

A Mediator with a Heart

Exodus 33:12-33

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If you have your Bibles I'd invite you to turn with me to Exodus 33, as we continue our study in the Old Testament. In the first eleven verses of this chapter, especially verse 3, the Lord says to Moses, "to go up to a land flowing with milk and honey, for I will not go up in your midst." This summarizes the emphasis of Exodus 33:1-11, that God is assuring Moses and His people that He will refrain from immediately destroying them, that He will fulfill His promise to take them into the Promised Land to clear the Canaanites out before them, to settle them in that land, to give them a land flowing with milk and honey, but He will not go up in their midst. That means not only that He will not go up in their midst in the tabernacle which He has already revealed to Moses, but that there will be no visible manifestation of or experience of His presence with the people of God. In the next passage, Moses responds to that revelation. Let's turn to Exodus 33:12 and hear the word of God.

Then Moses said to the LORD, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people!' But You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me. Moreover, You have said, 'I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.' Now therefore, I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight. Consider too, that this nation is Your people." And He said, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest." Then he said to Him, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here. For how then can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight, I and Your people? Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?" The LORD said to Moses, "I will also do this thing of which you have spoken; for you have found favor in My sight and I have known you by name." Then Moses said, "I pray You, show me Your glory!" And He said, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you, and will proclaim the name of the LORD before you; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show compassion on whom I will show compassion." But He said, "You cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live!" Then the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My

hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen."

Amen. This ends this reading of God's holy and inspired word. May He write its eternal truth upon our hearts. Let's pray.

Lord and God, we thank You for this passage. We sense something of the glory of it, the wonder of it, the uniqueness of it, and we pray that by Your Spirit You would speak to our hearts through Your inspired word, and that You would enable us to embrace this word in faith and respond to it with a joyful delight and obedience. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Here's the situation. After chapter after chapter on worship, before the mediator can come down to deliver the instructions of God on worship, the people of God have already gone after false gods. They've been idolatrous. They have worshiped in ways that the Lord has not commanded them, and God has spoken His judgment to Moses and to the people in Exodus 32. Moses intercedes with God in Exodus 33, pleads that God would not destroy His people on the spot, and God, in an amazing expression of His graciousness refrains from an immediate judgment that His people deserved. But He tells them, "I'll give you the promised land, but not My presence." You see, the great theme of Exodus 33, positively and negatively, is the presence of God. Exodus 33:1-11 contemplates the people of God experiencing His blessing without His presence. Exodus 33:12 and following, show us the mediator and his utter dissatisfaction with that solution, because of his realization that the blessings of the promised land, without the presence of the Promiser, is a curse.

This passages teaches two truths. First, in verse 12-17, there are Moses' five arguments, bold arguments, his requests that he presses against God, and then his petition to the Lord, and finally God's stunning and gracious response. Then, in verses 18-23, there is Moses' follow-up prayer, this audacious prayer, and again God's stunning and gracious response to it. Throughout this section Moses' mediation, Moses' intercession, Moses' prayer, Moses' petition is showing the eternal covenant of redemption established between the Father and the Son for the sake of our salvation, and it is showing us the heart of God, and it is giving us a foretaste of The Mediator. It's showing us in advance what The Mediator is going to do for us.

I. Moses' mediation shows us the eternal covenant of redemption, the heart of God and a foretaste of The Mediator.

In verse 12-16, we see that Moses was entirely unsatisfied with the state of affairs described in Exodus 33:3, when the Lord says, "Fine, I'll take you up to the promised land, I'll give you a land flowing with milk and honey, but I'm not going up in your midst. My presence will not be with you." Moses is totally dissatisfied with the state of the negotiation, if I can reverently speak of it in those

terms. So Moses boldly goes back into the presence of God, armed with strong arguments for God on behalf of Israel. In that, my friends, Moses is a foreshadowing, he is a type of The True Mediator who speaks audaciously to God on our behalf. And Moses, in verse 12, begins with a complaint based upon the fact that God has not only told him, but also told the whole nation, that he is the divinely appointed mediator. He is divinely chosen by God and appointed to that office by God, and Moses says, "Lord, You say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but You Yourself have not let me know whom You will send with me." In other words, Lord, You have given me this huge job, but You have not really told me what Your plans are. Specifically, You've not told me whom You are sending. You've generically said a messenger or an angel is going up before me, but Lord, if I'm the mediator, if I'm the mediator that You chose, if I'm the mediator whom You appointed, don't You think You ought to share that information with me? He begins with this complaint, and then come the arguments, in verses 12-16.

In the second half of verse 12, Moses pleads the argument of God's election of, and grace to, himself. He says, "Lord, You have said, 'I have known you by name, and you have also found favor in My sight.'" Moses is appealing to his mediatorial role, not a role that he invented for himself, not a role that he initially wanted for himself. "Lord, this is great news. Who were you going to send," he says in Exodus 3. "You, Moses." And then came the excuses. So he's pointing out that "Lord, I didn't appoint myself to this job. You have said that You knew me by name, that I found favor in Your sight. You have known me, You have chosen me, I have found favor in Your sight." Moses is pointing to his mediatorial role and saying, "You've said aloud to me and Israel that You chose me and favored me, but You haven't even shared with me Your plans."

The second argument is in verse 13, where Moses argues God's election of Israel. "Consider too, that this nation is Your people." God, these are Your people by Your choice. They weren't born Your people. You made them to be Your people when You called Abraham out from Ur of the Chaldees. You made promises. They are Your people by choice, just like I am the mediator by Your choice. Moses, you see, is appealing to the very heart of the covenant. And how is the heart of the covenant expressed as, over and over in Scripture? "I will be your God and you will be My people." And you hear Moses saying, "They're Your people, Lord." This is so important because the Lord, in His righteousness indignation, in the past chapter has referred to them repeatedly as "this people" and "your people." And Moses is turning around and saying, "No. Your people by Your choice. Are You going to go back on that?" Moses is pointing to the unchangeableness of the choice of the election of God.

Then in verse 15, the third argument, where he points to the supreme importance of God's presence. Without it, nothing else matters. Then Moses says to the Lord, "If Your presence does not go with us, do not lead us up from here." In other words, he is saying, "Lord, if we must forfeit Your presence to go into the promised land; just kill us now and get it over with. If you're not going up with us,

kill us here, because we were made for Your presence and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.” Moses understands the supreme importance of God's presence, of his favor, of His nearness to His people. Without it, nothing else matters.

In verse 16, Moses argues a fourth point; God's presence is the only acceptable proof of His favor to Moses. “For how can it be known that I have found favor in Your sight? I and Your people.” Apart from Your presence and the tabernacle, how could Your acceptance of my mediation be demonstrated?” Lord, You can say “I have chosen you,” but if You don't hear my intercession for this people, and show Your favor and Your presence with them, how can my mediation be proven, how can it be demonstrated, how can it be manifest? I am a failure as a mediator if I fail to bring the two parties together.

Again in verse 16, he goes on to argue that God's presence is the distinguishing mark of His choice of His people. “Is it not by Your going with us, so that we, I and Your people, may be distinguished from all the other people who are upon the face of the earth?” He's saying, “Lord, the thing that makes us different, is that You are with us.” Does that not shout to you that “The thing that makes us different is the outward ordinances that you've give us.” No. The thing that makes us different is that You are with us. That's the only thing that makes us different from this world. All the covenant signs in the world are empty unless we have the ultimate distinguishing mark of the presence of God. So Moses presses these arguments, and we see the foreshadowing of The Mediator in this. If I could reverently paint the scene of Satan accusing God's people, and the Mediator, the Lord Jesus Christ, responding on their behalf, and explaining the case before the heavenly Father. As limited as that analogy is, as problematic as it is, if taken in the wrong direction, you see the Mediator saying, “Lord, yes they've sinned. Yes, she's rebelled. Yes, she deserves judgment. You chose Me as the Mediator. Yes, they deserve judgment. Yes, they've sinned. You chose Me them as Your people. Yes, they've sinned. Yes, they deserve judgment. The only way that I can be vindicated, Father, is if they are saved.” No wonder Paul says that “He was justified, or vindicated, in His resurrection, which was the foretaste of our resurrection.” It was necessary. You understand this. For God to fail to bring you through would be an indictment upon His own Son, because His own Son has said, “I am their Mediator, and I can only be vindicated in their salvation, so save them, O Father.”

And then in verse 13, comes Moses' petition. If You have really chosen me, if You've really given me grace, then show me Your heart, show me Your attributes, show me Your way. “Now I pray You, if I have found favor in Your sight, let me know Your ways, that I may know You, so that I may find favor in Your sight.” Moses is asking to know what God is like, as He expresses His character in the ways that He deals with His people. And God's going to answer that prayer in a glorious and marvelous way. But notice something very interesting. That petition comes in verse 13, but Moses doesn't finish arguing

until verse 16. And God answers the petition in verse 14. Now does this remind you of anything? The Lord replies before Moses has finished his argument. "Lord my first reason why You should do this is..." "Moses, I'll do it." "Right, OK, two more points, Lord." Have we seen this before? "Honey, I know I told you I wasn't going to overspend this month. But you don't understand. We had a birthday party and then there was the shower I had to give and then..." "It's OK honey." "Right, but then I had to help get this meal for this girl who really needed it this week and then..." "It's OK, honey, it's fine." Have you ever seen someone keep on arguing through the "It's OK"? Here's Moses piling up the arguments, and God's showing His heart, "I've heard you, Moses. It will be done." And don't you love the way the Lord answers in verse 14, "My presence shall go with you, and I will give you rest." I seem to remember someone else saying that once. Perhaps now you appreciate the tremendous significance when Jesus looked at His disciples and said, "I will give you rest. I'll give it to you." What is that, but a claim to be the sovereign, blessing, gracious God of heaven and earth, who alone is the hope of His people. I will do it. If anyone else in the world had said that, other than God, it would have been the most arrogant statement ever spoken. "You have that need? Fine. I'll meet that." "You need that rest? Good. I'll give it to you."

And then the second part of the Lord's response comes in verse 17, where Moses receives a word of approval with a phrase connected to it that is only given one other place in Scripture. The Lord says to Moses, "I will also do this thing of which you have spoken, for you have found favor in My sight. And I have known you by name." The only other person in Scripture of whom that is said, the first half of the phrase, is Noah. "Noah found favor in the sight of the Lord." The Old Testament will tell us that Moses would be the only prophet who knew the Lord face to face. The Lord has said, "Moses, I've heard you, and I'll answer." And in that blessing, you are seeing a foreshadowing of the specialness of Jesus the Mediator, with the heavenly Father. The Father's known Him face to face, because He's the Son of the Father, and there's no one who has found the favor the Son has found with the Father, so that the Father, twice from heaven says, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." If you ever doubt that your Mediator has the pleasure of His Father, you listen to what His Father says about Him. Moses' mediation points us to the covenant of redemption and to the heart of God, and gives us a foretaste of the Mediator, but this story isn't over yet. It continues on, if you look at verses 18-23.

II. Moses' bold prayer shows us the importance of God's presence and The Mediator's prayer for you.

Moses takes it a step further and makes one audacious request, and God again stuns us with His response. Moses' bold prayer shows us the importance of God's presence, and it also shows us something of the Mediator's prayer for you. The Mediator. Not Moses' prayer for you, but Jesus' prayer for you. Look at Moses'

prayer, here it is: "Show me Your glory." It seems to be a request not only for God to reveal His essential nature to Moses but also for God to come again in a visible manifestation like He had when He called Moses into this service in the beginning at the burning bush. Because God answers both parts of that reality in His response, and does three things which reveal His essential nature, and then tells Moses something about his limitations of experiencing His visible glory.

We see God's answer in four parts, and the first three parts are in verse 19. In response to Moses' audacious prayer, "Show me Your glory," God says, "I will show you My goodness. I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you." God is saying to Moses, there is one thing My people need to learn out of this whole event, is that I am good beyond their imagining. My friends, that is something for us to go back to over and over, even and especially in those moments of our lives when we are tempted to doubt the Lord's goodness in our dealings, when He does things that are inscrutable, when He does things that break our hearts, when He takes away that which is most precious, when He seems to give His children stone for bread, then we must remember this revelation: "I am good. That's what I am, Moses. You want to know what I am really like? I am good."

Secondly, look again at verse 19, "And will proclaim the name of the Lord before you." You realize that this is the only time in all of the Scripture that God is the subject of a sentence about the proclamation about His name. This is God the Preacher saying, "Moses, I am going to preach My name." I am going to preach My character to you, I am going to preach My attributes to you, I'm going to preach My nature to you, I am going to self reveal who I am to you.

Thirdly, in verse 19, God goes on to say, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show compassion to whom I will show compassion." Paul will pick this up in Romans 9. That's where Paul will go to teach that God is sovereign, and if in His mercy He shows compassion on whom He will show compassion, then that is no reflection on His character as deficient or arbitrary in any way. And Moses is making the same point. God is sovereign, but He is never arbitrary. We can never complain that He administers His justice, but we can never claim that His mercy to us is based on something in us, because "I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion, I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious." His justice is always deserved; His grace is never deserved.

And then God says in verse 20, "Moses, you cannot see My face, for no man can see Me and live." This reminds us again that God is incomprehensible, that He dwells in unapproachable light. Even in our unfallen state we couldn't have come into God's presence. The angels themselves around the throne shield their eyes, yet, there is this refrain you continue to see in the Scriptures, which we hear Jesus say in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God." Paul, in I Corinthians 12 can say, "Now we see in a mirror dimly, but then, face to face." And, of course, there's the glorious passage in John 1:14, that tells

us that “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” That passage is based upon this Exodus 33 text. John is saying nothing less than that in Jesus Christ we have seen the Father’s glory. And there is in God nothing unChristlike at all.

But you know, it's even better than that. Can I say that? Turn with me to John 17, because this prayer of the Old Covenant mediator, that he would behold the glory of God, qualified as the answer to it was, is transcended entirely by what the New Covenant Mediator does. He does not simply pray for Himself, but prays for you. Notice especially in verse 19-21, Jesus’ specific indication that He is not merely praying what He is about to pray for His disciples, but for all those who come to faith, “The glory which You have given Me, I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are One, I in them, and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity so that the world may know that You sent Me and loved them even as You have loved Me. Father, I also desire that they who You have given Me be with Me where I am so that they may see My glory, which You have given Me, for You loved Me before the foundation of the world. O Righteous Father, although the world has not known You, yet I have known You, and these have known that You sent Me, and I have made Your name known to them and will make it known so that the love with which You loved Me may be in them and I in them.” The New Covenant Mediator, The True Mediator, prays that you would be invested with His glory, that you might be united to God, that you might behold His glory forever. But yet there breaks a far more glorious day, the saints they rise in bright array. The King of Glory passes on His way. Alleluia. Alleluia. And You will see it, because the Mediator has asked of the Father. Let us pray.

Our Lord and Our God, of Your presence, of the sight of Your glory, we can say, “Less would not satisfy, and more would not be desired.” Grant us this heart, that Your glory would be our vision, and that we would see it by faith in the Lord of Glory, even Jesus Christ, our Savior and Lord, in whose name we ask it, Amen.

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