



GOD DELIVERED US

Exodus 24:12-18

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These Old Testament passages, with terrifying visual displays of God's power, seize the imagination. When I read these pages from Exodus, I cannot help but recall Charlton Heston's portrayal of Moses and the grand vision conveyed in the movie *Ten Commandments*. I don't so much think Charlton Heston played Moses, but rather Moses bears a striking resemblance to Charlton Heston with a big white beard.

However, these passages are not an opportunity for God to show off and flex His miraculous muscles. Instead they are meant to convey the other-ness of God; how far beyond us, is the nature of God. God's presence is likened to a devouring fire.

I spent a summer in the Grand Teton National Park in 1988. Wildfires raged there for several weeks; they are a terror.

Fierce, alive, and blazing hot – they are filled with an unpredictable, destructive power.

Similarly, God is not in our control and cannot be put in a box. The fullness of God's glory is so immense and beyond our small minds that even a momentary glimpse would melt them.

This fact can be a source of anxiety or great comfort. It is up to you. If you want to be in control of your life and the direction of the world, then you are in for a life of misery and pain.

If you want to trust God, the creator and ruler of the universe, whose power and wisdom far outstrips your own, then it will be a source of hope.

Think for a moment of the context of this passage. Israel has recently emerged from a centuries-long enslavement by the pharaohs, false gods whose power relied on lies and treachery, and whose kingdom was built on their tortured labor.

Contrast this false power with that of the one, true God. Not only can this Lord commit great feats and awesome displays but He will use it to free His people rather than enslave them!

Israel is preparing to embark on a decades-long journey to discover what it means to live as the people

of the one, true God. They are about to receive the gift of the law, which will be the blueprint to live as a free society. This is not just a list of do's and don'ts. Think of it as the very first people's constitution.

In this setting, God's displays of power underscore the trustworthiness of the source. It is not a decree from a despotic, false God, the laws of which only further the fortunes of those in power. It is a gift from heaven, from one with true power over all things.

To have this display occur while Moses ascends is to put God's stamp of approval on him, leaving no doubt in their minds that Moses is God's chosen servant.

After this encounter, Moses descends not only transformed but transfigured. His face glows with the presence of God, shining like the sun, not only conveying raw power but splendor as well.

Encountering God is like being struck by a meteor. It leaves a crater, an indelible mark for all to see.

The Jewish people have accumulated millennia of traditions to enable them to access these pivotal moments in history.

Their traditions create an *anamnesis*. Anamnesis is a concept developed by that famous philosopher Plato in his work *Phaedo*. For our purposes, it refers to an ability to remember an event that you never experienced. Even though you were not there, it becomes so deeply embedded in your psyche, it is as if you were. This gives the Jews today a powerful ability to connect to the presence of God here and now.

For example, as the Jews today recall God's great actions from the past such as the Exodus event, they say "God delivered us!" Not God delivered the Israelites. Not God delivered *them*. God delivered *us*. People thousands of years later are so connected to the event that, to them, it is as if God parted the Red Sea right before their very eyes.

The Jews have found an effective way for the meteor-like impacts of God, from thousands of years ago, to imprint on their lives today.

But we don't have that same collective memory.

When you look at the moon, with the exception of its bright-white appearance, what is its most noticeable feature? The impact craters. Some of those impacts were left billions of years ago and they can still be seen. But not so with the earth. For two reasons.

First, there is the process of erosion. Our weather patterns, bit-by-bit over the course of eons, level out the surface of the earth, wiping away a meteor's imprint.

Secondly, the earth has something called plate tectonics, which constantly transforms the earth's surface from below. The tectonics are powered by the heat in the core of the earth, which leads to portions of the crust being sucked down, partially melted, and emerge renewed.

Thus, a meteor's imprint is wiped out from within and without.

You and I have a tremendous amount, outside of ourselves, that works to erase our memories and experiences of the powerful presence of God. Our insanely-busy schedules with endless chores are like rainstorms that erode our ability to relive and re-experience God's wonders from the past.

We have a lot shifting within us – our personal hopes, dreams, and anxieties that bury these memories deeper and deeper until we no longer have access to them.

When the powerful memories of God's presence are buried, is when we start to lose control. It is when we are tempted to build idols, as Israel did when they waited for Moses to come down off the mountain on another occasion.

We need to find a way for those meteor-like impacts of God's presence to resurface. To access those memories, as the Jews have learned to do. I have a collection of things that help me to remember.

When I think about the times when I begin to feel sorry for myself, I remember this hat. This came from one of the translators in Haiti, from Abel. You heard my son Mathew tell a story about him and so did I. Abel didn't give me the shirt off his back, but he gave me the hat off his head! He protected us during a time of a little bit of fear and trepidation during a three-hour traffic gridlock. So if I begin to feel sorry for myself, I remember what life is like for Abel.

And when I wonder, sometimes as a pastor, if what we are doing is really making a difference, that's when I pull out this box of notecards. They contain loving thoughts that you all have written to me – thanking me for visits in the hospital or sermons that meant something to you. someone even sent me a roll of Duct tape with Ducks on it, as a wonderful gift and memory.

And when I sometimes think about taking life too seriously, I look at my socks that I've got on and they remind me to smile once in a while. God wants us to enjoy life.

And then this tie I am wearing today. This tie was my father-in-law's tie. He died about 15 years ago. Whenever I wear it, I remember that he's still watching and I had better treat Wendy with all the love and respect and honor that she deserves.

And that ruler – I just pulled that in at the last minutes. Every once in a while God surprises you with a memory you are not ready for. Dr. George Pera is here. He was my pastor when I was in high school. And I remember one sermon he gave. I don't remember what he said, but I remember he took a ruler and dropped it to the floor. That reminds me that the Word of God should be preached with passion and with conviction.

But sometimes you need something a little bit more. God did amazing displays in front of people, but God himself remained hidden in a cloud. And, in Jesus Christ he emerged from behind the curtain.

And Jesus gave us this (Communion) cup to remember that when people saw his face, they were seeing the face of God. And when people felt his touch, they were feeling the warmth of the divine. And that when we all experience this feast together, that's the special memory we have. We know that God is our friend and that he loves us ever so much.

Look for those things in your life that help you hold on to the grace and glory of God. Set your face toward him when times are difficult. If you ascend that mountain of faith, you too will see the face of God. Amen.