

'God Manifesting Himself in Adversity 1'

by A.W. Tozer

God usually manifests Himself in adversity, and we must be God-hungry, obedient, and willing to pay the price of obedience to experience His comfort and presence.

Scripture: Numbers 20:1

Topics: "Faith and Obedience", "God's Presence in Adversity"

Description

A.W. Tozer emphasizes that God often reveals Himself in times of adversity, using the example of Moses and the Israelites in the wilderness. He explains that while God desires to manifest His glory, it is typically in moments of struggle that individuals are most receptive to His presence. Tozer highlights that Moses was a man of faith, hunger for God, and obedience, which allowed him to experience God's revelation. He warns against seeking God's comfort without obedience and encourages believers to be daring and hungry for God, suggesting that upcoming challenges may lead to greater manifestations of God's presence. Ultimately, Tozer calls for a deeper faith and willingness to encounter God in difficult times.

Transcript

"God Manifesting Himself in Adversity"

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About 14 years ago, I preached on a text, and I want to preach on that text again because it seems very appropriate to this hour. And I am going to divide it up into two sermons and to have sermons from the sixth verse of the twentieth chapter of Numbers this morning and next Sunday morning. There will be two distinct and separate sermons, but will be united and related to each other as twin sisters might be related, separate, individual, and complete in itself, but related closely to another.

Now, the twentieth chapter of Numbers. Suppose we just read that together. Why don't you join me in reading that and then you'll feel you at least have the Word if the sermon that follows isn't much good. Chapter twenty of Numbers, verses one to six, everybody. Then came the children of Israel, even the whole congregation, into the desert of Zin in the first month: and the people abode in Kadesh; and Miriam died there, and was buried there. And there was no water for the congregation: and they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people chode with Moses, and spake, saying, Would God that we had died when our brethren died before the Lord! And why have ye brought up the congregation of the Lord into this wilderness, that we and our cattle should die there? And wherefore

have ye made us to come up out of Egypt, to bring us in unto this evil place? it is no place of seed, or of figs, or of vines, or of pomegranates; neither is there any water to drink. And Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation, and they fell upon their faces: and the glory of the Lord appeared unto them. Now we'll stop there. And verse six is the one that will get most of our attention.

Moses went from the presence of the assembly unto the door of the tabernacle of the congregation. Now, if you have any other version beside the King James, that is, almost any other, all others which I'm acquainted. That says the tent of meeting. It was a tent in the middle of the camp where God met with Moses, or with Israel; where God revealed Himself. It was the tent of meeting, called your tabernacle and the meeting of the congregation. So, we have a tent of meeting, a place where God met people.

Now, what I want to say to you, and I want to take two sermons to say it. It is that God manifests Himself to people in varying degrees of intensity and clarity, but that usually, He manifests Himself in adversity. I wish we were better Christians than we are. I wish we were such good Christians that God would manifest himself in prosperity, but He usually doesn't. He usually manifests Himself when you're in trouble. That's because you are like you are. And that's because I'm the kind of man I am. And Moses and Israel were the people they were. And so, God manifested Himself in the time of Moses' difficulty. They were on Moses. They were grumbling and criticizing. And it was all but a riot. If they just had a leader or two, there could have been a riot.

Now, this is repeated with slight variation throughout the Old Testament, the history of the Old Testament. If you go back, say to Abraham and learn how Abraham and the hour of great trouble, in the hour when he lay at night for the sacrifice, the deep sleep. The birds came down just before he went into that deep sleep. The birds came down and he had to keep them away from the sacrifice. There, with deep sleep and darkness upon him, God revealed Himself and said, Abraham, don't be afraid. Your seed will be like the sand by the seashore.

Later on, Jacob when he was in trouble on his way traveling across the dreary wilderness, waist and howling, God appeared to him by a ladder set up from earth to heaven. Later on, when Jacob was about to meet his brother Esau and was afraid, God met him again by the river. He changed him from Jacob to Israel. You can trace the whole history of Israel down through and practically every time when a man was in trouble, under pressure, if he was the right kind of man, then God made Himself known.

There are two or three reasons why He doesn't make Himself known at other times. One is, a man doesn't need it so much when he's not in trouble. The second is, we are not focused toward, our souls aren't focused toward when we're not in trouble. And then, maybe a third reason would be that God wants us to walk by faith most of the time and trust Him there even when He's not manifesting Himself. I think probably that's the most important of the three reasons.

Now, the glory of the Lord appeared to the man Moses. He went over by the tent of meeting. He separated himself a little from Israel and went over by the tent of meeting and waited to see what God would do. And the glory of the Lord appeared there unto Moses. Now don't ask me to explain what the glory of the Lord is because I cannot do it. No man can do it. God is what the theologians call, inscrutable. God is what the theologians call incomprehensible. And God cannot tell us what He is. He can only tell us what He is like. And thus He is translating downward into understandable human terms, or the best God could do. Not because God was unable, but because we were unable to take it. The finest French chef that ever cooked

up a meal, and what a terribly prosaic way to talk about the doings of a French chef in cooking up a meal. But the finest French chef that ever prepared a gourmet's delight; if he were feeding a three-month-old baby, he'd have to translate himself downward into the terms the baby could take. He would have to give him the formula and follow it closely. And all of those spices and those fine sauces that he took such delight in and made many French sounds of joy over, he couldn't use them on the baby. He would have to translate himself downward into infant terms. And it wouldn't be his fault. He might easily be in great demand in hotels and restaurants around the world, but the baby wouldn't care. He could only take milk. Perhaps just a bit of juice at it.

And so God, who brings angels to their knees and causes the seraphim and cherubim to cover their faces and cry holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty. Yet, we being such infants, God has to translate Himself downward to us and put Himself in terms we can understand. So, he says, the glory of the Lord appeared unto Moses. I suppose that glory was a light. I suppose that glory was a sound. I suppose that that glory was a hidden and yet revealed something too terrible and wonderful for Moses to understand, but terrible enough to keep Israel at a distance and wonderful enough to bring Moses to his knees. This was God seeking to show Himself to human eyes and being unable to do it because of human sin. For Always remember that human sin is a cataract on the human eye. And even when it's removed, even when we've been delivered by the blood of the Lamb, we still have somewhat of the veil over our faces until the time that we shall see Him as He is, and shall be transformed and glorified, and be given a body like under His glorious body.

Now, here is the second thing I want to tell you. The first being that God manifests Himself in adversity, but the second thing is, He doesn't manifest Himself to everybody in adversity. There are those to whom He cannot manifest Himself in adversity. But Moses happened to be, by the grace of God, one to whom He could. He could appear to Moses because Moses was the kind of man that could receive the impression.

You let two people go out on a day, two men go out. Let an artist and hunter go out on the same Fall Day. And the artist, even though he's carrying a gun, he'd probably never get a shell in the chamber. He'll be so busy admiring the landscape, the color of those leaves over there, and that yellow oak, and those fiery red maple leaves, and that green, silver stream that flows between those brightly colored hills, and that little farm cottage down there. He will never see a rabbit because he, nature can manifest itself to him. He can see and feel; the very clouds talk to him and the wind across his cheeks says something. But the hunter, who has paid tremendous, lots of money for clothing that he doesn't need, just a pair of overalls and a new shirt would do, but he's all fixed up. And he has himself a big gun with the stock all engraved. He's proud of that and hangs it over the mantel. And he goes out there and sees nothing but rabbits. And if he doesn't see a rabbit, he comes home absolutely dejected and miserable. He's ashamed to go home. I didn't get a thing. I wasted a day. And the man who is susceptible, who is impressionable comes home and talks for a week about the glories of that wondrous landscape. It just depends on what kind of impressionability there is there if nature can talk to you or can't talk to you. And when a man wants to shoot a poor, little harmless bunny rabbit and the rabbit doesn't cooperate, he can be miserable. But that's all he sees.

I went hunting one time with a one-eyed man for rabbit. By the end of the day, the one-eyed man had all the rabbits and I had the exercise. But he was kind enough to give me the rabbits. I thought I'd let you know I wasn't against hunting; I was just illustrating.

Now, Moses happened to be one to whom He could appear. But you know, most people, God can't show Himself, even in adversity He can't. The three things about Moses I want to talk about and make it brief.

One is, that Moses was God-hungry and the second that Moses was a man of faith, and the third that Moses was an obedient man. Now these three, Moses was God hungry. Never forget that Moses said, O God, show me thy glory. And it was the seeking after the glory of God, the manifestation of the glory of God. That was why God could reveal Himself. The rain falls on the sidewalk and runs off again. Rain falls on the poor and thirsty earth and sinks away, and you can almost hear the earth enjoying it. God pours Himself out upon a congregation and the poorest, thirsty hungry hearts receive Him with delight. But there are always those who sit around the edges, hardened, critical and steely of countenance, and the waters of Shiloh run off from them and never a drop of it sinks in.

Moses was a God-thirsty man. Most of us have learned to live with mortality. We've learned to live with time We've learned to live with temporal things. Moses hadn't. Moses had to have God or Moses would have died. And then Moses was a man of faith, and the curse of unbelief lies upon us too much. Moses was a man of faith. He believed God. He dared to believe God. He made some mistakes. Sure, he did and you'll be able to criticize Moses if you're looking for faults. It certainly didn't come through one hundred percent. Right in this very chapter here, Moses made mistakes. But Moses nevertheless was a believing man and a man of faith. And God can reveal Himself to a man of faith just as the waves of radio can reveal it themselves to the tube that sensitive.

Even while I'm talking to you now, everything is going through this building. George Washington wouldn't have believed this, but you know it's true. Abraham Lincoln would have smiled and told a joke about it, but it's true. Our speeches, sermons, newsmen are telling about the latest time that Khrushchev cleared his throat and how everybody in the West leap to attention. And there's everything going on. And of course, there's a lot of jazz and other stuff. We're glad we don't have to hear it, going right through this building now. But you're not sensitive enough to hear it. If you had a tube, a few tubes properly arranged, and a few other little gadgets, you'd hear it.

Do you remember that lady that claimed that her hair pins were sensitized so she can hear radio. It was in the newspapers about two years ago and there was big talk about it. I think she was kidding with her fingers crossed and her tongue in her cheek and was having some fun with the newspaper man. She said, my bobby pins are sensitive. And she said I can hear a radio program. I'm tuned in. Well, I don't know where she is now. Maybe she is tuned in. But there's such a thing as having God manifesting Himself and we don't know it, God's speaking and we don't hear it, God shining and we don't see it, God revealing himself and we don't know it, because we meet God's overtures in cold unbelief.

If you ever have the experience riding around on buses. I have had this experience quite a number of times. You feel good you know. Maybe something's nice has happened, or it's stopped snowing and you feel good and you would like to say hello to the driver. You'd like to comment. But he turns a fishy pale, cold, foreboding eye on you and you go on and get off at your stop and don't say a word. Something dies inside of you. Something nice that you would have liked to passed on, but you can't.

Sometimes there will be a driver that will be so friendly and he'll talk and speak to you when you get on. Out here on 95th Street and there road over to Vincents, one driver fought all the way over with a passenger about a dime. All the way over he fought. If he hadn't been a big fellow and I hadn't been afraid what he would do, I'd offered him a dime and told him keep still. But he fought all the way over about a dime. And I transferred to Vincents and other man driving; and when I got on the man said, good morning. I paid my fare and I stooped over him and said, what a difference between you and that last driver. And I told him what I told you about that last driver. He said, that don't pay, that don't pay. I said, you know it's

fun riding a bus with a fellow like you driving. And I said to this man, thank you. He said, well I try to be friendly. Well, he was. But you never know whether to let yourself go in a friendly overture for fear you will get spiked.

So God, always the friendly God wanting to manifest Himself and to show Himself to people. But some, God gets cut off that harsh and hard. We meet him with a stony stare and unbelief. Others, simple-hearted people believe, and God can manifest Himself. Moses was a man, simple in his faith, though profoundly educated, and a great man, yet he had the simple faith of a child.

And Moses was an obedient man and I want you to know that this man intended to go on with God if it cost him everything. He gave up a place close to the throne, you know. He gave up being a prince in Egypt to go along with the covenant of the seed of Abraham and went out and spent forty years keeping sheep when he could have had those forty years shaking hands with the plenipotentiaries and ambassadors from all over the world. He allowed his religion to cost him something, Moses did. The trouble is now, our religion doesn't cost us anything. It's cheap. Cheap grace, cheap faith, cheap heaven, cheap eternal life, cheap Savior. And Moses, it cost him something. In our day, religious people go floating around, making decisions, passing judgment, writing stuff, making speeches, but it never cost them a dime. It cost Moses everything.

I tell you; it is futile to try to have religious comforts and appropriate religious consolation without obeying spiritual laws. No use to try. And that is the great woe of our time. This happens to be the most religious period that I can remember. One dear friend of mine, who is now in heaven, he was a preacher and he wasn't too much of a preacher, but he rose one day in oratory and said, this is the worst world I've ever lived in. And I often say, I hope it's the worst one he'll ever see. And I think it is, because he was a good man; and he's no doubt with his Lord. But all I can say is this is the worst period that I've ever lived in when it comes to religion. We've got more religion now. It's running out people's ears. But it's an ominous and deadly thing, because it is an effort to appropriate spiritual comforts without obeying spiritual laws. It's trying to get God to help you without obeying God, and it'll never work. It will never work.

Moses didn't try it. He wanted help from God and he went God's way. He withdrew himself and went over and stood by the tent of meeting and said, I don't know what you mean to do God, but if you don't do something, they will. And God came down and stood in a cloud and manifested Himself to Moses and the people. And the people shrank back in fear and Moses knelt in holy awe. Moses would have to pay the price for this. The unregenerate heart, the traditional Christian, the social Christian, the poetic Christian, the psychological Christian, the nominal Christian, they want comfort, they want God's comfort, but they don't want God. They want God's peace, but they don't want God's cross. Moses wanted both and he got both. And a man will not obey our own God and Christ, let him prepare to live and die by himself. Let him prepare to live and die alone. And let him prepare for judgment alone.

How could the prodigal son hope for a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet and a robe on him. How could he hope for it, if he stayed in the foreign country? He had to come home to get it. His father had rings and he had robes and he had shoes and he had orchestras and music and ready to have a feast and a party. But the boy had to come home. He said, I will arise and go to my father. But in America, we're staying in the far country and still wanting God's ring and God's robe and God shoes. And the same fellow that will be sponsored by cigarettes and booze, will sing all God's children got shoes. All God's children got wings. He wants God's wings and God's shoes, but he won't pay the price of obedience to God's Word. Moses would.

The prodigal had to come home and we have to too. We have to be obedient. But you know, for everybody that believes, and I know that the majority, if not all of you here today are believing men and women. And I believe that you are wanting to be obedient men and women. And in a greater measure than most places, I would say I think your God-hungry men and women. I pray it may be so.

So, what I have to say and what I've said applies to you. Because, while we're not like Moses in degree, we are like Moses in kind, you see. There's a difference between degree and kind. Two men stand over there, one of them, four foot, five inches tall. The other one, six foot four. They're the same in kind, but they're not quite the same inside. So, a man can be a believer, an obedient believer, and a God-hungry believer, and still not be the stature of Moses. Nobody claims to be. We only claim we want to be, and we are growing. So, I'm not looking for perfection. I'm only saying I hope that you're God-hungry and that you're obedient and that you're believing. And if you are, you have a right to claim this, God appearing in adversity.

I'm going to close with this thought. I want to leave it with you. I dare to prophesize; I dare to do it. I dare to tell you this, that over the next few months, you're going to see more of God than you've seen over the last few years. Do you know why? Too much prosperity, too much peace, too much getting along, too much enjoying ourselves, too much spiritual pleasure. It's all good and all right. But the Lord said, well, that crowd over there on the corner, they've enjoyed themselves tremendously, and it's wonderful, we're glad, but they're going to have to learn that I appear in adversity.

So, you will see more of God over the next few months than you've seen over the last few years, and if I'm mistaken about it, write me off as no true prophet. But I think I'm right. God appears to people that are hungry for Him to appear. He appears to people who will pay the price. He appears to the daring people. You've all heard the old story of the colored brother when they said, he believed God, you know. And they said, if God told you to jump through that wall, what would you do? He said, it would be my business to jump and God's business to have a hole in that wall.

And that's what I say. We must believe in God, and it's God's business, if we dare to trust Him. If you don't put God to the test so to speak, and dare to go out and be adventurous, you will never be able to see the glory of the Lord in the land of the living. Even this morning, even this morning here, the Lord's table, this sweet time of fellowship around the Lord's table, when we touch and handle things unseen. And the invisible presence of the Most Holy One is with us. It takes a certain amount of adventure, a certain amount of believing, a certain daring approach to God and thirst after God. If you don't have it, you sit and shrug your way through another communion service. But if you have it, you can drink of that same drink, and eat of that same bread.

I pray that we may this morning have faith and obedience, and a bit of daring and a yearning after God. For if we have, He will manifest Himself. And the tighter the squeeze, the more He will manifest Himself. The greater the trouble, the greater the manifestation. That's always been like that and it's that way today.

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