

# Our Faithful Intercessor and Merciful God

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Preacher: Rev. Jonathan St. Clair

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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 Allie. I'm a member of the Central Berkeley Community Group. Today's reading is going to be from Deuteronomy, chapters 9, verses 6 through 7, 11 through 17, 21, 26 through 29, and chapter 10, verses 12 through 22.

Understand then that this is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land to possess. For you are a stiff-necked people. Remember this and never forget how you aroused the anger of your Lord, your God, in the wilderness.

From the day you left Egypt until you arrived here, you have been rebellious against the Lord. At the end of 40 days and 40 nights, the Lord gave me the two stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant.

[ 1 : 1 9 ] Then the Lord told me, Go down from here at once, because your people whom you brought out of Egypt have become corrupt. They have turned away quickly from what I commanded them and have made an idol for themselves.

And the Lord said to me, I have seen this people, and they are a stiff-necked people. Indeed, let me alone so that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven.

And I will make you into a nation stronger and more numerous than they. So I turned and went down from the mountains while it was ablaze with fire, and the two tablets of the covenant were in my hands.

When I looked, I saw that you had sinned against the Lord your God. You had made for yourselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. You had turned aside quickly from the way that the Lord had commanded you.

So I took the two tablets and threw them out of my hands, breaking them into pieces before your eyes. Also, I took that sinful thing of yours, the calf you had made, and burned it in the fire.

[ 2 : 2 3 ] Then I crushed it and ground it to powder as fine as dust and threw the dust into a stream that flowed down the mountain. I prayed to the Lord and said, Sovereign Lord, do not destroy your people, your own inheritance that you redeemed by your great power and brought out of Egypt with a mighty hand.

Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Overlook the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness, and their sin. Otherwise, the country from which you brought us will say, Because the Lord was not able to take them into the land he had promised them, and because he had hated them, he brought them out to put them to death in the wilderness.

But they are your people, your inheritance that you brought out by your great power and your outstretched arm. And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good.

To the Lord our God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. Yet the Lord set his affection on your ancestors and loved them. And he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations as it is today.

Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords.

[ 3 : 52 ]     The great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.

And you are to love those who are foreigners. For you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. Fear the Lord your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name.

He is the one you praise. He is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes. Your ancestors who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.

The grass withers and the flowers fade. Good morning, friends.

Congratulations on being here today and just making it out of the house. You know, after I graduated from college, I found myself in a pub in Western Ireland, and I met a friendly local there.

[ 5 : 07 ]     It was a little town called Doolin, sort of known for its session music, pub music, and a friendly local started buying me pints of Guinness. And when he discovered that I was training to be a pastor, he said, oh, you hatch, match, and dispatch.

And by hatch, match, and dispatch, he meant I was in the business of births, weddings, and funerals. And fortunately, over the years, we've done more matching and hatching here at Christ Church than we have dispatching.

And yesterday, we had another match. We had a wedding of Ethan Van Andel and Kate Mallison. It was beautiful. Some of you were there under the Redwood Grove, and then here at the reception last night.

Really joyous event. And I was thinking at the reception last night about a wedding I officiated a few years ago from a couple that met here at Cal. And at the reception, the mother-in-law stood up to give a toast to her new son-in-law.

And she said, so you're the husband now, and from now on, you make all the major decisions in the household. And all the egalitarians in the room started sweating, and the feminists were feeling super uncomfortable.

[ 6 : 14 ]     She said, yeah, now you make all the major decisions, but your new wife decides what's a major decision and what's a minor decision. And I thought, yeah, that's pretty smart. You know, I love being married.

It's so great to find that one very special person that you can annoy for the rest of your life. And when Catherine and I got married for better, for worse, I couldn't have done better. She couldn't have done worse.

And it's a beautiful thing. But we also know that Jesus was single. Jesus charted a path, a high and noble path for all of his disciples that would come after him and be single.

But as we begin today, I just want to say it fascinates me that one of the primary metaphors to describe the relationship between God and his people is marriage.

This exclusive, intense covenant bonds between a husband and wife. That's what God says. That's what his relationship with us is like. And I just want us to think about that metaphor.

[ 7 : 12 ] As we open up Deuteronomy, we come to this fifth and final book in the Torah, which is the capstone and the summary of everything that's gone before it. It's Moses' last words to the people of God before he dies.

And what I think this text in Deuteronomy 9 and 10 is telling us today, God's word for us, is that our broken vows call for a selfless advocate and a new life of gratitude.

Let's think for a minute about our broken vows.

I want you to imagine a newlywed couple and they're on their honeymoon. They plan this special wedding weekend for all their family and friends. They've had the rehearsal, the dinner.

They've had the ceremony. They've made the vows. They've had a big rocking party and they've made these serious covenant promises to one another before the eyes of God and each other and their community to love and cherish each other until death do us part.

[ 8 : 18 ] Pretty serious stuff. And then they go on their honeymoon to a tropical island, not just for like a week. They go for 40 days. I mean, who goes for 40 days?

But they spare no expense and they're having a great time swimming in the ocean, walking on the beach, reading books, eating well, seeing the sights, making love, luxuriating in the rest and the joy of their covenant that they've just made.

And then all of a sudden, just out of the blue, one of them is unfaithful. On their honeymoon, one of them is found in the arms of another and their covenant is shattered into pieces.

How would you feel if you were the one to be so betrayed? You'd be heartbroken. You'd be outraged. How could you so quickly stab me in the back after such high promises, after such deep sacrifices that we just made to commit ourselves exclusively to one another?

It's hard to describe the emotions you would feel. That's why we have country music. That's why we have the blues. You know, like, what does it feel like to be cheated on?

[ 9 : 34 ] And that's exactly what happens between Yahweh and his people with the golden calf. And we're told this didn't just happen one time on their honeymoon and they made up and then they lived happily ever after.

The prophets tell us that this happened over and over and over again. God's chosen people, his beloved people, the treasured possession for whom God went to great lengths to save from slavery in Egypt.

They entered into this exclusive relationship with God and they made these covenant promises in response to his. And they said, you will be our love supreme. You will be our one and only everywhere and always.

And yet what happened? They adulterated the relationship. They adulterated the relationship by introducing another lover and another allegiance into the relationship.

And we hear about that in verse 16 where Moses says, when I looked, I saw that you had sinned against the Lord your God and you had made for yourselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf.

[ 10 : 38 ] You turned aside quickly from the way that the Lord had commanded you. The people of God decide, you know, we no longer want to live by faith in this living God that we cannot see.

We want to live by sight and we want to make God less than he is. And so they cast him in the shape of a bull. Now, some of you know this statue on Wall Street, Charging Bull.

Anybody seen this statue? It's been there since the 80s after a market crash as a symbol of financial optimism. And this golden calf wasn't that different. It was a symbol of strength and vitality and energy and prosperity where the people said, we are going to make God into who we want him to be and to do for us what we want him to do.

God doesn't define us and fashion us. We define and fashion God. And the Apostle Paul reflects on this as not just one incident in the life of Israel, but the consistent theme in the history of humanity where he says in Romans 1, they, all people, exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served created things rather than their creator.

Another theologian commented, this is John Calvin. He said, the human heart is a factory of idols. Every one of us is, from his mother's womb, expert in inventing idols.

[ 12 : 08 ] Now, I doubt that many of us have statues at home that we pray to and seek good fortune from, but an idol is anything more important to you than God.

An idol is anything that absorbs your imagination more than God. An idol is something that you seek to give you what only God can give. And you know you have a counterfeit God, a false God, when anything becomes so central and so essential that if it's lost to you, your life hardly feels worth living.

You can kind of hear the self-talk in your own heart when you say, you know, my life only has meaning and I only have worth if I have power and influence over other people.

Or if I win the love and respect of this group or that person, or if I have this quality of life and this standard of living, or if I'm this productive or this successful, then my life has meaning and my life has worth and value.

And these become our functional gods. The gods that we're living for are gods of power, a god of approval, a god of comfort, a god of control, and on and on.

[ 13 : 26 ] We're expert in inventing idols in which we reduce God and redefine God and replace God with something he's not. And so why does Moses remind the people of this painful honeymoon affair?

Because we didn't read this verse, but in verse 4 it says, you might say to yourself, the Lord has brought us to the promised land because of our righteousness.

And then verse 6 picks up and it says, understand then that it is not because of your righteousness that the Lord your God is giving you this good land for you are a stiff-necked people.

We tend to either think too low of ourselves or too high of ourselves. And the danger here is thinking about ourselves with moral self-congratulation, with a self-righteous superiority complex over other people.

And Moses says, actually, you have a history of being stiff-necked. It's this image of an animal that refuses to listen to its owner, that has this unbending, stubborn, willfully obstinate, not readily submissive, not easily led sort of attitude to its master.

[ 14 : 44 ] And I think Moses brings this up because he's saying, look, this golden calf was not an exceptional lapse. It's just the most obvious and most horrendous example of our human, congenital, ingrained, characteristic tendency of habitual rebellion that seeks life from other sources than the living God.

And the prophets repeat Moses over and over. Here's the prophet Jeremiah. He says, my people have committed two sins. They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug out their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

And so how does Moses respond to the broken vows of God's people? It says in verse 17 that, so I took the two tablets and I threw them out of my hands, breaking them to pieces before your eyes.

And this isn't so much an impetuous act as it is a prophetic symbol that the moral law of God and God's covenant bond of love with his people has been shattered because they've adulterated the relationship by allowing other lovers to creep in, rendering the relationship null and void, null and void.

And this is a desperate situation that the people of God find themselves in. And so that leads me to my next point, that our broken vows call for a selfless advocate.

[ 16 : 15 ] Our broken vows call for a selfless advocate. Anybody ever had somebody plead your case when you royally screwed up or you just totally didn't deserve it?

Maybe a parent, a teacher, a coach, a colleague, a friend went about for you, put in a good word for you when you just didn't deserve it. Well, if any nation in the ancient Near East deserved to be destroyed, the scriptures tell us over and over again, it was the people of God.

More than any other nation, their very existence here on the edge of the promised land is proof of the mercy and the grace of God. And the question is, how did they get God's mercy?

What changed in this situation? What changed is that Moses stepped up to advocate for them. Moses went to become their mediator and their reconciler who interceded before God on their behalf.

And you can hear him doing it in verse 26. He says, I prayed to the Lord and said, Sovereign Lord, do not destroy your people.

[ 17 : 22 ] And what follows is this model prayer for all who feel the tension between what the people of God are called to be and what we actually are. Anybody feel that tension?

What the people of God are called to be and what we actually are. And this tells us, don't give up on the people of God. Learn how to pray like Moses. And how does Moses stand in the gap between God and his people?

Well, first of all, he's selfless. He completely empties himself of his ego. And he says, You know, this is not about me. Because God had said in verse 14, he was so ready to be done.

He said, Let me alone, Moses, so that I may destroy them and blot out their name from under heaven. And I will make you, Moses, into a nation stronger and more numerous than they.

God is ready to scrap plan A, start plan B. He says, Moses, you and your family can be the new chosen people. But Moses ignores that offer completely.

[ 18 : 20 ] And he just kind of says, Okay, whatever, God. But I'm going to redirect your attention to things that are way more important than little old Moses. Namely, God, I want you to pay attention to your love and to your promises and to your character and to your reputation and to your power.

Walk with me through this prayer in verse 26. Sovereign Lord, do not destroy your people, your own inheritance that you redeem. Redeemed. God, remember your special love for your people.

Remember that they are your treasured possession, your inheritance in the world. And then he says in verse 27, Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God, remember the covenant promises that you've made, that you swore to Abraham. You'd give him seed and land, that you'd give him a people and a place, that you would provide him kids and a home where they can live.

And God, you cannot go back on your word. You have to be faithful and follow through on what you said you're going to do. And then he goes on in verse 27. He says, Overlook the stubbornness of this people, their wickedness and their sin.

[ 19 : 31 ] God, be who you are. Be gracious. Be patient. Be forgiving. Overlook and cover their sin by your mercy. And then in verse 28, he says, Otherwise, Egypt, the country from which you brought us, will say, Because the Lord was not able to take them, and because he, into the land that he promised them, and because he hated them, he brought them out to put them to death in the wilderness.

God, consider your reputation. Do not let yourself become the laughingstock of the nations. Do not let people misinterpret you as unable or unloving.

Father, hallowed be your name. Do not let your name be dishonored because of the stupidity of your people, Moses says. And then in verse 29, he says, But they are your people, your inheritance that you brought out by your great power and your outstretched arm.

And Moses comes back to where he started this prayer in verse 26 with the redeeming power of God. And he says, God, do what you do. You rescued us in the past, and now I'm asking, save us from ourselves.

Can you imagine what would happen if we begun to pray like this? And if you pour out your hearts and your longings and your hopes to God like Moses does, 1 Peter 5 says that we're to cast our anxieties on the Lord because he cares for us.

[ 21 : 04 ] And a simple way that the Bible urges us to do this is to tell God not only what we need or what we want, but to tell him why he should grant our requests.

Moses pours out his heart by supporting his requests for mercy with arguments. Moses makes a case to God, and he appeals to God. He says, it's on the basis of what you've revealed about yourself, your special covenant love, the promises you've made, your character of compassion, your glory in the world, your power to redeem.

And I want to suggest that we adopt Moses' example of chutzpah in our prayers. Could we be more bold and direct with God?

Rather than telling God what we need, tell him why we need it on the basis of his word. Imagine what God would do if we prayed with this kind of persuasive urgency.

Now I've been slowly working my way through the Marvel movies, the Marvel Cinematic Universe with my kids, and we're a little behind.

[ 22 : 12 ] We're on Ant-Man, and Ant-Man and the Wasp is our latest. So pray for us as we try to catch up with the rest of you. But I've learned that action films, in action films, the main actor or main actress has stand-ins because it can take hours to set up a scene.

And so you get an actor and then somebody who looks and acts like the actor to stand there until you're ready to film the actual scene, right? And that's what's going on here.

Moses is a stand-in. Moses is a placeholder, a pointer to the main actor, one better than Moses, who will be an even more selfless advocate.

And that main actor comes on the scene, and what does he pray for us? He prays, Father, forgive them, for they don't know what they're doing. Moses prays, overlook their stubbornness and wickedness and sin.

And Jesus, the main actor, when the final scene comes to be played, he says, Father, forgive them. And when does Jesus pray this prayer for us? He prays it when he's slowly suffocating on the cross.

[ 23 : 22 ] Historians tell us that crucified revolutionaries died with curses on their lips. These were gruesome scenes. There were screams of rage and pain and despair.

And so of all the words of recrimination, of condemnation, of accusation that could have rung out, what does Jesus say? He says, forgive.

Of all the prayers that I need prayed for me, this one's the most essential. Father, forgive him. Not Father, help me, but Father, forgive them.

Not Father, relieve me, but Father, save them. Jesus doesn't pray for himself. He prays for us. Jesus emptied himself to become one of us and he humbled himself to death on a cross to become the selfless advocate that we desperately need.

And he dares to ask God for what only God can give. Why does Jesus have the right and the authority to pray, Father, overlook their stubbornness, forgive their sin?

[ 24 : 30 ] Because he's there, fully God and fully man on the cross, in our place, as our substitute, bearing our sin, our guilt, our shame, receiving God's just judgment judgment of death that we deserve in order that we might receive the infinite mercy and astonishing grace of God that we don't deserve.

And the Apostle Paul summarizes it this way in 2 Corinthians 5. He says, God made him who had no sin to be sin for us so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

And so friends, my question for us is have you placed your confidence in this one who's your only selfless advocate before God?

And are we ready to renew our trust and renew our covenant with him today in this one who has secured God's mercy for us when he prayed for us with us in mind saying, Father, forgive him.

Father, forgive her. This is what we most need. Our broken vows call for a selfless advocate but they also call for a new life of gratitude.

[ 25 : 52 ] Our broken vows call for a selfless advocate and a new life of gratitude. It says in verse 12 of chapter 10, now Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you?

Now that you've experienced the astonishing mercy of God and you've received the infinite grace of God and you've been powerfully saved, what does the Lord require of you?

What is the basic grateful response that's fitting to such a reality? And Moses says, we're to fear, walk, love, serve, and observe.

Listen to verse 12. This is what it means to show that we're grateful to be the redeemed, forgiven people of God. What does he ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good.

What does it mean to fear the Lord? It means to have an attitude of respect and reverence for God in everything that we do that permeates all other attitudes. What does it mean to walk in obedience?

[ 27 : 03 ] It means to imitate God in our ethical life. What does it mean that that word in the center of the list to love? It means we're to reflect the loyal love of God back to him.

And what does it mean when it says we're to serve him? It means we're to worship him with our time and our talents and our treasures. And then what does it mean to observe his commands?

It means that we're to give constant careful attention to his revelation in his written word. And so I want to close with two practical applications.

First for the Bible-less and then for the fatherless. A word about the Bible-less and a word about the fatherless. I've been reflecting on this term a Bible-less Christian which is a grotesque anomaly.

I know it's a contradiction in terms and I think it's not a lack of Bibles. It's not that we don't own them. We have many of them at home. We have infinite number on our phones.

[ 28 : 03 ] The problem is that many Christians just don't open them or read them. And why is that a problem? Because if you claim the mercy of God, the mercy that Moses hopes for and the mercy that Jesus secures, then the basic thing the Lord asks of us is to observe his commands.

And where do we find those? How can we observe what we do not know and what we're not regularly informing ourselves about? I want you to imagine this newlywed couple, right?

And the husband says to his new bride, he says, you know, I'm enjoying this relationship but from now on I'm not going to listen to what you say. I know words are going to come out of your mouth.

I know you're going to communicate things to me but I've come up with this brilliant idea that we can have a wordless relationship. And so I don't really need to hear from you what you're thinking.

I don't really want to hear from you what you want or what you need. I'm just going to pop these AirPods in and I'm going to kind of feel my way through the vibes of how to please you.

[ 29 : 09 ] Now how is it going to go for this new husband? How do you think the wife is going to appreciate being ignored? Or imagine if you have a car and you need to change the oil and instead of consulting the manual from the manufacturer you just pop the hood and you start banging around on the engine and you go, you know what, I have a brilliant idea.

Water is so much cheaper and cleaner than oil. I think I'm going to put water in this engine. How's that going to go for you? Aren't you going to wish that you had relied on the maker of the car to tell you how it runs?

Brothers and sisters, we cannot live a life of gratitude to God without His written instructions that He's given to us for what He wants from us and what will please Him and how He's built our lives to work.

And so if you find yourself as a Bible-less Christian this morning and you feel a little uncomfortable, good, I've done my job, God, we want you to become a self-feeder.

We want you to go from nothing to something. We want you to wake up tomorrow and turn to Psalm 1. Turn to the Gospel of Matthew chapter 1. If you don't know what to do, don't have a plan for how to do it, don't have a method, come talk to me, come talk to Andrew.

[ 30 : 31 ] We want no one here to be a Bible-less Christian because God's calling us to observe His commands and to walk in obedience to what He said.

And the last thing I want to say is not just a word for the Bible-less but a word about the fatherless because when we open and when we read our Bibles, we find it reveals to us the heart of our Creator for His creation and for the creatures that He's made in His image.

And we read things like this in verse 18. He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow and He loves the foreigners residing among you giving them food and clothing.

This tells us that the Creator God fixes His attention not on the glory and the power of the wealthy and the strong but on the needs of the poor and the weak and the vulnerable and this fundamental moral character of a just and merciful God is to be reflected in the society and the culture of His people.

And so I want to just encourage us as we close to find one way for every person here to find one way in this upcoming holiday season to defend one child.



[ 31 : 48 ] One child who at no fault of their own has become fatherless, has become motherless. One child who's been orphaned and whose needs can be met by your resources and my resources.

And if you want to know more about what we're doing with Care Portal or Foster the City or Compassion International and other things, email Andrew and he will send you to the right people and the right opportunities for how we're trying to set up our church to defend the fatherless.

But I want you to imagine. Imagine us being a people who with one hand we've opened up the powerful word of God and with the other hand we're blessing the vulnerable image of God.

and I think if we could do those two things open the word of God and bless the vulnerable image of God we will have moved the needle pretty significantly toward this new life of gratitude that God is inviting us into us whose sins have been mercifully forgiven.

Us whose sins have been graciously overlooked. I hope and pray this is so in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

[ 33 : 03 ] Amen.