

**Seeing God**  
**Exodus 34:1-9**  
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Everything that we know of God is the result of God making Himself known to us. We do not climb up to where He is using the steps of reason and logic; He comes to where we are through the revelation of Himself in His Word the center and culmination of which is His Son. We are told in Psalm 138:3, “You have exalted above all things Your Name and Your Word.” God makes Himself known to us most particularly and most powerfully in His Holy Word the center of which is the revelation of His Name in all the fullness that we can know it, the name of Jesus. Jesus, there is something about that Name. Philip Graham Ryken says that no matter how far we reach toward God with our reason and our logic, God still has to stoop to reach us.

When theologians speak of the revelation of God as declared to us in the Word of God they use two terms. They speak first of the general revelation of God in the world that He has made. The Psalmist says, “the heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork. Day to day pours out speech and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard” (Psalm 19:1-3). Paul puts it in these words, “. . . for what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. For His invisible attributes, namely His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse” (Romans 1:19-20). God makes Himself known to us in the world that He has made in a way that is clear and convincing. The world is the stage for the manifestation of His glory in the second kind of revelation which is known as special or particular revelation. This is the revelation of God in which and through which He comes to the world to reveal who He is, why He comes, and what He wills. This revelation is clear and convicting. It comes to us through His Word and in His Son. The purpose of this particular or special revelation is the redemption of sinners who begin through redemption the journey of transformation where life has one simple and central focus: the proclamation of the gospel to others and the glorification of our God through who we are, what we do, and what we say.

This text in Exodus teaches us about the revelation of God. It shows us how God reveals Himself, to whom God reveals Himself, what is first for us in this revelation of God, Who He Is, and how we respond. Verse one shows us how it is that God reveals Himself. He reveals Himself by giving to those whom He has chosen His Word. There are two truths that are very important in verse one. The first is the very specific way in which God shows us how His Word works. Here we have a human being, Moses, chosen by God to be the instrument for the writing of the Word of God. Moses provides the tablets of stone; God does the writing. There are two stones you know because this is a covenant between God and His people. One copy is for God who keeps it inviolable in heaven; the other is for His people upon the earth. It is why we are taught to pray, “Your Kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.” And the will of God is revealed in the Word of God which for us is the Holy Bible. God choosing men like Paul and James and Mark and Matthew and using them as instruments through which He would communicate His Word. Here is the first truth that I want us to see: the Word of God comes from a holy God through human authors which simply shows that a holy God can use imperfect people to accomplish His perfect will. Would you explain that one to me?

That is why the second truth must be understood. Some of the core convictions that are central and critical in the communication of God to us constitute conundrums that we cannot resolve but which we are called to accept by faith because we accept the Bible as the revealed Truth of God. For example, we believe that the Bible is given by God through human authors. God proclaimed His inerrant, infallible word through fallible and flawed humans. His perfect word comes through imperfect personalities with these imperfect personalities bearing their stamp upon God’s perfect word in the various styles that we see in the Bible. The Gospel of John does not read like the Gospel of Mark. Or we believe that Jesus was fully, truly human and fully, truly God. Or we believe that God is One God manifest in three persons. Or we believe that God is absolutely sovereign and we are fully responsible. Paradoxes impossible to resolve are at the center of God’s Word so that we might trust Him and do His work in the world and not waste time seeking to unravel that which simply often creates more knots the more we seek to unravel. It is why declaring the Gospel and developing devoted disciples is a far more important enterprise than defending the faith.

God reveals Himself in His Word and calls upon those to whom He reveals Himself to trust Him and to obey His Word. Moses was that kind of man. God speaks to Moses with three imperatives that are characteristic of every person who wants to receive the revelation of God through His Word. God says, “be ready, come up, present yourself.” Here is the posture of the person to whom God reveals Himself. Be ready. Open your Bible. Gather your study aids. Join a Sunday School Class and/or Bible Study Group. Enroll in an on-line Bible class. Come up. Study emerges out of worship. Worship leads us to study. We do not study the Word of God to build up knowledge because knowledge puffs up; we study the Word of God to gain wisdom so that we can live out what we are learning. Present yourself. Open your heart to the Word of God. Come ready to be confronted rather than confirmed. Come ready to be transformed rather than touched. Come ready to see your life shaped for the glory of God rather than receiving something that can help you feel better about yourself.

God reveals Himself in His Word and to His people, but we must see what is fundamental in the character of this God who reveals Himself to us: He is a holy God, 3. He is God greatly to be feared. This God is serious about the great gift of His salvation and the reason for His granting it. It is not so that we can be secure but so that we can serve Him and honor Him in a way that shows all who see us and hear us. So Moses did what all who hear His word desire to do: he obeyed, 4. And look what God did. It is what God has to do or there would be no meeting with God. He came down in the mystery of the cloud to where Moses was and He made Himself known. The Bible says that He proclaimed His name. Ten characteristics are communicated here that show us who our God is. Ten words. Look at them with me.

The Lord. It is repeated not because God stutters or we are slow of hearing but because He wants us to get this. He is a PERSONAL God who wants a personal relationship with us. The title “Lord” is Yahweh; He is the one who rules the world for His glory. He needs no one or no thing and He wants a relationship with you. It can only come one way and that is through Jesus. God sent Jesus as the Savior from sin, your sin and my sin. He wants to save you today. How do you know you are saved? By a life that even today is being changed by the grace of God through the word of God for the glory of God. A saved person has been saved from the wrath of God and the fires of hell so as to live for the glory of God as his life is surrendered to

Jesus as Lord. Are you saved? I believe that God reveals this first because it is what He most wants. He wants a relationship with you and with me.

God. He is POWERFUL. He does rule the world. His Kingdom is coming. His reign will be established upon the earth with or without you. That God who desires a personal relationship with you will live without it. He is not dependent on you or me. And those who refuse to receive Him or to receive Him on terms other than His will face eternal judgment on the Day of Judgment. He is gracious as the Lord and He is holy and just as God.

Compassionate. He is PLEADING. The word means “to groan inwardly.” He wants you to turn to Him in repentance. He wants to save you. He doesn’t want anybody to perish. We see this picture in Jesus when He saw the crowds harassed and helpless, and he was moved with compassion. So is God today as He is making Himself known to us even in these moments. He longs to show us the depths of His love by delivering us from the dreadful darkness of our sin which is seen in our living for ourselves.

The fourth term is MERCIFUL. Our God not only pleads over us but He is PLENTIFUL in His mercy. He abounds with mercy. His grace is who He is in reaching out to sinners. His compassion is what goes on within Him as He groans over sinners. His mercy is the particular manifestation of His grace and compassion to you and me as sinners. Would you pray today with the penitent in the temple courts, “Lord, be merciful to me a sinner.”

The fifth word is PATIENT. The KJV translates it best here, “longsuffering.” He is slow to anger. The Psalmist says that He does not treat us as our sins deserve but is tender and compassionate in His care and concern for us. Make no mistake about the longsuffering mercy of our God but do not presume upon it. Longsuffering is a word that cuts both ways. It does mean that our God is wonderfully patient but it also means that there is a period or exclamation point beyond which He does not go.

The sixth word is simply and intensification for the word for mercy and it has the sense of PASSION. Our God desires to deliver us from sin. Our God is making Himself known to His people. Our God is showing the reach of His mighty hand to save. He is passionate about His glory. He is passionate about His purpose. He is passionate about His people.

The seventh word translated “faithfulness” in the NIV is actually the word for “Truth.” Our God is PURE. What is written stands written. The Truth of His Word in which His way is revealed will not change. It does not matter what we believe about what it means to be saved or how we understand what it means to serve God. God has spoken in His Word. He has made Himself known. It is not God said it, we believe it, that settles it. It does not matter whether we believe it or not. God said it, that settles it.

The eighth word is PRESERVING. The opening words of verse seven just thrill me. They ought to thrill the soul of every child of God here. They are the reason even under the Old Covenant that you and I can know two truths about which we must be clear. One, God preserves all those whom He has saved by the power of His grace; two, those whom He preserves persevere because the One who is preserving us gives us irresistibly all that we need to persevere. Not to be perfect. But it is clear to us that there is a power at work in us that is personal that cannot be stopped. God is calling us further and higher. He is birthing in us a passion for Himself, His word and His Way. Listen to the opening words literally, “Keeping (with emphases on who is keeping and it never ending) us right with God by enabling us to do the things that are righteous.”

We Baptists love “once saved, always saved,” but we have made a biblical mess of it in our day. To be always saved, you have to be once saved. To be preserved you have to persevere. Perseverance is the evidence of preservation and without perseverance we are like ten year old pickles where the lid has come loose. Everything about us appears to be pickles until we pop the top and the smell is our first sign that something is not right.

The ninth word is PENETRATING. God delights in forgiving sinners. Three words are used here for sin that paint a powerful picture. Working from the last to the first, God says that He forgives us as sinners which is our nature. He takes off the rotten rags of our ruin and robes us in the rich regalia of royalty. He further forgives us for what we have done by our sin to God. Rebellion in a good translation here. It is as if God is saying, “I forgive you for being a rebel and acting like a rebel,” and then the third word has to do with everything that we have done as rebels. God covers everything here: who we are by birth, how we acted because of it, and what we did. And the word for forgiveness paints a powerful picture of God lifting our sins from us and removing them as far as the east is from the west, even into the depths of the sea. But don’t forget that when He took

them from us, He put them on Jesus who in His body bore our sins upon the cross.

One last word and most of us would just as soon there be nine and not hear the tenth; It is the word PUNISH. God is gracious and loving and merciful and compassionate. But He is also holy and just. He will not let the guilty go free. For all who refuse to repent, God will punish. And there will be no single generation that will escape. There is a sense in which verse 7 does mean that the sins of one generation show up in the next. Alcoholic parents produce alcoholic children; men who participate in sexual perversion shouldn't be shocked when their sons go down the same paths. Sin sows seed in one era that bears fruit in the next and it never stops until by the grace of God we respond to the call of God and surrender our lives to Jesus. Then we can see punishment for sin due to our living for our selves turn to praise to God as we live to please Him.

God reveals Himself in His Word and to His people and speaks through His word so that we can know who He is. And how do we respond? The Bible says that Moses did three things: He bowed in repentance; He worshipped with rejoicing, and He offered himself and the people in response. He asked God to forgive them and to receive them as His inheritance. Moses is saying to God, "we want to be of value to you; we want to be used by you; we want to honor you." Such is the only real response of any person who has heard God speaking to them. Have you. We repent of our sins. We rejoice in God's grace. And we want to honor Him in every way.