

Moses Pleads for God's Presence

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[0 : 00] Well, let's turn now to the passage we read in Exodus chapter 33, looking at verses 12 to 23, that final half of the second half of the chapter.

Exodus 33 and verse 12. The passage really is about Moses pleading with God, and the central theme in it is the presence of God.

Now the background to it is obviously the previous chapter and the way in which Israel committed that great sin against God in fashioning this golden calf as an idol for themselves.

The aftermath of that we see the wrath of God, the displeasure of God, and of Moses as well. And you know yourselves the incident very well, and how the Lord said as a result of that, that he was not going to go up with the people or amongst the people.

That he would send an angel before them, but he himself would not go. Because sin, of course, distorts our relationship with God. And what the previous part of this chapter 33 is to do with verses 7 to 11, where you find an emphasis on this tent of meeting.

[1 : 26] Scholars have divided as to whether this was in fact a different tent to the one described in Exodus as the tabernacle, which was in the midst of the camp and the people camped around it, or whether this was in fact a second smaller tent that Moses made at this particular occasion or before the main tabernacle was finished.

But in any case, the emphasis in it is that God is now separated. There's a distance between himself and the people due to their sin. And therefore he's not represented as being in the midst of the people, the way the tabernacle represented him in the midst of the people.

And he himself by the glory cloud above the mercy seat in the very innermost part of the tabernacle. That's not what's emphasized here. It's a tent outside the camp.

It's something they've got to travel to and come to Moses. But of course it also means something else that despite their sin and for all the grievousness of their sin and for all the fact that God has separated himself at a distance from them, he's not cut them off altogether.

Moses is the mediator between God and the people. And in that way, he stands as a representative in the Old Testament or a type as we usually call it or a portrait of Jesus, of Christ as the mediator, who stands between a sinful people and a holy God and who because of him, the people can say that they are not entirely cut off from God forever.

[3 : 02] Moses, you see, in this tent that he pitches and goes out to and where the glory of the Lord, the pillar of cloud comes to stand at the entrance of the tent when Moses goes up and the people worship that is in that, in this passage 7 to 11 and the situation it's in in the chapter there.

It's just slotted in there so that we can see that God is telling them something by this. He's saying to them, yes, your sin is grievous. It's hurt me. It's so grievous that I'm not going to go up with you now in the journey between here and the promised land.

But I haven't dismissed you altogether. And I'll come to you through Moses. I speak to him face to face and he will divulge to you what I have to say.

And so Moses comes with that background to plead with God. He comes with three particular pleas in this passage from verse 12 to the end of the chapter.

We're looking at it and breaking it up in that way. The first plea and God's reply, verses 12 to 14. The second plea and God's reply, verses 15 to 17.

[4 : 14] And the third plea and God's reply in verses 18 to 23. Let's look at the first plea and God's reply, verses 12 to 14. Now here's Moses coming with his first plea.

He says to the Lord, remember the background. He's saying, see, you're saying to me, bring up this people. But you have not now let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, I know you by name.

And you have also found favor in my sight. He begins by a reference to the formidable task that God has given them. To actually lead these people safely through the desert onto the land of promise.

And Moses sets that before the Lord in such a way here as is more or less saying to the Lord, I cannot do this without you.

I cannot bring these people up. I cannot lead these people from this point to the land of promise that you've promised them. Even if an angel goes up, it's not going to be enough, Lord.

[5 : 19] You have to go with me. You have to be in our midst. If we won't have you with us, with me, then don't take us up from here. We'll see that in the next plea.

Moses knew that he needed more than an angel. Great though an angel would be, even the highest angel is not God. And what Moses knew he needed was God.

And for his own leadership and for his relationship with the people and for the people themselves in the relationship with him and with God. They needed and he needed the very presence of God.

And nothing less than that would do. And so it is with you and with me as well. Of course you need your Bible. And you need church services. And you need all the external things of religion.

And you need the way in which all of these things are, if you like, mediated to you through the means of grace as we call them.

[6 : 23] And you need all of these things in your possession. And you have all of these things in your possession. But there are no substitutes for God. We cannot make it without God. We will not have a successful journey without God.

Without God's presence. Without God at the very heart of our lives. Whatever role we have in the church, even if it's not a leadership role, we cannot manage it without God.

And the more we know God and the more we have God evident and shown to be at the heart of our lives. The more prepared and the more equipped we are for whatever task it is we have in the church of God.

Is that not your own priority today? Is that not your own concern? Is that not what you're putting ahead of everything else? Is that not your plea as well as you follow Moses here saying, look, you've given me this task.

It's an important task. It's a privilege. A task that you have allotted to me. But Lord, how can I do it without you? I need you in this.

[7 : 29] I need your presence. And you see he says, I know you by name and you have also found favor in my sight. He's putting before God what is already the case.

And what he's saying is, Lord, seeing it as the case, you've said this, that you know me by name. You know me so personally. You know me in such a particular intimate relationship with me as a friend.

And I have found your favor. Your grace has come to rest upon me. He's using, you see, that as arguments for what he's pleading for.

The fact that he knows God so well. The fact that God has done this for him. That God has brought him into this relationship with himself. The fact that he knows the favor of God to have come towards him and rest upon him.

The grace of God. He's using that as arguments in this plea. As if he's saying, Lord, seeing this is in fact what you say about me.

[8 : 34] This is what is true. Let that be the ground of my approach to you. There's a lot in that.

That we haven't time to go into. But the presence of God is never detached from the Lord knowing us by name.

And from the Lord's favor coming to be upon us. How do we come to know the presence of God? It is by being in relationship with God. In friendship with God.

Now it is God who brings that about. It's God's grace and God's undeserved favor that brings us into that. But there is the very core and substance of a Christian's life.

It's not simply a matter of knowing the presence of God. But it's knowing the presence of God through being in a right relationship with him. And through that nearness.

[9 : 29] It's such a wonderful phrase that, isn't it? God saying about Moses, I know you by name. What can be more intimate, more precious, more personal than that?

And isn't that really for yourself today as a Christian? Isn't that something that really thrills your heart that God can say, I know so and so by name.

I have come into a personal, friendly, intimate relationship with her or with him. And I delight in that. What else is going to give us delight?

Like this relationship with God. This personal, this friendship, this intimate relationship. Through God's grace, through God's favor.

God coming to know us by name. We'll see later on that Moses speaks about the name of God. And the name of God being revealed to Moses.

[10 : 42] And the connection there is there between the Lord knowing Moses by name. And Moses knowing the Lord by name. The Lord's name. That will come up later on. But that's what really our heart should be set upon as well.

And our hope based on these things. The grace of God. The favor of God. God knowing us by name. This personal relationship with God. And this wonderful emphasis on knowing God as our God.

And he then goes on, if that's the case or since this is the case. Now he says, please show me now your ways. That I may know you in order or continue to find favor in your sight.

And consider too that this nation is your people. He ends the first plea with this. He says, show me now your ways. It's literally your way. And what he means by that is more than just his own personal relationship with God for its own sake.

What he means here is, show me your way for these people. Now you see that's so important to Moses. When he's pleading again for God's presence to remain with them.

[11 : 56] To go with them. He's pleading this against the background of what we read earlier in the chapter. The Lord had said to Moses, say to the people.

You are 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. And that really locked itself into Moses' mind.

God saying, that I may know what to do with you. And it's as if Moses is saying, Lord, have you decided what to do with these people now? Show me now your way for them.

Tell me what your intention is for them. So that I can carry out my leadership in the way that I must. He's pleading with God to reveal more of what he's going to do with the people.

What their future is. What their prospects are. And it's so important to him that he adds this. Consider too that this nation is your people.

[13 : 00] Aren't there times when you come before God? With some uncertainty. With some disquiet in your mind.

Some things happen between you and God that brings your relationship with him into some sort of question on your own part. But then you go to God's promises.

You go to God's commitment to his promises. That all those that have his favor will be indeed his people forevermore. And that he will be their God. And that's what Moses is pleading.

Now he's saying to God, is this not the case? That these people are your people? Have you not said that they're your people? Have you not said that they would actually remain your people? That you would be their God?

Is this not the heart of your covenant with them, Lord? Consider this now. That this people is indeed your people. This nation is your people.

[14 : 03] And here is God's reply. He said, my presence will go with you. And I will give you rest.

And that's for Moses himself particularly, personally. It's a very personal reply to Moses for his own benefit, first of all. Then he'll tell them something else for the benefit of the people, too.

After Moses has prayed specifically for them. But that's how the first plea is answered. I will go with you. My presence will go with you. And I will give you rest. And that's an assurance for Moses.

My presence does not mean the presence of a special angel. It means God himself. God's heard him. God's responded. And he's saying, my presence will go with you.

Second plea, verses 15 to 17. And Moses said to him, if your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.

[15 : 06] Notice the way that that verse includes me and us. Just read it again and see how these two words make all the difference. He said to him, if your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here.

In other words, what Moses is saying is, if your presence is not given to me as the leader, if you will not go with me, if your presence does not accompany me, if I don't have yourself, then there's no point in the people going up from here.

Because Moses, with the presence of God, is endowed to be the leader that he must be for the people. And Moses, without the presence of God, does not have that endowment, does not have that ability.

On his own, or even with an angel, it's not the same. And what he's saying is, don't bring us up from here. If your presence does not go with me.

In other words, he's saying, if you've chosen me to be their leader, and if you don't assure me that your presence will go with me, how can I be their leader? How can I go without your presence?

[16 : 23] And for every person in leadership in the church, that is really such an important emphasis. Along with what's going to come later when Moses, in the third plea, says, show me please your glory.

For every person that's in a leadership role in the church of God. Whether ministers or elders. But they are particularly the ones in leadership in the church.

Leadership in the sense of God giving them a position in which they exercise spiritual rule in his church. It's absolutely crucial for us that we know this for ourselves.

If your presence does not go with me, don't bring us up from here. It's really saying to us, don't try and be a leader in God's church without his presence.

Don't try and carry out the role of leadership without the presence of God in your life. You can't do it. It's just impossible. And that's something that we always have to apply to ourselves.

[17 : 29] But of course, it's also to an extent true of every Christian, of everybody in the church, that wants to serve the Lord and wants to serve the Lord effectively. How do you serve the Lord effectively?

You don't do it without his presence. Without knowing that he's with you. Without knowing that he is actually there himself. Equipping you and encouraging you. And accompanying you and assuring you.

And reassuring you. And forgiving you. And re-establishing you as he did with Peter. It's so important that we know God himself so centrally in those issues.

But you see then, he goes on to speak about the distinctiveness of God's people. He says, How shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people?

Is it not in your going with us? So that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth. Wonderful words.

[18 : 30] What is it that makes the people of God a distinct people? You can answer that in different ways. People will say, well, such and such a person or such and such a group of people, they're so zealous for the Lord.

They do so much for the Lord. They are so committed to attending church services. Is that what makes us distinct? Is it how often we actually pray that makes us distinct?

Is it the fact that we're not Muslims that makes us distinct? Well, some of these factors will obviously come into what makes God's people distinct.

But there is one thing above everything else that makes the people of God distinct from every other people. And it is this. It's the presence of God in their midst.

There's no other people in the world anywhere, in any other religion, despite what Muslims will actually, and others will claim, there is no other people in the face of the earth that have this truth about them, that they have God himself with them and in their midst.

[19 : 42] Is it, he says, not in this, in your going with us, that we are distinct? And that's still the mark of God's people today.

The mark of God's people. There are so many ways of answering the question, why did Jesus die and was he raised again from the dead? So many ways to answer that.

So many different proper answers to it. But there is one answer that fits in with this, and it's given in Psalm 68, and it's picked up in the book of Acts, where that psalm is quoted in regard to the resurrection and the exaltation of Jesus.

You have ascended up on high and led captivity captive. You have received gifts for men, even for the rebellious. Why? So that the Lord might dwell amongst them.

Why did Jesus die? Yes, to forgive us our sins. That we might have acceptance with God. That we might come to know the favor of God. That we might have eternal life. Yes, all of that.

[20 : 48] But central to all of that is so that the Lord might dwell amongst us. So that the living God would inhabit us. Would make us home amongst us. That we would be his tabernacle.

That we would be his tent. That we who trust in him might indeed come to know this living presence. So that by it we are distinct. You see, for Moses, being known as the people of God is so important.

As he will come to travel in the leadership of these people through the wilderness. As they come into contact with other peoples, with other beliefs. And people who will not share their view of the future.

He's concerned that these other people will know the distinctiveness of these people of God. And what makes them distinct. And that's his great concern, you see.

If God does not go with them. And if God is not manifestly amongst them. That's to say. If it's not evident that God is amongst them.

[21 : 57] Then these other people are not going to say. These are a different people to us. They are a distinct people. They have God in their midst. Their God travels with them. And so Moses is saying.

Is it not in us that we shall be distinct? I and your people. So important, isn't it, for ourselves today.

Many things that must mark us as believers, as Christians, as a congregation. Nothing is more important. Nothing is of more fundamental importance.

Than that God is here. That God is in our midst. That God travels with us. That God shows himself through us.

That the presence of God is real to us. That every day he's our accompanying God. He's the resident master in our lives.

[23 : 00] And God answers the second plea. This very thing that you have spoken. I will do. For you have found favor in my sight. And I know you by name.

You see, God now repeats. What Moses had said in his first plea. In answering him this time. He says, I will do this very thing also. In other words, I will go with you. I will. I've heard you.

I'm going to answer your prayer. And of course, when you look at it in terms of these pleas. And this ongoing prayerfulness. This is an outstanding example in these verses.

Of perseverance in prayer. Of building one step after another. Building one layer after another, if you like. Even in the responses of God.

Moses doesn't leave it at that. He builds on that. And puts in his next plea. And wants a bit more from God. It's an outstanding example of perseverance in prayer. For yourself.

[23 : 54] For myself. Sadly, if you're anything like me. We all too often. I all too often. Step back from. Prayer and pleading with God.

And I'm satisfied with. Too little of what God has to offer. Moses wasn't. And in persevering in prayer. He's a great example for us.

In that as well. And God says to him. This very thing. I will do. For you have found favor in my sight. And I know you by name. How important it is to God.

That he knows Moses by name. That Moses has his favor. It's not just significant. From the receiver side. From Moses side. God is saying.

This is so precious to me. It's so important to me. It's so significant in my sight. That I have now. Granted you your request.

[24 : 56] And the third plea. He says. Lord. Please show me. Your glory. Verse 18. Through to the end of the chapter. The third plea. And God's reply.

Moses said. Please. Show me your glory. That's all he said. Please show me your glory. But. Well I say. That's all he said. What a request.

What a plea. And it's not that Moses didn't know. Anything of the glory of God before. Because. You read earlier on. In the book of Exodus. In chapter 24. For example.

In chapter 29. Where the glory of God. Had appeared. On the top of the mountain. On Mount Sinai. Where you find the glory of God. Having come to. Stand.

In the pillar of cloud. Food. That sort of thing. Moses knew the glory of God. Previously. But now he's saying. Lord. Please add to this. Give me more. Insight. Into your glory.

[25 : 51] And what makes you glorious. And what a privilege. It is. To stand before God. And ask him such a thing. And you can ask him. The very same. Even if you know his glory already.

Even if you know something. Of what makes him glorious. In your own personal experience. As he's revealed himself to you. Through the gospel. And through the Holy Spirit. Here's a privilege today. That we can come.

On the Sabbath day. And use our time. In the way that Moses here instructs us. Lord. Please show me your glory. Will we not. Go home today.

And spend time. This afternoon. On this evening. With this prayer. In our minds. With this desire. In our hearts. Lord. Please show me your glory. Show me more of yourself. Make me know.

More of what it means. More of what it means. To be in relationship with you. And with your people. And what their prospects are. And what you are.

[26 : 46] As a redeeming God. Show me. Please. Show me. Your glory. And that's not really.

Just for himself. It's so that he will be able. As we've said already. To lead these people. Effectively. Glory. That's why he wants to know.

More of the glory of God. The glory. The glory of God. Really. The word glory. Glory in Hebrew. I think we mentioned this. Many times before. But. It really means. Literally. To be weighty.

Or to be heavy. That's the idea of. Heaviness about it. And you then. Move to that. From that. Idea of heaviness. To the idea of significance.

And you still use that word. About a person. Or about something. Or other. That you say. Has weight to it. Has a substance to it. That's a weighty thing. That's heavy. Or that person.

[27 : 42] Really has. Weight about them. And I'm not talking about. Bodily weight. Talking about. Significance. Somebody who. Whose presence. Really. Or whose abilities. Give them. Significance.

If you like. That's what he's saying here. In terms of God. Moses knows. The glory of God. He knows. Already. Something of the weight. The significance. Of God.

And what he's saying is. Lord. Show me more of what makes you weighty. Show me more of your very substance. As my God. What gives you that significance.

As God. I want to know more of that. From you. So that I can go on. In this journey of leading these people. And then. God's reply.

Itself is. A remarkable reply. By any standards. He said. I will make all my goodness. Pass before you. And will proclaim before you.

[28 : 39] My name. The Lord. Now that's anticipating. The next chapter. What's in the next chapter. Where the Lord. Passed before Moses. And where he proclaimed himself.

As the Lord. In terms of his mercy. In terms of. All these words you find there. From verse 6 onwards. We're going to look at that this evening. Because. It's such an important follow on.

From what you find here. In Moses plea. And we'll look at that. Under Moses experience. Of God's presence. As God. Came. And manifested himself. As he passed by. What he's saying here.

I will make my goodness. Pass before you. And isn't that interesting. Moses had said. Show me please. Your glory. And Moses. Is told. I'm going to make my goodness.

Pass before you. In other words. For one thing. It does show us. That the goodness of God. Is part of. What makes him glorious. It belongs. To his glory. Do we think of the goodness of God.

[29 : 35] In that way. Just spend a few seconds now. Thinking of. How God has been good to you. What ways has he been good to you.

Up to now in your life. How is he good to you today. Do you associate that with glory. With the glory of God.

With what makes him. Weighty. Significant. Important. I will make. All my goodness. Pass before you.

And then. He says. I will proclaim. The name of the Lord. Now the name of the Lord. Or he says here. Before you. I will proclaim. My name. The Lord. That of course.

Is God's covenant name. And. What Moses is being told. By God is. I'm going to reveal. To you. Something new. Something additional. About my character. About my nature.

[30 : 36] About what makes me God. Because the name of God. Is in the Bible. Always associated with. What belongs to God. In terms of his character. Of his work. Of his being.

And nature. As it's seen. And as it's. Displayed through his works. Of redemption. Especially. And Moses is being told here. That's what I'm going to do. You've asked about.

Showing me. Showing you my glory. And God is saying. I'm going to make my goodness. Pass before you. And as you. As my goodness. Passes before you. It will reveal. More of my name.

More of what I am. More of what I do. And we'll see that. That's exactly what happened. As it's recorded. In the next chapter. But.

You notice here. The link with. The name of God. And the name. Of Moses. To God. I know you said. God by name. And now. Moses is being told.

[31 : 31] Lord. I will reveal to you. Proclaim. My name. I'll give you insight into it. And there's. That wonderful coming together. There of. The Lord. Knowing Moses. By name.

So personally. And now. God taking him further. Into experiencing. More of the name of God. So that Moses can say. I know God. By name. Personally.

There's that. Wonderful coming together. Of God. And a human being. Of God. And Moses. In his soul.

So that Moses can say. I know you by name Lord. And the Lord can say. I know you by name Moses. It's just like a partnership.

Or two people in marriage. Isn't it? The mutual knowing. Of one another's name. And insight into. Character and nature.

[32 : 27] What a wonderful thing. To know God. For God to bring us. To know himself. It's the knowing of names. And.

You notice there. The major emphasis. Then on grace. And on graciousness. I will be gracious. To whom I will be gracious. And will show mercy. On whom I will show mercy. That's sovereign mercy.

Of course. But. The predominant emphasis. Is on mercy. And on grace. That will come out more fully. As we see tonight. In the next chapter. But then you see.

He says. There. But you cannot see my face. For man shall not see me and live. And the Lord said. There is a place by me. Where you shall stand. On the rock. And while my glory passes by.

I will put you in a cleft of the rock. I will cover you with my hand. Until I've passed by. Then I will take away my hand. And you shall see my back. But my face shall not be seen.

[33 : 26] Well it's difficult in a few minutes. Just to. To. Try and. Get around these great words. They are amazing words. But what they amount to basically. Is this. God is saying to Moses.

You cannot. Stand. Even you. Cannot stand. My glory. In its full blaze. My face. As I really am. Without something coming between me and you.

So I'm going to put you. In a cleft of a rock. In a narrow cave. Or fissure in the rock. And from that you'll see me passing by.

But I'm going to arrange that. You'll only see my back. You will not see my face. And Moses is being told really that. The full revelation of God in his glory.

Is impossible. Because it would consume him. He wouldn't be able to stand it. Not even Moses. None shall see my face. And live.

[34 : 29] And yet. He is giving him more. Revelation of himself. He's going to see. His back as it were. And even the back of God. Is so full of splendor.

And meaning. And truth. As we'll see again from. The next chapter. God went before him. Passed before him. Moses saw his back.

And what he saw. Was to do with mercy. Steadfast love. Faithfulness. Forgiveness. All of these things. And you and I cannot see God's face.

And live. At least not as we presently are. We need someone between us and God. That's what we have.

Because the manifestation of God's glory. Did come to be revealed. In a human being. In the son of God incarnate. When he took our nature.

[35 : 33] Isn't that why you read in John's gospel. The word became flesh. And tabernacled among us. See the link with Moses. And we beheld his glory.

The glory as of the only begotten of the father. Full of grace and truth. No one has seen God at any time. He goes on to say. The only begotten.

Who's in the bosom of the father. The heart of the father. He has revealed him to us. And you link that too. With what Luke says about the transfiguration.

When Christ. Was transfigured on the mount. And then he says. There appeared with him. Moses and Elijah. Who appeared.

With him. In glory. You see. It's mediated to us. Through Christ. That's where we come. To behold.

[36 : 35] To experience. To appreciate. To live with. The glory. Of God. No one shall see my face. And yet.

As Paul wrote. We have come to know God. In the face. Of Jesus Christ. Let's pray. Lord.

We give thanks today. For the way. In which you revealed. To us. In your word. How you have come. Into a living relationship. With us. As sinners. Through the forgiveness.

Of our sin. And through receiving us. By your grace. And in your mercy. To yourself. Bless us. We pray. As we receive. Of your truth. Again today. Make us truly.

Thankful. And make your presence. Precious to us. So that we may go on. From this place. With that great concern. That Moses had. That the Lord himself.

[37 : 33] Would go with us. Be with us. We pray now then. And hear our prayer. For Jesus sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.