

Journey Resumed, Covenant Renewed – Exodus 32:1-34:35; 40:1-38

Introduction

- My first memory as a child was going to my grandfather's farm when I was about two or so to milk a cow. Looking at the cow and then myself, I realized that the cow could crush me without realizing what it was doing. I was terrified of the cow, but there really wasn't a reason to be scared for my parents and grandparents were right there with me.
- Over the last few weeks we have looked at and studied the Tabernacle, the priesthood, and the sacrifices, feasts, and festivals. To understand the context of the lesson today we have to go back to Exodus 19. God had called Moses to go up to see Him...
- **Ex. 19:1-3** *In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that very day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. When they set out from Rephidim, they came to the wilderness of Sinai and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain. Moses went up to God...*
- So far, so good. Just like when I got to go to my grandfather's farm...
- **Ex. 19:16** *So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.*
- The children of Israel were frightened by the sights and sounds as I was when I was asked to get to close to that old cow...
- Moses went up to the mountain, received the ten commandments, and returned to the people and what happened?
- **Ex. 20:18-21** *All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin." So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was.*
- Notice what happened here: (1) The people requested for Moses to be the mediator between God and man, the man they had rejected before; (2) God had come to test them so that they would not sin; and (3) Moses went back up the mountain again. From Exodus 21 – 23 Moses was with God in the thick cloud. Moses came down and reported to the people what God had said, brought the leaders up and down and then Moses alone returned to the cloud...
- **Ex. 24:17-18** *And to the eyes of the sons of Israel the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the mountain top. Moses entered the midst of the cloud as he went up to the mountain; and Moses was on the mountain forty days and forty nights.*
- From **Ex. 25-31** Moses was in God's presence, receiving the law and regulations that the children of Israel were to follow and Moses was gone for 40 days and nights and then our passage for today starts:

- **Ex. 32:1** *Now when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people assembled about Aaron and said to him, “Come, make us a god who will go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.”*
- If you are like me the start of this passage is a shock. The people had been led out of slavery in Egypt, God had miraculously saved them and showed them many signs, led them through the Red Sea and destroyed the army of Egypt. The people had seen the manifestation of God’s presence and then this surprising verse.
- Peter Enns in his commentary on **Exodus (The NIV Application Commentary)** states:
- *The rapid pace with which we move from the final instructions for the tabernacle (31:18) to the rebellion at the foot of the mountain (ch. 32) is almost numbing. The reader is not at all prepared for what is about to transpire. There is a brief notation of Moses’ delay in coming down the mountain (32:1a), and suddenly we find ourselves caught up in an event that could threaten to unravel God’s entire plan. There is no deliberation, no plotting, no indication as to what actually motivates the Israelites to do what they did. All we read is that they see that Moses has been delayed and so they gather around Aaron to make their request. - Enns*
- The passage before us today is a familiar one: the golden calf, Moses smashing the two tablets that contained the ten commandments, the Levi’s coming to Moses’ aide, Moses going back to the top of the mountain, the remorse of the people, the building of the tabernacle, and Moses’ face glowing after his encounter with God. One of the main themes in this passage is the growing relationship between God and Moses. Let’s take a look at these four points...

Lesson

- **Point #1:** Moses pleads for God not to destroy His people
- **Ex. 32:11-12** *Then Moses entreated the Lord his God, and said, “O Lord, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You have brought out from the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians speak, saying, ‘With evil intent He brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to destroy them from the face of the earth’? Turn from Your burning anger and change Your mind about doing harm to Your people.*
- God had seen the rebellion and corruptness of the sons of Israel in making the Golden Calf and that God wanted to destroy them. Moses intercedes for his people, not wanting or desiring that his people would be destroyed.
- Moses earlier in Exodus 3:11–4:17 had argued with God out of his own selfish and petty motives. He was more concerned about how he looked, how he would do, and how he would be accepted before the people. He had provided argument after argument of why he should not be the leader and spokesperson for God. What do we see here in this passage? We see that **(a) Moses had learned to put the interests of the people ahead of his own interests.** It was God’s people that God Himself had brought out of Egypt, not Moses. It was by God’s mighty hand that Israel was rescued. It was by God’s action against the Egyptians that finally allowed the nation of Israel to flee Egypt. It was God who destroyed the Egyptian army during the crossing of the Red Sea. It was not Moses.

- (b) Moses was concerned for God's honor. If God was to destroy the sons of Israel, God's name would be mocked and He would not get the honor and glory that He deserved. One of the highest things that we can do with our lives, and maybe the ultimate goal, is to bring glory to God's: **1 Cor. 10:31** *Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*
- J. I. Packer in **Knowing God** states, *People who know their God are before anything else people who pray, and the first point is their zeal and energy for God's glory come to expression in their prayers.* – **J. I. Packard**
- Moses had learned this lesson and applied it to his life. He had a zeal for God that he expressed in his prayers.
- (c) Moses called on God to fulfill His promises. God had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that they would be a great nation, that they would inherit a land, and that all families of the earth would be blessed.
- This is a bold prayer, based upon God's character and word. This shows us the basis on which we are to pray for others. Look at what is says at the end of Moses' prayer: **Ex. 32:14** *So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people.*
- Did you catch that? Moses' prayer resulted in God changing His mind. There have been many explanations over the years of what this really means and how we are to understand this. How do we explain how God's sovereignty can be reconciled to the fact that God here changes his mind? Dr. Enns states,
- *What can we say about this change of heart? It certainly seems that Moses, through argument and pleading has been able to get God to alter his plans. To put it in plain English, Moses gets God to change his mind. There is really no other way to read this and we should not try to avoid it...The reason for this here seems to be that the writer is focusing his attention on Moses' role as intercessor, not on the inner workings of God's psyche.* -Enns
- **Lesson 1: We are called to pray to God based upon His character, His glory, and His promises.**
- **Point #2:** Moses asks God to forgive His people
- **Ex. 32:30-32** *On the next day Moses said to the people, "You yourselves have committed a great sin; and now I am going up to the Lord, perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." Then Moses returned to the Lord, and said, "Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if You will, forgive their sin—and if not, please blot me out from Your book which You have written!"*
- Moses after experiencing the corruptness and sin of the people after coming down from the mountain and smashing the tablets and getting the people under control again, turns to God and asks God to forgive the people. Sin at its heart is a sin against God and no matter what man tries to do, forgiveness is primarily a function of God in forgiving the people.
- Moses indicates that an atonement is needed for the people's sin. What is atonement? It is the way that our sins are dealt with or covered...

- *That the Bible's central message is atonement, that is, that God has provided a way for humankind to come back into harmonious relation with him, is everywhere apparent in Scripture...atonement covers all the sins — intentional, unintentional, heinous, trivial of those for whom it is intended* – **Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology**
- Atonement is illustrated by the following story...
- **Atonement** - *I read about a small boy who was consistently late coming home from school. His parents warned him one day that he must be home on time that afternoon, but nevertheless he arrived later than ever. His mother met him at the door and said nothing. At dinner that night, the boy looked at his plate. There was a slice of bread and a glass of water. He looked at his father's full plate and then at his father, but his father remained silent. The boy was crushed...The father waited for the full impact to sink in, then quietly took the boy's plate and placed it in front of himself. He took his own plate of meat and potatoes, put it in front of the boy, and smiled at his son. When that boy grew to be a man, he said, "All my life I've known what God is like by what my father did that night."* - **J. Allan Peterson**
- That boy's father paid the penalty for his son's misdeed, and that is what Jesus has done for us: Jesus was willing to die for our sins. That is the basis of atonement in the Bible.
- Moses goes before God, confessing the “great sin” of the people and asks God to forgive their sins. If God would not forgive their sins, Moses was ready to offer himself for their sins. Moses had certainly changed from his first encounter with God 40 years before. He was not timid, nor reluctant, to be the mediator between God and His people. His commitment is shown by his willingness to pay the ultimate price for their sins by his death. The Lord answered Moses that He was not willing to sweep their sin under the rug, but the time would come when the time is right. God reserved the right to punish them at a later time...
- **Ex. 32:33-34** *The Lord said to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. But go now, lead the people where I told you. Behold, My angel shall go before you; nevertheless in the day when I punish, I will punish them for their sin.”*
- True forgiveness is only possible by the death of Jesus on the cross:
- **Eph. 1:7** *In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace.*
- **Col. 1:13-14** *For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*
- **Lesson 2: We are to pray for others that they may find Jesus and be forgiven of their sins.**
- **Point #3:** Moses spent time in the presence of God
- **Ex. 33:7,11** *Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp...Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend.*

- Moses considered his time with God critical and continued to approach God and intercede for the people. God spoke to Moses “face to face”. This is an intimate term and shows God’s intimate relationship with Moses.
- *Numbers 12:8 explains the meaning of this phrase. God will speak to Moses ‘mouth to mouth’, that is to say, not in dreams or visions, but clearly and directly. Moses had the gift of clarity of spiritual insight: he shared the very counsels of God. – R. Alan Cole, Exodus*
- God had chosen Moses at the beginning of Exodus to be his representative to the people, the spokesman before Pharaoh, the leader the nation of Israel as they traveled from Egypt to the promised land. The most important thing in all this was that Moses was humble and was willing to be used by God. Initially he was not willing, but by this point in the story he did it willingly. The tent of meeting was where the people “sought the Lord.” It was also the place that Moses sought God and His counsel. It was the place that the presence of God was visibly seen through the “pillar of cloud” descending upon the tent. It was where God meet Moses face to face.
- Look at what Moses prayed for: **Ex. 33:13** *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.*
- Moses would pray to God, worship Him, and ask Him for His favor. Notice that Moses wanted to know God better, so that he would find favor in His sight.
- This is in line what Jeremiah says in **Jer. 9:23-24** *Thus says the Lord, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the Lord.*
- Moses desired to see God’s glory in 33:18 and in 34:6 God passed before Moses and revealed more of Himself to Moses:
- **Ex. 33:18-19** *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.”*
- **Ex. 34:5-7** *The Lord descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the Lord. Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”*
- Notice what Moses learns of God from God’s revelation to Moses:
 - (1) God is compassionate and gracious – God understands them and provides what they don’t deserve
 - (2) God is patient – He waits before He punishes

- (3) God is loving – God cares for His people
- (4) God is truth – What God says is not false. He speaks the truth. His word can be trusted.
- (5) God forgives and punishes – God has provided the way of forgiveness, but if the people rejected Him, He would punish the guilty.
- *This list of attributes is true not only of God's behavior in chapter 34, but throughout Exodus. The reason he brought Israel out of Egypt in the first place is because He is gracious. This attitude is now rekindled toward his people in the aftermath of the golden calf incident. -Enns*
- Nicholas Herman, as known as Brother Lawrence, was born around 1611. He was a soldier, then a cook, and then as a sandal repairman in a French monastery. Here is what he said:
- **Presence of God** - *Brother Lawrence related that we should establish ourselves in a sense of God's Presence by continually conversing with Him. It was a shameful thing to quit His conversation to think of trifles and fooleries. We should feed and nourish our souls with high notions of God which would yield us great joy in being devoted to Him...He said we ought to quicken and enliven our faith. It was lamentable we had so little. Instead of taking faith for the rule of their conduct, men amused themselves with trivial devotions which changed daily. He said that faith was sufficient to bring us to a high degree of perfection. We ought to give ourselves up to God with regard both to things temporal and spiritual and seek our satisfaction only in the fulfilling of His will. Whether God led us by suffering or by consolation all would be equal to a soul truly resigned. - Brother Lawrence, The Practice of the Presence of God.*
- This leads us to our next lesson that Moses practiced:
- **Lesson 3: We are to seek to live in the presence of God.**
- **Point #4:** Moses wanted God's presence among the people
- *Ex. 34:9 He said, "If now I have found favor in Your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession."*
- God had said in Ex. 33:3 that He would not go in the midst of the people. Here Moses asks God to be in the midst of the people. What happens?
- *Ex. 34:10 Then God said, "Behold, I am going to make a covenant. Before all your people I will perform miracles which have not been produced in all the earth nor among any of the nations; and all the people among whom you live will see the working of the Lord, for it is a fearful thing that I am going to perform with you.*
- God renews His covenant with the people, by repeating the Passover celebration (34:18-20, 25, the Ten Commandments (34:14, 17,21), and the Book of the Covenant (34:22-24,26), and promises to drive out their enemies in the Land. Moses goes up to the mountain for another 40 days.
- When Moses returned to the people they were in the fear because Moses' face was shining.

- **Ex. 34:29-32** *It came about when Moses was coming down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the testimony were in Moses' hand as he was coming down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because of his speaking with Him. So when Aaron and all the sons of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers in the congregation returned to him; and Moses spoke to them. Afterward all the sons of Israel came near, and he commanded them to do everything that the Lord had spoken to him on Mount Sinai.*
- Moses' face shone because of his spending time and communion with God. This was probably to impress on the people that Moses was the mediator between them and that God's authority and presence rested upon Moses. He was the one that God had chosen to lead them and to speak God's word to them.
- *Thus, the people's response is appropriate: fear: It is only after Moses assures the leaders that there is nothing to fear that the people come near and hear him speak (vv. 31-32). A little fear is good for them. They must relearn what they first experienced in chapter 19: Being at the foot of the mountain is serious business. They are receiving God's law. -Enns*
- In the New Testament **2 Cor 3:7-18** tells us that Moses continued to wear the veil even after the glow started to fade. It concludes **2 Cor. 3:18** *But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.* We are to behold God without a veil for we do not have to be in fear of God's presence.
- Chapter 40 relates the Tabernacle being built and God's renewed covenant is shown by His presence in the Tabernacle and God's guidance by the cloud and fire, the same as when they set out from Egypt.
- **Ex. 40:34-38** *Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud had settled on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. Throughout all their journeys whenever the cloud was taken up from over the tabernacle, the sons of Israel would set out; but if the cloud was not taken up, then they did not set out until the day when it was taken up. For throughout all their journeys, the cloud of the Lord was on the tabernacle by day, and there was fire in it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel.*
- God's guidance and presence had returned. God was with them, and would continue to guide them to the promised land. God is moving ahead with the plan He had announced earlier. When God moves, the people move. When God stays put, the people stay put. God's plans and purposes are being fulfilled. God wanted His people to be committed to Him and they had a few false steps along the way. All is forgiven.
- After their flight from Egypt, the people had paused before the mountain of God as God provided His Law, rules, the Tabernacle, the priests garments, and the sacrifices, feasts, and festivals they were to celebrate. Their journey was finally starting again...
- **Lesson 4: We are to desire the presence and guidance of God in those around us.**

Application:

- There are some powerful applications from this well-known passage.
- (1) We must be sensitive to sin and things that lead to sin in our lives.
- Even though the children of Israel had God within their midst and guiding their daily path, they were still sinning and not doing what God wanted them to do. This is especially surprising for those who had such a clear example of God's presence and guidance. They had seen the hand of God in their lives over many months and they still stumbled.
- **1 Cor 10:12-13** *Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall. No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it.*
- (2) We must pray for God's patience in our lives and those we care about.
- God is patient, but there is a time when His patience comes to an end. As this passage has shown us judgment can occur at any time and we don't have the luxury of depending upon God's patience to endure for all time.
- **Rom. 2:4-6** *Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds.*
- (3) We must strive to live in the presence of God.
- God is always with us. We can never flee from Him as Psa. 139 says. But we are also called to live our lives walking with our God daily, becoming like Him and doing what He says.
- **Deu. 31:6** *Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you."*
- (4) We must seek God and to do what He wants us to.
- God has made us for a purpose. We are to obey Him. We are to bring glory to His name. We are called to enjoy Him forever.
- **Mic. 6:8** *He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*
- **Psa. 15:1-3** *O Lord, who may abide in Your tent? Who may dwell on Your holy hill? He who walks with integrity, and works righteousness, and speaks truth in his heart. He does not slander with his tongue, nor does evil to his neighbor, nor takes up a reproach against his friend.*
- **Phil 2:12-13** *So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.*
- **The Westminster Shorter Catechism Question #1:**
- **Question:** *What is the chief end of man?* **Answer:** *Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.*

- Let us make this our goal in life.