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James Freie

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Sometimes I Lose Heart

A Reflection on Ministry

2 Corinthians 2:12-4:15

by James Freie

Once there was a preacher who was having trouble becoming all he could be. He did not have a clue as to what a valid ministry was all about. He thought he knew, but he was wrong. With a distorted perception and motive, he tried to do ministry. One day he realized his ladder was leaning on the wrong wall. In his despair he hit bottom. He had always heard, "When you hit bottom, look up." He did. The notion of a valid ministry became more clear. In reading 2 Corinthians he realized that some ministries obscure God's glory. Those ministries which do, cannot offer transformation. Transformation is dependent upon seeing God's glory. A valid ministry unveils God's glory. As he listened to Paul talk, the dilemma became clear—was he going to be obsessed with his own glory or was he going to help people see God's glory? He was deeply convicted. Now he knew—only in seeing God's glory does transformation take place!

Confession of weakness never comes easy. That preacher, having trouble becoming all he should be, was me. Listening to Paul reminded me of the foundation of all ministry. If Jesus is not at the center of all I do, is it a valid ministry? Do I not labor in vain? If the heart of Jesus beats faint within me, then will it be a ministry of fading glory? Before, I had been hesitant to talk about my weaknesses, my feelings of inferiority, and my moments of humiliation. As I listened to Paul talk about how suffering affected him (1:5-11), how he missed his opportunities, how his motives were questioned (1:12-2:11), and how he defined a valid ministry, I realized God's glory was unveiled in human weakness. I made a determination to stop hiding my weaknesses and speak of them more honestly. I would behold the glory of God in the face of Christ more earnestly. I wanted to know every inch of his face, and to feel every wrinkle. I wanted to see the twinkle in his eyes and watch the tears run down his cheek. I wanted to see his smile and hear his voice. I wanted to feel his touch and to know his heart.

It is true. Jesus lifts veils. He makes it possible to behold with unveiled faces. I stood with Moses when he cried with passion, "O God of the burning bush, I want to see your face and behold your glory." I listened with Moses when the God of the burning bush said, "You cannot, and live, but I will pass before you and give you a peek of what I'm really like. I will tell you who I am." With eyes wide open, Moses looked as God's presence passed in front of him. With his ears he took in every sound and heard God say, "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation." It changed him, absolutely changed him. But one day he looked in a mirror and noticed it was a fading glory, so he hid it. But are we bold; bolder than Moses? Yes, because the God of the burning bush invites us to look at his glory in the face of Christ. We do not hide, we look. So I looked and something happened. I stand in awe. Like a woolly bear caterpillar making his way; little does he know he is on his way to a transformation beyond anything he could ever imagine. Sometimes I lose heart, but I hear those words blowing in the wind, the wind of the Spirit, God's empowering presence, "James, what I do for the woolly bear caterpillar I am doing for you. Even more glorious is the ministry of the Spirit, therefore do not lose heart."

James Freie is the preaching minister of the Church of Christ in Albany, Oregon.