

Knowing God

Exodus 33-34

This morning as we look at Exodus 33 & 34 we come into a tragic moment. A tragically broken relationship now exists between God and Israel.

I recently heard a gross and grieving story that made me sick to my stomach when I heard it. I am sad to share it but I think that it may help us grasp the reality of what has happened in between God and His people Israel.

It was a story about a marriage that was being heart wrenchingly broken. What had happened was the night before the wedding the bride had slept with another man. Can you image the betrayal as the very next day she vows to “to have this man to be her wedded husband, to live together after God's ordinance in the holy estate of marriage? To love him, comfort him, honor and keep him in sickness and in health, and forsaking all others, be faithful to him so long as you both shall live?

The bride betrayed that the night before and sadly that wasn't the end of it. It came to light that she had gone back to that lover over and over again over the years of their marriage. Breaking to vows, her covenant to the Man who loved her.

I cannot fathom the grief, the pain, and even the righteous anger that the husband must have felt at this betrayal.

What we have seen in Exodus is that the people of Israel are a people that God chose. He said “I choose you to know me, to be with me, I will save you from slavery, I will protect you from you enemies, and I will give you bountiful land where we'll be together, I will be your God and You will be my people, because I love you”

Then in the midst of receiving and exchanging Covenantal Vows the people of God reject him and cheat on Him! They take the gold that God gave them and make another lover, to seek another God!

I cannot fathom the pain of God who loves perfectly being betrayed by those He loves and I cannot fathom the righteous anger that He had towards them.

At the end of Exodus 32 we see the two stone tablets shattered just like the sin of Israel had shattered the covent, the relationship that God sought to make with them.

Yet, Moses ,who loves God and is himself outraged at what Israel has done seeks, to be a mediator between Israel and God to see if there is any way to restore the relationship that has been shattered.

This is where we start in Exodus 33. As we look this morning at God's response to Israel we are meant to Know God!

Exodus 33:1-3

The LORD spoke to Moses: "Go up from here, you and the people you brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land I promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying: I will give it to your offspring. 2 I will send an angel ahead of you and will drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hethites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. 3 Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go up with you because you are a stiff-necked people; otherwise, I might destroy you on the way."

The whole purpose of the Exodus was for God and his people to be together. God's presence with them will be firmly established in the proposed tabernacle. By saying "go ahead, but you're going without me," means the events of the previous thirty-one chapters are being undone.

The Israelites were facing life without God. There would be no divine presence in their camp—no tabernacle. And without the tabernacle, there would be no altar for sacrifice, no laver for cleansing, no lampstand for light, no table for bread, no incense for prayer, no ark for atonement, and no glory in Israel. The Israelites would have to go it alone.

They get the house but the marriage ended.

How does Israel respond?

Exodus 33:4–6

When the people heard this bad news, they mourned and didn't put on their jewelry.

5 For the LORD said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites: You are a stiff-necked people. If I went up with you for a single moment, I would destroy you. Now take off your jewelry, and I will decide what to do with you." 6 So the Israelites remained stripped of their jewelry from Mount Horeb onward.

First, we see word quickly spread throughout the camp: “God’s not going with us!” Instantly, the people were dismayed. We see their distress both by their attitude and by their actions. They began to cry, partly because they were sad to see God go, but also because they were sorry for their sins. They were grieved by their betrayal of God. Then they took off their jewelry and kept it off from this point on—as an act of repentance.

This seems to be a true act of repentance as repentance is saying what I am doing the way that I am going is wrong, I am sorry i.e. expressing grief, then seeking to go the right way.

What we see about God is that He is actually not going with them because they have proven themselves to be a “stiff necked people” another way of saying a “sinful and rebellious people”. And if He were to proceed with them then in His Just wrath He would destroy them.

God is protecting them. God still cares about them! What Love and Grace!

Well what happens next?

Exodus 33:7-11

7 Now Moses took a tent and pitched it outside the camp, at a distance from the camp; he called it the tent of meeting. Anyone who wanted to consult the LORD would go to the tent of meeting that was outside the camp. 8 Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would stand up, each one at the door of his tent, and they would watch Moses until he entered the tent. 9 When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and remain at the entrance to the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. 10 As all the people saw the pillar of cloud remaining at the entrance to the tent, they would stand up, then bow in worship, each one at the door of his tent. 11 The LORD would speak with Moses face to face, just as a man speaks with his friend, then Moses would return to the camp. His assistant, the young man Joshua son of Nun, would not leave the inside of the tent.

- Moses continues to be the mediator between Israel and God. But notice where the conversation with God is taking place.

R. Kent Hughes gives us this insight on the “**Tent of Meeting**”

This “tent of meeting” was not the tabernacle. What makes this somewhat confusing is that elsewhere in Exodus the inner structure of the tabernacle is also called “the Tent of Meeting ” (e.g., Exod. 27:21; 40:2). Both tents were places to meet with God.

However, at this point, when the tabernacle had not yet been built, Moses had his own private tent of meeting.

One significant difference between the two tents was that whereas the tabernacle stood at the center, Moses pitched this tent outside the camp—way outside. The Bible stresses that it was located “some distance” from the Israelites. It had to be far away because the Israelites were still under divine judgment. Their camp was still a place of sin, and God had said that he would not dwell in it. So at least for the time being, if the Israelites wanted to meet with God, they had to go outside the camp. They were separated from God by their sin.

In addition to the location there are two things that we should notice here.

First, The people of Israel in their repentance sought to worship and draw near to God.

Second, In abounding grace God was still willing to communicate with his prophet. Although there was separation caused by Israel's sin God had not completely cut off his people. There at the tent of meeting God spoke with Moses “face to face, as a man speaks with his friend” (Exod. 33:11). The phrase “face to face” does not mean that Moses could see God, in just a few verses God will say, “no one may see me and live” (v. 20). Rather, it is a figure of speech intended to show that God and his prophet enjoyed direct communication. Moses had immediate access to God. This was a level of intimacy and fellowship that no human being had experienced since the day that God banished Adam and Eve from the garden. Moses and God were friends. God told him everything he needed to know about his plans for Israel. He spoke with Moses like a friend with a friend.

So the friend of God speaks with God.

Exodus 33:12-23

12 *Moses said to the LORD, “Look, you have told me, ‘Lead this people up,’ but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor with me.’* **13** *Now if I have indeed found favor with you, please teach me your ways, and I will know you, so that I may find favor with you. Now consider that this nation is your people.”*

14 *And he replied, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”*

- Moses has been commanded to lead the people to the Promised Land. He has been promised that an angel will go before him. But Moses knows that he needs

someone to go with him if he is to succeed and not just anyone, Moses needs and wants God to go with him!

- So God replies that He will go with Moses.
- But Moses notes that God has only committed to going with Moses and not with Israel so He asks.

15 *"If your presence does not go," Moses responded to him, "don't make us go up from here. 16 How will it be known that I and your people have found favor with you unless you go with us? I and your people will be distinguished by this from all the other people on the face of the earth."*

17 *The LORD answered Moses, "I will do this very thing you have asked, for you have found favor with me, and I know you by name."*

- What was it that distinguished the Israelites from other nations as the people of God? It was not their land. It was not their wealth. It was not their culture, because they had been living in slavery. It was not their righteousness, because they could not keep even the most basic commandments. The only thing the Israelites had going for them was their relationship to God. And other people would only know that he was their God if he stayed with them.
- This connection between Moses and Israel brings us close to the heart of the gospel. Why did God decide to stay with the Israelites? It was partly because of the promises he had made in the covenant. It also may have had something to do with their repentance, with the way they took off their ornaments as a sign of contrition. But God said he saved the Israelites because he was pleased with their mediator: "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you and I know you by name" (v. 17). Moses was proving to be an effective mediator,
- God agreed to go with Israel because he was pleased with his prophet. The Israelites were saved by the merits of their mediator. The grace and love that God gave to Moses also extended to them.
- Our salvation depends on the pleasure God takes in our mediator. Our salvation rests entirely on the delight that God takes in the person of his Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ.
This is why the Father's words about the Son were so meaningful. When Jesus came up from his baptism, God's voice from Heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased"

18 *Then Moses said, "Please, let me see your glory."*

19 He said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you, and I will proclaim the name 'the LORD' before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." **20** But he added, "You cannot see my face, for humans cannot see me and live." **21** The LORD said, "Here is a place near me. You are to stand on the rock, **22** and when my glory passes by, I will put you in the crevice of the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. **23** Then I will take my hand away, and you will see my back, but my face will not be seen."

- We see the greatest desire of the friend of God is to see His glory, to know Him!

Exodus 34:1-8

The LORD said to Moses, "Cut two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. **2** Be prepared by morning. Come up Mount Sinai in the morning and stand before me on the mountaintop. **3** No one may go up with you; in fact, no one should be seen anywhere on the mountain. Even the flocks and herds are not to graze in front of that mountain."

4 Moses cut two stone tablets like the first ones. He got up early in the morning, and taking the two stone tablets in his hand, he climbed Mount Sinai, just as the LORD had commanded him.

5 The LORD came down in a cloud, stood with him there, and proclaimed his name, "the LORD." **6** The LORD passed in front of him and proclaimed:

*The LORD—the LORD is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth, **7** maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin. But he will not leave the guilty unpunished, bringing the consequences of the fathers' iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.*

8 Moses immediately knelt low on the ground and worshiped. **9** Then he said, "My Lord, if I have indeed found favor with you, my Lord, please go with us (even though this is a stiff-necked people), forgive our iniquity and our sin, and accept us as your own possession."

Moses wanted to see God. So God said, “All right. Come up here and I’ll show you who I am. But if you really want to know me, it’s not about seeing what I look like—it’s about knowing my infinite perfections, especially as I display them in the salvation of sinners.” So God preached his Word to Moses, proclaiming his sacred name and announcing his sovereign attributes.

God’s name testifies to his eternal self-existence and self-sufficiency. Who is God? He is who he is—the covenant Lord. He always has been, and he always will be.

When the Bible speaks of God’s name, it is always something more than simply a title. God’s name stands for his entire being. It is his nature. It is who he is. So when God passed by Moses and said, “the Lord, the Lord,” he was revealing himself as the God of creation and redemption—the God who made and saves his people

This is one of the most important verses in the entire Bible. We know it’s important because it is quoted or referred to dozens of times, especially in the Old Testament. King David prayed, “But you, O Lord, are a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness” (Ps. 86:15; cf. 103:8; 145:8). The prophet Joel said, “Return to the Lord your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love” (Joel 2:13). Jonah said the same thing when he complained about God’s mercy to Nineveh: “I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love” (Jon. 4:2). The words that God first spoke to Moses became Israel’s confession of faith, the people’s working definition of God.

God is “**compassionate**.” This is a word of sympathy. God cares about our situation. He is sympathetic with our weakness. His heart is drawn to help us whenever we are in need. The Bible says, “As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him” (Ps. 103:13).

God is also “**gracious**.” This is a word of mercy or undeserved favor. People often say they want God to give them what they deserve. If he were to do that, we would all perish in our sins. But God does something better. Rather than giving us what we deserve, he gives us something that we *don’t* deserve: the free gift of his grace. Salvation is not based on any merit of our own but only on God’s desire to show mercy.

Next God says he is “**slow to anger**,” which is a vivid way of describing his patience. Some of the older translations call it “longsuffering.” To say that God is “slow to anger” implies there are times when he does get angry, when he responds to sin with holy wrath. But God is “*slow* to anger.” He is not capricious or volatile. And when he acts

against evil, he does it righteously and deliberately, not because he loses his temper. John Mackay explains it well:

Slow to anger does not present the Lord as a frustrated deity who eventually loses patience and strikes out against those who have thwarted him. It rather acknowledges that the Lord is reluctant to act against his creation, even when it is in rebellion against him. He waits long to give the sinner opportunity to return in repentance. But he is not forgetful and will not condone sin. At a time of his choosing he will act decisively against it.

Here God's covenant love is connected with the Hebrew word for **faithful love** (*emet*), which also means "truth" or "truthfulness." The point is that God always follows through on his love. His love is loyal and steadfast. Since he never goes back on a promise, once God promises to love, he keeps on loving. And his love is boundless. It is love without measure for there is no end to it.

Finally, God is "**forgiving**." The Hebrew verb used here (*nasa*) means "to lift or to carry." This gives us a picture of what God does with our sin. He takes it away, lifting the heavy burden of guilt right off our shoulders.

God is willing to forgive any and all kinds of sin. Sometimes we feel so weighed down with guilt that we wonder whether there is any way for God to forgive us. We are tempted to feel that what we have done is so evil, so vile, that we have fallen beyond the reach of his grace. But however we define what we have done, **God** is willing to forgive.

This is probably where we would like to stop, with all the divine attributes that we love to praise: gracious compassion, faithful love, patient forgiveness. However, this is not where God stopped, and we must not stop before he does. God concluded his sermon on the divine attributes by making a strong affirmation of his *justice*: "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" (Exod. 34:7b).

Why do we like to stop? Because we know that by our nature we are like Israel, we have betrayed God and in our sin objects of wrath.

So how can we reconcile God's justice with his grace? It all seems very confusing until we understand that God worked it all out on the cross. On the cross Jesus died to make atonement for our sin. The Bible says he did this so that God could be "just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus" (Rom. 3:26). It is on the cross that God's Love and Justice meet. Out of God's compassion, grace, patience, abounding in love and faithfulness, He sent Jesus to pay the debt that we owed because of our sin. We do

not have to die for our own sins; Jesus has already suffered the punishment that we deserve. He forgives all those who draw near to Him in repentance and dependence on the Merits of the one true mediator. Jesus!

Now we get to know God!

Exodus 34:10-28

The covenant is restored. The relationship is restored!

(Summarize) Moses's Radiant Face - Exodus 34:29-35

29 As Moses descended from Mount Sinai—with the two tablets of the testimony in his hands as he descended the mountain—he did not realize that the skin of his face shone as a result of his speaking with the LORD. 30 When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face shone! They were afraid to come near him. 31 But Moses called out to them, so Aaron and all the leaders of the community returned to him, and Moses spoke to them. 32 Afterward all the Israelites came near, and he commanded them to do everything the LORD had told him on Mount Sinai. 33 When Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face. 34 But whenever Moses went before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil until he came out. After he came out, he would tell the Israelites what he had been commanded, 35 and the Israelites would see that Moses's face was radiant. Then Moses would put the veil over his face again until he went to speak with the LORD.

What we see in Moses' face is the glory of the gospel. To see this, we need to turn to the New Testament, where the Apostle Paul offers a surprising interpretation of Exodus. To the Corinthians, he writes:

Now if the ministry that brought death, which was engraved in letters on stone came with glory, so that the Israelites could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of its glory, fading though it was, will not the ministry of the Spirit be even more glorious? If the ministry that condemns men is glorious, how much more glorious is the ministry that brings righteousness! For what was glorious has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was fading away came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! (2 Cor. 3:7–11)

Here the apostle draws a comparison between the law of Moses and the gospel of Jesus Christ. There was something glorious about the law. The Israelites could see this in Moses' face, which was shining so brightly that they could hardly bear to look at it. However, the law could not bring full and final salvation, and thus whatever radiance it had was fading away. Its glory was true but temporary.

How much more glorious, then, is the gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is the good news of eternal salvation through the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus Christ—his death on the cross and his triumph over the tomb. This good news is a ministry of God's Spirit (2 Cor. 3:8), who alone can give us faith in Christ. This makes the gospel more glorious, because through the gospel the Holy Spirit does a glorious, transforming work in our lives, changing our minds and hearts from the inside out. And through the work of our perfect mediator Jesus we will someday get to KNOW God completely and be with Him forever!

Living in Light of this Truth

As we consider what Israel had to do to meet with God, we are reminded of the amazing privilege that we have today. Where can we go to meet with God? We don't have to stay at a distance. We don't have to go outside the camp. We don't have to approach the tent of meeting. We don't have to consult with a prophet or a priest. As believers in the Lord Jesus Christ, we have immediate access to God through the presence of his Holy Spirit.

Today the tent of meeting is inside us, because God has come to make his home in us. This is the work of God the Holy Spirit. Jesus has sent the Spirit to live in us. Thus the Apostle Paul prays "that out of his glorious riches he [God] may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith" (Eph. 3:16, 17a). This means that we are the place of God's dwelling. From the very moment that we receive Jesus into our hearts by faith, we are in direct communication with Almighty God.

How would you have responded to the news that God wasn't going? Most people probably think they would be very upset, but I'm not so sure. Consider what God was offering the Israelites: He was offering to bless them without having a relationship with them. But this is exactly what most people want!

It is shocking but true: Most people want God to help them overcome whatever obstacles they are facing in life, and they want to reach a promised land, but they are not all that interested in having a personal relationship with the living God. They would be happy to have God defeat all their enemies and let them into heaven, even if he would not be there. In fact, this is what some people who claim to be Christians have

tried to do. They have made a decision for Christ so they can get into Heaven, but they are not living with him as their Savior and their God.

Even the Israelites knew better. They refused to settle for any blessing apart from God's very presence:

Their example reminds us to love God more than we love his blessings. Many blessings come from knowing God. There is the blessing of repentance, of being able to see our sin and turn away from it. There is the blessing of forgiveness, of receiving a pardon for all our sin. There is the blessing of justification, of being declared righteous in God's sight. There is the blessing of sanctification, of growing in godliness. There is the blessing of adoption, of having all the rights and privileges of a child of God. There is the blessing of perseverance, of staying with God to the very end. There is the blessing of glorification, of having the free gift of eternal life.

The blessings go on and on forever, **but the biggest blessing is God himself.**

John 17:3 This is eternal life: that they may **know you**, the only **true God**, and the one you have sent —**Jesus Christ**.

Knowing him is better than anything else we can imagine. We should not focus so much on what God does for us that we neglect who he is to us. How blessed I am to have a personal relationship with the living God. I am blessed to meditate on his many perfections—his infinite wisdom, power, holiness, goodness, and love. Oh, how blessed it is to know him as one God in three Persons. How blessed it is to know the Father as Creator, the Son as Redeemer, and the Spirit as Sustainer of life. How blessed it is to communicate with God every day, to hear His voice as we listen to what he is saying to us in his Word, and to tell him all our troubles through prayer.

Let's Pray

All I once held dear, built my life upon

All this world reveres, and wars to own

All I once thought gain I have counted loss

Spent and worthless now, compared to this

Knowing You, Jesus

Knowing You

There is no greater thing
You're my all, You're the best
You're my joy, my righteousness
And I love You, Lord

Now my heart's desire is to know You more
To be found in You and known as Yours
To possess by faith what I could not earn
All-surpassing gift of righteousness

Oh, to know the power of Your risen life
And to know You in Your sufferings
To become like You in Your death, my Lord
So with You to live and never die
Knowing You, Jesus
Knowing You

You're my all, You're the best
You're my joy, my righteousness
And I love You, Lord
Thank you, for loving us First

Benediction

Ephesians 3:14-21

Prayer for Spiritual Strength

¹⁴ For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named, ¹⁶ that according to the riches of his glory he may grant you to be strengthened with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith—that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may have strength to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the

love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

²⁰ Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, according to the power at work within us, ²¹ to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, forever and ever. Amen.