

Exodus 34:1–9

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[0 : 00] Good morning. It is a joy to be here today and a particular joy to be your pastor.

I want to take for my text today that opening phrase in verse 6, the Lord passed before him, or as the 1611 King James Version puts it, and the Lord passed by.

And the Lord passed by. Given the context of Exodus 32, where we saw Israel's great sin with the golden calf, this passing by of the Lord is perhaps the greatest act of kindness recorded in all the Old Testament Scriptures.

It could have read, and the Lord took them out. Or the Lord himself went around.

It might just as easily have read, and the Lord passed judgment upon. But none of that is there.

[1 : 36] It says, the Lord passed by. In these few words, we have every indication to believe that God was truly willing to persevere with Israel.

That's really the gist of the text before us today. God is willing to persevere with sinners. This God that created us is willing of his own voluntary accord to make a fresh start with us.

I don't know how many of you today know your greatest need. But according to the text today, your greatest need is that the Lord would pass by.

You may not know it. You may not feel it. We may not always understand it. But to have what Moses has here is what we need.

He had asked God to see something of his glory. And God says to him, I will show you my goodness. Just as we have sung, for he is good.

[3 : 07] So too now he comes and makes himself known. Here it is. Right where you can get it.

In God, you have one who is not only willing to reenter into a covenantal relationship with his chosen spouse, Israel, but that is, even though he knows who they are, he is nonetheless willing. The detail of those stone tablets and another trip up the mountain in verses 1 to 4 let us know that the promise Israel needed is the one God intends to give.

Namely, a fresh start with God. You can't get anything else from the first four verses than a knowledge that the promise we need, namely that God will yet be with us, is in these words given.

He said to Moses, cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first and I will write on the tablets which you broke. Be ready by the morning and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai and present yourself to me on the top of the mountain.

[4 : 33] And then with language that brings us right back to Exodus 19 when they first came, when they made their first start with God. He says, No one shall come up with you. No one shall be seen on the mountain.

No flock, no herd, nothing grazing near. All reminiscent of the moment when God took Israel for Himself and gave them His Word.

He had started with them there. And now He is restarting with them after, after the horrific sin committed by them.

The Lord passed by. He gave them a sign of His goodness.

the emphasis of the text. After that that mental evocative sense that God is going to redo what He had once done.

[5 : 33] That He's going to not only give them the promise of the land and the protection over their enemies but His very presence and now in the most intimate of all exchanges in the Old Testament.

He's going to stand and walk right past Moses who's stuck in the cleft of the rock. Many of you are between a rock and a hard place.

May today it be a cleft where the Lord might pass by. The promise we need verses 1 to 4 is met by the passing we long for.

Verses 5 to 7 The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with Him there. You might recall back in verse 21 He had told Moses to stand on the rock but now Moses having left that tent of talking is now on a mountain of meeting and while he is standing the Lord descends and stood with Him there and proclaimed the name of the Lord.

The Lord passed before him and proclaimed the Lord the Lord a God merciful and gracious slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness keeping steadfast love for thousands forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin but who will by no means clear the guilty visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.

[7 : 24] I submit to you that in those words you have the passing by that you long for. Four observations from the center of the text. First just when we expect to get a picture of what God looks like we get instead a proclamation of what God is like.

He wanted to see God instead he is going to hear God. He is looking for an image of God but he gets an address delivered by God.

You do not have here a manifestation of God so much as you have a declaration of his name. It is fascinating. This is not visual.

This is verbal. What are we to make of it? Evidently for Moses to see God meant to hear God. Behold your God. you see him with your ears listening to his word. And for this there is another striking Old Testament parallel with another prophet by the name of Elijah and these two will show their face later in the scriptures on another mountain on which a cloud descended and the Lord in their midst.

[8 : 49] But Elijah also wanted an intimate encounter with God. He needed the Lord to pass by his life. And when he did God didn't show up in an earthquake.

He didn't come with bells and whistles. Dry ice. He didn't come with fire. No candle lit ceremonies under which we bow in the numinous of his presence.

Now the scriptures are clear. You don't worship God in the holiness of beauty. You worship God in the beauty of holiness. And when he came to Elijah he came it says as a still small voice.

Literally a word that when God passed by he does so through word. This is fascinating for in every other ancient religion of Israel's time the gods not only had a name which we'll consider in a moment of Israel's God but they had an icon to go with it.

So you didn't have a god without a name without a visual representation of that god. For Israel though no image is allowed.

[10 : 10] You want to see God? You want his goodness to come by? It will come by in the form of his speech and his word. The implication of the teaching of the text of this first observation is this if you want to see God today if you want him to pass by you today if you want him to be near you if you want to see his glory or his goodness or his life transforming power in your life in light of your sin you need to hear him through a word long ago put down.

These words then are God's words on God. He goes up stands there verse 5 ready to see God and God preaches audience of one.

I didn't know God had churches so small but in this sense it was a member one member church Moses his own private audience with God and God is preaching on God no task too small for him no congregation unwanted for him here it is God preaching to us about God and second this is most important these observations notice how different the Bible's view on God is to the common consensus view that our neighbors or friends or well meaning parents will put upon us the conventional wisdom that's pontificated everywhere you go today is that the God of the Old Testament is a God of wrath and the God of the New Testament is a God of love that's nonsense needs correction look at the content here of what God says about God what does he say how does he lead what's his forward foot

God is merciful and gracious the opening line he's slow to anger he's abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness this is from the Old Testament how in the world we've been led to believe by many people that the Old Testament God is a vengeful judging wrathful God and the God of the New Testament is otherwise is beyond me it's beyond the text this God is a loving God this God extends mercy and grace and forgiveness and patience and kindness and love in the face of people who have taken him for granted I really want you to see that the New Testament writers were much better than the present day readers of what happens to God before and after Jesus just take a look at

Acts 12 next time somebody comes to you or you yourself are wondering if you can accept the God of the Old Testament because you've been told he's such a wrathful God in Acts chapter 12 verses 42 and 43 if I have the right chapter it's just like me to do this to you I just want to see if you actually have your pages turning with me Acts chapter 10 verses 42 and 43 you have a summary of what the apostles thought the Old Testament said about God and what it meant after Jesus as well notice verse 42 here's

[14 : 15] Peter and he commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he that is Jesus is the one appointed by God to be judge of the living and the dead to him notice all the prophets bear witness that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name this is an ironic statement the apostles actually read the Bible in an inverted way from the way we've been taught to read it they think that their role is to proclaim Jesus as what judge so the New Testament record is God now has a king in the world and you ought to repent and live under him they would say that the Old Testament God is demonstrating incredible patience and kindness and waiting and overlooking in other words that the God of the Old Testament or in Acts 10 the way he puts it there the prophets are bearing witness!

that everyone who believes will receive forgiveness of sins through his name first observation on this passing by remember this just when you want a picture of what God looks like the scriptures will give you one of what he is like and then secondly the God of the Hebrews of Israel is the God that we long for a God of mercy and grace and forgiveness and justice for we long for a God of justice too third the topography of this text these verses in the middle of our reading are beyond my wildest hopes concerning what I might actually come to know about

God the things that are said here about God are so elevated so wonderful so worthy of your afternoon meditation this is what he says what does God look like we'll hear these words verse six the Lord the Lord God has a name hear Yahweh do you remember the question that Pharaoh asked Pastor Ney was reminding me again even today of Moses well who is your God and what is his name that I would listen to him well here's the answer the Lord he's the Lord he's the one that makes covenant promises to his people he's the one who is present he's the one who is I am who I am this is the one that transcends time past and present and future this is the one who is always here has been here will be here the

Lord is the one who makes covenantal promises that he really keeps even when the ones he makes them to don't keep theirs and it's because God reveals his glory by his name that we glory in his name that's it he's decided to show you his goodness by revealing his name and therefore we glorify thy name look at the characteristics of God what the ancient Jewish writers would have called the 13 attributes of Yahweh he's merciful and gracious notice there's nothing here about his his his his raw power or his unbridled wrath he's merciful and gracious his mercy and his grace are what you need to pass by your life on this day

I was told a story of an individual who looked out over waters and there were many ships and they wondered if God was really as merciful as to be able to forgive their sin because they alone knew all the things that they had done and so as they're looking out over the waters and all the ships turns to the man next to him and says you know I don't think God could forgive all my sins he can't be merciful to me or gracious to me he won't be capable of demonstrating his love to me because if you loaded my sins on all those ships they would sink to the bottom of the sea so heavy would be their weight the man looked back at me said oh well God's mercy God's grace is as big as the sea it can take all your stuff it can take all your stuff to the bottom and bring you back up into the newness of life do you know that about

[19 : 34] God do you know that he's slow to anger you know it took 430 years before he pronounced judgment on unbelieving Egypt with his wrathful signs and so people will appeal to the plagues on Egypt and say oh I can't handle the old testament God he's a vengeful God he's a wrathful God he actually takes nations out and the actual fact is this he waited 430 years to execute justice on a people that would not bend their knee to his name 430 years you got 430 years of patience for the people driving you nuts have you been offended the way God's been offended slow to anger abounding in hesed as was prayed today hesed steadfast love immovable always abiding never leaving never fading that's

God he'll keep it not only for you but to the thousandth generation I mean it's just stunning he doesn't clear the guilty he's the only God who will one day bring all things into just right alignment praise his name it's interesting to note how often this little text here in verses five through seven is

referred to in Israel's history and to what end the other writers are picking up on it let me just give you a few Nahum the prophet who's pronouncing judgment coming on Nineveh for their centuries long movement away from God opens with these words so that the city would be warned don't forget God does not clear the guilty so these words are used to warn us these words are also used to awaken

God to remember us in our needs Psalm 57 if you need God's help in this hour and you feel overrun by the throes of life these words are what the people of God meditated on these words out in prayer before God to awaken him to his very character oh God be merciful to me be gracious to me they don't only warn us and awaken God to remember us they remind us of the wonder of his love that was the response of reading today from Psalm 103 bless the Lord oh my soul forget not all of his benefits and then it goes on to say he is merciful and gracious in other words the one who is recounting the wonderful works of God in their own life are doing so with these words not only that these words are wooing us after a long season of wayward living it is worthy of your time to put your eyes on Joel chapter 2 it is worthy of your attention on the

Lord's day to read these words and to see them with your own eyes Joel chapter 2 verse 12 even now declares the Lord return to me with all your heart with fasting with weeping with mourning rent your hearts and not your garments return to me the Lord your God for he is gracious and merciful slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love he relents over disaster who knows whether he will not turn and relent and leave a blessing behind him these are the words that a wayward man woman or child here today can pray to God these are the words the prophet puts before a wayward people with the application who will know

I mean you got a wake in your life that is yet rumbling through the waters creating chaos because of your sin who will know if he will leave something in his wake that will show the mercies of his own name in your own life your own relationships in your own home these words even recall for us why Jonah that prophet of old refused to tell other people that God was willing to make a fresh start with them he said I'm not going out there I'm not hitting the street I'm not telling them that you're good because I know as soon as I do that they're going to turn to you what I really want you to do is put your hammer down on this city shows you how far away Moses was Jonah was from the heart of God he used these words because he knew if he hit his streets with the good news of a merciful gracious

[25 : 02] God people might actually turn to him and they did these words warn us they awaken us they remind us they woo us they recall for us they are a!

description of God throughout fourth observation when you come to the New Testament this name of God falls almost completely off I've thought about it this week this phrase about merciful gracious slow to anger abounding in steadfast love which is used repeatedly in the Old Testament suddenly evaporates in the New why is the name of God no longer passing us by as I've thought about it this week perhaps it's because the New Testament writers consider Jesus to be the climactic figure on the stage of human history that in Jesus you have the embodied fulfillment of all these words that in the fullness of time the verbal ultimately gave way to the visual that the world for 33 years was a place where you could see

God that you had flesh not merely a figure of speech that you had word incarnate that you had one who completely embodies mercy grace slowness to anger steadfast love faithfulness the one who would forgive and notice what he forgives iniquity transgression and sin the name that passes by Moses on the mountain in our text gives way to the Nazarene named Jesus in Jesus all the characteristics listed here are etched in his divine interaction with the world in need of God's passing by and yet in him we are told that God forgives sins think of the birth narrative of Jesus Joseph is called to name Jesus Jesus why because he will forgive the people of their sins! even as he is born he is birthed into the characteristics of this exodus material he is birthed under the name of forgiveness and salvation when he entered into his ministry early on he looked at a paralytic and said son your sins are forgiven and that caused the ire of others because they said who can forgive sins but God alone because they knew a text like this but in Jesus you have one who claims to be able to forgive sins in Jesus you have the most amazing grace and mercy of God afforded to you the final full complete restorative redemption of the Lord in the name of Jesus in our text

God abounds in steadfast love in Jesus life he's willing to extend love it's the one named Jesus that the blind man in distress calls out to for divine help Luke records it as he drew near Jericho that is

Jesus a blind man was sitting by the roadside begging and hearing a crowd going by inquired what this meant they told him Jesus of Nazareth is what passing by and he cried out Jesus son of David have mercy on me and those who were in front of him rebuked him but he cried out all the more and this Jesus who was passing by is said by Saint Luke to have stopped and given grace and mercy in birth Jesus embodies these words in life

[29 : 35] Jesus embodied these words in death Jesus embodied the very one who passes before Moses as he hung on the cross did he not say father forgive them for they know not what they do that is God looking bald faced into the eyes of a people who have rejected him and crucified him and says father forgive them and if he is willing to do that for us given who he is who are we to not extend that to others who need the same from us and on the other side of God's eternal nature he is also just he says here he will no means clear the unguilty and in revelation 19 which is not merely just the apocalyptic visions that come to a prophet about

Jesus but in chapter 1 it indicates that this is actually the revelation of Jesus so in other words when you get to revelation 19 and you have that one coming on a white horse in judgment you have the appearance of one who will not clear the guilty John beholds it in a vision and yet I tell you you and I I tell you you and I indeed everyone who has ever lived shall see the man coming on a white horse and in my mind a long black coat executing the righteous judgment of God the promise we need verses 1 to 4 God is a God who makes a fresh start with sinners the passing we desire is actually the person of

Christ in your life look at verses 8 and 9 and then I find my seat the posture that makes God smile here's the posture then this is your response my response our response if you through the power of the Holy Spirit have ears to hear what I've been saying today and Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped and he said if now if I have found favor in your sight O Lord please let the Lord go in the midst of us for it is a stiff neck people and pardon our iniquity and our sin and take us for your inheritance the posture that makes God smile three things he bows his head in worship and he did it quickly he wasn't waiting too many people sit under the hearing of God's word know how they are to respond and decide the leash will be a little longer yet for me quickly when Christ shall come with shout of acclamation and take me home what joy shall fill my heart then I shall bow in humble adoration and there proclaim my God how great thou art don't wait for that day do it this day he bowed his head in worship the second posture that would make God smile that would allow him in sense allow you in a sense to know that you're allowing him to pass by as he asks for pardon notice that he says now go with us because you know we are a stiff neck people so pardon our sin like Moses do you want your own encounter with God's glory do you want some sign that God goes with you are you like Israel in great need of knowing that

God is willing to make a fresh start with you then ask for pardon ask for pardon ask for pardon many in jail and they don't even know it never thought they had to ask for pardon ask for forgiveness ask him I dare you ask him he's merciful gracious forgiving your iniquity your transgressions and your sins your restart with God will not recommence by following external set of rules like stone tablets you decided to pick up again it will happen as the Holy Spirit enters into your life takes over it will happen as you submit your life to him it will happen as you say yes

[35 : 16] I am a stiff neck person pardon my sin please oh God may you mean more to me than all I have bought instead there's only one name under heaven given under men through whom that can happen and it's the name of Jesus and then pardon others ask for pardon extend pardon the Lord's prayer very clear on this forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us very clear very clear you want God's forgiveness for your sins Jesus places it contingently on your forgiveness of the sins of others how you doing with God today show me how you're forgiving others who got in your way he bows in worship he asked for pardon three he requests this is amazing he requests that

Israel would be God's inheritance take us for your inheritance do you see the words there he requests that they would become God's possession the same term is used in Deuteronomy 32 8 and 9 in a material way here it's coming in a figurative manner there the Lord would give the nations their fixed borders their land their possession their inheritance here he's basically saying that God make us the place you decide to dwell in I mean think about that God may I be the terrain in which you live and move and have your being God walk in my garden weed my weeds grow my plants change my life the message on a mountain he passed by

Moses you need him to pass by he will if you have heard his word our heavenly Father we give ourselves to you in fresh ways today in Jesus name amen let's stand and go out with song