

God commands Israel to depart from Sinai

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[0 : 0 0] Let us join together in the worship of God. We shall sing to his praise from Psalm 32.

Psalm 32. And from the beginning of the psalm. O blessed is the man to whom is freely pardoned, all the transgression he has done, whose sin is covered.

Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not his sin, and in whose spirit there is no guile, nor fraud is found therein. Psalm 32. And as I did refrain my speech, and silent was my tongue, my bones then waxed old, because I roared all day long.

For upon me both day and night, thine hand did heavy lie, so that my moisture turned is in summer's drought thereby.

I thereupon have unto thee my sin acknowledged, and likewise mine iniquity I have not covered. I will confess unto the Lord my trespasses, said I, and of my sin thou freely didst forgive the iniquity.

[1 : 2 7] And so on. We shall sing these verses, one to the double version, marked five. O blessed is the man to whom is freely pardoned.

O blessed is the man to whom is freely pardoned, all the transgression he had done, O blessed is the man to whom is freely pardoned, all the transgression he had done, O blessed is the man to whom is freely pardoned, all the transgression he had done, O blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputeth not his sin, and in whose spirit there is no guile, nor fraud is pardoned.

When I was I did reprise my speech, and silent was my tongue, My books and walks and walks and hold because I rule it all day long.

For upon me both day and night, thine hand with every lie, So that my voice should turn it in, in summer strife thereby, I thereupon have unto thee my sin acknowledged, And likewise my iniquity, I have not covered it.

I will confess unto the Lord my trespasses, said I, And of my sin thou freely did, forgive the equity.

[4 : 5 3] Let us join together in prayer. Let us pray. O Lord our God, as we come before you with this act of worship, We give thanks that we come confessing our sin, Knowing that you are willing to receive from us such a confession.

That in the words of the psalmist, That you are looking for your people to acknowledge their sin, To confess it and to seek to public, publicise it, Before the eye of a holy God.

So that we would not be guilty of covering it, Or fleeing from your presence, As those who would believe that there was a place to where we would go, Where we could do that.

We pray that you would remember us this day, As we confess our sins to you, In order that that confession would ensure that forgiveness would follow.

We pray that you would cleanse us each one from all our sins, And thankful that there is no doubt in our mind, Concerning the cleansing agent that you have set before us in the gospel of your grace.

[6 : 30] That the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin, And that no matter whose sin it is, And whether it is great or small, That you are willing to bring us to yourself, By way of the provision made by.

We pray that you would remember us this day, And all we come with, Of our cares and concerns, Those that we pray for and pray with, We would ask that you would remember us each one.

We are thankful that we can come in this manner, Although it is not the traditional or the usual way of coming, Because of the situation that has brought us to this place.

But we give thanks that you, our God, Are able to minister to us in this situation, Just as you are wherever we are found. We know from your word that there were times when, The saints of old were bound in chains, Some were thrown into cisterns, Of water, Some were thrown into the lion's den, Some were talons, Some were put in the aussi, From the local situation, Where they lived and grew up, And made strangers in a foreign land.

You followed them there, And you did not leave them to their own devices. So it is to stay that whoever your people are, Wherever they are, That their God is with them.

[8 : 18] In our own situation here you are with those who are alone in their homes, those who are cut off from the company of others by reason of their disability or illnesses that have ensured that they are not able to go out and about as they used to.

We pray for those confined to beds, we pray for those in hospital, we pray for those in care homes and we pray that you would bless them body and soul, that you are to alleviate suffering of any description.

We bring them before you as we bring their carers before you and ask that you would sanctify every way in which they are your hands in delivering such care.

We remember in your presence those who are grieving, sorrows that afflict the just in number many be. And we know that at any given moment your people in this world are experiencing the griefs and the sorrows that are commonplace.

And that whoever it is that is in the world they will have times of trouble as we said. Troubles that afflict the just in number many be but get at length out of them all the Lord shall set them free.

[9 : 52] And we give thanks that no matter the afflictions that come, and they are many, that your healing hand is upon them and that you are able to deliver them to the point where they would celebrate the victory gained by way of your hand.

So continue to watch over as we pray as a congregation, as a community, as an island, as a nation. Remember the world in which we live that is riddled with all kinds of pollutions, not least of which is the pandemic, but there are many other hills in the world that are ongoing.

We pray for the careless and the indifferent. We pray for those who are in the grip of idols and who serve foreign gods.

We pray that you would pour out your spirit upon us as a generation that many would flee you and seek your face and forgiveness. And you would sanctify the redeeming that you have with them providentially, that they may turn to seek Christ, who is the alone saviour of sinners.

Be gracious to us, we pray, blessing your word as it goes out by whatever means that you have ordained. Your word will not return unto you void, but it will accomplish that which you have purposed for it.

[11 : 31] So hear our prayers and petitions for our nation, for those who govern us, for our Queen and our family at this time of mourning. Continue to watch over them and bless them, we pray, and uphold them and sustain them, as all who are like them in their griefs.

Bless your word as we read it, and all who gather under it today, may be submissive to it and cleanse from sin. In Jesus name, Amen. We are going to hear the word of God as we have it in the Old Testament Scriptures.

It is reading from the book of Exodus, in chapter 33. And the Lord said unto Moses, Depart, and go up hence, Thou and the people which thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt, and to the land which I swear unto Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, saying, Unto thy seed will I give it.

And I will send an angel before thee, and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite and the Hittite, and the Perisite and the Hivite and the Jebusite, and to a land flowing with milk and honey.

For I will not go up in the midst of thee, for thou art a stiff-necked people, lest I consume thee in the way. And when the people heard these even tidings, they mourned, and no man did put on him his ornaments.

[12 : 58] For the Lord had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel, Ye are a stiff-necked people. I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee.

Therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto you. And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by the Mount Horeb.

And Moses took the tabernacle and pitched it without the camp, and far off from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of the congregation. And it came to pass that everyone that sought the Lord went out into the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp.

And it came to pass, when Moses went out into the tabernacle, that all the people rose up, and stood every man at his tent door, and looked after Moses until he was gone into the tabernacle.

And it came to pass, as Moses entered into the tabernacle, the cloudy pillar descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle. And the Lord talked with Moses.

[14 : 06] And all the people saw the cloudy pillar stand at the tabernacle door. And all the people rose up and worshipped, every man in his tent door. And the Lord spoke unto Moses face to face as a man speaker unto his friend.

And he turned again unto the camp. But his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle. And Moses said unto the Lord, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people.

And thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me. Yet thou hast said I know thee by name. And thou hast also found grace in my sight. Now therefore I pray thee, if I have found grace in thy sight, show me, know thy way, that I may know thee, that I may find grace in thy sight.

And consider that this nation is thy people. And he said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest. And he said unto him, If thy presence go not with me, carry us not up hence.

For wherein shall it be known, here, that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight? He said, Not in that thou goest with us.

[15 : 23] So shall we be separated, I and thy people, from all the people that are upon the face of the earth. And the Lord said unto Moses, I will do this thing also that thou hast spoken.

For thou hast found grace in my sight. And I know thee by name. And he said, I beseech thee, show me thy glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before thee.

And I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee. And will be gracious to whom I will be gracious. And will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. And he said, Thou canst not see my face.

For there shall no man see me and live. And the Lord said, Behold, there is a place by me. And thou shalt stand upon a rock. And it shall come to pass while my glory passes by.

That I will put thee in a cliff of the rock. And I will cover thee with my hand while I pass by. And I will take away mine hand. And thou shalt see my back parts.

[16 : 26] But my face shall not be seen. Amen. And may the Lord add his blessing. To this reading of his word and to his name be the praise.

I'd like us to turn again to the words that we have at the beginning of chapter 33. And when the people heard these evil tidings, they mourned on no man to put on him his ornaments.

For the Lord had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel, Ye restiphnecht people, I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee.

Therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee. And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by the Mount Horeb.

And so on. Looking at these opening verses of the chapter. You will remember, I'm sure, that the previous chapter describes what was one of the most shameful of Israel's experiences in the wilderness.

[17 : 45] Moses had spent forty days and forty nights on Mount Sinai. Israel are gathered at the foot. And they tired of waiting.

Why they behave as they do is in many ways a mystery. But in another it is just another demonstration of human nature without the restraint of grace.

However that grace is administered. The result, as you know, was the golden calf.

Made out of the golden jewelry that they had taken with them as spoil from Egypt. These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.

Of course Moses could not see what was going on. But God did. And he told Moses, I have seen this people. And behold, it is a stiff-necked people.

[18 : 48] We read of the fury of the Lord. And the advocacy of Moses. As he intercedes for their preservation. Even though he himself is motivated to anger.

So at the point at which we are at in chapter 33. God commanded Moses to lead the people away from Sinai.

And on to the promised land. Even the land that he had promised to Abraham, to Isaac, to Jacob and their seed.

I would like us to consider what is described as a covenant renewal. First of all, identifying the nature of the promise given.

Secondly, ask why does it speak of the presence of God as potentially destructive. Thirdly, why did the people describe it as evil tidings?

[19 : 51] And fourthly, what was the response to it? God made a promise to the people. It is in three parts.

I will send an angel before thee. I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorite, the Hittite, and the Perisite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite.

I will not go up in the midst of thee. You would have thought that this promise of the presence of an angel would have been encouraging news.

However, as we shall see, it is not the same as the presence of God himself. Sometimes in the scripture we have the description, the angel of the Lord, or my angel.

For example, when the angel spoke to Abraham regarding Sodom, one of them is identified as the Lord. Again, at the burning bush, God spoke to Moses out of the bush as the angel of the Lord.

[21 : 13] While I do not want to be dogmatic about the difference, I believe that there is a difference and that the children of Israel saw it.

If the angel is with them, and God says he will not go up, it does not make sense if there is not this difference.

Secondly, because of his promise, he will drive out their enemies before them. The land that is theirs in the promise can only be theirs if others are dispossessed of it.

And this is what he will do. But the third part of the promise is an explanation of why it is an angel and not himself. God is not denying the truth about himself.

Scripture reminds us frequently of what is divine imminence. God is present in every part of his creation, and he is present at all times.

[22 : 20] One of my own favourite psalms is Psalm 139. We hear and read in that psalm, From thy spirit whither shall I go?

Or from thy presence fly? I send thy heaven to, lo, thou art there, there if in hell I lie. The saintly Job said of God, His eyes are upon the ways of man, and he seeth all his goings.

There is no darkness, nor shadow of death, where the workers of iniquity may hide themselves. So what does God mean when he says to the children of Israel that he will not go up in the midst of them?

He means that if he is present with them as their God, he cannot but show his displeasure towards them, as they are in a backslidden condition.

They are, he says, a stiff-necked people. As a horse resists the control of the bridle and the reins, so they are resisting his revealed will for them.

[23 : 42] Matthew Henry in his commentary states, God would have brought them under the yoke of the law, and into the bond of his covenant, but their necks were too stiff to know them, or to bow.

God would have cured them of their corrupt and crooked disposition, and have set them straight, but they were willful and obstinate, and hated to be reformed, and would not have God to reign over them.

God is not turning a blind eye to their sin. He is simply telling them that his company requires appropriate behaviour.

Our God, we are told, is an all-consuming fire, and where there is combustible material within his riches, his wrath will burn, even against his own people in justicement.

Yes, God is present, but his presence is hidden, and they can derive no comfort from it.

[24 : 55] So, when God says what he says to the people, they are evil tidings. God reaffirms his promise, but for them the lack of his presence induces all kinds of fears.

The ESV translation is disastrous words rather than evil tidings.

Disasterous words. They had enjoyed his presence and often took it for granted. Something that we easily do. He led them, albeit by the hand of Moses, but his presence was real.

It was vivid. It was tangible. A pillar of cloud by day. A pillar of fire by night. But as someone has pointed out, God hiding his face from them was at one and the same time a judgement and a mercy and a ground for sadness.

God speaks to them through Moses. And despite the threat, there is a way open to them to put things right. There is always a way of escape.

[26 : 16] As Paul reminds the church in Corinth, There hath no temptation taken you, but such as is common to man. But God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that you are able, but will with the temptation also make a way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.

Wherefore my beloved, flee from my idolatry. God never puts his people in the way of sin. They are well able to do that themselves.

They are responsible for their own lives. And God is able to strengthen them when tested, should they apply to him for that strength, of course.

Here they are reminded of what they should do in response to their grief. But in particular, in response to God. They must learn that the right response is to be grieved for what caused the evil tidings, rather than the evil tidings themselves.

There is a difference. Someone has put it, and as is often the case, It was the consequence of their sin which distressed them, rather than the sin itself.

[27 : 42] And there is a difference. I am not sure of the order here. But clearly, when Moses instructs them, he instructs them according to the direction that is given to him by God.

The Lord had said unto Moses, Say unto the people of Israel, You are a stiff-necked people. I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee.

Therefore, now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee. And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by the mount.

They heard what God had said, and they responded to what God had said. Very much against the train of thought that they were governed by prior to this.

The ornaments, I believe, were tied to the time in Egypt. Some suggest that it is an alien experience to the Israelites and the Jewish culture, that they would wear jewelry of any description.

[29 : 11] But we read in chapter 12, that they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver and jewels of gold and raiment. And the Lord gave the people favor in the sight of the Egyptians, so they lent them such things as they required.

And they spoiled the Egyptians. Ironically, the very things they had used in part to make the golden calf, the golden calf, and which incidentally will be used at a later stage for the construction of the tabernacle.

Now it represents the grief that they have for their sin, that has so offended God, that they remove these jewels.

They needed to repent of it. We know that if we go away from God, that He hides His face from us.

The only way back to His favor is by way of the brokenness and the contrition that He demands. So we were singing in Psalm 32.

[30 : 26] We read at the end of chapter 32, that the Lord plagued the people, because they made the calf which Aaron made.

People imagine that God will wreak instant havoc on the sinner for their sin. He can, and He often will, but He is not obliged to follow any time table but His own.

But thankfully, He allows a day of grace to give the opportunity to repent. The prophet Isaiah states, Wash ye and make you clean.

Put away the evil of your doings from before mine eyes. Cease to do evil. Learn to do well. Seek judgment.

Relieve the oppressed. Judge the fatherless. Plead for the widow. God promises to respond to that. But it must come before restoration.

[31 : 28] Some people are content with a limited exposure to God's presence. They will hardly miss it when He is not there. Similarly, if they are guilty of wrongdoing, His displeasure may pass them by, and they can go on in their sin.

But remember this, that can only ever be temporary. What God wants and expects from His people is the kind of obedience that will leave them needing the kind of repentance that was sought.

Sadly, no one of us will live such exemplary lives that will leave us without the need to repent.

In the Christian's life, they are taught that the Christian experience begins with repentance. It is a saving grace.

It is something that God bestows them with, endows them with at the very outset. But it does not stop there. As sinners, they will always find themselves in need of repentance.

[32 : 45] Here in this passage, we read of the remarkable favour that God continues to show to these people. Even though they have gone away from Him in such a dramatic way.

If you remember in the passage as we read it, the promise is given to them again.

Then, my presence shall go with thee. And Moses says to him, if your presence go not with me, carry us not up thence. For wherein shall it be known here that I and thy people have found grace in thy sight?

Is it not in that thou goest with us? The people of God are known because God is with them.

They are known because they are conscious that God is with them. And their behaviour is affected by that knowledge of God's presence. And the more we are aware of it, the less likely we are to fall prey to sin.

[34 : 02] And to allow it to erode our relationship with God. May God in His mercy remind us of the provision that He has made for us. When we do succumb to sin, to confess it and to flee from it to God that we may find covering.

And that we may find grace to help in our need. Let us again join in prayer. O Lord our God, as we confess our sin, we do so for good reason.

For our sin is a wicked thing, it is heinous, it is extreme, it is something that is offensive to you. Whatever guise it takes, however it is seen, we give thanks that when we confess it.

And when we do so with the heart that is the heart of the penitent, broken and contrite. That we are assured that you will receive it as a sacrifice with which you are well pleased.

Go before us, we pray, remembering us each one, directing us to the one who offered himself as a sacrifice for sin, on behalf of his people.

[35 : 27] Now may grace, mercy and peace from God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit be with you all now and always. Amen.