

THE STORY: UNDERSTANDING THE BIG PICTURE OF THE BIBLE

Week 3 – “. . . you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen”

Deut. 29:29 - *The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.*

What has God made known to us? That which He wants known about Himself. We have His instructions, His promises, His plan for the world, and consequences for not embracing His promises.

“Secret things” – what might those be? Could these secret things be that which God desires to hide – that which is hidden? Consider: “secret things” may include the specific way in which God will carry out His will. The unifying principle in the Bible: the character of God to which we need to cling! God has given us 66 books. We know Who He is! If there are things within God that are “secret”/“hidden,” should we not still trust, submit, and lean on His character - His glory? AMEN AND AMEN!

Ex. 33:12-14 - Moses enters into the role of intercessor before God for the nation of Israel. Moses clearly understood that without God’s presence they would not be a people set apart from other nations. Although God had declared that Moses had found grace in His sight, God had not given Moses the assurance that was necessary to carry on this difficult task – in Moses’ estimation. Moses has asked for God to make His **ways** known to him, so that he, Moses, may continue to find favor in God’s sight. God promised His presence (paneḥ – face) to Moses. God promised that He would send His Angel (Ex. 33:3). Who is God’s Angel? The Angel of the Lord – a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus. Isa. 63:9 tells us that the Angel of the Lord is the Angel of His Presence! Deut. 29:29 – the secret things belong to God!

The Hebrew word for “paneḥ” carries a wonderfully graphic connotation: “the part that turns.” God sees all things in His presence. If God had a face, it would be a face that turns in that EVERYTHING is in His presence. He sees everything. That’s why King David asked, “Where can I flee from Your presence?” (Psa. 139). In other words, I cannot flee from Your presence, God, because everything is in Your presence!

Ex. 33:15-17 - Moses did NOT get an immediate answer to “let me know Thy ways” (v.13). The “secret” things belong to God. Again, could the “secret” things mean God’s ways? Consider God’s ways:

- Within the redemption from Egypt – there were those who died – the first born within the homes that didn’t have the lamb’s blood applied – and there were many who were delivered.
- We see light and darkness at the same time – Ex. 14:19.
 - God is light and in Him is no darkness AT ALL – I John 1:5.

Moses returns to his first petition – v. 18 – *I pray Thee, show me THY GLORY.*

Ex. 33:19-23 - The Lord is not obligated to do what Moses had asked. God chooses when and to whom He will reveal His glorious goodness. God is under no obligation to show mercy to anyone. Grace has no reason for being manifested on a person except for the graciousness of the Giver! God in His holiness could have destroyed this sinful people and have been absolutely JUST in doing so. God's character demands justice! On the other hand, God could also forgive His people AS LONG AS their sins were atoned for. He's already laid down that standard/requirement in Lev. 17:11. God's forgiveness is based on Jesus' finished work on the cross – taking God's wrath for us. Rev. 13:8 – Jesus is the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. This is God's plan from all eternity.

GOD'S WRATH

Wrath is defined as “the emotional response to perceived wrong and injustice.” Both humans and God express wrath. There is, however, a vast difference between the wrath of God and the wrath of man. God's wrath is holy and always justified; man's is never holy and rarely justified. In the OT, the wrath of God is a divine response to human sin and disobedience. The wrath of God is consistently directed towards those who do not follow His will (Rom. 1:18). God's wrath against sin and disobedience is perfectly justified because His plan for mankind is holy and perfect. God provided a way to gain divine favor – repentance – which turns God's wrath away from the sinner. To reject that perfect plan is to reject God's love, mercy, grace and favor and incur His righteous wrath. John 3:36 - *He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him.* The wrath of God is fearsome and terrifying. Only those who have been covered by the blood of Christ, shed for us on the cross, can be assured that God's wrath will never fall on them. We are saved from God's wrath through Him (Rom. 5:9).

God's wrath will be poured upon the earth during the Tribulation.

Dan. 9:24-27 – the Church is not mentioned or even alluded to in the 70 week prophecy of Daniel re: end times.

Rom. 8:1 – there is therefore no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

I Thess. 5:9 – believers are not appointed to wrath.

Rev. 4 – throne room; 24 elders with crowns (24 divisions of the priesthood seen in I Chron. 24); the Church is represented by the 24 elders in Rev. 4 – priesthood of the believers; Rev. 4:10 – they cast their crowns before God's throne (and in the midst of the throne – Rev. 5:6 – was the Lamb).

Rev. 5 – Jesus opens the seals – God's judgments on the earth.

Rev. 6:16-17 - *Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!* ¹⁷ *For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?”*

v. 20 - *But He said, “You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live;” v. 23 - . . . you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen.”* Why could Moses see one side of God but not the other? The Bible consistently teaches us that no man is able to

see God's face and life. Had God granted Moses all he had asked; Moses would have been struck dead by the presence of the living God.

John 1:18 - *No one has seen God at any time. . . .*

John 5:37 - *And the Father Himself, who sent Me, has testified of Me. You have neither heard His voice at any time, nor seen His form*

Num. 12:8 – (re: Moses – v. 7) *I speak with him face to face, even plainly and not in dark sayings (not in riddles); and he sees the form/similitude of the LORD.* (Hebrew – temuna – representation) There was no mediator between God and Moses. The Lord did not speak to Moses through visions and dreams – but plainly.

“It was not that Moses saw the full glory of God (John 1:18); but rather that Moses had the most explicit intimate encounters (Dt. 34:10)” John MacArthur

Ex. 33:21-23 - While Moses stood upon the rock, God said that He would pass by Him in all of His goodness. God's hand shielded Moses from the full radiance of God's splendor (v. 22). My back/back parts: Hebrew word *a'khore* means hereafter (as it relates to time). Moses could only see behind God, not God Himself. The word, *a'khore*, could more accurately be rendered “the after-effects” (or hereafter) of His radiant glory, which had just passed by.

Gen. 16:13 – When the Angel of the Lord visited Hagar in the desert and told her she was with child, Hagar said, “Have I also here seen Him Who sees me?” “Seen Him” literally means “the back of Him.”

“Whatever Moses saw of God's nature. . . is referred to as ‘God's back’ and was never subsequently described by Moses.” John MacArthur.

The “secret things” belong to God!

What has God revealed to us in Jesus?

John 1:14 - *And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*

II Cor. 3:18 - *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

Ex. 34:5-7 – “. . . To know that God is Jehovah is to know that He is merciful and gracious, not clearing the guilty, but punishing iniquity. To know that He is Jehovah is to know His name, His character. To know that He is Jehovah is to know His goodness – goodness that upholds what is right. If He does not uphold what is right, He is not good. If He does not keep His word, He is not faithful and cannot be trusted. Jehovah's righteousness, therefore, is an essential component of His love. . . . Jehovah is righteous, faithful, and loving. Even when His holiness demands the death of transgressors, this is an expression of His goodness and love as it upholds His faithfulness and shows Him trustworthy.” James Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation Through Judgment*, pp. 104-105. The Bible has established that mankind is set on sin (Gen. 6:5; 8:21), so all deserve to be punished. But God is also pleased to show mercy, which He is not obligated to give to anyone. He mercies whomever He pleases (Ex. 33:19b).

Moses' response to God's glory: *So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped* (Ex. 34:8).

Rom. 11:22 - *Behold then the goodness and severity of God.* Whatever we may fathom re: God's severity, the truth is that God's severity is GOOD. For Israel, the revelation of the severity of God – as seen in His comments to Moses re: the golden calf episode – was for PURIFYING!!! And, think of this in our lives. . . .

Heb. 12:5-6a - *My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him; for whom the LORD loves He chastens. . . .* God is loving in His chastisement of us because He hates the sin in our lives that mars fellowship with Him.

Oswald Chambers (July 29th) – we, as believers, must be able to look at the darkest, blackest fact full in the face without damaging God's character.

I believe in God. Do I believe Him?? Do I believe what He says in His Word? Do I take God seriously?

Matt. 11:6 – *And blessed is he who is not offended because of Me."*

As believers, when God chastises us – how do we respond? When God has allowed something in our lives that isn't exactly thrilling, are we able to thank Him for His goodness? Are we willing/able to put God's glory before our comforts?

Joel 2:1-2a tells us of a message of judgment at the hand of God – "the day of the Lord". Yet, in Joel 2:12-14, we read of restoration and hope. We see this wide swing throughout Scripture of God's judgment and His blessing – His restoration!

The severity of God is seen in the penalty which Jesus bore. Because of Jesus bearing our penalty, God carried out His justice. The goodness of God is seen in God justifying those who believe (Rom. 3:26) – declaring them righteous because of His righteousness – because of Jesus paying the penalty for our sin – bearing the wrath of God for us. At the cross both the goodness and severity of God collide – for our GOOD!!! AND THE CRASH IS ON GOD'S HEART!

As we look at the big picture of Scripture, we need to remember that there is mystery in God's wisdom – in His ways. God chooses the weak and the foolish and the insignificant for His purposes – causing us to depend entirely on Him:

When God called Abram and told him that He would make a great nation with a multitude of descendants, God started with a man who was married to a woman who was childless – who was barren and OLD!

In choosing a king, God chose a boy, David, whose own father, Jesse, didn't think he would be king.

In God's plan to save the world, He sent God the Son, Jesus, to this sinful, fallen world as a baby, born to a peasant girl in questionable circumstances. Jesus was sent to a small, no-nothing town, Nazareth in Galilee. The connotation of the name, Nazareth, was GERM! People of the day asked, "Could any good thing come out of Nazareth?"

What is the conflict in the Bible? Spiritual warfare which was set in motion when Satan was cursed in Genesis 3:15 and the Redeemer was promised. What is the setting of the Bible? The world/the universe! The world is a *theater* for the display of God's glory. Psalm 19:1 - *The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork.*

As we move forward in the Bible and understand it literally, believing that Jesus was physically born in Bethlehem and carried out His earthly ministry in Israel for three years. . . believing that Jesus will return to the earth literally to reign from Jerusalem for 1,000 literal years. . we can look forward to the promise of the Kingdom of God on this earth. We look forward to RESTORATION! In our study of the Bible, we are always moving toward RESTORATION.

The first two chapters of Genesis contain two complementary accounts of creation – two perspectives on creation. The scope is more cosmic in Genesis 1. The emphasis is on God creating, thus focusing on God's transcendence over creation. In Genesis 2, humanity is focused upon. Genesis 2:25 – Adam and Eve were both shameless and innocent. God gave them everything in the garden. However, there was one stipulation. God told them not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. There is no reason given for this prohibition other than it was a test. Eating from that tree, after it had been forbidden by God, would indeed give man the knowledge of evil. Evil can be broadly defined as disobeying God. Enter the tempter, Satan, the adversary, the deceiver. Satan had challenged God's authority. He had already rebelled against God, voicing his desire to be like God – to be worshipped (Isa. 14:12-21). Eve succumbed to Satan's temptation and ate. Adam also ate. Man wasn't satisfied with ALL that God had given them. Man wanted to be like God. Man was following after Satan's desires. Man refused to trust that God had their best in mind. Man was to have dominion over all creation. That wasn't enough. Adam and Eve wanted to be like God.

At the Fall when man sinned – immediately there was a separation from God (Isa. 59:2). God's desire is to NOT be separated from man. Exodus 25:8 – God desired to dwell with His creation. Gen. 3:8 – MAN hid. Sin caused guilt and shame. We no longer see man and God walking together (Gen. 3:8). BUT GOD has **not** chosen to hide Himself from mankind. God pursued man. What a picture of redemption! Gen. 3:9 – “Adam, where are you?” Of course, God knew where they were. I'm suggesting that this was God's way of prompting Adam to explain why he was hiding. God's words to Adam are a self-revelation of God – we see His desire to draw Adam and Eve to Himself – to show them mercy. From the beginning, God's response to human sin expresses His mercy. God's desire is not the death of the sinner but his life. Our God is a God of grace. God is a personal God!

God created; man fell; God promised redemption and we move forward toward restoration! That's the plot of the Bible!

Why would God allow Satan into the Garden to tempt Adam and Eve? God knew what would happen! God had told Adam and Eve not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of

good and evil. Adam had been given a law to follow, which, in and of itself, included the option to obey or disobey. Man had been created with volition – with a will – the ability to make our own choices/decisions. Adam fell/sinned because he freely chose to disobey God! The responsibility lies with man! Freedom of choice means that temptations WILL occur. Robots with no freedom of choice are not tempted; they can only respond according to their programming. But Adam and Eve were different. Being made in the image of God, they had freedom of choice. They could rebel or not.

CONSIDER: We wouldn't know God's grace, mercy, and love if Satan had not rebelled, if man had not sinned. And, against the blackness of evil, doesn't God's grace, mercy and love shine brighter? The remainder of the Bible – after Genesis 3 – sets us forth on the road to redemption and ultimate restoration! We're on the VICTORY road! The way back to God is laid out for us in Genesis – at the beginning. MORE TO CONSIDER: God's destiny for mankind is to have dominion over His creation (Gen. 1:26). This is God's plan. God's plan is ALWAYS Plan A. This will take place. God's plan has NOT been ruined!

Gen. 3:22-24 - Man was driven out of the garden (Gen. 3:22). God drove Adam and Eve out of the garden following the fall and barred the way to the tree of life in the garden by placing Cherubim at the east of the garden and a flaming sword which turned every way – to guard the way to the tree of life. This is God's GRACE! If man – IN HIS SINFUL, FALLEN CONDITION – ate of the tree of life – he would live in that fallen condition forever!

God has chosen to restore and reconcile His original plan. A key in understanding the big picture of the Bible is to grasp that God will restore and reconcile everything that was lost in the fall. For God's credibility to be intact, everything must be restored.

UNIFYING PRINCIPLE: GOD'S CHARACTER!

AND, because humanity had brought the problem into the world (Rom. 5:19; I Cor. 15:21-22; I Cor. 15:45) -- humanity was going to be the solution to the problem. Thus, the Messiah – the God/Man – 100% God/100% man – was promised.

QUESTIONS:

What is the overarching theme of the Bible?

What is the unifying principle of the Bible?

How can the Bible's plot be summarized? By what four words?

The plot emerges from conflict. What is the recurring conflict in Scripture?

What is your Biblical view of restoration?

How does this all fit?

SUGGESTED HOMEWORK:

Continue in your journal. How is any struggle you're experiencing find its roots in the conflict of the ages – spiritual warfare?

Write out how you grasp the goodness and the severity of God.

Read week 4's handout when you receive it.