

Exodus 33:12-34:28

Introduction

This morning, we come to the final end of the matter. This morning, we see the story of the golden calf brought to its final, *astonishing* and completely unexpected conclusion. It's been a long road, hasn't it?

Because of their sin with the golden calf, Israel was in danger of being consumed. But Moses prayed, and the Lord heard Moses' prayer and relented of the disaster that He had spoken of bringing on His people. Then we saw the golden calf destroyed, and 3000 people killed with the sword of the Levites. Then we saw Moses praying a second time – praying that God would forgive the people, and not give them the punishment they still deserved. This time, however, Moses' prayer is not *as* successful. God will still bring the people of Israel into the Promised Land, but *someday* He *will* punish Israel *in full* for their sin with the golden calf. As a sign of this coming judgment God sends a *plague*, for the first time, on His very own people.

Then, just when we think we're ready to move on, God tells the people to "depart" and "go up from" His presence: "...but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people." God relents of the first "disaster," only to proclaim a second. The people are trapped. Either they depart from Mount Sinai and the Lord does **not** go up among them, or the Lord **does** go up among them and they *will* be *immediately* **consumed**.

If we have any hope, it's only this. God seems to be **reminding** Moses, again, of his role as covenant mediator.

- Exodus 33:1 — 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.**"

The threat is real, and yet God seems to be reminding Moses that He has **not yet** carried it out.

- Exodus 33:5 — The LORD... said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, '...take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you.'"

If we have any hope, it's only this: In the very act of **pronouncing disaster**, God seems to be calling Moses to **pray**.

Now, the last time we saw this happen, Moses prayed, and the Lord relented of the disaster that He had spoken. It's true that Moses' second prayer was less successful, but that prayer seems to have been completely of his own initiative. It was well-intentioned, but somewhat misguided. Might God really be, for a second time, **calling** Moses to pray? Is it possible that for a second time, God might relent of the disaster that He has spoken?

And then, in the middle of all this, we're suddenly given a picture of the relationship between God and His covenant mediator that we would never before have dared to imagine. "Thus the

LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.” (33:11) We’re about to see an example of this in the coming verses.

But, how can even the prayer of Moses make *any difference this time*? Apparently, his prayer was effective last time partly *because* God was planning to send the people away from His presence! Only, now, Moses must pray that God will **not** send them away from His presence! It’s a trap – with no apparent way out. *So*, Moses prays.

I. Exodus 33:12a — 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.”

Moses knows that the angel of the Lord will still go “**before**” the people – just like always. (cf. Exod. 14:19; 23:20-23; 32:34; 33:2) But with the Tabernacle, God had said that He would dwell “**among**” the people. (cf. Exod. 25:8; 29:43-46) So Moses’ point seems to be this: “If you will not go up **among us**, then *who will?*” Only, that’s not actually what Moses says. What he says, is, “You have not let me know whom you will send **with me**.”

Notice that all of Moses emphasis is on “me” (Moses), not “us.” Moses isn’t being selfish. It’s just that at this point, it seems best not to be putting the people forward. The emphasis is on “me,” but the “us” is always there under the surface. “See, you say to *me*, ‘Bring up **this people**,’ but you have not let *me* know whom you will send with *me* [*us*].” The people are still uppermost in Moses’ mind. He hasn’t forgotten them for a single moment. But now he prays on their behalf indirectly by praying, first of all, on behalf of himself. “You have not let me know whom you will send **with me**.”

II. Exodus 33:12b–13a — “Yet you have said, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’ Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order that I might continue¹ to find favor in your sight.”

Moses isn’t bragging. He’s not saying, “I **deserve** this.” He’s just reminding God of what God *Himself* has said. “**You have said**, ‘I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.’” Now *therefore*...

“**IF** I have found favor in your sight [*if* what you have said is true], please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order that I may continue to find favor in your sight.” See how all the emphasis is still on “**me**,” and “**I**.” But underneath the surface, Moses still has in mind “**we**,” and “**us**.”

The whole organization of the Tabernacle was a revealing of God’s ways. And, so, it was at the tabernacle, where God’s ways were revealed, that God’s people could come to know Him. Moses still doesn’t mention the people, but it’s the people that are always in his heart and mind. “How can it be true that I have found favor in your sight if you will not go up with me [*us*] – if you will not show me [*us*] your ways that I [*we*] may *know you*?”

¹ Cf. NIV; NET; NLT; NCV

The “we” and “us” hidden in the “I” and “me” finally come to the forefront only in the very last words of Moses’ prayer.

III. Exodus 33:13b — “Consider too that this nation is your people.”

So, now it’s clear – even if it’s still rather indirect. For God to go up with **Moses** is, for Moses, the same thing as God going up with—and *among*—**all the people**.

It’s a deceptively simple prayer. It’s a prayer full of “I” and “me” (rather than “we” and “us”) because it’s grounded almost entirely in the favor that *Moses* has found in God’s sight. And yet even as Moses prays for himself, that he will continue to find favor in God’s sight, it’s really his prayer for *all* the people.

So, what will the outcome be? Can a prayer this “simple” really be enough? Could **any** prayer **ever** be enough? Verse 14:

IV. Exodus 33:14 — And he said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”

God’s response is even more “simple” than Moses’ prayer. In fact, it’s all so “simple” that we’re left wondering if we really heard what we think we heard. We replay it again in our minds: “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” “My presence” is literally “my face”; so what God promises is His *intimate* and *personal* presence. That’s what God has said. But then we wonder: Does God really *mean* what it sounds like He *means*? When God says “My presence will go with **you**, and I will give **you** rest,” does He really mean Moses *along with* all the rest of the people? Or does He mean *only Moses*?²

Moses *cannot* rest until he knows the answer to this question. In fact, I almost wonder if this was the result that God intended. And so, emboldened by this first response, Moses dares to pray again, pressing God even further.

V. Exodus 33:15–16 — And he said to him, “If your presence will not go **with me**, do not bring **us** up from here. 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?”

See how “I” and “me” changes in these verses to “**we**” and “**us!**” And see, especially, how Moses ties his own welfare together with the welfare of all the people. “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?” To quote one commentator, Moses understands that “no people, no matter how religious they are... can be a people of God without the Presence of God.” (Durham) (Here’s a warning, also, to us.)

² Throughout Exodus, “you” is used over and over not only as a reference to the “singular” Moses, but also as a “corporate singular” reference to the whole people of Israel. Which meaning is intended can only be determined by context, and at times the context can be ambiguous.

So, now, there can be *no mistaking* what Moses is asking for. He's asking for *everything* – all or nothing. He's asking for the **full restoration** of God's original promise that He would dwell **among** His people, even as He said in Exodus 25:

➤ Exodus 25:8 — And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst.

And now that there's no mistaking what Moses is asking for, there should also be no mistaking what God *means* when He answers.

VI. Exodus 33:17 — 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.”

Once again, the “simplicity” of God's response leaves us almost in shock. After all that we've been through, can this *be*? We replay it over again in our minds: “The LORD said to Moses, ‘**This very thing that you have spoken I will do.**’” Only maybe we're still wondering, *How? How* can that be?

God says 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.**” We have to be careful that we don't hear in these words an *emphasis* on the “*worthiness*” of Moses. Certainly, one who finds favor in God's sight must be a righteous and godly man, and that *is* important, here. But, it's not the primary point. What God is emphasizing is not mainly Moses' righteousness, but rather His own sovereign grace in **choosing** Moses³ and **granting** him His favor. That's always the case whenever this phrase is used anywhere in the Scriptures. (cf. Gen. 33:15; 39:21; 47:29; Exod. 3:21; Num. 32:5; Ruth 2:2; 2 Sam. 14:22; 16:4; Dan. 1:9; Luke 1:26-31)

- Ruth 2:2 — And Ruth the Moabite said to Naomi, “Let me go to the field and glean among the ears of grain after him in whose sight I shall find favor.”
- 2 Samuel 14:22 — And Joab fell on his face to the ground and paid homage and blessed the king. And Joab said, “Today your servant knows that I have found favor in your sight, my lord the king, in that the king has granted the request of his servant.”
- Daniel 1:9 — And God gave Daniel favor and compassion in the sight of the chief of the eunuchs.

When the angel Gabriel tells Mary that she has found favor with God, and that she will be the mother of God's Messiah (Luke 1:26-31), the main point is not Mary's worthiness to be the mother of Jesus, but God's sovereign goodness, and grace, and mercy. (cf. Luke 1:46-55) When Gabriel says to Mary, “Greetings, O favored one,” this certainly assumes that Mary is a righteous and God-fearing woman, but the *emphasis* is *not* Mary's righteousness, but rather God's amazing grace in choosing her to be the mother of His Messiah. So also in Exodus 33, we must not see Moses being exalted for his righteousness (though he is righteous), but rather God being exalted for the grace and favor that **He** bestows in choosing Moses and setting him apart for Himself, to be the mediator of His covenant. **Why** does God listen to **Moses**? Because Moses is the one that

³ The meaning of “I know you by name” is essentially “I have chosen you.” (Cf. NET translation note on Exod. 33:12). However, this choice is not arbitrary or detached, but rather the expression of God's powerful love.

He has loved and that *He* has set apart in His *own* sovereign *goodness* and *mercy* and *grace* to be His righteous servant – to be *the one* that He will listen *to*.

Listen, again, to the Lord’s words 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.” Are you beginning to see the *majesty* and the *greatness* of **God’s** grace? Are you beginning to see the *freedom* and the *sovereignty* of **God’s** grace? Are you beginning to see the *beauty* and the *wonder* of **God’s** grace?

But in spite of all this, maybe we still wonder how God can grant Moses’ request. How can God say *now*, so simply, that He *will* go up among the people of Israel – *and yet not* consume them? It seems that even Moses wonders. So, emboldened by the first two responses to his prayers, Moses dares to pray *again*:

VII. Exodus 33:18 — Moses said, “Please show me your glory.”

Who *ever* heard of any request bigger or greater than this?!? Basically, what Moses is asking for is the *ultimate sign* – deep as Sheol *and* high as heaven! (cf. Isa. 7:11) He’s asking for the signature of Yahweh Himself on the promise He’s made to spare the people and *still go with them*.

But what gives Moses the *right*? How can he dare to ask such a thing? In the previous few days, Moses has *seen* the sinful depravity of man, and Moses has *seen* the devouring holiness of God. We *all* have. So when **this** God says that He will go up in the midst of **this** people, and *you* are the one that He’s called to lead them, wouldn’t you need a sign as deep as Sheol and high as heaven? This isn’t lack of faith. It’s simply a right—and a healthy—fear of the Lord. Still, Moses is asking something that no other human being before or since has ever dared to ask. Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” How could we not be holding our breath?

VIII. Exodus 33:19–23 — And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD [YAHWEH].’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” And the LORD said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”

Brothers and sisters! We have just come all the way from the deepest, darkest pit, now all the way to the highest mountain peak of all. That after all of the constant, sustained tension, and hopelessness, and doom and gloom, we should have come now to *this!!!*

I won’t try to “explain.” There’s a whole lot of mystery here. We hear about God’s “face,” and His “hand,” and His “back,” and we know that God is Spirit, and these are all figures of speech pointing us to other realities. But this much is clear, and the most wonderful of all: When God reveals His **glory** to Moses, it will be a revealing of *all* His **goodness** – all that is contained in His *covenant name*, **Yahweh**. (cf. Exod. 3:14-15) When God reveals His **glory** to Moses, it will

be a revealing to Moses (and to us) of God’s sovereign freedom to be **gracious** to whom He will be gracious(!), and to show **mercy** on whom He will show mercy(!). (cf. Rom. 9:14-16)

How can God show grace and mercy to a stiff-necked Israel? Because **He** is utterly **free** to do so. Because *already* in His sovereign **goodness** and **mercy** and **grace** **He** has **loved** Moses and **He** has set him apart to be the one whose prayer He will answer – the one on whose behalf He will spare the people and **graciously, mercifully** dwell in their midst.

Against the backdrop of the golden calf—against the backdrop of all the judgment, and all the disastrous threats, and all the prayers of Moses—the compassion, and the mercy, and the goodness and grace of God are now shining in *all* of their *infinite* splendor. This *is* the **glory** of the Lord. This is the “sign,” deep as Sheol and high as heaven. This is the signature of Yahweh Himself, after His gracious, merciful promise to dwell even among this stiff-necked people. So now, for the most part, we’re ready to just *read* – still holding our breath:

IX. Exodus 34:1–3 — The LORD said to Moses, “Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. Be ready by the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain. [Exod. 19:20] No one shall come up with you, and let no one be seen throughout all the mountain. Let no flocks or herds graze opposite that mountain.” [Exod. 19:12-13, 21]

Is that sounding *wonderfully* familiar? Are you *seeing* in these words the grace, and mercy, and goodness of God as we could *never* have seen it the *first* time?

X. Exodus 34:4–7 — So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God **merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love to the thousandth generation⁴, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin**, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” [Exod. 20:5-6]

Now, when we hear these words, when we see this revelation of God’s glory, we *understand* better than we ever could have before. Do you understand? Do you *see* the **glory** of **God**? It’s *this* new, and deeper understanding of God’s glory that finally emboldens Moses to pray one last time – this time even more openly and transparently, and this time with an underlying assurance that even in the asking it’s already given.

XI. Exodus 34:8–9 — And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. And he said, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go **in the midst of us**, although they are indeed⁵ **a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.**”

⁴ ESV note; cf. NET note, NRSV and HCSB; See especially the ESV marginal note on Exod. 20:6

⁵ Moberly [quoted in Hamilton] Cf. Most translations

What is Moses asking? He's asking that the covenant that was broken, and rendered null and void by Israel's sin, be established once again. He's asking that the covenant relationship between God and His people be fully and finally remade. The request is bolder than ever. And yet can there be any doubt, now, as to the answer that God will give?

XII. Exodus 34:10 — And he said, “**Behold(!!!), I am making a covenant.** Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.”

What then follows is not a boring repetition of laws that we've already seen. It is a repetition of laws we've already seen, but *every word* is now sweeter to us than it could have ever been before. Because every single word is the sign of a broken covenant remade – a lost people found again, and taken again to be God's very own.

XIII. Exodus 34:11–28 — “Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. [Exod. 23:28, 32-33] You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), [Exod. 23:23-24; 20:3, 5] lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods. You shall not make for yourself any gods of cast metal. [Exodus 20:4] You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month Abib, for in the month Abib you came out from Egypt. [Exod. 20:15; 13:3-4] All that open the womb are mine, all your male livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep. The firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. [Exod. 13:2, 13] And none shall appear before me empty-handed. Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest. [Exod. 20:9-10] You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end. Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the LORD God, **the God of Israel.** [Exod. 23:14-17] For I will cast out nations before you and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your land, when you go up to appear before **the LORD your God** three times in the year. You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover remain until the morning. [Exod. 12:8-10; 23:18] The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God. [Exod. 23:19a] You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk.” [Exod. 23:19b]

And the LORD said to Moses, “Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant **with you and with Israel.**” So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights. [Exod. 24:18] He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he [the LORD] wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. [Exod. 31:18]

Conclusion

A broken covenant remade. God will go in the midst of His people. The tabernacle *will* be built, as we see in the coming chapters. God will take the people for His inheritance.

Brothers and sisters! *Here* is a **miracle**; that after witnessing the making of the golden calf, and all that came after, we should be *here, now*. Last week, we were left trapped, with no hope, and no way out! This week, we have learned that when all is **most** hopeless, it's **then** that God's mercy and grace powerfully abounds – it's then that **God** does the impossible. How can God show mercy and grace to a stiff-necked people like us? Because **He** is utterly **free** to do so. Because **He is merciful** and *gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin*. Because *already* before the foundation of the world, **He loved** His one and only Son, and **He** chose Him, and **He** set him apart to be the one whose prayer He would answer (cf. Mat. 3:17) – the one on whose behalf He would **GRACIOUSLY, MERCIFULLY** spare even sinners like us (even a sinner like Moses; cf. Deut. 38:48-52), and **GRACIOUSLY, MERCIFULLY** dwell *with us*. This *is* the **glory** of the Lord. *See* the **GLORY—the GLORY(!)**—of the Lord!!! And truly *seeing*—truly *experiencing* that **mercy and grace**—may you and I “go and **sin no more.**” (cf. Jn. 8:11)