



MT. ROSE REFORMED
ORTHODOX PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

For They Shall See God

Reverend Scott Johnson | *March 29, 2026* | *Exodus 24:9-18*

Old Testament Reading

The Old Testament reading is Exodus chapter 24, verses nine through 18. And this is God's holy, inerrant, and inspired word. Exodus 24, nine through 18. Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and 70 of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet, as it were, a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness, and he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel. They beheld God and ate and drank.

The Lord said to Moses, come up to me on the mountain and wait there that I may give you the tablets of stone with the law and the commandment which I have written for their instruction. So Moses rose with his assistant Joshua, and Moses went up into the mountain of God. And he said to the elders, wait here for us until we return to you. And behold, Aaron and Hur are with you. Whoever has a dispute, let him go to them.

Then Moses went up on the mountain, and the cloud covered the mountain. The glory of the Lord dwelt on Mount Sinai, and the cloud covered it six days. And on the seventh day, he called to Moses out of the midst of the cloud. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. Moses entered the cloud and went up on the mountain, and Moses was on the mountain 40 days and 40 nights.

New Testament Reading

Our New Testament reading is 2 Corinthians 3, verses 12 through 18. I made a mistake in the bulletin. I put chapter four, but it's 2 Corinthians 3, verses 12 through 18. 2 Corinthians 3, 12 through 18.

Since we have such a hope, we are very bold, not like Moses who would put a veil over his face so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome of what was being brought to an end. But their minds were hardened. For to this day, when they read the old covenant, the same veil remains unlifted because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day, whenever Moses has read, a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God will stand forever.

The Majesty of God's Glory

You can turn back to Exodus chapter 24 for our sermon text. There are some places in the world that you just have to see with your own eyes to appreciate how stunning, how beautiful they really are. Videos and pictures, no matter how lifelike they may be, they just can't convey the majesty, the grandeur of a place like the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls or Mount McKinley. You have to see those places in person to get the full effect, to really understand just how wonderful they are.

And if you've been able to visit one of those places in person, you know what a powerful impression it makes on you to stand on the rim of the Grand Canyon and to look over that amazing part of God's creation. It's not just to see a pretty scene or pleasant scenery, but it's to see something that is truly full of glory, full of wonder. And if there is such amazing beauty and glory in these natural wonders, how much more glorious is the God who created them?

And if beholding with our eyes something in creation can fill us with such a sense of awe and wonder, then what must it be like to behold the one who created those things, the creator? What must it be like to see him in all of his glory? Because God is infinite and unlike this creation and even the most stunning thing that we may behold in this creation, God, He is infinite in glory. He is infinite in beauty and in majesty. And for that reason, for you and me to somehow see God with our eyes, there would be no experience like it. There could be no greater experience than for us to behold the creator, the Lord, the one who made all things.

The Hope of the Beatific Vision

In fact, one of the ways that the Bible describes for us the hope that we have as Christians, one way that it explains to us what heaven will be like is to say that one day as the redeemed people of God, we shall behold God with our eyes. We shall see him. Jesus gave the promise, blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God. This is what theologians have called the beatific vision. That day when we shall no longer behold or apprehend God by faith, but that day when we shall see the Lord in all of his glory and splendor and beauty.

1 Corinthians 13:12 says, for now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. And this is our hope as Christians for the world to come, for the life to come. Seeing God now in this world is not our experience. However, there are a few instances in the scriptures when God did allow his people to catch a glimpse, as it were, of God himself, to see with their eyes, the Lord, at least to see in parts, as he revealed himself to them.

And one such instance in which God made Himself known visibly to His people is described for us this morning in our passage. This is when the Lord called to Himself Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and 70 of the elders of Israel. He called them to come up to Mount Sinai and to worship Him there. And verse 10 says that they saw the God of Israel.

The Covenant Context

Now last week we read about the events leading up to this, Moses and the leaders of Israel. When they saw the vision of God, this was after these events took place that we saw last week. Before they went up on the mountain, Moses led the people in a worship service in which God's covenant with his people Israel was formally inaugurated. You remember that Moses read the law and the commandments to the people of Israel. The people responded by saying that they will do everything that's written in God's word. They pledged their obedience to God.

And then oxen were sacrificed to God. Moses sprinkled what he called the blood of the covenant, the blood of those oxen that were slaughtered. He sprinkled that on the people. And that meant that they were to keep the covenant with their God upon pain of death. And so by this covenant making worship, by this covenant making ceremony with the blood of the oxen sprinkled on the people and all of that, God was confirming to the Israelites that he was their

God and they were his people. That is the heart of that covenant relationship between God and us. He is our God, we are his people.

And so our passage this morning picks up with what took place after that. And we'll focus this morning particularly on verses 9 through 11. And this is the vision of the Lord that was given to Moses and the others who were with him. But we'll go over the rest of the passage briefly before we zero in on verses 9 through 11. And so let's look at verses 12 through 18 just briefly.

Beginning at verse 12, we can assume that after Moses and the elders of Israel saw the Lord, after they ate and drank before him, that they went back down the mountain. And then in verse 12, the Lord calls Moses to go back up the mountain. Only this time, he takes just one person with him, and that is his assistant, Joshua. And Moses leaves the people of Israel behind. He leaves them in the charge of his brother Aaron and Hur.

We'll find out later in Exodus that if Moses thought that the people of Israel would be in safe hands with Aaron in charge, he was badly mistaken. That's when the golden calf disaster took place, when they worshiped the golden calf. But when Moses and Joshua go up the mountain, they see the glory of the Lord in the form of a cloud covering on the top of the mountain. And after six days, the Lord calls Moses to come alone into the cloud. And so Moses by himself, he enters into the presence of God.

And at some point, then the Lord gives him two tablets of stone on which God himself with his very own finger wrote the 10 commandments. And by the way, these Ten Commandments, they are given on two tablets of stone, not because one tablet of stone contained the first half of the Ten Commandments and the second tablet of stone contained the second half of the Ten Commandments, but it was customary in the ancient Near East when a covenant was made between two peoples that each party to the covenant would have their own copy.

And so that's what's taking place here. God gave Moses two tablets of stone. One was the copy for the people of Israel. The other was the copy that belonged to the Lord. In this case, the Lord gave to Moses both copies. And so this is when God gives the 10 commandments on these two tablets to Moses. And then verse 18 tells us that Moses was on the mountain for a total of 40 days and 40 nights.

The Fellowship of a Shared Meal

Now, again, what I want to focus on with you this morning is this vision that God gave of himself to Moses and Aaron and to the other leaders of Israel. And the first truth to take from this vision of God is this, that is to see God is to know him. To behold God is to know him and to be known by him. We need to keep in mind that God gave these Israelites this vision on the mountain. He gave them a glimpse of his glory as part of the worship service in which he made his covenant with them.

And again, the purpose of God's covenant was to bring His people into a relationship with Him so that the people of God would know God, they would know the Lord, they would delight in Him as their God, and God, on His part, would know His people Israel, and He would delight in them as His people. Again, that's the heart of the covenant relationship that God makes with His people. And one way that this communion or fellowship between the Lord and his people was expressed was in this meal that the leaders of Israel ate before the Lord. And so in verse 11 it says, they beheld God and ate and drank.

Now, the fact that the people of Israel here, that they ate and drank in the presence of the Lord, this is not just an interesting detail in the passage, as though Moses is telling us that he and the people who were with them, they'd been up on the mountain ever since morning time. Now it was getting late in the day. They were hungry. They took out their brown lunch bags and they had a bite to eat. That's not what's happening here.

Rather, in that ancient culture, to share a meal together was very significant. It was very meaningful. It was something that bound people together. It was an expression of communion or fellowship between people when they shared a meal together. And we can relate to that because to a certain extent we know from experience that that is still true today.

I remember one year when I was in high school, I absolutely dreaded lunchtime because none of my friends had the same lunch period that I had. And the last thing that I wanted to do was to eat lunch all by myself. That's very lonely. But I also wasn't confident enough just to sit down at a table full of kids that I didn't know and have lunch with them. And so that was quite a dilemma for me because we naturally want to be with friends when we eat. And that's because sharing a meal together is an exercise in fellowship or communion with one another.

And that was especially true in biblical times. And so in the scriptures, we see sometimes when people make a covenant with one another, that there is a meal included as part of that covenant ceremony. And so, for example, in Genesis chapter 26, when Isaac and Abimelech, the king of the Philistines, when they make a covenant with each other not to attack each other, the Bible says that Abimelech, and this is Genesis 26:30, made them a feast and they ate and drank.

And something like that is also taking place here on Mount Sinai, only this is a covenant, not between two peoples, but a covenant between God and His people. And so the fellowship or the communion that takes place here is these elders of Israel, and Moses, as they eat this meal together, it is a communion and a fellowship, not only with one another, but with the Lord. They are sharing a meal, if we can put it this way, with God Himself. They are expressing their fellowship with Him.

And we do the same thing today as the people of God. When we worship God, we also have a sacred meal, a covenant meal, in which we commune with the Lord, and that is the Lord's Supper. When we take part in the Lord's Supper, we are experiencing not only communion with one another as fellow members of the body of Christ, but more primarily, we are enjoying and engaging in that communion and that fellowship that we have with Christ himself as he is present with us in that sacrament.

Now, I say all of that because it is in the context of this sacred meal, in the context of this covenant meal that the leaders of Israel saw the Lord. Verse 11 says, they beheld God and ate and drank. And so what this means is, is that their seeing God was part of that communion that they had with him as their covenant Lord, as their God and savior. And the same is true for the promise that God gives to you and me in Jesus Christ, that one day we shall see him face to face.

That promise that one day we shall see God, that is not a promise that we will behold God in all of his glory and majesty as a tourist might behold the Grand Canyon or Niagara Falls, admiring it from afar. No, God will give us a glorious vision of himself as he envelops us and blesses us with his gracious and loving presence. And for us to see God in his glory will be to bask in the eternal, the infinite love that God has for us in his son, Jesus Christ.

And so this promise of seeing God is all about being in the presence of the one who loves us, who is our God, who will love us forever. Think of it this way. What is it that lights up a baby's face more than anything else? It's the sight of seeing her father looking down and smiling at her.

And that is what it will be like for us only a million times greater to see the face of our father smiling at us as we gaze into his loving countenance.

And in fact, that is what makes the promise of God a beatific vision. The word beatific is an adjective that describes something that imparts blessedness or happiness. The great theologian, Jonathan Edwards, he called the beatific vision the hapifying vision. I suppose he made that word up, the hapifying vision. And he called it that or it's called the beatific vision because there will be no greater joy, no greater happiness for you and me as the children of God than one day to see with our very own eyes what we only see now by faith and that is the beaming face of our heavenly father as He brings us into His glorious presence forever and ever.

And so to see God is not just to behold Him in His glory and greatness, but it is to be brought into His loving presence, to be embraced by Him as our Father. And one day we shall experience that fully and perfectly in the world that is to come. And so to see God is to know Him and to be known by Him.

The Requirement of Holiness

The second truth about beholding God is this, to see God is to be made like Christ in His righteousness. In order for any of us who are sinful by nature, and of course that means all of us, in order for any of us who are sinners, in order for us to see God in his majesty and glory, we must be made holy. Jesus said, blessed are the pure, blessed are the pure at heart, for they shall see God.

You'll notice in this passage that there isn't a whole lot of description about what Moses and the others with him, what they actually saw when they beheld God. In fact, the only thing that is described for us in this passage is the floor, the platform upon which God was standing or sitting. In verse 10 it says, there was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. The word sapphire is referring to a deep blue mineral or stone called lapis lazuli. Only here the stone is clear; verse 10, it's like the very heaven for clearness. So God was standing or sitting upon some sort of bluish crystal floor or platform.

But you'll notice there's no description of what God himself looked like. It would be like if you were invited to meet the president at the White House and when you got back, somebody asked you, well, what was he like? And you said, well, let me tell you about the carpet in the Oval

Office. It was spectacular. But you had no words, I suppose, to describe what it was like to meet the president. It's as though the vision of God was so overwhelmingly glorious that Moses could only find the words to describe the floor at the feet of the Lord.

Matthew Henry makes this very apropos comment. He says, our conceptions of God are all below him and fall infinitely short of being adequate. In other words, what Moses describes for us here, the floor upon which God was sitting. In the same way, we can only begin to describe what God is like. We can only reach up so much in our descriptions of who God is, his essence, his character, and so on.

Well, later in verse 17, when the people of Israel saw the Lord from afar, Moses describes it this way. Now the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. But this is not what Moses and the others with him saw when they were up on the mountain. It was something different. Verse 10, again, they saw the God of Israel. Verse 11, they beheld God. God did not just appear to them as fire or a cloud on top of the mountain, but in some visible form, in some way, God appeared to Moses in a way that they could behold him, that they could see him. It's just not described for us.

But however God did appear to them, we can say this for sure, that they did not see God in all the fullness of his divine glory and majesty. They did not see God in the fullness and perfection of who he is as God, because if they had, if they had seen God in the fullness of who he is, they would have been struck down dead immediately. Because when it comes to seeing God, one of the consistent teachings we find in the scriptures is that in this life, no one can see God. No one can see God in the fullness of his glory and live. The book of Exodus teaches us that.

Later in chapter 33, when Moses says to the Lord, please show me your glory, the Lord says that he will show him not his face, but his back. And why was that? Because the Lord says, you cannot see my face for man shall not see me and live. The New Testament teaches the very same thing. 1 Timothy 6:16, speaking of God, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see.

The Intensity of God's Holiness

And why can we not behold God with our eyes in the completeness or fullness of his majesty and glory? The reason is this, it's because of our sin, because of the corruption of our hearts. Almighty God, he is infinite in his holiness and righteousness. Habakkuk 1:13 says that God is

of purer eyes than to behold evil. He cannot look at wrong. And in our sin, we are unholy. We are unrighteous. And so for you and me to have an unfiltered vision of God means that we would be destroyed in an instant by his holiness.

I remember several years ago being at my cousin's house for a family get-together. And my cousin, he collected all of his scrap lumber and several logs, and he made this huge bonfire. And as the night went on and more wood was added to the fire, the coals at the bottom of the fire just got hotter and hotter and hotter. Eventually, by the end of the night, you could toss a soda can into the fire, into the coals, and within seconds it just melted and evaporated, just was vaporized by the heat of the fire.

And that's kind of a picture of what would happen to us. The searing intensity of the holiness of God would be so overwhelming that it would annihilate any person who came into his presence. And this is why so often in the scriptures for those who did see God, at least they saw him in a partial way, they were often left with a sense of dread and fear. For example, when the angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah and his wife, those are the future parents of Samson, Manoah says in Judges 13:22, we shall surely die for we have seen God.

And the most famous example of this, of course, is when the prophet Isaiah, in Isaiah chapter six, when he sees the Lord in his glory in the temple, Isaiah cries out, woe is me, for I'm lost, for I'm a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts. It's remarkable sometimes when you hear or read about somebody claiming to have seen God or to have seen Christ, and the way they describe it is almost as if they had seen a celebrity walking down the street, very casual, very informal.

Well, what happens in the scriptures when someone sees the Lord? When God appears to someone in the Bible, that person says, woe is me, I am undone. It is something that overwhelms us with dread and fear because of who God is. But here in this passage, not only did the Israelites not perish when they came into the presence of God and saw him, but in fact, they went on to eat a covenant meal in the presence of the Lord.

You can almost hear the surprise in the text itself that the people were not destroyed. In verse 11, it says, and he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel. They beheld God and ate and drank. Almost as if Moses is saying, how could this be? How could they behold God and go on to eat and drink in his presence?

The Cleansing Power of the Blood

Well, part of the answer was that this was not a full revelation that God gave to Moses and the others with him, just like later in chapter 33, the Lord will hold back from fully revealing himself to Moses. He will only show him his back and not his face. So here too, he did not reveal himself in all of his glory to these Israelites. But another reason why Moses and those with him, why they were able to see the Lord with their eyes and live, why they were not overcome with the holiness and righteousness of God because of their sin, another reason why they could see God and live was because they were literally covered with the blood of the sacrifices that they had slain earlier.

Remember, before this vision of God, Moses took the blood of the sacrifices, he sprinkled that blood on the people, and that blood signified, among other things, that blood signified for them the fact that they were cleansed from their sin. The Lord had atoned for their sin. And so with that blood, covered with the blood of the sacrifices, the people could go before the Lord and come into his presence and even see him.

And the reason why you as a believer in Jesus Christ, the reason why you can have the hope that one day you will see God, you will see Him in all of His glory and majesty, and the reason why this will be for you a true beatific vision, a blessed vision and not a death sentence, is because of the blood of Jesus Christ that was shed for you upon the cross. If your hope and your trust are in the Lord Jesus as your savior, not only does his death on the cross take away from you the guilt of your sin so that you can come into the presence of God without fear of condemnation, but also Jesus Christ has given you the gift of his Holy Spirit and the Holy Spirit is at work in you to purify you from the sin that remains in you.

And the Spirit does his work of sanctifying and purifying you as a Christian as he directs your gaze towards Christ. And so it's not only true that in order for us to see God, we must be holy, but it's also true that when you and I, by faith, behold the Lord Jesus Christ, we are made more holy. By faith, even now, you can see God. Again, not with your eyes, but with the eyes of faith, you can behold God as he makes himself known to you in his son, Jesus Christ, as Jesus is made known to us in his word.

Transformation Through Gaze

And so to fix our gaze upon the Christ that is given to us in the scriptures, to look to Him, to set our eyes upon Him, this is to be transformed more and more into His image. We become what we look at. We become what we gaze at. And when we look at the Lord Jesus Christ, we become more like Him. That's what the New Testament reading tells us in 2 Corinthians 3:18. And we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another for this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.

And this is where you are much better off than those Israelites on the mountain. Now to be sure, to have been one of those 70 elders, to have been there with Moses and to have seen the glory of God as he revealed himself there, that would have been a life-changing experience, a true mountaintop experience. And so, however God revealed himself to the Israelites, it would have been an incredible thing to experience beyond words.

However, as amazing as that was for them, God has given you, as a believer in Jesus Christ, something even more wonderful, even more amazing, and that is that he has revealed himself to you in the person of his son, Jesus Christ. And so, no, you have not yet seen Jesus with your eyes, but with the eyes of faith, as you look to Christ, what you see as you look to Christ is a fuller, a greater, a more glorious, a more perfect, a more wonderful, more beautiful revelation of God than God ever gave to any of the saints in the Old Testament, including here when he revealed himself to Moses and the elders on Mount Sinai.

As wonderful as that was, Moses and those others with him, they would have loved to see what you see by faith. God revealed in his son, Jesus. When Philip, the disciple, said to Jesus in John 14:8, Lord, show us the father and it is enough for us. Jesus replied, have I been with you so long? And you still do not know me, Philip. Whoever has seen me has seen the father. Whoever has seen me has seen the father.

And then John earlier in his gospel, he says, and the word became flesh and dwelt among us and we have seen his glory. Glory as of the only son from the father, full of grace and truth. And so if you believe in Christ, you have seen the father. You have seen God as he has revealed in his son, Jesus. You have seen in the life, in the ministry of Jesus, the grace and compassion of the father towards sinners.

Believing is Seeing

And the more you put Jesus in your sights, the more you set your gaze upon Christ, the more you will understand the character and the love of the father, the more and more you will grasp the depths of the love that God has for you in his son. But this is all by faith. This is by faith. The world says, those who do not believe in Christ, the world says, seeing is believing. And so the unbeliever says, if God will just show himself to me, if he will appear to me, of course I would then believe in him, but he is invisible. I don't see him. I don't know if he exists. If he would just make himself known, if I could see him, then I would believe.

But God says, no, it's the other way around. Believing is seeing. Believing is seeing. God says to us and to the world, if you would see my glory, if you would see me for who I am, if you would see my truth, then believe. Believe in my son, Jesus Christ. And you will see. Because God has revealed himself to us. He has made himself known to us. And it is only a sinful, willful blindness that keeps someone from beholding the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said to Thomas, have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. And if this faith is yours, then God promises you that one day what you perceive by faith, you will then see by sight. And that is that beatific vision, that haplifying vision, that one day what you know is true by faith, what you behold only with your eyes of faith, God will show you in fullness, his glory, his greatness, as he has made himself known to you. And you will see his glory as it shines out through the face of Jesus Christ. That is our hope as believers. But even now, we can see God as we behold him by faith in his son, Jesus. Let's pray.