

IV. Advent in Biblical Perspective
From Christophanies to Epiphanies
“Christophany #3 – The Glory Cloud”
Exodus 33

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This is God’s Word and it’s the truth. Exodus 33:1–3 says [1] *The LORD said to Moses, “Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your offspring I will give it.’ [2] I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. [3] Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.”*

The grass withers, the flower fades, God’s Word abides forever and by His grace and mercy may His Word be preached for you.

I enjoy selectively looking at certain movies because of world and life view things they represent. American cinematography has attracted me so some things I can’t see for various reasons for just my own sanctification so I’ll just read the reviews and other things I’m able to see for I’m just trying to get an understanding of the world and life views that are out there today. Probably the greatest year in American cinematography was 1939 because of the various movies that were put out. When American cinematography does its job they usually create one-liners that enter into American folklore.

For instance if I were to say to you today, ‘well we’re not in Kansas anymore Toto’ you would probably know exactly what movie I heard that from. That was one of the big five movies that was put out in 1939 and that was one that my sisters and I would use as kids to stay home from Sunday evening church to see on TV because they would show this movie once a year on a Sunday night. That was perhaps are only shot at not going to church on a Sunday evening. We would say “Mom, dad the Wizard of Oz is a Christian movie, can’t we stay home and watch it?” I have exposed my children and grandchildren to it throughout the years. Then there were all those Rocky movies that started in the 1970s where everybody would say from those movies ‘absolutely.’ Do you know which movie this one comes from; ‘I made him an offer he can’t refuse’? This one came from the movie The Godfather.

Interestingly, not the godfather, but God the Father, now makes an offer in the text in front of us that seemingly can’t be refused but must be refused. It is a very attractive offer, an offer that is appealing. It is an offer that would appeal to the multiple senses of those who are being offered – Moses and the covenant people of God, Israel. The offer is one of amazing magnitude, of economic success and a land of milk and honey. Forget the manna for that’s gone. It is an offer of national fame for they will become an empire that will drive out multiple nations. The offer will include military success over those warring tribes and national security. It will include religious significance. They will get a supernatural being, an angel to accompany them on this journey. So there will be success, significance, and security that will be all theirs.

There is one caveat for you don’t get Me among you. I’m not going up with you for if I went up with you I’d consume you because you’re a stiff-necked people. You not only rebelled at Mount Horeb by making the golden calf and you continue to stand in your rebellion against Me. I will do what I promised for I promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob that I would give you

this land. I promised that when their iniquity was full I would use you as their judgment to drive out the Canaanite nations. I promised this land of milk and honey that I will give to your generations and will give you security in the land. I will do what I promised but this is what I won't do. I will not go with you, says the Lord.

So what would you do with that offer? What if I told you that you could have heaven and that every one that you wanted to be there would be there, plus all the technology you would ever want to have and it's forever, but you don't get Jesus when you get there? What would you do with that offer? The answer to what we would do with that offer concerning there is what we would do with the offer of Him now. That's where you'll find out the answer. That is the offer that they have made to Him. It is an offer that seemingly can't be refused because it has all the prosperity, success, self-esteem, significance and everything one would want but they just don't get God. The One they live as if they don't want they don't get but He will give them over to what they want so they get what they have demonstrated what they want. Before we get to that I want to briefly review what we've covered in this Advent series up to now.

There is a bigger context that is here and that is the unity of God's Word. Hopefully you have been seeing this. God's Word is unified around one central theme and that is the glory of the Triune God revealed in the preeminence of Christ as Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. That is the theme that runs throughout 1600 years in the assimilation of God's Word through forty plus human authors and we are celebrating that promise that runs throughout the 39 books of the Old Testament that God would send a Messiah, the Promised One, and that He would do two things. One is that He would save His people from their sins and two He will not only deliver them from their sins and their enemies because He will defeat them but He will deliver them to Himself and they will be with Him forever in a new heavens and a new earth.

We see that these two promises through the One Promised One would be fulfilled through two Advents and it's what we call epiphanies. It is that Christ comes in the flesh. It is an out breaking of the glory of God and that is the Incarnation itself. It is that God would come among us. What is the epiphany of Christ? The Incarnation/Epiphany is a work of God's grace whereby God Himself has come to us, to be among us and become one of us in order to save us from our sins, and will come again for us to be with us forever. He didn't lay aside His deity but the privileges of His deity and His glory to humble Himself and take upon Himself humanity, since by a man comes death, since by a man must come the resurrection of the dead, for veiled in flesh the Godhead see.

What we don't see in that New Testament and the Old Testament is the two promises will be fulfilled through two Advents. Your Bible is the revelation of God and it's progressive in its unfolding. The Bible starts off telling you that there is one God and progressively the Old Testament begins to reveal what comes to a shout in the New Testament that this One God actually dwells in three Persons – Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We find that God saves His people by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone and it comes out with the message of the covenant of grace which begins to be unfolded step by step in your Bible from Adam to Noah to Abraham to Moses to David and then to its shout of fulfillment in Jesus Christ in the New Covenant, as the Savior, the Mediator of all mediators now comes. When you get to the New Testament you see that it is not just one epiphany where He fulfills two promises but it's two epiphanies. The first one He comes to bear our judgment, defeat our sin and our enemies and the second one He comes again in that same Incarnate body but now bearing the marks of our redemption, now glorified and transformed in order to receive us to Himself. In that coming He

will destroy the enemies He defeated in His first coming and we will be received in a new heavens and a new earth. That unfolds systematically in the Bible step by step.

One of the ways it is unfolded is the promises and the Promised One is communicated through prophecies. There are sixty plus prophecies pointing to this glorious Messiah who will fulfill the promises of God. Another way that it is prepared for us is through types in the Old Testament. There are the types of Jesus that precede Him that point to Him such as Melchizedek, Moses, Aaron, David and others. In our next study we'll see a fourth Christophany when the angel of the Lord speaks and Isaac becomes a type of Christ on Mount Moriah and the sacrifice.

One of the key ways He points to the epiphany is through Old Testament theophanies that are pre-incarnation appearances of God. They are more precisely known as Christophanies which are appearances of the Second Person of the Trinity. Some examples of this are in the glory cloud as the angel of the Lord or sometimes as the captain of the Lord of hosts. While there are at least 14 there could be arguments that there are more. There are multiple Christophanies in the Old Testament pointing to the epiphany of Christ in its two Advents of His first and second comings where He will fulfill the promises of God. We have only been able to look at a couple of them.

The first one we looked at was at the beginning of the book of Exodus when Moses was called to be the deliverer of God's people from Egypt, slavery, bondage and Pharaoh. We looked at the angel of the Lord who spoke from the burning bush. That angel of the Lord was Christ Himself. What was that Christophany pointing to? The Son of God, who called Moses to deliver His people from the bondage of slavery and the tyranny of Pharaoh to dwell in the Land of Promise, has now come Himself to deliver His people from the bondage of sin and the tyranny of Satan, to dwell with them in the new heavens and the new earth forever. So Moses is sent in the power of God but it is really pointing to when God Himself will come, this glorious God of majesty.

Then we covered another Christophany that is mentioned twice in the Bible – Daniel and Joshua – which is known when Jesus comes as the Captain of the Lord of hosts. We looked at the one in Joshua 5 when Joshua is getting ready to fight the battle of Jericho and goes out the night before and encounters this warrior with a drawn sword. Joshua asks him, "Are you for us or for our adversaries?" The Captain of the Lord of hosts basically tells him it's the wrong question. The question isn't which side am I on but 'are you Joshua on My side? I am the Commander of the Lord of hosts. Take off your sandals.' This is the echo of what Moses had to do at the burning bush for he is on holy ground because where God is that is sacred ground. Joshua you are second in command for I am the General. So Joshua then surrenders to Him. What is this Christophany pointing to? The Captain of the Lord's Host who came to Joshua ready for battle, is the Son of God who came to us at Bethlehem ready for War, and has won the victory.

There's a phrase out today I hear all the time which says 'we may have to go to war but we're not going to have to do boots on the ground.' You never win a war without boots on the ground. I'm not saying we need to go to war for that is a discussion for another time. You don't get on the side of victory without boots on the ground. That is what Christmas is – boots on the ground. The Divine Warrior came to do battle with your enemy, sin, Satan, hell and the grave. He came with a drawn sword. People are saying we have a war on Christ but we have another message. Christmas is the divine declaration of war. The Captain of the Lord of hosts came to

Bethlehem with His sword drawn to win the battle for our souls. He went to the valley of decision and stayed the course to save us from our sins, Satan, death, hell and the grave.

Now we come to a third Christophany today. This is one you find most often and it's when God appears and speaks from the glory cloud – the cloud of fire and pillar. It is the cloud of the Shekinah glory of God. This is one of those instances where God speaks to Moses from the glory cloud at the Tent of Meeting. He has this offer that He gives to Moses with one caveat. I will give you success and everything you want but I will not go with you. In those first couple of verses of Exodus 33 He says 'here are your people, the people' and notice He is not calling them 'My people.' He did say He would give them an angel but up until now The Angel of the Lord, Christ Himself had spoken from the burning bush and had been with them. Here is clearly God giving the clues of distancing Himself. In this incredible offer they get everything but Him.

So you can have heaven and everything you want in heaven but you don't get Jesus, so what would you say? I will give you everything I have promised but I'm not going with you. Notice the careful use of the language. Now there is no where you can go that God is not there but He says He won't be with them personally or among them. If He was He would consume them. They are a stiff-necked people. So what did they do?

Exodus 33:4–6 says [4] *When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. [5] For the LORD had said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you.'*" [6] *Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.* They got these ornaments from the Egyptians when they left Egypt. They would not only have been of financial value but they would also be idolatrous. So not only did God destroy the golden calf when they built it but now He is telling them that all those things that connect them with idolatry of this world that is empty to take them off and throw it away.

Every year when our church is facing the every member commitment season or the faith promise season or the year end challenge I almost hesitate at moments like this but then I remember I count these as precious God given moments because I know I have an opportunity to take that which would very easily put me toward the idolatry of this world and I can separate myself from it by taking it off and giving it to the Lord. That is what He is telling them to do. Those things that have hooked them to the idolatry of Egypt He tells them to cast them off. So when they heard this offer it wasn't an offer that couldn't be refused but that must be refused. They repented and cast away anything that would connect them back to Egypt. So we see what they did, now what does the leadership do?

Exodus 33:7–11 says [7] *Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. [8] Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. [9] When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. [10] And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. [11] Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.*

This kind of looks like to me, American contemporary Christianity, an American church. First of all it tells you three times in the text where the Tent of Meetings was in various ways.

The Tent of Meeting was outside the camp. Where was it supposed to be? It was supposed to be in the middle of the camp. It was the place that you met God and everyone could go but no one went. They had a hired religious profession to go which was Moses. Though, in order to show their religious reverence they would stand at the door of their tent but they wouldn't go to the Tent of Meeting. Then they wanted Moses to come back and tell them what God said. They also gave Moses an associate pastor to help him, Joshua. Is that not the contemporary church today? Preacher, you serve the Lord every day of the week and we'll show up for an hour and let us know what God says. We will be religiously reverent in our homes but we're not going. Send us podcast but we're not going to that Tent of Meeting but you come back for us.

In other words, we have God in a box. Forget the doc in a box because we have God in the box. We have God close enough that if we need Him we can call upon Him but not too close lest He change the way we live. He is accessible, nearby for our convenience but not too close lest we get uncomfortable. We won't have the tent where it is supposed to be but we'll have it outside, close by. We don't want Him in our midst for it might change the way we live, how we live and why we live. We found out what the people would do, so what does Moses do?

Exodus 33:12–17 says [12] *Moses said to the LORD, "See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.'* [13] *Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people."* [14] *And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."* [15] *And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. [16] For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"*

[17] *And the LORD said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name."*

Moses basically says to the Lord 'You want me to lead the people? They are not my people but Your people. I can't lead them up unless You go with us and I need to know how to lead them up for I can't do this without You. By the way, how is it that the world knows that we are Your people. The way the world knows that we are Your people is not by our prosperity or success or material wealth or significance or military success or personal security but the way the world knows is that You are with Your people. We are Yours and You are ours. The world will know that You are ours because You are with us.' That is why You brought us out of Egypt, to bring us to Yourself. Therefore Moses says, 'We need You and if You can't go with us then just leave us here and we'll die in the desert.' We would rather have You in the desert than the land of Promise without you. This is our life – we are Yours and You are ours.

So what is our takeaway from this? The felt, sustained, personal presence of the Lord is more important than *any* success in life – even life itself. Do you believe that? Then why is it when we don't get success that we think we don't have life even though we have the Lord. Why is it that we measure ourselves by success instead of the presence of the Lord? Why are we so distracted by the success metrics of this world instead of seeking the Lord? I'm under such conviction in the study of this particular text that I had a hard time getting to this pulpit in light of it. I began to also realize that I can't really be trusted with any success in life until the Lord is more important to me than any success in life, because I will use it to worship and wear it as my ornament.

Do you remember when the disciples met Jesus in John 1 and 2? What was it that Andrew said to Jesus after He met Him? He said “Tell us where You are staying for we want to be with You.” This is why the angel said “Immanuel, God with us.” This Christophany is pointing to the epiphany. We don’t get an angel but we get the angel of the Lord. God Himself has taken upon Himself humanity to be with us, to save us and if He had not come for us in Bethlehem to be with us, among us and one of us, we would die in our sins. That is why our joy is unspeakable. It is because He came to us, for us, to be one of us, to be with us, so immediately you and I must ask – this God who is a burning fire, who will consume His adversaries, why am I not consumed? God is not simply with you but He is within you which is what He did when He poured out His Spirit for now you are the Tent of Meeting.

The reason we’re not consumed is not because we’re better than the Israelites but it’s because Christ took all the wrath we ought to be getting and then set us free so that there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. When He came to be with us He went to the cross for us as one of us so we are not consumed by Him. Therefore He ascends to glory and by His Spirit He is now within us. His presence is with us. That’s why we love the Lord’s Day for it’s when the Tent of Meeting assembles and the Lord is present in the midst of His people. I understand there are providential hindrances but please tell me what is more important than being in the presence of the Lord when His people assemble as the Tent of Meeting. Forget the preacher for it’s about the assembly of the Tent of Meeting.

He came in the flesh and the Word became flesh and Tent of Meeting, tabernacled among us and we beheld His glory. There was the glory cloud in Christ, veiled in flesh the Godhead see and now He is ascended and sends that Shekinah glory within us, in a special way when we assemble. So is the felt and sustained presence of the Lord more important to us than any success in life, even life itself? That’s why Paul says in Philippians 1:21, [21] *For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.* I want to know Him and the power of His resurrection, forgetting those things that lay behind. Paul goes on to say in Philippians 3:13, 14, [13] *Brothers, I do not consider that I have made it my own. But one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, [14] I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.*

Now do you see why Jesus tells us what heaven is? Jesus says in John 14:2–3, [2] *In my Father's house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? [3] And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.* We will be with Him forever. There are so many people I want to talk with then I get to heaven, in fact you can just line of the “Johns” for that’s who I want to start with. If I am allowed though I will go right by them for I want to see the One who died for me, who saved me, who loved me, who came for me.

When Cindy and I were first married I was putting her through college and one of the jobs I had was with United Parcel Service (UPS). I was a package car driver, not a truck driver and that was back when we had to wear plastic bow ties to show that we were official. I remember my route to this day. I went 125 miles a day with 85 stops and 16 pick-ups. The last stop was the Ford Motor Company. My route went by one of the homes that I grew up in as a kid at four years of age. At that age I had a collie and his name was Prince. The collie looked like a prince to me and that’s why I named him that. I can remember taking my naps outside and putting my head on Prince to sleep.

Then Prince died and I went to my dad and mom and told them. I asked them “Do you think Prince will be in heaven?” My dad and mom very carefully said to me “Son, we don’t

know for sure but we do know Jesus will be in heaven and that will be enough. He will have everything that He wants for you to have there but all you need is Him.” Notice, my mom and dad carefully avoided whether Prince had a saving relationship with Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Now with my kids, I told them that dogs would be in heaven but don’t look for cats but my parents pointed me to Jesus and I will never forget that.

I will close this way. About three years ago my wife to rid herself on one of her jobs which was keeping me where I needed to be, she bought me a book titled GPS for Dummies. Up until now she was the one who globally positioned me every day of my life as a dummy. I know the GPS is now on iPhones but this was an amazing thing because you just plugged in the destination and it would tell you how to get there, how long it would take, restaurants and spots to stop along the way. You could get all this information from this but it was only useful if you had the destination right.

What is your destination? Now you have your directions for life. Don’t say to me that it’s heaven. Your destination is Jesus for that is what makes heaven, heaven and on the way there is nothing more important than the felt and sustained presence of the Lord. That is more important than any success in life, even life itself. That is why God came for us, Immanuel to be with us. He sent the Holy Spirit who is within you and He is coming again so that where He is there you will be with Him forever. Let’s pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the moments we could be in Your Word. If this day Jesus is your Savior would you join me in conviction and yet the joy of my soul and pray, Jesus help me live this day for what makes tomorrow glorious. I will be with You. Help me live today where there is nothing more important in life than the personal, felt and sustained presence of the Lord, even life itself. Dear friend you may be reading this and you don’t know Him. I’m not offering you a Jesus that will make you money or will bring your family under total control or will make sure you get the headlines in the paper but He will change your life. He doesn’t come to be your coach, therapist and success mentor but He has come for you. So I invite you to Jesus. Jesus, this day, who has won the victory over sin, Satan, death, hell and the grave, You are more important to me than any success in life, even life itself. You are my Redeemer, Immanuel, God with us and I pray this in Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Power Point

INTRODUCTION/REVIEW

The Incarnation/Epiphany is a work of God’s grace whereby God Himself has come to us, to be among us and become one of us in order to save us from our sins, and will come again for us to be with us forever.

CHRISTOPHANY #1

THE ANGEL OF THE LORD–THE BURNING BUSH

The Son of God, who called Moses to deliver His people from the bondage of slavery and the tyranny of Pharaoh to dwell in the Land of Promise, has now come Himself to deliver His people from the bondage of sin and the tyranny of Satan, to dwell with them in the New Heavens and the New Earth forever.

CHRISTOPHANY #2

THE CAPTAIN OF THE LORD OF HOSTS

The Captain of the Lord's Host who came to Joshua ready for battle is the Son of God who came to us at Bethlehem ready for War, and has won the Victory.

CHRISTOPHANY #3

THE GLORY CLOUD

LIFE TAKEAWAY

The Felt and Sustained presence of the Lord is more important than any success in life—even life itself.