

## Rescued to Know Him: Mercy Made Known

Exodus 33:7-34:35

I have no doubt that each and everyone of you came in to church this morning with something that has been on your mind over the past week. There's some circumstance, some anxiety, some decision, some unknown in your life that you have given thought to each and every day for the last 7 days. I'm talking about that situation that your mind drifts back to when you have a moment to sit quietly or after you flip the light off to go to bed. Something has snagged your mind like a fishing hook snags a bass and you keep going back to it.

I'm not here to tell you this morning that you shouldn't think about that pressing issue or circumstance. I am here this morning to ask you to let another hook lodge itself in your mind and tug on you at least once a day. It's the hook of the sheer underserved mercy that a sinner like you has been shown.

*"As when things are cold we bring them to the fire to heat and melt, so bring we our cold hearts to the fire of the love of Christ; consider we of our sins against Christ, and of Christ's love towards us; dwell upon this meditation. Think what great love Christ hath showed unto us, and how little we have deserved, and this will make our hearts to melt, and be as pliable as wax before the sun."* – Richard Sibbes

Sibbes makes the point here that dwelling on the undeserved love and mercy of God will melt us like wax in the sun. You want to change your disposition? Think about mercy. You want to build encouragement into your life? Meditate on mercy. You want to experience more joy? Let the hook of God's mercy stick in your brain. I want to help you with that this morning as we continue this story of the golden calf and the intercession of Moses for Israel and God's revelation of His glory to Moses.

Last time we began looking at **7 Features of God's Mercy that God has Made Known**. Now, keep in mind that these features are put on display here with Moses and Israel. We can learn much from them, but please remember that God's revelation of Himself in the Old Testament is not as fully clear as it will be in the NT. We'll get to that later.

### **1. Personal (33:7-11)**

The entire golden calf story takes place in chapters 32-34 and we have essentially divided this section into two parts. The first part, in 32:1 – 33:6 describes Israel's sin and the consequences of that sin. The second part, in 33:7 – 34:35 describes Moses's intercession for them and God's gracious mercy toward them.

This portion begins with a look into Moses's personally close relationship with God. Listen again to verse 11. God's mercy is a personal mercy to Moses but it doesn't stop there. It expands out and is meant to be put on display.

## **2. Displayed (33:12-17)**

Moses asks God what the plan will be going forward because he knows Israel needs God's presence with them. The heart of this interaction is found in verses 15-16. The point is that Israel's purpose is to be distinct as God's people, with God among them, so God's mercy and grace can be broadcast out to the nations. God agrees to go with them because this is His purpose for Israel. He wants His mercy displayed.

After God agrees to go with them again in verse 17 Moses wants to know God more intimately. He's grown in His knowledge of God but he wants more. Look at verse 18. God responds to this request and this gives us our 3<sup>rd</sup> feature of God's mercy.

## **3. Sovereign (33:18-19)**

God does what God wants. He will show compassion to whomever He wants in His timing and for His purposes. The Apostle Paul actually picks up this verse in Romans 9 to talk about God's sovereign purposes in election to salvation. He says this in Romans 9:16. This should be an incredible encouragement to you. It's not based on your effort or ability. Salvation does not come to you because you put yourself in the right social circumstances. God has shown you mercy through the gospel because He's God and He can.

After God points out that His mercy is a sovereign mercy He continues to clarify exactly what sort of merciful revelation He's going to give to Moses.

## **4. Holy (33:21-23)**

Listen to 33:21-23. We've seen this before in God's relationship with sinful human beings, but God's holiness cannot come into direct contact with human

defilement and sin. But notice here that you have both holiness and mercy. God will reveal more of Himself to Moses, that is the mercy, but at this point it must be a veiled or controlled revelation. The book of Hebrews speaks to the necessity of holiness for any human who desires to see God in Hebrews 12:14. This passage comes in a section of Hebrews encouraging and challenging believers to persevere in the faith. The point is that growth in holiness and godliness must take place if we are to ultimately see the Lord.

### **5. Abounding (34:1-9)**

Now we come to the heart of the whole passage. God begins to prepare Moses to see his glory and have his goodness pass before him by commanding him to make two more tablets and then to come up the mountain. Look at 34:1-4. God does this because He is preparing to reinstitute the covenant that was broken because of Israel's sin. Even this act of renewing the broken covenant is an act of abounding mercy. And God explains to Moses where this impulse to reinstitute the covenant comes from within God. Look at verse 5.

God is going to proclaim to Moses His name. God had told Moses back in chapter 3 that his name is I AM or YHWH or The LORD. Moses had communicated that name to Israel. But what sort of person is YHWH? What are the qualities that make up the LORD? That's what God will proclaim to Moses here. You can see at the beginning of verse 6 that God repeats this name twice to Moses at the beginning of the revelation. Everything that follows will be the content that gives Moses a richer and fuller grasp of who God is and why He does what He does.

So, what does God tell Moses about Himself? God is merciful. He's like a mother with a weak and needy child. There's tender compassion there. He's gracious or kind. Think of a person of superior rank and social standing giving something undeserved to someone of lesser rank or social standing. That's God. He is slow to anger. He's long of nostril. He breathes deep and long at wrongdoing and doesn't boil over quickly in anger. You could even use the word indulgent here. He's patient. You can anger Him, as we've seen, but it happens slowly.

Notice the next two descriptions use the same word translated "steadfast love" which is one word in Hebrew. The idea in this word is that God is loyal and faithful to the covenant He has made. Notice the two different adjectives used to describe this loyal love. He's abounding in it. There's tons of it and always more to

go around. And He keeps His loyal love. He protects it and preserves it. He's passionate about His relationship with His people and will do whatever it takes to maintain it and cultivate it.

Finally in verse 7 He forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin. To forgive is to lift or carry away and God uses 3 unique words here that cover the human problem of sin from 3 different perspectives. In other words, God says that He is ready and willing to forgive the entire scope of human sin.

Now, it would be easy for sinful human beings to hear God describe Himself in this way and think, "that's fantastic, I can sin and God will just overlook it, forgive it, and I won't be held accountable for it." God wants to make clear that that is not the type of mercy He has. His mercy does not shrug off sin and here's where we feel the tension here. Look at the rest of verse 7. Israel can bank on God's mercy to deal with their sin of the golden calf, but they cannot imagine that sin will be excused or not dealt with by God. And this is the pattern we see throughout the OT. Just think about the book of Judges and the cycle that occurs.

Israel sins by idolatry. Israel's cries out to God in their sin. God sends a deliverer. He rescues them. They have peace for a few years. They sin again. Repeat the cycle. There's always this tension. God desires to be merciful and forgive, but His people are always sinful and their hearts are never able to not sin. Think of this tension like the resolution you wait for at the end of a song. The OT leaves it hanging.

But when we turn to the NT Jesus magnificently resolves this tension in sweet harmony. Let me show you how. Look with me at Romans 3:23-26. All have sinned but are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

You might read that and think, well sweet, it's a gift to us! God can just be merciful to sinners after all and freely give us this gift of salvation and redemption from our sin. Maybe God could have just been merciful without bringing justice in the OT. Tension gone. Not so fast.

Jesus is able to be our redemption because He was a propitiation, a satisfaction for God's wrath for sin. Then notice the second part of verse 25. God has been slow to anger, patient, and forbearing toward human beings, but this couldn't

go on forever because God is also righteous. Here's the tension that we saw in Exodus 34. Patient, slow to anger but who will be no means clear the guilty.

But the fact that Jesus is a propitiation solves this tension. Here's what Moses could never be. This is what the animal sacrifices in the OT could never solve. The tension remained in the OT until a full propitiation came and was offered.

Back in Exodus this revelation of God calls out the appropriate response from Moses. Look at 34:8-9. Worship and a request for this merciful God to go with Israel. God agrees and reinstates the covenant.

### **6. Covenantal (34:10-28)**

Look at 34:10. God then goes on to go over some of the main covenant requirements for Israel in 11-28. These are representative of the whole covenant but are of special need for Israel since they had so quickly turned aside to the golden calf. For example, notice verse 12. Moses receives these instructions again and is on the mountain another 40 days and nights and the covenant is renewed with the people. Look at verse 28. And this brings us to a very interesting end to this story and our 7<sup>th</sup> feature of God's mercy.

### **7. Glorious, but Not that Glorious (34:29-35)**

Now, keep in mind I am talking about God's mercy as displayed here through the Old Covenant. Remember what has happened. Moses has been in God's presence in a special way and had a special revelation of God's character to Himself. He now knows God in deeper and richer ways than before. We saw in 33:7-11 that Moses was used to talking with God face to face, but things are different now because of God's proclamation of who He is. Listen to 29-35.

The Old Covenant has glory because it does reveal God's character to Israel and to us. We see who God is and that's the whole purpose of all of this. Israel was rescued from Egypt and brought into a covenant with God to know Him. Moses has been brought close to God and so the Old Covenant does have glory and does reveal God to us. But listen to what Paul says about the Old Covenant and about this passage with Moses in 2 Cor. 3:7-11.

Here's what I think Paul is getting at. We see God's character and glory in the Old Covenant, but the full and final and richest vision of God's glory comes through

Jesus Christ and the New covenant. Look at the verse we began with last time in 2 Cor. 3:18. The veil has been taken away in Christ and now we fully see the tension resolved and the glory of God in Jesus Christ. This glory transforms us as we proclaim Christ and the gospel. Continue with me in 2 Cor 4:1-6.

Notice the language used here in verse 6. The light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Beautiful connection back to Moses's request to see God's glory by seeing God's face. God, in His mercy has given us Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ. It's in Him that we see the justice and mercy of God come together. Nothing is more worthy of your mental time and energy than the mercy of God shown in Christ. Let's pray.