

The Goodness of God Made Manifest

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristChurchEastBay.org. Good morning, my name is Constance St. Clair and I'm part of the Christ Church Youth Group.

A reading from the book of Exodus, chapter 34, verses 1 to 14 and verse 29. The Lord said to Moses, Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets which you broke.

Be ready in the morning and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain. No one is to come with you or be seen anywhere on the mountain.

Not even the flocks and herds may graze in front of the mountain. So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up to Mount Sinai early in the morning as the Lord had commanded him.

[1 : 12] And he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. Then the Lord came down in a cloud and stood there with him, proclaiming his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation. Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped.

Lord, he said, if I have found favor in your eyes, then let the Lord go with us. Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin and take us as your inheritance.

Then the Lord said, I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people, I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the Lord, will do for you.

Obey what I command you today. I will drive out before you the Amorites, Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Be careful not to make a treaty with those who live in the land where you are going, or they will be a snare among you.

[2 : 36] Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones, and cut down their Ashereth poles. Do not worship any other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.

When Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands, he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord.

The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands for it. Today we are continuing in this sermon series.

We're about 10 weeks into this sermon series on revival and the simple prayer, Lord, revive us. And in Exodus 32 through 34, we're learning to pray from Moses.

Just like Jesus and the apostles teach us how to pray and what to pray in the New Testament, so this first and greatest of all the prophets, Moses, teaches us how to pray and what to pray.

[3 : 39] And we notice that he prays in a way that's different than many of us pray because he prays with a persistent urgency. Moses, as we've seen these past weeks, he argues with God.

He makes a case. He piles up evidence. He claims the promises of God. And when God answers one prayer, he doesn't stop. He's not satisfied. He just keeps going, asking God for more and more and more.

We remember Jacob, right? This great character in the Bible and how God changed the name of Jacob to the name Israel. And why did he do that?

Because Jacob was a man who prayed and he grabbed hold of God and he said, I will not let you go unless you bless me. And we're told that Jacob, he struggled with God and he wrestled with God and that he overcame.

And isn't that what it means to be the people of God, to be the children of Jacob, to be the new Israel and to be the church? It's not to say, you know, God has already chosen me.

[4 : 47] God already knows everything. So I'm just going to sit back and relax and let go and let God know to be the people of God means to struggle with God in prayer, to wrestle with God in prayer and to say like Jacob, I'm not going to let you go unless you bless me.

And that's what Moses is doing. He's arguing with God. He's like a lawyer who goes to court to wear out the judge with his case. And so my question for us is, have we begun 10 weeks into the sermon series to pray like this yet?

I hope that maybe we've started. This kind of prayer is what calls down the reviving presence of God and the reviving power of God. But Moses doesn't just pray persistently, he prays persuasively.

And again, this is different than how many of us pray because many of us chit-chat with God. How many of us chit-chat with God? We say, Lord, bless him and bless her and give us a good day and keep us safe, et cetera, et cetera.

And that's good. If that's where you're starting out, that's great. But it's kind of boring. You know, it might just bore God to tears with these vague sort of, you know, indefinite general prayers.

[6 : 08] And that's why we're studying this prayer of Moses. What does he pray for? Well, we've seen so far that he's praying for the revival of the people of God. He's saying, Lord, have mercy on your compromised people.

Lord, cause your presence to return among us. Lord, give us an assurance of your love. Lord, cause us to be distinguished by your holiness.

And we see Moses in prayer, as it were, rising from one step to the next step to the next step in prayer until he finally gets to this highest step where we looked last week.

He says, Lord, now show me your glory. And this is really how Jesus prays. When we look at Jesus' great prayer in the Gospel of John chapter 17, Jesus says, Father, I want those you've given me to see the glory that you've given me.

He says, now, Lord, show them your glory. And that's what the people of God are meant to pray. That's how we pray for revival. God, manifest your glory. God, cause your glory to pass by us.

[7 : 17] Show us your glory. Are we praying this yet? Like Moses, are we advancing step by step in prayer, rising from this argument to that argument to that argument before God with an ever-increasing boldness?

Like Moses, do we have that longing and that desire for more and more from God? And can we say with the Apostle Paul, I haven't already obtained this.

I haven't already arrived at my goal. But what I'm doing is I'm straining forward and I'm pressing on that I might gain the goal and win the prize of Christ.

And friends, where is that straining and where is that pressing among us for revival? Like Moses, are we striving and seeking and rising on the wings of faith where we get to the point that Moses gets where he says, God, I'm no longer seeking your gifts.

I'm seeking your glory. Lord, I no longer am after your blessings. I'm just after you. This is what the psalmist says in Psalm 42.

[8 : 34] As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, my God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?

Psalm 63, it says, you, God, are my God. Earnestly, I seek you. I thirst for you. My whole being longs for you in a dry and parched land where there is no water.

This is how the people of God pray in the Bible. And I just wanna begin by saying, week 10 of the sermon series, are we praying like this yet? Because these are the kind of prayers that call down God's glory and lead to revival.

Well, to get into this text today, Exodus 34, this passage is one of the greatest passages in all the Bible. And it teaches us that God wants to show us his glorious name and character and ability.

That God is wanting very deeply to show us his glorious name and character and ability. And I wanna start by how God wants to show us his glorious name.

[9 : 52] Perhaps you are here and you're exploring Christianity today and you're wondering, you know, who is God and what is God like? Well, today is your day because this is the high point and the center point of God's revelation of himself in the Torah, the first five books of the Bible.

And he answers that question directly. Who is God? And if you're a Christian today, I'd like to suggest that 99% of our troubles as Christians are that we don't know God, that we don't know his name, we don't know his character, his attributes, his person and his goodness, which here in this text is like a diamond shining in all of its facets.

If only we knew God as he is, we would be like the Lord Jesus himself. He lived in this world as we do. He faced the same difficulties, the same trials, the same temptations that we have, although much, much worse.

And yet how different his life is from mine or perhaps from yours as well. That he knew God. Jesus knew the name of God and the character of God and the ability of God.

And that is our greatest need. And how does God meet our greatest need? Well, he says here in this text, I'm gonna give you a deeper insight, a deeper understanding into myself, into what I am.

[11 : 22] Of all that you need to know, this is the greatest of all possible knowledge. And think about that for a minute. Think about all the goodness of God that he's already revealed to Moses up to this point.

And now he says, I'm gonna give you a deeper view. I'm gonna display it before you in a way that you've never experienced it before. And that's what happens in revival.

God gives us a fresh and a deeper experience of himself. And what does he say in verse six? He says, well, it says, and he passed in front of Moses proclaiming, the Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin.

Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation. Now notice that God is not mumbling here.

He's proclaiming. That God is not suggesting. He's not hinting. He's not implying. That God is declaring. God is preaching, as it were. And this is a plain, clear, simple revelation of who God is.

[12 : 36] It's not hard to know what God has revealed about himself and about salvation and about doctrine and ethics and the way that we should live. It's not hard to understand it.

In fact, people understand it so well that they just don't like it very much. Because when God reveals himself, what happens is that he removes us from the center and puts us over here on the margin and says that he's in the center.

When God reveals himself, what we realize is that we are not the creator. We're just mere tiny little creatures that are dependent upon him. And when God reveals himself, we understand that it's not we who get to decide what's true and what's false, what's right and what's wrong, but that has in fact been decided for us by someone much greater than us.

And this revelation, if we're honest, it hurts our pride. It hurts to be de-centered and to be so humbled. And this is what happens to Moses in verse 8.

Moses bowed down to the ground and he worshiped. God's preaching of himself is plain, it's clear, it's simple, and when it's rightly received, we fall down on the dirt and we worship.

[13 : 57] That's what happens in revival. You guys with me? Okay. Well, what does God preach about himself? What does he say about himself?

We get these two names here, Lord and God, or Yahweh and Elohim, and a name reveals the essence of a person. So what do these names mean?

Well, Elohim, our word for God, it means the all-powerful creator. The God who said, let there be light, and there was light, let us create human beings in our own image, that's who this God is. There's no limit to his eternal power, his infinite power. He is almighty. He's God. He's Elohim. But what about this other name, Lord, or Yahweh?

This is the name on which we should focus our attention because it's the name that God has always chosen to reveal what's most vital about himself. And notice he repeats it twice, the Lord, the Lord.

[14 : 58] This name means I am. I am the self-existent one. When God comes to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3 and Moses says, well, Lord, who am I to tell them sent me?

He says, well, tell them I am who I am. That's who sent you. And he is. He always was.

He forever will be. He has no beginning like me, no end like you. And this is the name that the Lord has always used when he makes a covenant with human partners.

And think about that for a second. This self-existent, independent God who has absolutely no need for me and no need for you, he humbles himself and he commits himself to protect and to redeem and to save us.

So here's Elohim, the almighty creator and here's Yahweh, the self-existent, covenant-keeping redeemer who says to Moses at the burning bush, I've seen the misery of my people and I'm coming down to rescue them.

[16:08] That is the gospel. The Lord descending. The redeemer coming down to save. And I wonder as we're seeking revival, is this what we're praying?

Lord, come down. Lord, descend upon us. Lord, show us the glory of your name. Show us the glory of our omnipotent, all-powerful creator God for whom nothing is impossible.

Show us the glory of our self-existent, covenant-keeping redeemer who parted the Red Sea and who raised Christ from the dead.

In revival, these names of God become a precious treasure of his people so that we're praying them, we're singing them, we're talking about them with all the richness and beauty of their meaning.

This is what God wants to show us. He wants to show us his glorious name. But he doesn't just want to show us his glorious name, he wants to show us his glorious character as well.

[17:15] Look at verses 6 and 7 where God is preaching to us this list of his own attributes. And what's the first in that series of attributes?

It's compassion. It's mercy. That's what's given emphasis and priority. And if the first in the series of attributes is compassion, what's the last in that series?

It's that he will not declare the guilty innocent, that he punishes the guilty. Now in Jewish thinking you build up to a climax, you save the best for last, right?

And so what's the crown jewel of all these attributes? It's that God is a holy God. God is a righteous God. God is a just God. And that means that he does not wink at wickedness.

He does not respect rebellion. He does not smile at sin. And it's important for us to ask the question, is this holy God of the Old Testament different from the God of love in the New Testament?

[18:20] Well, Jesus, when he prays in John 17, what does he pray? He prays, Holy Father. Holy Father. And he teaches us over and over that God, in fact, does not clear the guilty.

He does not declare the guilty innocent, but he punishes evil. And why does he do that? Because he's a righteous God who has an eternal hatred for sin.

Because his wrath burns against all that would spiritually and morally degrade and destroy the creatures that he's made.

In fact, if he doesn't feel those things, if he doesn't do those things, then he's not a good God. He's not a just God. He's definitely not a loving God. If we look at the teachings of Jesus, the most loving person who ever walked planet Earth, we hear it right here in Matthew 13.

He says, Just as the weeds are gathered and burned with fire, so will it be at the end of the age the Son of Man will send his angels and they will gather out of his kingdom all causes of sin and all lawbreakers and throw them into the fiery furnace and that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

[19:35] So this first attribute of God, his compassion, it does not mean that God neglects the moral order, that he forsakes just judgment. In fact, we should not expect to escape the consequences of our sins.

God's compassion does not mean that people can do whatever they want, that in fact he punishes the children who perpetuate the sins of their parents.

He will not put up with a generation of people in their impenitent rebellion that continues what their parents and their grandparents were doing. No, they're going to get what they deserve.

That's the high point of the revelation of God in the first five books of the Bible. And you say, that's terrible. This is awful news.

I mean, how can you love this sort of God? How could Moses bow down and worship this kind of God? Well, listen to God's whole sermon about himself because what does he say?

[20 : 40] He says, I'm the Lord, the Lord, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in loving kindness and faithfulness, forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.

His compassion, that first term, is like a mother's tender feelings for her vulnerable infant child. He's deeply moved.

When Israel was in bondage in Egypt, it was the compassion of the Lord that compelled him to come down to the rescue. That's the first word he uses to describe himself. But what's the second key word?

The word is grace. Grace is this beautiful gift of favor given with delight. It's what Moses prays when he says, Lord, look upon these golden calf worshiping people and don't give them what they deserve.

Give them what they don't deserve. Give them grace. And that third key word, he's slow to anger, it means that he's patient with human evil and that he gives us lots of time to come to our senses and to change.

[21 : 47] That when he's with his wandering people in the wilderness and they're grumbling and they're complaining and they have hard hearts and stiff necks, we see that God is long-suffering.

And he's slow to anger with his people. But what about the fourth and the fifth key words of God's preaching about himself? That fourth word is that he's loyal in his love.

He's got a promise-keeping commitment where he displays his generous, steadfast loyalty to the promises he made to weak and helpless covenant partners like us.

And it's that kindness of the Lord that softens us and leads us to repentance. And that fifth word, his faithfulness, that's his truth.

That's his stability, his reliability, his trustworthiness that he can always be counted on. And when you take these words, his *emet* and his *chesed*, his love and his faithfulness and you combine those terms together, what you get is the expression of an absolute and eternal dependability of the Lord to dispense his goodness upon us.

[23 : 00] How can he maintain his love and his faithfulness to wicked and rebellious sinners who are guilty like me and like you? Well, what's the sixth word?

He's forgiving. He's forgiving for those who humble themselves, for those who repent and turn away from themselves. For those who cling to all these attributes of his compassion and grace, the Lord is forgiving.

And you see, in revival, we experience the glory of all of this character of God passing before our eyes.

That's what revival is. Lord, come and show us the glory of your character in a fresh way. And so I wonder, friends, have you been tempted to say, you know, God is love and he's nothing else? Many people, many churches, many Christians are tempted to say that. You know, in order to be relevant, we need to stop preaching the way that God preaches about himself.

[24 : 11] And to attract people, we need to tone down his holiness, we need to extract his justice and his wrath, and we need to let people know that God just declares everybody innocent.

He just accepts everybody without demands, without expectations. He's not a troublesome God. He just, you know, he doesn't punish the guilty. He just declares everybody great without any need for genuine repentance or costly forgiveness or real faith.

But my friends, that's not true. That is to cut the very heart or attempt to cut the very heart out of the living God. A church in revival like Moses bows down before this God and worships the glory of his goodness in all of its paradox, right?

His compassion and his holiness, his mercy and his justice. A church in revival is reveling in verse 7 where it compares this massive number of maintaining love to thousands of people and yet he punishes three or four generations.

we delight that God has put a limit on his just judgment and that his kindness actually seems to know no bounds. Thousands upon thousands upon thousands is the idea.

[25 : 38] You see, in a revived church, the glorious character of God is made manifest so that we are believing and we are praying and we are singing and we are experiencing and we are living not just a few of these attributes, not the ones we like the most, not the ones that make us the most comfortable and fuzzy inside but all of them and we delight in the full truth of God's preaching about himself and we say, Lord, make us like you.

Make us more like you. Help us to know you and make us like you. All right, I'm preaching now. Here we go.

God wants to show us his glorious name and he wants to show us his glorious character but he also wants to show us his glorious ability, right, his glorious ability and I'll end with this.

You know, this text is so important that it's referenced and repeated over 20 times throughout the rest of the Old Testament and it becomes kind of this confessional statement, this short list of God's, Israel's basic commitments, her basic convictions about her God and when people read it, you know, over the centuries they've said, well, wait a minute, wait a minute.

This is impossible. There is a tension here. There's a conflict here. There's a contradiction here in the very heart of God. There's an either or in his character and you can't have it all, right?

[27 : 12] God, either you're going to forgive everyone or you're going to punish everyone but you can't do both. So what's it going to be? Is it going to be the forgiveness of sinners or justice for sinners?

Because the sense here is that God is too merciful to let sinners just perish but he's too just to just let sinners off the hook and if he's forgiving but not punishing then he's not just and if he's punishing but not forgiving he's not merciful.

So how in the world can you people worship a God of such contradiction? And how is God able to reconcile in himself these apparent contradictions?

Or remember that Moses says, Lord, show me your glory and God says, well, actually Moses, you can't handle that but let's make a deal. What I'm going to do is hide you in this rock, I'm going to cover you with my hand and I'm going to give you a partial glimpse of a very small portion of my back parts.

That's all you can handle. But you see, Moses gets the back part of God's glory but what do we get? We get the whole thing.

[28 : 38] We don't just get a partial glimpse, we get a full glimpse of not the back of God but the front of God, the face of God. This is what Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, he says, God gave us the light of the knowledge of God's glory displayed in the face of Christ.

You see, in Jesus Christ, this creator God, this redeemer God came down and he took on flesh to display his glory. And in Jesus, we see the fullness of the goodness and the glory of God passing before our very eyes.

And my friends, there's no more wonderful discovery that a human being can ever make than that this self-existent God who is all-powerful in his majesty and his glory, who is light and in him is no darkness at all.

For this God who is a consuming fire to love you so much that in his holy righteousness he has put your sins not upon you but upon his beloved son.

And he's given to him to bear the anguish and the suffering of those sins. He's put upon him the shame and the punishment for all of your sins that you and I might be forgiven and delivered and that we might be called the children of God.

[30 : 04] How do we see the glory of God in the cross of Christ? Well, there in that one place and in that one time we see God's compassionate, forgiving glory and we see his holy, punishing glory coming together to embrace each other.

It's in that place that God's mercy and his justice come together and they kiss one another. Right there where Jesus is crying out, my God, my God, why have you forsaken me?

And right there where he's praying for us, Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing. And it's right there in that place that he yells at the top of his lungs.

It is finished that he, the innocent one, was declared guilty so that we, the guilty ones, might be declared innocent.

In Jesus Christ, our sins are both punished and forgiven all at once. and it's his resurrection that tells us that that cross of his, it was not a defeat, it was in fact a victory.

[31 : 19] So thanks be to God. Thanks be to God that he has made a way to get rid of my guilt and my sin without getting rid of me.

Thank God that he's made a way to get rid of your guilt and your sin without getting rid of you. This is the greatest news in all the world.

It's what the Apostle Paul summarizes in Romans chapter 3 when he says, God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement through the shedding of his blood and he did this to demonstrate his

righteousness so as to be both just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

And how can you tell that a person knows this? How can you tell that a person has experienced this God who is both just and the justifier? How do you know that a person has come to experience the atoning of their sins through the shed blood of Christ?

Well we get a hint in verse 29 it says, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of the covenant law in his hands he was not aware that his face was radiant because he had spoken with the Lord.

[32 : 40] You see a revived church and a revived Christian is someone who so experienced the presence and the power of God that they're radiant with the glory of his name.

They're radiant with the glory of his character. They're radiant with the glory of his ability in Christ crucified to save us. And that radiance of God's glory just seems to ooze out of every pore of somebody who's really encountered this living Lord.

And that person I think begins to pray and to sing this way and I'll close with this. This is from Charles Wesley. They say oh for a thousand tongues to sing my great Redeemer's praise the glories of my God and King the triumphs of his grace my gracious master and my God assist me to proclaim to spread through all the earth abroad the honors of your name.

He breaks the power of canceled sin and he sets the prisoner free his blood can make the foulest clean his blood availed for me for you for all of us that's what he wants to show us Lord come show us your glory in the name of the Father Son and Holy Spirit Amen