

Exodus 33:1–11

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[0 : 00] Good morning and welcome to Holy Trinity Church as we now find ourselves in the second sermon of a summer series that will take us through the end of the book of Exodus.

On the back side of some relational friction, and I'm sure all of us have been there, you're likely to hear somebody ask, okay now, are we alright?

We straight? You know, after what happened and all. We still good? I suppose if I had to put a title on this message today, that would be the title.

We still good? But it's certainly a question anyone in Israel would have posed to God after the dust settled on that golden calf debacle and that burning hot judgment that we read about last week.

All the consequence of their sinful breach of relationship at the base of the mountain. And at the first glance, at least as we pick up the story where we left off last week, it appears that even after the golden calf incident, the relationship between God and Israel, while strained, is on some solid footing.

[1 : 30] In other words, the plan to go up to the promised land is still intact. Take a look at the way it opens. Verse 1, 33, The Lord said to Moses, Depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt.

You can almost sense a little bit of the strain is still present. The people you have brought up. But that said, we still good, God says.

To the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying to your offspring, I will give it. I will send an angel before you and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, the Jebusites.

Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey. A couple of things by way of observation. Even after the golden calf incident, two things become clear in this declaration by God.

First, his past promise of land that was made to the patriarchs is going to be kept. That's what he says.

[2 : 35] Go up to the land. The one that I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. To the one that I said I would give it to you, I will still give it to you.

That promise had actually been made very recently. Back even in chapter 31, verse 18.

He had given them this and they were to set out with it. But not only was the past promise of land still intact after the golden calf.

God's past promise of protection would be honored. I mean, look at that. There in verse 2, I will send an angel before you and I'm going to get it done.

That also had been promised to them back in chapter 23. An angel was going to get the work done on God's behalf. And so, you could state that at this moment, everything seems to be okay.

[3 : 37] Strained but still intact. Yep, we good. But... And then it moves, doesn't it? Right there in the middle of verse 3.

But... Oh, there's the dreaded but. But I will not go up among you. Now this divine reassurances that were given in verses 1 and 2 is coupled with this disastrous reality at the outset of verse 3.

God himself will not go up with them. As he had promised. He made that promise back in chapter 29. Verse 45.

That he would go up with them. In other words, he says, Now that the golden calf thing has come, the land I'll give, the protection I'll afford, but I'm not on this journey any longer.

The God who saved them out of Egypt, the God who spoke to them on the mountain, the God who took them for his own among all the peoples of the earth, that God will do all that he can to help them, but he has no intention of living with them.

[4 : 57] I would guess that even after the reason given at the latter part of that verse, even if you understand the next line in its best light, I'm not sure they would have felt much better.

Notice what he says in verse 3. But I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people. I mean, that's a backhanded compliment as well as you can do it. I'm not going to go because I don't want to have to consume you. Let me see if I can lay that out for you.

That he was in some sense giving them something gracious here, if you can believe it. So, for Israel, God's absence among them, his lack of presence with them, on account of his holiness and their sinfulness, is some measure of grace and provision.

I mean, that's something to consider here. This is something you really ought to ask yourself, okay, when does the pastor take me into this sermon? Well, right here. Right here. There's a lot of people wondering where in the world is God.

[6 : 16] We may even question him, shake our fist at him, wonder why he hasn't showed up for us. All the while, he keeps providing for us. All the while, he keeps protecting us.

And little did you and I know that if he did move in among us, it would be the death of us all. That's worth considering.

The implication. Two promises are kept, but one is going to be annulled. Israel's going to get God's goods, but Israel's not going to get God. They would get his blessings, but not the one through whom all blessings flow.

They'll inherit land, but he won't be there as their lover. As far as comfort goes, it's all going to be good. As far as companionship goes, you've got nothing from me, says God.

I'm gone. I'll give you a life, but you are now disconnected from the source of life. That's it. In a nutshell. Three and a half verses. We all good?

[7 : 23] Yes and no. And no. That's the unsettling issue at stake in chapter 33 and 34. Does sin keep us from knowing God?

That's the question on the table now for Israel. Is the tabernacling of God now an undoable thing? Put differently. Put differently, will sin in the camp override his promise to dwell in our midst? And if not, then how so? Now, look at the reaction of the people. Fascinating. Just as that disastrous reality is revealed in verses 4 to 6, we see the direct response of the people set down in the text.

When the people heard the disastrous word, they mourned. And no one put on his ornaments. For the Lord had said to Moses, say to the people of Israel, you're a stiff-necked people.

If for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So, now, take off your ornaments that I may know what to do with you. Therefore, the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments from Mount Horeb onward.

[8 : 29] Two reactions of the people. They mourned, verse 4 and 5. They removed jewelry from their faces, verse 6. What's the implication? This is an amazing response.

Israel knew now that from this moment on, they needed a fresh start with God. He had already saved them. And they were not only back to the starting line, but in sense, with ground to make up. Before that little chip on their shoe told them they were in the race again. They mourned their sin, which put their relationship in jeopardy.

In other words, for Israel. Get this, not for us. For Israel. Having a relationship with God was still something to be desired.

So much so that they longed for it. And the loss of it was worthy of lamenting over. We've got to stop again.

[9 : 36] I'm bringing you into the text. Is that true for you? Is that true for me? Is that true for us? Is that true for us? After all, we've all lived messy lives.

But what do we do with the fact? Could it be that this is an instance where Israel is actually unlike us in a healthy way? You know, we're always looking at Israel as the problem child.

The folk that got it wrong and thank God we didn't. I'm actually starting to wonder with this mourning, this lamenting, this loss. Maybe we're the problem child.

Maybe Israel's got a couple things to say to you today. I wonder. I wonder. Are we quite content to get hold of whatever God has to offer without a deep-seated need to get hold of God?

Are we content to go on living our lives without God as long as God will be content to give us enough to get on well enough without Him? Do we ever lament the loss of relationship with God the

way we lament the loss of our stuff?

[10:45] Israel, after being told that all the good stuff was still coming, the UPS truck was still on the way, FedEx was out the door, the mortgage lender was going to inherit the land, you were going to get the deed clear and free, yours, your bounty, your provision was going to be extended beyond anything you could imagine.

You were going to get it all, but not get God. How many of us would go, fine with me? It ought not be this way.

I wonder sometimes whether we really understand what we have lost out on when our sin puts our relationship with God in jeopardy.

At this point, though, the text shifts. I mean, you might be saying, thank God it shifts. When do we get out of this paragraph? Well, okay, you're out. It moves from verses 1 to 6, which is about go up to the land, and in 7 to 11, it's this odd paragraph that takes up a concern of going out to the tent. All going up to the land. All going up to the land language subsides. Now we get something about going out to the tent.

[12:20] And here the narrator turns our attention away from the people and on to one person. In other words, a people going up to the land gives way to a prophet going out to the tent.

What's the relationship here? Take a look at how that paragraph opens and how it states itself in the middle and how it closes. Verse 7, 9 and 11.

Verse 7, Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp. And he called it the tent of meeting. Look at what it says about him in verse 9.

When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak with Moses. Look at verse 11. Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend.

When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent. Instead of mourning, Moses simply moves out by way of observation.

[13:30] They mourn, he moves out. And rather than removing jewelry from his face, Moses is said to meet God face to face.

Now what are we to make of all this? There are at least two puzzles, probably more, presented to anyone that's kind of a careful reader of biblical text. And so, I don't want to spend the whole time on it, but it would be unworthy of a preacher not to take a look at them.

One is the item of this tent, the tent. See it there in verse 7? The tent. It's something that he called the tent of meeting.

Now, if you're here this morning and you've never read through Exodus on your own, and you're just coming along week by week to explore how the Christian belief handles these ancient Jewish texts, then you might not be aware that the tent of meeting actually hasn't even been constructed yet.

Moses was given blueprints for the tent of meeting back in Exodus 26. That tent of meeting actually isn't going to be manufactured until chapter 36.

[14:49] So, what are we to make of this? For some, who have looked at these texts in great detail, they begin to wonder if there are various sources at work, like the narrator did his research and was putting things together and drawing from a variety of sources, and this paragraph gets placed in here, which, you know, we all write from a variety of sources, but some even go on then to say that, well, the research notes of this paragraph conflict with the research notes of the previous paragraph, and the guy that put this together didn't really, you know, want to iron out all the editorial problems before he put it to press.

In other words, what we got here is a book that went to press before they actually figured out all the conflicts that were within it. So, talk about the tent here, but we already know that that can't be true, so this chapter is in conflict with that chapter, and all of a sudden, everybody's confidence in the Bible begins to tailspin.

But there are other ways to think about it. We might not have someone here who's just not overly concerned with the right kind of editorial process. It could be Moses' own tent.

In other words, notice he said he called it the tent of meeting. And we also know from chapter 18, if you want to see it, verse 7, when Jethro's around, it's actually, Moses' tent is referred to with a definite article, the tent.

So it could be that Moses just said, y'all are mourning here, I'm moving out. I'm taking the tent, I'm going to call it the tent of meeting. Very much a live possibility, textually, historically, that is a historical question, and it could be that.

[16:39] Others have thought perhaps it's a provisional tent. You know, it's a precursor of the one that gets later. It's like the until then tent. You know, how your car's broken on the side of the road.

You jerry-rig it until you can get the real parts to get it fixed. Here's the jerry-rig tent before the real carburetor arrived. Which, by the way, why do they always take so long to arrive?

I never understand it. Or, some people think it just could be two different tents. Like, there was a tent that the Levites oversaw for the whole sacrificial thing, and there was the second tent that Joshua oversaw, and, you know, there's no conflict there.

I don't really know which is correct, although I certainly don't see any reason on the basis of the tent being here, to think that the writer put something down that must be at odds with what you're reading later on.

But the other puzzle is not so much a historical one, but a literary one. Look at the end there, verse 11. Thus he used to speak to Moses face to face. It's very interesting, given that next week we're going to read verse 20, but he said, you cannot see my face, for no man shall see my face and live.

[17:51] I mean, I can just hear Bob Dylan saying that. But at any rate, if you don't know him, you're not familiar with how he handles that. But no man can see my face and live. So what is it? Which is it?

Did he see him face to face, or did he not see his face? It's just a puzzle in the text, but it's not a historical one. It's a literary one. Face to face, I think, is a figure of speech.

It's an idiomatic expression. It's connected to the idea of location. To talk to somebody face to face is to indicate that you're in the same place. So you write an email at work.

Hey, I'd like to talk about this on email, but this is going to be better discussed when we see each other face to face. What you're really saying is we've got to get in the same place to talk about this. It's an element of location.

It's an idiomatic expression. It's what you say when you say we need a face to face meeting. I think that's what's happening here. So here we have this little text in the narrative that I think fits when we come to understand it.

[19:01] It's contrasting the people and their dislocation with God and Moses who has this unique capacity to remain located with God in preparation for the dialogue that's going to take place next week between Moses and God.

So that's kind of where we are. But what can you take away from this paragraph outside of those puzzles? One, the repercussions that the great sin of the people had upon their relationship with God.

Notice, the people had to go outside the camp if they had any hope of hearing God. You see it in verse 7 and 8? Everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp.

You've got to go out. You've got to go out from the midst of a people that live in rebellion to God if you want to hear from God.

He's going to take you as you are but He's going to put you on your feet. you're going to move. You're going to no longer dwell in the assembly of the sinners.

[20:17] That seems to be what they had to do. If you had any hope of hearing God you had to get out. I don't know if you've ever read Pilgrim's Progress. There's this stunning image at the beginning when he begins to understand that he's dislocated with God through his sin where he flees the city and he's got his everyone's saying where are you going man?

Where'd you get religion all of a sudden? Come on back and he's got his hands and his ears going no I've got to get out of here. I've got to get out of here. If the people wanted to hear from God they had to get out of the middle of the sinful people.

Period. You may not like it but that's what they had to do. The second thing here verses 8 and 10 they would rise up but only from afar in their effort to worship God. So their worship was a distant worship.

Whenever Moses went up to the tent all the people would rise up and each would stand at his tent door and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent and the pillar of cloud it would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent and the Lord would speak with

Moses and when all the people saw the pillar of the cloud standing at the entrance of the tent all the people would rise up and worship.

Two times they would rise up the implication they would worship but their worship was from afar. Put differently Israel now knows God only from afar.

[21 : 47] Moses knows him as a friend. Israel worships from a distance. Moses worships him sitting in the same room.

We now know that the Lord won't go up to be with them but he will come down to meet with him. We know that God is willing to protect people God is willing to provide for people and at the same time refrain from giving his presence to people.

Hey, that's the state of the world in which we live right now. You gotta get a hold of this. You're angry at God but the reality is God is providing God is protecting and God is withholding his presence.

Why? He's a holy God and you haven't yet learned to mourn the right things or walk out of the right things find yourself under the right word and so you say where are you?

And he says exactly. You don't want me but when you're ready to open your door to all the holiness that I want to bring on in all the glory that I want to do you're ready to turn over a new leaf you're ready to turn over a new forest when you're ready when you understand that your greatest loss is that you don't have me rather than that you don't have anything else when you understand that when you lament that when you mourn that when you own that well then maybe you'll be willing to walk on out lay on down and ask for mercy at the tent of meeting the repercussions of a lost relationship with God I almost feel like this little paragraph is a pictorial flannel graph image of the world in which we live he's over there but but the question is am I going to leave off with my life as is to get where he is you know we always say you know

[23 : 57] God's going to come to you okay I get it but according to the text you got to get your way to God and that's going to come at some cost that's the pattern really for the rest of the Bible's teaching now this is the second thing I want to say by implication and you know I'm getting near to being done because I know it's hot and some of you are like that's too long for me but at any rate here it is later in Israel's history and again if you're coming to church week by week and I know many of you are trying to sort out how Christianity puts the whole Bible together what's going to happen later in the Bible story in Leviticus is that there is going to be a sacrificial substitute for people's sin that isn't only made in the camp but one that goes outside the camp in other words God is sending the sin away through this provisional sacrifice really fascinating in the New Testament you think of Jesus who in Hebrews 8 it says he actually went into the true tent when he was on the cross and we know that the cross was at Golgotha and that the Golgotha is in sense outside the city and that he goes outside as a mediating presence for the sin of the city and dies a death where the glory of God comes down upon him meets with him even though he felt abandoned in regard to all things experiential and he's a provision for sin in Hebrews 13 it actually says that just as Jesus went outside the camp you and I have to go outside the camp to be with him that's what the Bible so the whole Bible is trying to give you an image that you are really dislocated from God that that is your greatest need and it isn't as if you're Moses and the person you got relational conflict with is the people no no no it's not Moses me when is the one who offended me going to get on out here and get right with me no we are all in the city and Moses says I'm out of here and Jesus says

I'm out of here can't do it it's not Moses me it's Moses he Jesus goes outside the camp Jesus meets with God Jesus is a provision for us and Jesus bears the reproach of the people the whole Bible begins to unfold this and then in Revelation 14 now you don't want to go there but wow Revelation 14 the very end gives this ironic description that if you don't get outside the camp now to Jesus for salvation guess what's going to happen when the trumpet blows Jesus is going to take you outside the city for judgment so move now or move later walk the sawdust trail or be part of that fiery chaff at the end of the age well let's let me let me find my way to my seat the only way for you to go up to the promised land is to go out to be with

Jesus that's one so maybe that's you today give your life to Jesus two learn to lament your real loss that would be revolutionary for the church today this would completely reorient our lives if God would matter for many of us for the first time that we would see God as as something of significant and something that matters rather than God as a means for what we think matters have we ever learned to lament what it is we've really lost three recognize your need to someone for someone to intercede for you I know that relationally and in friction we know the other people need an

intercessor but recognize your need to be part of Israel by way of community that you need an intercessor for you that you need

Jesus four learn what it means to go outside the camp now what do I mean by this someone says you know what okay so we came to church we go to Jesus we go to Jesus give my life to Jesus Jesus okay all right now let me let me give you some more Jesus not enough for you to leave the camp is to leave off with sinning take that home take that to work take that Monday to Friday take that in this life not merely looking to Jesus for the life to come leave off with sinning it's having a disastrous effect on our relationship with God not only leave off with sinning but look up to the Savior and then for many of us begin to embrace the reproach which will inevitably come with his name we good we good we still good heavenly father these ancient Jewish texts placed in holy writ for the welfare of the church today help us to go up to the promised land but oh lord help us to get you help us to go out from the world that has been displeasing to you and bring ourselves to the foot of the cross in Christ's name amen