Unattractive Glory

2 Corinthians 12:7-10 (KJV)  And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong.

In Exodus 26 God commanded Moses to build a tabernacle. This house of worship would become the dwelling place for the glory of God. It was an exquisite structure, adorned with beautiful draperies that, according to scripture, were skillfully embroidered. Its construction was attractive in every way possible. Only the very best was used to create this tent of meeting where God would commune with man. Moses employed skilled craftsmen who were anointed by God for the task of creating the tabernacle. Following the instructions of God, they first wrapped the tabernacle in the finest of linens and the purest of gold. They clothed it in royal colors like blue and scarlet and purple. However, the wonder of it all, is that the beauty of what was inside made the coverings pale in comparison.

Within the exquisite finery that covered the tent were riches beyond the wildest imagination. The holy vessels contained therein were composed of pure gold. Beaten into shape by skilled hands, not poured into a mold. They were original pieces. Nowhere on the face of this planet was there any other like them. There were the finest of jewels and the most precious of metals. Everything about the place was exquisite beyond comparison.

But the finest of it all was still concealed beyond the veil. In that holiest of places where the ark of the covenant resided, where the mercy seat was established, beyond the veil was the most precious treasure of them all. God's glory resided in that segregated area called the Holy of Holies. It was there that God came down into that place and filled the tent with his own glory. The greatest treasure of the Hebrews wasn't the gold and jewels that made that place sparkle and shine. It wasn't the skilled artistry or fine linens. The greatest treasure that they possessed was the glory that resided beyond the veil.

However, in Exodus 26:14 God commanded Moses to cover all of these unprecedented riches with the basest of materials. He was instructed to cover it all with ram's skins dyed red and to cover that with badger skins -- badger skins! This was the same leather that was, and still is to this day, used to make sandals for the feet. All of the beauty of the tabernacle was concealed from the eye by a covering of a base, common, valueless material. This remarkable tent was disguised in the unremarkable covering of badger skins. This unique tabernacle that
was unlike anything this world had ever seen was completely obscured by the worthlessly common material of choice for sandal makers!

It is unlikely that anyone who looked upon the rough badger skin exterior of the tabernacle could possibly have imagined the riches housed within. Were it not for the cloud by day and the fire by night, no one would have singled out that coarse, unattractive tent as the dwelling place of God. However, housed within the unattractive exterior of that tent was the hope of Israel and the glory of God. It is this striking contradiction that appeals to me. Beauty concealed in the common. Riches concealed in the worthless. The glory of the almighty was housed within the confines of the unattractive. God, by design, placed his glory in an unattractive package!

I am convinced that this is an indicator of a deeper truth. The Glory of God is often contained in what, to the casual observer, appears to be an unattractive package. On the outside it is base, common and unattractive but when you press beyond the outward façade you will discover that housed within the unattractive is the riches of God’s glory in all of its splendor.

There is a lesson to be learned there. Somewhere in the unattractive circumstances of your life, God may be trying to reveal to you His glory. Consider this: Many years later God invested his glory into a different tabernacle. John 1:1 tells us that “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.” John 1:14 tells us that “the word was made flesh and dwelt among us.” That word translated as “dwelt” means to fix a tent or a habitation upon. It has alternatively been translated as a verb form of the word tabernacle, meaning God tabernacled among us. The idea conveyed is that, in Christ, the glory of God dwelt, much as it did in the tent that Moses constructed. John said (in the same verse), “we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.” In Jesus Christ, God invested his glory into a tabernacle of human flesh.

This is important to me, today, because Isaiah chapter 53 describes this same Jesus. Starting from verse 2, Isaiah described him this way: “He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him. He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.” The same glory that was manifest in the tabernacle was invested into the flesh and blood of the person of Jesus Christ. And, once again, the package was unattractive!

Jesus led a life of persecution and opposition. He was well acquainted with struggles and rejection. He was a man of sorrows and pain, who was no stranger to grief and human frailty. When God robed himself in flesh he surrounded himself with ruin and misery. He lived in the chaos that sin had made of the world. He spent long days doing good, with little thanks for his trouble, and long nights watching in
prayer. The hard life that he lived took its toll upon his flesh until the prophet, looking through window of time, would say that there was no beauty about him that we might even desire him.

Such was the nature of God’s glory in this unattractive package that he accomplished his greatest work by the avenue of a violent, shameful death. When wicked men were through beating him, mocking him, and spitting on him, they nailed him to a cross. Satan laughed gleefully as his body was raised on that old tree. The demons of hell rejoiced as the body containing the glory of the almighty was marred and disfigured beyond comprehension. The men who saw him hanging there that day would rather hide their faces from him than to behold the brutal horror of his appearance.

However, just like with the tabernacle of old, one would never guess that the rough badger skin exterior of the one that hung on that cross was but a covering that housed the Glory of God. God reconciled man to himself and let his glory shine in salvation but obscured it all in the most treacherous and ugly event in the history of the world. Concealed within the pain and agony of the cross was the hope of the whole world! God’s glory was, once again, invested in an unattractive package.

I want to share with you a simple truth about the glory of God. There is a certain quality of God’s glory that is at its best in the midst of the unattractive. There is a certain quality about the glory of God that shines its brightest in adverse circumstances. God does his best work when his glory is wrapped up in the unattractive packages of life. Just ask Daniel, who learned this truth in a lion’s den. Or go ask the three Hebrew children who found this out in the midst of a fiery furnace. God’s grace is most obvious and God’s glory shines the brightest in the crucible of difficult times and troubling situations. Paul and Silas discovered this in a Philippiam jail.

Be careful how you judge the circumstances of your life, God has a way of wrapping his greatest miracles in the fabric of trial and trouble. God has a way of concealing his glory in the base, common, unattractive parts of our lives. When things aren’t going our way, when it seems like the deck is stacked against you, when trial and trouble are your constant companions, get ready because that’s the place where God’s glory really shines in your life. God’s glory is no stranger to sickness and suffering, it is no stranger to trouble and turmoil. As a matter of fact, it is at its best in the most trying of times!

Paul was afflicted with a thorn in his flesh. You will remember the story, contained in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10. Paul prayed three times for the Lord to remove this messenger of Satan that continually harassed him. However, God’s only answer was to say, “My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” Paul was learning an important lesson about the grace of God. Often times when we encounter hardships and trial we seek a means of escape from them. We pray, like
Paul did, asking God to take them away. We want God to deliver us by substitution. We want him to substitute health for sickness. We say give me deliverance instead of pain and weakness. But the simple fact of the matter is that sometimes God’s glory comes to us wrapped up in unattractive packages and if he substituted something more attractive to us, we would miss the true blessing of his glory in our lives.

Sometimes our blessings come through transformation, not substitution. Sometimes this is the only way for God to demonstrate his glory to us. Rather than removing the affliction or problem in our lives, he gives us his grace so that the affliction works for us and not against us. His grace transforms us in the midst of the trial. He doesn’t change the problem, instead he changes us. It is in those times that we discover the riches of God’s glory in the most adverse of circumstances. Once Paul grasped this concept he respond to the trial by saying, “Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

This is where it gets interesting. The verb “rest” is the same word used by John in John 1:14 and conveys the same image and connection to the tabernacle. As a matter of fact in the Amplified Bible the verse is translated this way: Therefore, I will all the more gladly glory in my weaknesses and infirmities, that the strength and power of Christ (the Messiah) may rest (yes, may pitch a tent over and dwell) upon me! Paul was saying, it is in this unattractive circumstance, in this trying time, in this terrible thing that I find that the glory of God has pitched a tent over my life. From the outside it may be unattractive. From the carnal point of view it’s a tragedy. But once I push beyond the veil and get to the heart of the matter I discover the incredible glory of God at work in my life.

Once I got past complaining, once I quit praying for God to take it from me, I discovered that, in my weakness, God was exhibiting his glory. I found the riches of the presence of God, I found that joy unspeakable and peace beyond measure once I pressed through the veil of my suffering and encountered the presence of God. It seemed as if God has cast a tent of badger skins over my life and placed within that unattractive package the immeasurable glory of God! All of a sudden, Paul said, I am “I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:10 ESV)

I want to encourage you, today, that God has a plan and a purpose for your life. Even when you find yourself in hardship and trial, even when you find yourself in unattractive places, lift up your eyes and behold the glory of God. It is in those unattractive circumstances that God pitches his tent over your life and overshadows you with his unfathomable glory! When trouble comes, get ready. When sickness overtakes you, get ready. When your enemy rises up against you, get ready. God is just about to demonstrate his incredible grace in your life. You’re going to come out of the other side of the valley with a fresh experience of God’s glory in your life!

Close
In Exodus 33:18, Moses asked God to show him his glory. No doubt you remember the story, how God declared His name and caused his goodness and mercy to pass over Moses, revealing to him the hinder part of his glory. I have often said that it was the request of Moses to behold the glory of God that distinguished him from all other men. Moses had the audacity to ask to see the one that no man could see and live to tell it. I have always believed that it deeply moved the heart of God that Moses desired to see the glory of God.

I know, this evening, that many of you are going through trials and troubles in your life. I understand that life hasn't been a bed of roses for you, as of late. But I just wonder what would happen, this evening, if you would stop asking God to remove the hardship and instead started praying, “Lord, show me your glory!” Show me what it is that you desire to do in my life. Show my your goodness and mercy. Lord I want to see your grace at work in my life.

I believe that God wants to pitch a badger skin tent over your life and reveal to you the exquisite nature of his glory. I believe he's bringing circumstances to pass in your life so he can demonstrate the sufficiency of his grace. Why don't you find a place tonight and pray, “Show me your glory!”