

Exodus 34:10–28

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[0 : 0 0] just a brief prayer heavenly father we bow in your presence may your word be our rule your spirit our teacher and your greater glory our supreme concern through jesus christ our lord amen it was the third wedding ceremony in which i was the groom there's a story behind that but i won't tell the full fullness of it we were outdoors in the california coastal town of santa barbara california close enough to the water where we thought you could not see the ocean you could see it it was the heart of the summer and christy and i found ourselves exchanging our vows for the third time now in the past tense we had already recited them five months earlier in the northwest suburbs of chicago there aren't too many things i remember about this day there are not many things i remember vividly but i do remember the charge that was given to us by the efficient our efficient scottish by descent alliterated a charge to us that all became begun with the letters th he said be thankful be thoughtful and the last one i think deliberately in the thickest scottish brogue he could come up with he said be thudda and i'm standing there i'm like what in the world is thudda and as he began to unfold his charges be thankful to god and to one another be thoughtful uh in how you treat one another and serve one another and he got to thudda which translated in american english is thorough be thorough we were to live lives of thanksgiving and thoughtfulness but what he began to unfold in his last charge was we were to be thorough i didn't understand what he meant when he introduced the word but as the ceremony proceeded what he implied was being be thorough in your handling of sin thorough and dispelling things that will arise during marriage that would draw you apart thorough and destroying all that you would encounter that might jeopardize this marriage covenant you have entered it didn't make sense at the time it doesn't i find it doesn't make sense often to young newlyweds but i've come to grow in my understanding of the threats that impinge upon marriage marriage is hard a truth that many in this room will attest to upholding vows is incredibly difficult preserving the covenant which we entered upon is continually challenged by my own selfishness my own pride it's even it's challenged by vocation good vocation and and study it's challenged by the rearing of even the godly gifts of children he has given to us as challenged by worldly ideologies former affections the imagination my own sin plagued heart i'm in constant need to be thorough in expelling all that threatens our marriage covenant this thoroughness is what the text is concerned about this morning one's relationship with god requires thoroughness on two fronts particularly the expunging of that which may threaten the relationship and the cultivation or the practice of rituals and

habits that preserve a relationship in other words there are things that you and i must rid ourselves of and there are things that you and i must regularly repeat exodus 34 begins to shape the richest one of the richest images the bible uses of the picture the relationship between god and his people namely god as husband and israel as wife though it's never explicitly stated in the old testament the metaphor is present if you begin handling the bible with regularity you'll find quickly that this image occurs cover to cover front to back it transforms and intensifies as the bible unfolds for jesus is portrayed as a groom and his people are the bride entire biblical books are based on this theme for example hosea and infidelity jesus uses this very metaphor of him being the groom and the church is his bride as he teaches and of course the book of revelation the final book in our bible is replete with marriage language so what is a covenant well it's an allegiance a commitment to one another a promise a standing contract between two parties in the ancient near east it occurred on several levels one it could occur between peers so you find kings that were peers that would actually covenant with one another for the well-being of their people but more often than not it occurred between uh there was a power differentiate differentiation there was kings and there was those lesser kings that they conquered see covenant is a commitment entered into by two parties it's evident from our passage you can't escape it because there's a relationship where god

declares i will do this i will do this i will do this i will do this repeatedly in the text if you're following along as a young child that's the challenge for you find how many i wills god says in the text and the relationship is reciprocated where he says you shall you shall not because the people there was an expectation that the people were to participate i will and you shall perhaps the closest analogy today is that of marriage of covenant though it's diminishing and weightiness the traditional marriage vows communicate the gravitas of the marriage covenant a dozen of us were were at a wedding ceremony for james and tory uh yesterday evening outside milwaukee and i was encouraged that they uh they recited their own vows but they also uh appended it with the traditional vows which are good which are great vows actually and it goes something along the lines of this the same vows i took i take you to be my wedded husband wife to have and to hold from this day forward for better for worse for richer for poorer and sickness and health to love and to cherish till death do us part according to god's holy ordinance i pledge my i pledge myself to you something along those lines but the understanding is that with understanding of that covenant is in all circumstances you have given yourself to this covenant and one of the lines that they they left out yesterday which i didn't point out to them but there's one of the traditional vows it ends with this till death do us part according to god's holy ordinance and forsaking all others keep unto him or her as long as you both shall live

see the vows are a commitment to enter into something but it's also equal commitment to deny something entirely namely forsaking all others this term of covenant bookends our texts so you see in verse 10 behold i am making a covenant so god makes in verse 10 and in verse 28 he is actually right or verse 27 he is writing the covenant verse 27 28 so covenant is the primary concern and this morning together may we see this statement with clarity there is a covenant made where exclusiveness is required and participation is expected there is a covenant being made where exclusiveness is required and participation is expected verse 10 follows a covenant made verse 10 follows a covenant made verse 10 follows verse 9 an incredible petition by moses pleading for the lord to be in the midst of his stubborn and rebellious people moses is asked to pardon them and take them as his inheritance and the request appears to be granted because in verse 10 god declares one of the most staggering statements in probably all the bible he says i am making a covenant and before all your people all israel i will do marvels such as has have not been created in all the earth or in any nation and all the people among whom you are so all the people among whom you dwell are to see the work of the lord for it is awesome thing that i will do with you and so the lord recommits himself to the covenant he's already made in chapter 24 the question has been posed in earlier weeks will the lord continue with people when they fail him and the answer is given in verse 10 yes as a matter of fact i'm going to double down on israel my promises will be so extravagant so lavish so grand that you yourself who experience will marvel and all the on looking spectators will be in awe so the question remains what is this awesome thing he is about to do in verse 10 well among the things the lord will do is securing of land for people so in verse 7 11 you have the lord promises to go before israel and to drive out inhabitants of the land it's reiterated in verse 24 israel's borders will be enlarged territorial they will be secure but also the land which they inhabit will be fruitful being an agrarian civilization each one of their plots would be fruitful so fruitful that they would not covet one another's land that's what the statement says in verse 24 no one should covet your land it's actually an internal thing they would not be asking oh well mr smith's lawn is so luscious and green i want his lawn no rather everyone's lawn would be luscious and green there would be no covetousness rather everyone prospered none would envy god was promising israel freedom from external threats and internal prosperity and flourishing not for a few but for all so we begin to see god's covenant in god's provision and god's protection which are explicitly stated but those are not the most captivating aspects of covenant certainly the heart of the covenant is that god would be with his people it's not explicitly stated but the petition is there in 34 9 it's implicit in our text for you see in verse 20 and verse 23 that the that the people would appear before the lord assuming that the lord would be with them the lord's house would actually be accessible to the people additionally we'll discover in future weeks that the remainder of the book of exodus is solely concerned with building a house for god because the covenant promise of god is that he would be with his people the covenant promise is encapsulated in three words god's presence provision and protection for his people this is what the lord had assured in his covenant yet the covenant is not unconditional by nature we have already seen that the covenant made was broken because not by god but by the people therefore the people come under covenant obligations as well there's a covenant made which where exclusiveness is required as the lord

fulfills his promise and going before the people he anticipates the allure and the benefits of conquests he makes their exclusivity uh in worship clear in verse 14 he reiterates the first commandment you shall worship no other god for the lord whose name is jealous is a jealous god the people of israel were not permitted to have a multiplicity of gods they were not polytheists they were monotheists so the surrounding countries nations oftentimes had various gods of various sorts for various things so whether they be for fertility or harvest or the sun the moon the stars or the livestock or the rain israel was not to be like that they could only worship one god because there was only one god and you're we're reminded of that in deuteronomy chapter 6 when they are to instruct their families what is one thing you must tell your children the lord the lord is one god he is god alone soul god only god and they were to go to great lengths to preserve exclusive allegiance to god they were not only to refrain from making allegiances or alliances with neighboring nations or that its inhabitants they were to destroy all forms of idolatry and idolatrous worship the actions they were required to do are all verbs of destruction tear down break it down cut it down cut it down in other words they were not to take idols as plunder or spoils of conquest they were not to redeem a beautiful altar to offer sacrifices to the lord upon they were to purge any hint of god of another god from their presence they were to rid themselves of any trace of another allegiance absolute destruction was required they were being forewarned of all the temptations they would face they would be tempted to form allegiances alliances partnerships and covenant with inhabitants of the land they would be tempted to engage in festivities in meals to honor little g gods their sons would be attracted to foreign women their daughters would be sought by foreign men and as a result they were they would prove to be unfaithful to the lord and the principle derived here is the land and its inhabitants would prove to be a seduction to god's people the god the lord knew the hearts of his people it's actually staggering because as they come out of the promised land and the and and we know they're they're in the

wilderness mooses goes up to sinai to meet with the lord before they had seen any of the promised land the natural inclination of their heart was i gotta make an idol before the seduction of their eyes was well the wickedness of their hearts they knew what transpired in egypt they had heard stories of of of foreign gods and so they reveal the state of all of our hearts that as calvin says our human heart at birth is an idol factory you and i by nature are experts at finding god replacements so what is your idol what is your idol oh bang if i just get this degree that degree i'm going to covenant with the degree and its promise of prestige from this university to secure this job to live in this zip code oh no no no i i i i i don't really make idols my my heart doesn't make them no no no well if i i i just look this way and dress like that and speak of such and display myself and sell myself then the world would love me and off we run fashioning idols from ideologies see the irony is that the blessing of god would become the desire of the people rather than the god who blesses it's staggering because what the lord is promising them is prosperity which is phenomenal but what the lord forewarns them is as i prosper you your little factory is going to replace the fact that i am the one prospering you and that which they give themselves to is whoredom other translations use the term prostitute themselves or play the harlot i actually don't even say come feel comfortable saying the word but it depicts the unfaithfulness of one when they have exclusively committed to another it is one of the most derogatory terms in our english language it's a term we never want spoken of us it's a demeaning term a hurtful term and yet the bible here introduces a term that will walk alongside the people of god and plague them for the rest of the old testament and probably us today and why because his name is jealous and because he is jealous he requires exclusivity jealousy is not a negative word in this sense we think of it negatively but god's jealous is jealousy is a perfect jealousy it encapsulates his passionate love and zeal for his people it embodies the covenant he has committed to and established see if you identify the greatest love that you have in your life you instinctively and naturally and rightfully will exercise jealousy over it you must because if you choose if you love your spouse rightly and if there is a foreign threat luring her away your response is jealousy and rightfully so because if you fail to demonstrate

[20 : 31] jealousy i would actually question the genuineness of your love see love is not morally neutral when one's love is threatened or attacked it will it will act and this is what the passage is moving us to understand that we can't just brag about god's unconditional love as if it's a unceasing fountain pouring over costing him nothing when in reality he is incited to jealousy because as we receive his love we are reciprocating it to everyone else but him his love is not morally indifferent pouring out its benefits heedless of human response he expects and requires our faithful love in return a covenant is made where exclusivity is required and participation is necessary the people of

god were to participate in the covenant that was being made the rhythm of their lives were to reflect this covenant the ordering of their time annually and weekly were to reflect this three feasts probably four were to be celebrated each year you see that in the feast of unleavened bread in verse 18 another feast of weeks in verse 22 the feast of in gathering again in verse 22 and the feast of passover mentioned in verse 25 on all these occasions the bible makes explicit the men are to stand before the lord each week according to verse 21 you work six days and you rest one when your livestock give birth it belongs to me when your wife gives birth to your firstborn son it belongs to me when you harvest the best of your harvest belong to me you cannot help but come to the conclusion that all of one's life was to be ordered by god and oriented toward god one's time one's resources one's material goods one's family he was the lord of the calendar the lord of the children the lord of the festivals the lord of the family he was lord of all see the people were expected to participate rituals and festivities have a formative impact what you do repeatedly shapes you forms you and fashions you one of the powers in ritual is the reiteration of a fading memory the late recent sociologist peter berger actually writes about this that men and women forget and actually the quote is men forget women not so much but men and women forget and part of memory is actually the repetition of ritual so that you and i re-enter into these memories hallmark has done a superb job of marketing holidays occasions for remembrance occasions for celebration each year i am invited to celebrate my wife and mother of our children on multiple days there is her birthday there is valentine's day there is mother's day and on each of these days almost all of these days i'll admit it now because she's going to call me out but before most of these days i find myself before this wall of cards that all clamor for my attention they're all saying pick me buy me write me write in me and the one i end up purchasing is the one that reminds me most of my most of my love and affection for her that brings into remembrance the covenant that i have pledged myself to for this reason and a whole host of reasons israel was to participate in upholding a collective memory namely the covenant that god had made with them in the same way we are to do the same we are not to undervalue the gathering of together gathering together of god's people on the lord's day formation happens here we are not to look lightly on the baptism or the dedication of children we are not to make trivial this table that you and i are invited to participate in for these things these rituals these habits these practices are like many say means of grace for our preservation as a covenant people these are gifts to sustain shape and remind us a covenant was made where exclusiveness is required and participation is expected for what to seize the promise in verse 10 that i will do marvels marvels that summon the language of creation god is saying to his people that i will do something that all of creation has yet to see or has yet to be done in creation all the people who look at you who watch you will see the work of the lord well you may be familiar with what happens as the story of the bible unfolds this covenant covenant is superseded by a greater covenant in jeremiah 31 and hebrews 8 and paul takes the language of verse 10 and actually imports it into his letter of 2 corinthians and he writes this that if anyone is in christ they are a new creation the old is gone and the new has come see the marvelous thing is not the promise necessarily of provision and protection and his presence the marvelous thing is this god reconciling himself you to himself through his son that is what you and i should marvel about that we in christ are new creations that christ that in christ god was reconciling the world to himself not counting their sins against them the greatest marvel the most awesome thing is that you are acquitted of your guilt before god the greatest story that you and i have to share is that god in christ is reconciling the world to himself and he will be thorough in removing your sin he will be thorough in saving you fully and so when the world asks what is the source of your joy or your happiness you look at them it says god in christ reconciling me to himself for the forgiveness of my sins and so when the world asks you what is your hope and despair it is god reconciling myself and the world to himself in christ what is your only comfort in life and death and agony that i body and soul belong to god and he is reconciling me to himself in christ what is your supreme delight that when i am flat on my back incinerated into ashes or buried in a box that god has reconciled in christ me to him oh and so this morning you're invited to a table a ritual to remind you it doesn't say it on our table but this do in remembrance of me that what that a body given and the blood poured god reconciling in christ god reconciling you and i to himself not counting their sins against them hallelujah let's pray father we thank you for your word and then how it is the declaration of the promise that if all are willing that you are able to reconcile the entire world to yourself forgiving all its sin paying all its penalty providing what was necessary to secure the lives of your people not only in this life but for all eternity continue to meet with us and

Speak to us and unfold in us a love that is exclusive and a participation in your life that is fervent we ask these things for Jesus sake amen amen