

The Book of Exodus

Lesson 23: God's Presence and Glory; the Covenant Renewed -- Exodus 33:1-34:35

Imagine the morning after the worst night of your life. The golden calf has been ground to powder, the guilty have fallen, and the camp is quiet with the heavy quiet that follows a great sin. Then God speaks, and what He says is more frightening than any thunder. He will keep His promise. He will give Israel the land flowing with milk and honey. But He will not go up among them, lest He consume them on the way. The gift remains; the Giver withdraws. And the people, hearing this, mourn and strip off their ornaments, because they have just learned that a land without God is no gift at all.

Into that silence steps Moses, and what follows is one of the most tender conversations in all of Scripture. Moses will not settle for the land. He will not settle for an angel sent ahead. He plants himself before God and pleads, 'If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.' He has tasted the difference between a religion that has God's gifts and a relationship that has God Himself, and he refuses to trade the second for the first. Then, emboldened by grace, he asks for the thing every hungry heart has secretly wanted: 'Please show me your glory.'

What God grants is not a sight but a sound, the most important sermon ever preached about the character of God. The LORD passes by and proclaims His own name: merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and yet who will by no means clear the guilty. There it is, the whole heart of God in a single breath, mercy and justice held together, grace that forgives and holiness that will not pretend sin is nothing. Hold those two truths in your hands and you are standing at the edge of the cross.

Then comes the covenant renewed, new tablets cut and carried up the mountain, the broken relationship mended by sheer grace. And Moses comes down with a face that shines, glowing with borrowed light, so bright he must veil it. That shining, fading glory is a signpost. Paul will one day point to it and say the glory of the new covenant in Christ is greater still, and it does not fade. So read these two chapters slowly. They are about the one question that decides everything: will God be with us? And in Christ, the answer is yes, forever.

Group Discussion: After the golden calf, God promised Israel the land but said He would not go up among them (33:1-3). Why was that prospect unbearable to Moses and the people, and what does it teach us about the difference between having God's gifts and having God Himself?

Personal Reflection: Moses prayed, 'If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here' (33:15). Is there any place in your life where you would gladly take God's blessings

but quietly keep your distance from God Himself? Where is His presence, not just His provision, the thing you most want?

Read Exodus 33:1–34:35

Study Questions

1. Read 33:1–6. God promised to give the land but said He would not go up among the people, lest He consume them. What does this sober word reveal about the holiness of God and the seriousness of the sin Israel had just committed?
2. Read 33:4–6. When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned and stripped off their ornaments. When God shows you the weight of your sin, do you respond with genuine sorrow and humbling, or do you rush past it? What would honest mourning over sin look like for you?
3. Read 33:7–11. Moses met with God at the tent, and the LORD spoke with him ‘face to face, as a man speaks to his friend.’ What does this nearness reveal about the kind of relationship God desires to have with His people?
4. Read 33:12–16. Moses refused to go forward without God’s presence, saying, ‘If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.’ Where are you tempted to march ahead with your plans, your work, or your life without first seeking the presence of God? What would it look like to refuse to go without Him?
5. Read 33:17–23. Moses asked, ‘Please show me your glory,’ and God answered by proclaiming His goodness and name, while hiding Moses in the cleft of the rock. What does

this reveal about God's glory, and about how a holy God graciously makes Himself known to sinful people?

6. Read 33:18–19. Moses' deepest longing was not for a sign but for God Himself: 'Show me your glory.' How hungry are you to know God as He really is? What in your life crowds out that longing, and how might you cultivate it this week?
7. Read 34:1–9. God commanded new tablets to be cut and descended in the cloud to renew the covenant Israel had broken. What does this renewal reveal about the patience and grace of God toward a people who had so recently betrayed Him?
8. Read 34:8–9. When Moses heard God proclaim His name, he quickly bowed his head and worshiped, pleading for God to pardon and go with them. When you glimpse God's mercy and majesty together, does it drive you to worship and to ask for His presence? What stirs worship in your heart, and what dulls it?
9. Read 34:6–7. God proclaimed His own name: 'The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness... forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty.' How does this revelation hold together God's mercy and His justice, and how are both fully satisfied at the cross of Christ (Romans 3:25–26)?

10. Read 34:29–35, where Moses' face shone after speaking with God. Looking back across these two chapters, the plea for God's presence, the showing of His glory, the proclaiming of His name, and the covenant renewed, name one specific way the Lord Jesus, in whom we behold God's glory unveiled (2 Corinthians 3:18), is forming you to seek His presence above His gifts.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Romans 3:23–26, God set forth Christ as a propitiation so that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus; 2 Corinthians 3:7–18, the fading glory on Moses' face contrasted with the surpassing, lasting glory of the new covenant in Christ; John 1:14–18, the Word became flesh and we beheld His glory, full of grace and truth, and the law was given through Moses but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ; Exodus 32:30–34, Moses' earlier intercession after the golden calf, setting the scene for these chapters; Numbers 14:17–19, Moses later pleads God's revealed name back to Him in prayer

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