

HOW MUCH DOES GOD WEIGH?

March 17, 2020

I wish to reflect on a passage of scripture that I have preached in some of your congregations. This is one of my favorite passages.

The story is told in Exodus 33 and is the account of one of many encounters between Moses and God. Moses, throughout Exodus, is continually doubting his call. Exodus 3-7 is a running commentary of God's attempt to convince Moses that he was worthy and capable of performing what God asked him to do. Indeed, one way of viewing the book of Exodus is through the lens of Moses' doubt and God's persistence.

This pattern continues in Exodus 33. Many events transpired leading up to this moment. Deliverance was granted from the Egyptians, manna and quail became staples for food, water was provided, guidance was present in the daytime and in the darkness and yet...one more time.

Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. 16How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?" 17And the LORD said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name." 18Then Moses said, "Now show me your glory (Exodus 33:15-18, NIV)." I don't believe Moses had any idea of what he was asking in wishing to see God's glory.

The word glory is a complex and rich study in the Old Testament. It is transliterated kabod or kabowd and can mean heaviness, substance or weight. In Genesis 31:1 we find the Hebrew word for glory used in relation to Jacob's wealth. The word for glory (kabod) is translated "wealth" in the NIV and glory in the ASV. In other words, Jacob's "weight or substance" was derived from his wealth.

In Genesis 45:13, we have a similar play on words. Joseph is speaking with his brothers and reassuring them of his good intentions. He told his brothers to speak of his father of the "honor" garnered in Egypt. (NIV) The ASV translates the word honor as "glory." Glory, for Joseph, was a result of his political success/power (honor) in Egypt.

One lens to look at Moses' question to God is, "Show me your substance, your weight." How shall we understand the stuff that comprises your character? How much do you weigh?

Here is God's response. "And the LORD said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim my name, the LORD, in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion. 20But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live" (Exodus 33:19-20, NIV).

A rich and textured passage. How is God's substance measured? In mercy and compassion. How much does God weigh? "You cannot see my face and live."

The story concludes with Moses going up on Mt. Sinai and coming down with a radiant face (Exodus 34:33-35). What happened? Moses' face was too bright for the Hebrews to gaze upon. Reflected glory...

There are a promise and a challenge contained in this passage. The incredible promise is this: God's mercy and compassion are so weighty and all-encompassing; we cannot even begin to understand its depth and breadth. We cannot look upon it and survive. When we think God's mercy must be in short supply, and God's compassion withering on the vine, we have not even begun to scratch the surface. These promises outlive and outlast all circumstances of our living.

The challenge for us is this: What will our neighbors say about our weight during this time of struggle? In what manner will we be weighed? When we are weighed upon the scales of living, will the needle of the scales land next to mercy and goodness?

Oh God of infinite mercy and goodness

We give you praise and thanks

Your goodness is everlasting and overwhelming

Oh God of infinite mercy and goodness

We confess our limitations of mind and spirit

We too often settle for a pale imitation of your generosity

Oh God of infinite mercy and goodness

Stir our hearts we pray

Move us beyond our fears and protectiveness to "weighty" living

Oh God of infinite mercy and goodness

Lord, listen to Your children praying, Lord, send Your spirit in this place; Lord, listen to Your children praying, Send us love, send us pow'r, send us grace!

Amen

Blessings to all,

District Executive Minister

John Jantzi