

Exodus 33:12–23

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[0 : 0 0] we can only imagine what went through the mind of Moses as he made his way outside of Israel's sin-laden camp on his way to what I would call the tent of talking.

He must have been aware, no doubt, that from afar, all the eyes of Israel were upon him, each one standing, as the text read last week, indicates at the entrance of their own tent.

Tents which presently endured only through divine mercy. More accurately, every tent in Israel would more rightly be called a makeshift abode of divine displeasure.

They had just come off the golden calf incident. These dwellings had just been overrun by death and by divine plague on a day when God's burning anger burned hot and 3,000 died by the sword of the Levites and many more, according to the end of chapter 32, by the plague which broke out in their midst.

So these remaining tents of Israel are standing upright on poles like many blackbirds which somehow escaped Yahweh's raging, unbridled wrath.

[1 : 4 1] And there they are. Not even the number that they had been just a couple of days before. Many, if not all, tents no longer housing loved ones who have now died.

And their eyes are upon Moses as he leaves the camp to enter into his own tent of talking. I can envision them, it says, looking down in worship.

In my sense, humble, terrified fear. Only Moses alone makes his way to the tent.

The one outside the camp upon which you could almost envision a divine cloud now descending. And on foot he is approaching, even as God's glory cloud is falling.

And then seamlessly God Himself passing in the midst of the cloud through that canvas-like curtain into the tent.

[2 : 5 6] And now here's Moses at the door itself. We're not told if Moses, who was an advocate and emissary of the people, felt fear in his attempt to bear the reproach of them before a holy God.

But I've wondered this week if the words that were penned by Rabbi Jachanen Benzaki shortly before his death capture the mind of Moses at the moment when his hand would have reached out and pulled back the hanging curtain, which alone separates him from the presence of a holy God.

These are the words. Were I going only to greet the face of a king of flesh and blood, his anger, were he angry with me, would be for this world only.

His chains, if he cast me in prison, only for this world. If he killed me, I should die to this world only. And perchance I could soothe him with words or bribe him with gold.

But now I go to greet the face of the king of kings, the holy one. Blessed is he. And if he be angry, his wrath embraces both this world and the world to come.

[4 : 1 8] And him I may in no wise move with words nor bribe with gold. That's the scene set before us for the reading of the text.

And what we understand is that once inside, Moses did not die. In fact, what we have before us this week and next week is a record of a conversation that took place between God and Moses as one friend speaks to another.

All the while, the people, in humble fear, having buried recently so many thousands of their own.

So here it is, the two of them. God, the creator of the heavens and the earth, condescended in some form behind a tent of talking.

And Moses finds his seat. And what is it that Moses wants? What does he want to get out of God? Two things.

[5 : 40] You'll see it today in our text. First, first, to know from God that Israel could still count on his presence.

And then secondly, to experience for himself an encounter with God's glory. That's what put him behind the curtain.

That's the simplicity of the movement of our text this morning. In verses 12 to 17, you are going to see, can Israel count on God's presence?

And in 18 to 23, can Moses have an encounter with God's glory? And you might wonder, of all the things going on in the world today, why we would take ourselves back all these hundreds of thousands of years to consider Israel's history and this encounter.

But I believe that when you see what transpires, it provides a pattern for us because your question is no different than their need.

[6 : 46] Can you count on God's presence going forward? Given what you know of your life and the wake of sin that is behind you.

Not only can you count on his presence going forward, but what about now? What about today? Any hope of experiencing God's glory.

Take a look at 12 to 17. Moses, looking to find out if Israel could count on God's presence. Verse 12 and 13 reads, Moses said to the Lord, See, you say to me, bring up this people, but you've not let me know whom you will send with me.

You've said, I know you by name and you have also found favor in my sight. Now, therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight.

Consider, too, that this nation is your people. Now, fascinating here, a rather awkward and circuitous way of speaking.

[7 : 58] It's a kind of a tough way to get around to your first ask. But when you consider the background, previous chapter, chapter 32, verse 10, and verse 34, Moses' words here make sense.

Verse 10 of chapter 32, God had just told Moses on that day, Now, therefore, let me alone that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them in order that I may make a great nation of you.

So what God had communicated to Moses, left in the mind of Moses, is it possible that he is going to annihilate all of them and bring me alone into the land and through me a new nation?

Also, verse 34, of the same chapter, God had said, But go now, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken you.

Behold, my angels shall go before you nevertheless in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them. So he is really wondering how many of us are rolling into the land?

[9 : 07] We're all setting out. But can they count on your presence? And so look at his conversation now with God. Bookended his concern that God's presence would go with the people.

Verse 12, See, you say to me, bring up this people. But I'm not really sure who among them you're sending with me. Or look at the very end of the same opening stanzas of Moses' words to God.

He says, Consider too that this nation is your people. You keep calling them my people. But God, they're your people. This is his concern. Can the people of God count on your presence given their sin?

He understands that he's received God's favor. That's all the middle section there.

You told me you know me by name. You've told me that I have favor in your sight. And if I have found favor, well, show me your ways.

[10 : 15] What's going on here? And remember them, please, oh God. He's like an insecure diplomat.

A tepid emissary. He's kind of out of his depth before a foreign power. He's not quite sure how to ask it straightforward. He's likely going back to all of these things.

And at first glance, when you look at verse 14, even though his ask of God wasn't real clear, awkward as it is, it almost looks in the English text as if his tact appeared.

You know, and that's what they say about diplomacy. Kind of you walk your way around to stuff tenderly and maybe you get what you want. Verse 14 says, and he said, that is God, my presence will go with you and I will give you rest.

And at first I thought, there it is. God has promised his abiding presence even though they've sinned. But unfortunately, at closer look, it's a second person singular.

[11 : 26] Not plural. In other words, God says, my presence will go with you, Moses, and I'll give you rest. So Moses really hasn't gotten what he wants from God on the basis of verse 14.

There's no guarantee at this point in the tent of talking that a deal got made between the prophet trying to mediate relationship between God and a sinful following people.

And so Moses, you know, that said he was a heavy-tongued kind of guy early on in Exodus 3, in his kind of heavy-tongued diplomatic way, he kind of conversationally keep moving.

He doesn't have what he wants. And so he now is going to keep the pressure on God. He wants God to promise him that Israel, not just himself, can count on his presence going forward.

So take a look at how he links himself to the people and eventually how he links God's reputation to the people. Verse 15, and he said, that is Moses, well, if your presence won't go with me, well, don't bring us up from here.

[12 : 52] For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? I love that line. They are what's on his mind. Is it not in your going with us so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth?

Moses is pressing the point. He wants a word from God that Israel can count on his presence. And finally, there you have it, the clear indication in verse 17 that his diplomacy, his mediation, his desire to have God stay with His people in the midst of their sin.

Verse 17 seems to work. And the Lord said to Moses, this very thing that you have spoken, I will do. But notice the reasoning. For you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.

In other words, God says, I will do this for the people because you have my favor and I know you by name. They will have my presence because you have my favor.

That's the pattern right there. It's a clear indication. Not only that Israel can count on God's presence, but now you know why. Moses gets what he wants, but it's because of Moses is who he is.

[14 : 24] God's logic is interesting. He promises to be present for the people because of the favor he has on Moses.

Two things that this means then for Israel. One thing it means for you and me. You ready? Here it is. Two things that this means for Israel. First, by way of context, which we're going to see this summer, it means the tabernacle can get built.

If you've ever read Exodus, you've probably wondered, why in the world do you get all these chapters 25 and following that give the blueprints of the tabernacle and then you're separated by the golden calf through chapter 34 and then you get all the repetition that the calf tabernacle actually gets made.

Well, here's the reason. Because the tabernacle represented the presence of God. And that deal wasn't confirmed until now. So now that this has happened, that will occur.

God's word to Moses here in a sense effectuates, brings about all of chapter 35 to 40. Forgiveness is really extended.

[15 : 32] Relationship with God is really repaired. In other words, the work of the tabernacle is going to happen. That's the implication for Israel.

Another implication for Israel though is that God, in getting God's presence, they literally get God's face. I want you to see this. This goes all the way back to verse 14 with what He had promised Moses in particular.

And He said, My presence will go with you. Literally, My face. My face goes with you. And now it means that for Israel, they receive in God's presence.

Another way to think about it, what do you have when you have God's presence? You live before His face. Let me see if I can look at this a little bit.

To have God's presence is to have God's face. To have God's presence is to have God's eyes. To have God's presence is to have God's ear.

[16 : 42] To have God's presence is to be at God's table. When my children were little, and they are no longer. There were times where I'd sit at the head of the table and all five of them around, and I'd say, Now, before I pray and thank God for this food, I'm your Father.

I want you to look me in the eye. And you know, they had to do it because they were little. I haven't tried it recently. We'll see if it still works. I'd just tell them I want to look you in the eye.

I want you to look, I want to look you all in the eye. And I'd go around the table and I'd look them in the eye just solidifying this relationship between a father and his children.

I wanted to experience with them the joy of our relationship. Conversely, and this is true in any family, think about it, not just family, relationship. When you don't have eye contact, you may not have presence.

When a parent has to say to a child, Hey, sweetie, of course, you know, I don't know if you say that or not, but if a parent does, Hey, get your head up. Look me in the eye on this.

[17 : 50] I'm talking to you. What they're trying to say is face-to-face. Relationship is looking in the eye. This is one of the amazing things, and aside, totally, I ought to get, I shouldn't even do it, but I will.

Christianity, by nature, is a socialization process. I've seen people come to Christ and all of a sudden, for the first time in their life, when they're carrying on a normal conversation with someone, they're actually looking at the person more than they're looking at the floor.

That ought to happen. The more you know God, the more you understand relationships, the more willing you are to live face-to-face. Now, Israel, here's Israel, eyes down, fearful before God, and what God has basically said is, hey, let me take you by the cheeks, Israel.

Let me throw your eyes heavenward. When you have me, you have my face. Wow. Think of it in a spousal relationship.

Think of it in the most intimate of all relationships physically. Face-to-face. Eyes-to-eyes.

[19 : 09] Unhurried. Quiet. Gaze. Upon the other's face. is in many respects the most intimate expression of union with one another.

And it's why everything that moves away from face-to-face is further and further debased. God says, you'll have my face.

You'll have me. You'll have me. This is what God promises to Moses. He's going to give it to Israel even in all her sin.

I don't know if this has fallen on you the way it fell on me. But those are two implications for Israel. Here's the implication for us. Not just by way of context or by way of content what they're going to get, but by way of Christian fulfillment the pattern is here.

Just as Israel was promised the presence of God because God looked on Moses with favor and he knew his name.

[20 : 31] So too you can be rightly related to God not because you cleaned yourself up. not because you looked all presentable but because he has favor on his son the Lord Jesus Christ and because he knows his name and he has his favor.

I think of Luke 2 those early moments even when Jesus was a boy it says he was growing up in the favor of God and man. We do not have God's favor but we have one who does.

How do you get to where you're going? How will you know God's presence goes with you from this day? Given who you are how can you get your head up and experience the joy of relationship?

It is because of the Lord Jesus Christ he has gone outside and sat with God and made provision for sin and because God is pleased with him all those who place their trust in him grab hold of him stand in the very presence of God alongside him.

And so we look up into the face of God with our arm around our older brother Jesus and probably standing a little bit behind his shoulder. Oh I hope your heart gets it.

[22 : 14] It's okay in Jesus to look up again into the eyes of God to glory in his acceptance. This is what it means when it talks about learning to gaze on his beauty.

again. What's that chorus?

Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace.

Think of the psalmist David perhaps reflecting on these very things.

Hear oh Lord when I cry aloud be gracious to me and answer me you have said seek my face my heart says to you your face Lord do I seek hide not your face from me turn not your servant away in anger oh you who have been my help cast me not off forget forsake me not oh God of my salvation teach me your way oh Lord lead me on a level path give me not up to the will of my adversaries I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living let me put it to you real clear Israel went into the tent to see if there was anything he could do to get a promise from God that Israel would have his presence

[24 : 14] Jesus went into the true tent and gave absolutely everyone access to the ongoing face of God through a perfect atoning sacrifice and all you've got to do is go to him in faith and ask him to bring you into the presence of the father the text moves and while you know me I could preach forever and it's father's day I might just take a little liberty but I don't think I will but the text moves from his first request 12 to 17 considering whether or not he has God's presence for Israel to now and oh Lord he basically asked may I have an encounter with your glory verse 18 Moses said please show me your glory and God said I will make all my goodness pass before you and I will proclaim before you my name the Lord and I will be gracious to whom

I will be gracious and show mercy on whom I shall mercy but he said you cannot see my face for man shall not see my face and live and the Lord said behold there's a place by me which you shall stand on the rock and while my glory passes by I will put you in the cleft of the rock and I will cover you with my hand until I pass by then I will take away my hand and you shall see my back but my face shall not be seen this wonderful paradox is going on in the scripture as as God through the spirit condescends to human language to help us in our relationship with God in one sense Israel is going to live in the presence of God's face but in another sense there's a lot more to it than that in fact if any of us were to see God face to face it would undo us I mean I love I love Joan Osborne for her for her wit but I wonder if she really got what she wanted if she'd be able to stand and sing if

God had a face what would it look like and would you want to see this idea of seeing the very presence of God I guess historically the only way I could put his request here is in the terms of what what people talk about when they talk about something called the beatific vision there's a history a school of thought that the beatific vision was to actually see God's face fully unvarnished in all his glory and that was something that's really reserved for after you die in 1929 in a wonderful book that I've read Kenneth Kirk in the Bampton lectures he does a whole book on how history has understood the beatific vision but he puts the the goal of it this way he captures the essence of it this way the sight of an earthly king is an object of desire to all men everyone in his capital longs to catch even a glimpse of his beauty the magnificence of his apparel the glory of his purple the excellence of his pearls the comeliness of his diadem the carnal men desire to see the glory of the earthly king but what of those upon whom has fallen the dew of the spirit of life and the

Godhead smiting their hearts with a divine passion for Christ their heavenly king how much more are they bound fast to that beauty to that ineffable glory to the unspeakable comeliness the unimaginable wealth of Christ the eternal king the desire to obtain those unspeakable blessings which by the spirit they see now only in a mirror that's what that's what Moses wanted knowing that Israel was going to have God's presence he's like can I encounter your glory I'm glad they've got it going forward give it fully to me now you know what glory means there's two aspects to the word it's it's the weightiness of the object the glory of an object is its weight let me see the full unhidden weight of God and but it's not only weight it's the it's that which emanates from an object that is its glory so so you could speak of the sun as the glory of what we have here but it's also the light that's emanating from the sun that's the glory that's what

Moses wants to see he basically says I want you now he's like it's like the fourth century hermit Macedonius who went out into the desert to be with God and someone saw him and said what are you out here doing and he goes I'm hunting hunting he says I'm hunting for God and I yearn to capture him my desire is to enjoy him I shall not cease from this my hunting that's that's Moses Moses and Macedonius I want God I said this last week what would happen to us today if God mattered if it did you would be ultimately concerned with whether or not you have his presence going forward if it did your heart would begin to grow in a desire to see more of him and that's

[30 : 27] Moses he wants them all right now you gotta love Moses I guess he's not like most of us he's like David though he's like anyone who begins to see that God does matter but notice what God does God trades out his glory for his goodness he says I'll make all my goodness pass before you I can't I can't give you all my weight you can't handle my weight you can't handle my outshining I'll give you some of my goodness in fact look at the goodness that will pass before him it's his name to see God's glory is to be associated in somehow coming to an understanding of his name the Lord and then he says I'll be gracious to whom I'll be gracious I'll show mercy to whom I show mercy and I think there it is how do you know God how do you see God what is it of God that we would see and be able to hold on to

God is a God of grace God is a God of mercy you got all those people back at the tent wondering whether they're next to go and the word that comes back is I've been with God and if you want to see God know that he's a God of grace and a God of mercy many of you this morning that's that's the thing you need of God's glory you don't need me to pull these curtains back and show some dry ice on a Sunday morning to move you and manipulate you through some experiential thing you need his name you need to know he's God of grace he's God of mercy that's who he is that's why the new testimony epistles when they write to the newly converted people of God always open with what grace and mercy to you they're basically saying I'm giving God to you I want God on you grace and mercy to you in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

I'll put it to you this way you can't get any closer to God today than through a fixed grasp of faith in Jesus he is all of grace to you he is all of God's mercy to you and when you grab that in faith you have God you don't need some audible word coming through the ceiling Moses wanted an experience God said well I'll give you a word grace mercy Yahweh well what do you do with that I'm going to close the New Testament develops this theme as you knew I would tell you it does there's a time in history where God takes on human flesh only for 33 years that's it however long the world is I don't know but he did that outshining thing veiled in flesh thing 33 years you could have seen him face to face you could have you just lived at the wrong time although even if you lived then you probably wouldn't have recognized him because he covered it all up big time came in quiet came in real quiet

John 1 14 only on the back side only after he'd already left and gone back into heaven did they start to realize who it was that had been walking among him not while he was with him but on the back side upon reflection one who had been there said and the word became flesh and dwelt among us that's tabernacled among us and we have seen his glory that's what Moses wanted to see glory as of the only son from the father full of grace and truth for from his fullness we have all received grace upon grace for the law was given through Moses grace and truth came through Jesus Christ no one has ever seen God the only God who is at the father's side he has made him known that was beautiful well I'm done so let me ask you the questions do you know the basis upon which you can have

God's presence going forward first of all I'm telling you this morning you can know if he looks on you through the one upon whom he has already had favor that's where you go can you encounter God's glory yes you can but not fully not till we see him face to face but you can encounter him through his goodness you can encounter him through his grace you can encounter him by giving your life to Christ and your ways to him and he will continue to make himself known Philip says to Jesus show me the father and Jesus says Philip are you really going to ask me to show you the father do you not yet know that if you have seen me you have seen the father turn your eyes upon

[36 : 35] Jesus look full in his wonderful face the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace that's as close as Jesus brings us to something to look at the Lord's table he wants you to see that and remember him he wants you to feed on that and be strengthened by him and so I invite everyone here who is resolved to find favor with God by attaching themselves to the name of Jesus to come today and to be strengthened by him in faith if you are not trusting

Jesus then this table will mean nothing to you so you'll just have to sit it out and think about this question if not through the death of Christ then on what grounds do you think you can be brought near for he is holy and unwilling to pardon in accord with your own efforts Paul in the letter to the Corinthians provides the instructions which we normally read he says for I received from the Lord what I delivered to you that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks he broke it and said this is my body which is for you do this in remembrance of me in the same way also he took the cup after supper saying this cup is the new covenant in my blood do this as often as you drink it in remembrance of me

I'm going to ask you if you would like to receive the Lord's supper to be strengthened in your faith to just find your way to the center aisle there'll be two lines you'll be able to carve off to either if if