”** (Exodus 34:29)

We are justified by the highest authority in deriving spiritual lessons from this incident in the life of the great law-giver. The Apostle expressly refers to it when he says that we all may, with unveiled face, behold the glory of the Lord, and be transformed (II Corinthians 3:13-18).

That blessed vision which of old was given only to the great leader of Israel, is now within reach of each individual believer. The Gospel has no fences to keep off the crowds from the mount of vision; the lowliest and most unworthy of its children may pass upward where the shining rays of the sun reach only the elect spirits that tower above the rest; but in the noon, when every tiny flower and hidden nook lies in full view of the meridian sun, **“We all . . . are changed.”**

#### I. THE DESIRE TO SEE GOD CARRIES WITH IT THE PLEDGE OF ITS GRATIFICATION

During long years the desire had been growing in the heart of Moses to see the face of God. **“Show me now thy glory, that I may know Thee”**; **“I beseech Thee, show my thy glory.”** Prayers like these were constantly on his lips.

And sometimes with him, as with saints of later days, the yearning must have become almost too intense to be borne.

- No invalid in the dark cold winter days so longs for the summer;
- no true heart so longs for its mate;
- no young bride just widowed so longs for the everlasting reunion of Heaven,

as do some saintly hearts long for God.

- **“Oh that I knew where I might find Him!”**
- **“My soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord; my heart and my flesh cry out for the living God.”**
- **“My soul thirsteth for Thee.”**

But these longings are certain to be fulfilled, because God is faithful.

- There is no stronger argument for immortality than this; it must be, because all men forecast it.
- There is no stronger argument for retribution than this; it must be, because men's consciences demand it.
- There is no stronger argument for the Being of God than to say, It must be, because the heart of man craves infinite love; the mind of man infinite truth; the spirit of man infinite communion with spirit.

And in the same way we must infer, that the presence of these intense yearnings for Himself – for face to face fellowship and intercourse – are the herald symptoms, the premonitory signs, that within our reach there is the possibility of an intercourse with God, which up till now our hearts have not conceived.

And if we garner every opportunity, cultivate every faculty, and keep our faces ever toward the mountain of communion, we shall infallibly find that the heart which yearns for the vision shall not be left without the vision for which it yearns; and that the yearning is the unconscious awakening of the soul to the fact that it is standing on the threshold of the highest privilege possible to man. It is thus that a babe awakens to a mother's tenderness, and a maiden becomes conscious of the great destiny to which an unexpected love, which has stolen so mysteriously upon her, beckons.

Oh, these mysterious risings of the water in the river where the barges lie, bearing them up on their arms, rattling their chains, straining their cords, and bringing them an assurance of the swell and fulness and glory of the great ocean, which calls to them to launch forth on its broad expanse and fathomless depths!

**“And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken; for thou hast found grace in My sight . . . Be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning unto Mount Sinai.”**

## **II. THE GRATIFICATION OF THE DESIRE DEPENDS ON OUR FULFILLMENT OF CERTAIN CONDITIONS**

(1) *We must learn to obey.*

This was the great characteristic of Moses. He was faithful in all God's house as a servant. His proudest title, by which he is known even in Heaven is **“the servant of God.”** **“They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God”** (Revelation 15:3). And the repeated refrain of the books of the Pentateuch is the phrase which sounds deep and often, as the toll of the bell over the waves: **“As the Lord commanded Moses, so did he.”**

God could always depend on him. He was a man after his own heart, who could fulfil all his will. And it was to him, rather than to the disobedient hearts of the people, that God revealed Himself.

And this is consistent with the words of our Lord, who said. **“He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and I will manifest Myself unto him”** (John 14:21).

Clearly, obedience is the stepping-stone to vision. We must be servants ere we can be friends. The path of literal obedience, albeit that it is rough and steep, is the only path to the mountain-summit, with its marvellous revelation. Is it not so always? The discoverer must obey nature, before he can expect to reach the vantage-ground from which to survey the harmony and helpfulness of her mighty laws, and the mystery of her secret processes.

Do not be disobedient to heavenly visions; never turn aside to your own preferences from the narrow path of unswerving loyalty to the voice of God speaking in his word, and in your heart, and in circumstance. Dare to do right, though you stand alone amongst the recreant hosts; and you will thus fulfil one prime condition of the vision of God.

*(2) We must be willing to pass through the thick cloud.*

**“God called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud . . . and Moses went into the midst of the cloud”** (Exodus 24:16-18).

Thick banks of dense cloud, dark in their earthward aspect, though insufferably bright on their inner side, shut out the light of sun and the spectacles of earth, and shut him in with God. But he had not seen the vision, had he not been willing to pass through the cloud and to stand beneath the shadow of the Divine hand.

The traveler who would pass from the wintry slopes of Switzerland into the summer beauty of the plains of Italy, must be prepared to tunnel the Alps. The garden, the Cross, and the grave, are the only way to the Resurrection morning.

The walls must be toned to a neutral tint on which masterpieces of painting are to be exhibited. And it seems indispensable that we should pass into the shadow of bereavement, temptation, and distress, if we are to emerge into God’s marvellous light and estimate its brilliance.

Not first the light, and after that the dark;  
But first the dark, and after that the light.  
First, the thick cloud, and then the rainbow arc;  
First, the dark grave, and then the resurrection light.

*(3) We must dare to be alone.*

When we read (Exodus 34:2, 3) those solemn words, **“Be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning, and present thyself there to Me in the top of the mount: and no man shall come up with thee; neither let any man be seen throughout all the mount, neither let the flocks nor herds feed before the mount”** they seem to echo down to us in other but similar tones, **“When thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret.”**

- Jacob must be left alone if the Angel of God is to whisper in his ear the mystic name of Shiloh;
- Daniel must be alone if he is to see the celestial vision;
- John must be banished to Patmos if he is deeply to take and firmly to keep “the print of Heaven.”

The insulated cloud alone contains in its bosom the mighty thunderstorm; that which is stranded on the mountain slope is soon robbed of its electricity.

Valuable as are the prolific opportunities for Christian culture and service which surround us, they will be disastrous indeed in their effect if they rob us of the time that we should otherwise spend with God, or give us a distaste for lonely heart-fellowship.

Let the first moments of the day, when the heart is fresh, be given to God. Never see the face of man till you have seen the King. Dare to be much alone on the Mount.

### **III. WHEN THE CONDITIONS ARE FULFILLED, THE VISION IS SURE**

Perhaps Moses, as he entered the cloud, expected that the Almighty would pass before him, riding upon a cherub, flying upon the wings of the wind, girt with rainbow and storm, while the thunder rolled as drums in his march.

But lo! he seemed to stand in a ravine, upon a ledge of rock, shadowed by a hand, whilst through that mountain-rent passed the Divine procession; and a voice, still, sweet, penetrating, told that God was Love.

Mark the progress of revelation to the adoring soul.

- In Horeb, Moses had stood in the outer court, to learn that God is changeless.
- In the giving of the Law he had stood in the effulgent glory of the Holy Place, to learn that God is righteous.
- Now he was admitted to the inner shrine, to learn that the Lord God was merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth.

The answers to our prayers for spiritual vision may not always come as we expect. But, however they come, come they will. None of those who wait for Him shall be ashamed. He will satisfy desires which He has Himself implanted. The King will be punctual to enter to see the guests who have complied with his conditions. As to Fletcher of Madeley, to Catherine of Siena, to President Edwards, to Dr. Payson, and to hundreds besides, so to you, when least expecting it, will come the beatific vision, perhaps constraining you to cry, as John Tennant did: “Hold, Lord, it is enough! or the frail vessel will break beneath the weight of glory.”

### **IV. SUCH VISIONS LEAVE UNMISTAKEABLE TRACES**

The face of Moses shone: and did not his heart and life shine also? Could it have been otherwise?

Linen in which the housewife has laid rosemary and lavender will smell fragrantly; ordinary iron placed near a magnet becomes magnetic; those that are in king's courts catch a refined and courteous mien; the friend of wise men gets wisdom; the members of a closely-knit family contract by association some tiny gesture, a peculiarity which betrays their oneness; it is proverbial how on the faces of an aged couple there is seen a strong resemblance, so that each reflects the other. And it is impossible for us to be much with God without becoming godly, i.e., God-like.

The old legends of the saints tell of those who, by long meditation on the crucifixion of the Lord, received in their very flesh the marks of his wounds. There is certainly a spiritual counterpart of this in the long, fixed gaze of the soul on the vision of God, by which the lineaments of the Divine beauty pass into the life, and light it up with a loveliness which is not of earth.

#### **V. SUCH TRACES ARE NOT PERCEIVED BY THOSE WHO PRESENT THEM**

**“Moses wist not that his face shone.”** He was glorious in all eyes but his own.

There is a law known to medical men as Holland's law; which affirms that whenever attention is directed specially to any one organ of the body, the action of that organ is more or less disturbed.

If, for instance, we begin to think of our heart, counting its beats, and listening to its throbs, we disturb its rhythmic action. There are few who can let the physician feel their pulse with perfect composure; and he is generally obliged to make some allowance for the effects of this self-consciousness. So with the functions of digestion, and respiration, and thought. These great and vital processes of the body go on most healthily and satisfactorily, when they are not made direct subjects of attention. And in these respects we may trace a close analogy between the physical and the spiritual life of man. A counter part of Holland's law pervades the physiology of the spiritual life. We shall do best, and make quickest progress, when we know it not.

True Christian excellence is as unconscious of its beauty as Moses was; whenever it becomes self-conscious it loses its charm. Beware of the man who talks about his graces. There is such a thing as being proud of humility, and making capital out of our nothingness. The man who boasts of a shining face is a counterfeit and a cheat. The possessor of the genuine article never talks about it, never thinks about it; and would be almost overwhelmed to hear of any such thing being ascribed to him.

The charm of a little child is its utter unconsciousness of self; and that is the charm in true God-likeness. It is like the bloom on a peach, the dew-jewels on the morning lawn, or the stillness of the surface of a mountain pool.

**~ end of chapter 18 ~**

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