

The Character of God

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.! For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

Exodus 33, and we are going to dive into another encounter with Moses and the Lord. So, Exodus 33, if you'll look with me there in verse 18, we are going to dive into this wonderful word of God this morning.

Exodus 33, verse 18, it says, Moses said, And he said, Verse 34, or chapter 34, The Lord said to Moses,

Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke. Be ready by the morning and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to me on top of the mountain.

[2 : 05] No one shall come up with you, and let no one be seen throughout all the mountain. Let no flocks or herds graze opposite that mountain.

So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first, and he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone.

Verse 5, It's the word of God.

It's the word of God. May God bless the preaching of it. Have you ever been busted?

Have you ever been caught red-handed, caught with your hand in the cookie jar, so to speak? Have you ever had to wait anxiously to see how your brother or mother or friend would respond?

[3 : 40] I remember one particular time, I was busted and especially anxious about what would happen next. I was in high school, and I was driving my Ford Ranger with plans to go do this and that.

I picked up a friend of mine, and while we were taking off out of his neighborhood, I decided to take the truck off the road to have a joyride through some freshly manicured grass.

As we were turning into this grass, the grass was still wet from the rain, and the rain made it more fun. So I just kind of kept the truck moving fast through the grass, making wide turns, leaving muddy ruts through the grass, and all was good and always fun.

But as I was turning back onto the road, I went to make the final turn off the wet grass, and the tires began to slide. I tried again, turning to the right and then to the left, back to the left.

I tried to brake, but the truck only began to slide more and more and more until I rammed into one of the neighborhood's light poles.

[4 : 52] And the light pole immediately fell to the ground. I knew I was busted. I knew I was caught, but I also knew, according to the fool's code of conduct, I couldn't just turn myself in.

I quickly reversed a bit and drove away, and as I was turning out of the neighborhood, a family from our church pulled in, getting a good look at my banged-up bumper, and then no doubt seeing the light pole down 50 yards up the road.

And so I had to take off quickly. I pulled off at a secluded spot a couple, I don't know, a mile or two up the road, assessed the damage of the truck. It was clear. I had rammed the light pole.

I wasn't going to be able to bend it out. It was only a matter of time until someone started asking questions, and someone found me. I was overwhelmed with a sense of guilt, anxiously awaiting for what would happen next.

Would my parents find out? Would the owner press charges? How much does a light pole cost? No doubt thousands of dollars.

[6 : 06] How would I find that money? I went back home and waited. This morning, in our passage, Moses is buried with a similar feeling of guilt.

While the verses tell of another staggering encounter between the Lord and Moses, the context brings us into Moses' guilt, anxiety, and fear.

The Lord had been with his people and shown himself to be completely for his people. But while he was up on the mountain learning how the people of Israel should live now that they were the people of God, the people got tired of waiting and, as you know, made a golden calf to worship.

Moses knew this may be it. It had only been days since they had promised to follow the Lord, and now they were turning their back on him.

The Lord was with us. Moses must have thought the Lord was with us in the plagues and the Passover and the Red Sea, but will he be with us now? Will he be with us when the enemy is not an enemy before us, but an enemy within us?

[7 : 19] Will he be with us when, even though we stray from him, will he be with us and not forsake us because of our sin and guilt?

And my guess, you know this feeling very well. Is the Lord still with me? How can the Lord still be with me after all the ways I've failed him and strayed from him?

In this passage, as we're about to see, and really the whole Bible, gives us the answer to these questions. After all, it is not our sin and guilt that is the reason for the season.

It is the sin and guilt of ours that is the reason of the season. Doug Wilson said it this way. In one sense, of course, Jesus is the reason for the season, but in another fundamental sense, sin is the reason for the season.

So where we're going in a word is, do not fear. The Lord is quick to forgive all and gives more grace than we can imagine. Do not fear. The Lord is quick to forgive all and gives more grace than we can imagine.

[8 : 27] So we're going to dive into this passage in three points. So if you'll look there with me, the first is the request. The first is the request.

At the beginning of our passage, Moses asked, show me your glory. You remember that? Look down there in verse 18. He says, show me, please show me your glory.

Now, what is Moses asking when he said he wants to see God's glory? What is he asked to see? Why does he ask to see his glory? And we must look back at the context in order to understand what is going on here.

After the Lord tells Moses how the people of Israel have made a golden calf and begun to worship it, the Lord says to Moses, my wrath will consume them.

And that's really what's going on in 32 and 33. There's this fascinating back and forth between Moses and the Lord. He's up on the mountain. The Lord has promised that he's going to consume them. And so the Lord, Moses is pleading with him.

[9 : 26] He's saying, why are you angry? What will the Egyptians say if you take us out through the Red Sea and then you just take us out here and kill us?

Don't you remember Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Don't you remember your promises to them?

Then the Lord says, okay, I won't consume you, but I'm not going with them anymore.

So maybe that's an upgrade a little bit. I won't consume them, but I'm not going with them. Then he says, Moses, I will go with you. I'll make a great nation of you.

We can just start over, me and you, Moses and the Lord. But then Moses famously pleads with the Lord. Look down there in verse 16 to 33. He says, in the second half, he says, is it not you're going with us so that we're distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth? And then the Lord shockingly relents. He turns from his anger. He graciously responds. Look at verse 17. Then the Lord said to Moses, this very thing that you have spoken, I will do.

[10 : 38] For you have found favor in my sight and I know you by name. He says, I'll go with you. I'm going to turn from my anger and give you grace.

Now, it's hard for us to feel the force of these words as Moses did. We have the rest of the Bible.

We have the rest of the story in our hands, right? I mean, we read Exodus 32 and 33 in the context of the rest of the Bible, in the context of John 3, 16.

But Moses did not. Also, we assume God will forgive. We take for granted God's willingness to forgive.

One French philosopher died muttering, God will forgive. That's his job. And so while we might not be so bold to say that, we often live with the assumption that God will always forgive. That's the one thing I can count on.

No matter how many wrongs I've done, he'll overlook it because I've tried hard. But Moses does not share that assumption. Moses knew his fate was sealed.

[11 : 45] This is the God who's consuming fire. This is the God who says, stand back, take off your shoes. This is the God who speaks with thunder and lightning.

And then he says, I will not consume you. I will go with you. Moses is stunned and floored. Moses is perplexed and amazed. And he says, show me your glory.

I think what he's saying there is, I don't understand you. I don't understand how you could be so good and so forgiving. Show me more of you. Show me who you really are.

Show me your glory. And the Lord says, first, I will have mercy and grace to whomever I please. Look at verse 19.

He says, I'll be gracious to whom I am gracious. And I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. Now this seems a bit unhelpful and off-putting. Kind of like withdrawing a handshake.

[12 : 45] I thought we were in this together. Father, the first thing you say is, I'll do what I want to do. Here's what he's saying. The first thing you must know is that I did not show mercy and grace because of what you did.

What he's saying to Moses is, I'm not showing you mercy and grace. I'm not showing this people mercy and grace because of your praying. I'm not showing mercy and grace because of your pleading. Now it's good and right. You should plead.

You should pray. But I'm not showing it because of that. I think what the Lord is saying is his grace is not like backyard football. Now there are a few things worse for an uncoordinated kid than waiting to be picked in backyard football because they kind of scan the crowd for who's the most athletic, whose biceps are the biggest, who's got a good leg, or something like that.

But God's grace is not like that. That's what the Lord is saying. He doesn't look at anything you've done to decide whether to be merciful and gracious. If he did, grace would no longer be grace. So the first thing the Lord says about forgiveness in this passage and about grace is it's not a reward for the do-gooders.

It's not a trophy for the talented. It's not a settlement with the shrewd. It's a free gift for the undeserved. He says, I will be gracious on whom I will be gracious and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.

[14 : 04] Romans 9, 16, Paul picks up this very verse. And then the next verse he says, so then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God who has mercy.

So we know wherever this thing is going, it's going to center on the grace of God that's completely undeserved. J. Gresham Machen said, the very center and core of the whole Bible is the doctrine of the grace of God.

The grace of God, which depends not one wit upon anything that is in man, but is absolutely undeserved, resistless, and sovereign. And it's right here at the beginning of our Bible for an important reason.

And then the Lord says, I will show you my goodness. The Lord promises to reveal himself to Moses again. Look at verse 19. He says, I'll make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim to you my name, the Lord.

Verse 21 through 23, he says, Behold, there's a place by me where 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.

[15 : 12] Then I will take away my hand and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen. At this point, Moses had many encounters with the Lord.

He's in the burning bush and on Mount Sinai, surrounded by thunder and lightning in the tent where the Lord spoke to Moses as with a friend face to face, but this will be different.

The Lord says, You cannot see my face for no one can see my face and live. But he says, I'll show you my goodness. I'll cover you with my hand until I pass by. I mean, what do these words even mean?

These references to my hand again and again. I'll take away my hand and you shall see my back. And can you imagine how Moses felt? He was terrified at the burning bush. He must have been terrified again here.

The Lord was going to draw near. That's where we're headed next. Point two, the revelation. The revelation. That's what happens in Exodus 34.

[16:09] He has this encounter with the Lord, a revelation of God, a theophany. And in so many ways, it's the fullest revelation of who God is in the entire Old Testament.

It's the fullest description of who God is in the entire Old Testament. Like the burning bush, it's completely unique. Nothing like it in all of Scripture. But unlike the burning bush, it's not a passage I think we're familiar with.

It's not an encounter. We live in light of. There's just several things we need to consider in this context. Immediately, at the outset of chapter 34, he mentions the tablets.

You know, if you remember, when Moses came down the mountain, when he saw the people worshipping the golden calf, he got angry. He threw down the stone tablets and broke them. Those are the ones the Lord had written with his finger.

And in stone, he'd written the Ten Commandments in those stones. I remember when I first became a Christian, I was visiting a friend of mine's house, an older man in the faith who basically led me to the Lord. And in his garden, he had a broken Ten Commandment tablet.

[17:14] I was like, why are they broken? I hadn't read my Bible. Well, this is the reason. Moses broke the first ones. And so the Lord says, cut out some more.

You see that? He says, verse 1 of 34, cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and I'll write on the tablets the words that were on the first one. What he's saying to Moses is, whatever else is going to happen in this encounter, one thing is clear.

I'm going to renew my covenant with this people. Now, this is just incredible. These tablets are broken, which symbolize the covenant he made.

And now the Lord says, go get some other tablets. This is a second chance. So Moses gets them and takes them up the mountain. And then the second thing we've got to notice is the presence of the Lord.

The Lord spoke to him as before, but now he draws near. Look in verse 5. Moses took in his hands those two tablets.

[18:18] Then the Lord descended in a cloud and stood with him there. Now, that's incredible. It reminds me of Jacob when the Lord came down the ladder or the staircase, so to speak, and was there beside him.

Well, here too is Moses. The Lord descended and stood with him. You know, you can only imagine. I mean, your mind can only imagine what happened in that moment. What did Moses sense? What did Moses feel?

What did Moses know in a way that was truer than ever before when the Lord was not just kind of speaking through a cloud or through lightning or through a bush, but he stood beside him?

There's nothing like a friend who stands beside you no matter what. But how much more of the Lord? You see, like, the uniqueness of this encounter.

And then the name. The name. The Lord passed by him, covered his eyes with his hand, with the Lord's hand.

[19:25] Now, this is so fascinating because the Lord doesn't have hands. That's what's called anthropomorphism. It's a way of describing God in a way that relates to us.

So we don't really know what happened. I mean, ultimately, the Lord concealed Moses' ability or the Lord took away Moses' ability to see in that moment. And then he let him see his back.

And the Lord begins. Look in verse 6. He says, The Lord! The Lord! The Lord! This is the name of God.

Nowhere else in Scripture is the name of God repeated twice like this. The Lord is saying, Moses, I am Yahweh. I am the one you know by name. I am the one who is with you and is completely for you, Moses.

Don't you mistake him. I am the Lord. And this is incredible. It's so far, so good, right? We know that. We studied that light last week. But then the Lord continues and describes himself.

[20:27] I mean, in so many ways, the Lord gives a Twitter profile of who he is. He gives a quick sketch of what he's like. He gives a few headlines. You know, we might put in ours, we like coffee and Jesus and poodles or something like that.

Well, the Lord unpacks all that he is. He gives a snapshot. This is, these are the bullet points. This is what he wants you to know. When you don't know what the Lord is, take away these bullets.

Now, it's here, we must keep this context in mind. Moses knows who the Lord is, right? He knows the Lord who called him and brought him and called him to be a deliverer.

But what Moses doesn't know is how this God can deal with him when he sins. What Moses doesn't know is what will happen if they fail again. And so this is the Lord's answer. He says, in a word, he says, I'll give you more grace than you can imagine.

I will give more grace than you can imagine. The Lord lists out five characteristics, each unpacking how he will respond to their sin and failure.

[21 : 35] And so he says, look down there in verse six again, the Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious. Merciful and gracious. You remember that same word pairing from verse 18 above.

They're paired together. Merciful and gracious. Merciful and gracious. Again, repeated here, merciful and gracious. Kind of littered throughout this passage.

And they're paired together throughout the Old Testament. These words describe someone quick to forgive and to help. These words describe someone on the tip of their toes looking for someone to help.

They describe that friend who you don't want to know how bad things are because they'll drop everything and come and help you. That's the way the Lord is.

Second Chronicles 16, 9 says, for the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the earth to give strong support to those whose hearts is blameless toward you.

[22 : 39] The Lord is merciful and gracious. The Lord is slow to anger. Now, not only is He quick to forgive, He's slow to anger.

Not only is He quick to respond when we sin, but He's slow to anger in our sin. I mean, the word literally here comes from a word meaning long of nose. Now, it's not describing the Lord's face.

It's describing the length of His patience. It's long. The Lord is not like you and not like me.

He's long-suffering. He's not quick-tempered or short-fused. He's slow to anger. We could spend the rest of the afternoon meditating on the patience and long-suffering of the Lord.

J.R. Packer says it well. Think how He is born with you. Just think. And still bears with you when so much of your life is unworthy of Him and you have so richly deserved His rejection.

[23 : 48] The Lord, God merciful and gracious, slow to anger. But He's not only quick to forgive and slow to anger, He pursues us with an all-in, untiring love.

He's abounding in steadfast love. And the translators translate this numerous ways. Loving kindness, mercy, unfailing love, love.

It's the Hebrew word hesed. It's steadfast love is probably best because I think it combines the essential characteristics of loyalty and love.

Loyalty and love. Love that is loyal and loyalty that is deeply loving. And He's abounding in it. He's great. That's just what that means.

Great. He's great in steadfast love. Steadfast love is God's loving commitment to keep showing mercy and grace to His people no matter how many times they fail. That's what He's saying to Moses.

[24 : 48] I will keep steadfast love no matter how many times you fail. Look down there in verse 7. It's repeated again. Steadfast love. Keeping steadfast love to thousands or for thousands.

The idea is thousands of generations. Forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. Forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. All three words because He forgives all of it. He's come to forgive.

Just as I was reminding my kids last night. John 3, 16. But my favorite verse is 17. The Son did not come into the world but to condemn the world but in order that the world might be saved through Him.

This is steadfast love and it's staggering. You know, if you think about it in context, Ray Ortlund has rightly said the Lord must be provoked to wrath but He does not have to be provoked to love. You don't have to push Him to make Him love you even and especially in the face of your sin.

Now, imagine a compassionate doctor has flown to a remote village to provide medical care and treatment for rare disease ravaging a primitive village.

[26 : 13] He's had all the equipment brought in, all the antibiotics and treatments brought in. He wants to treat people for free but as He seeks to provide this medical care, they refuse.

So He's there. He's done all that's necessary to be there and as He seeks to give this medical care, they refuse. They want to take care of themselves. They want to heal on their own but a few step forward to receive the care being provided.

How do you think that doctor is going to respond? Overwhelming joy. You know, His joy increases with the help and healing He's able to provide and the same thing goes on with the Lord.

These verses are telling us the Lord doesn't flinch at your sin. The Lord doesn't withdraw. Jesus Christ, His coming, announces that the Lord moves down toward you, moves into your mess. He puts on the waders. He gets down deep with all that's going on not to condemn you but to heal you. Now listen to this quote. This is incredible. If you get this, this sinks in, this will change your life. [27 : 32] Dane Ortlund says, when you come to Christ for mercy and love and help and your anguish and perplexity and sinfulness, you are going with the flow of His own deepest wishes not against them.

When you come to Him for mercy and love and help and your anguish and perplexity and sinfulness, you're going with the flow of His deepest wishes not against Him. This is steadfast love. You're not overcoming some reluctance in God. You're going with everything that God wants you to do. This is what steadfast love. It's not the love of a cold deity. It's the ferocious love of a father that says, this is my son.

I will care for him. You must not get close to him. This love debunks so many of our imagings about God. You know, when Scripture reaches the heights of what's so amazing, so mysterious about God, it's not His sovereignty.

It's not His infinitude. It's not His omnipotence or His omniscience. It's not those things. It's His steadfast love. Love, oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God.

[28 : 34] How inscrutable His judgment and inscrutable His ways. Why? Because He shows mercy to those who deserve wrath. We assume it would be wrong for us to think God wants to do us good.

But these verses say we have it all wrong. It would be wrong for us to assume God does not want to do us good. We assume it's best to keep our distance, to stay in the doghouse, to stay in the cold. But these verses debunk that and tell us the Lord doesn't play that way. You know, some people say the God of the Old Testament is all wrath.

God of the New Testament is all love. That is so bogus right here. The foundation of everything, of all that we enjoy and all that we love, is the love of God that comes out freely to those who deserve wrath.

And so He says steadfast love. I'm abounding in that, Moses, in faithfulness. Faithfulness naturally accompanies steadfast love. Love that is loyal is faithful. And that's why I think they cluster together.

[29 : 52] When we fail, God keeps His word. When we're faithless, God remains faithful. But we must not be confused.

You know, the Lord says, I'll give you grace more than you can imagine, but you must turn to Him. I think that's what's going on down there in verse 7. If you look, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sins, but who will by no means clear the guilty?

Visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, the children's children to the third and fourth generation. I don't think this teaches a generational curse, but I don't have all the time to unpack that.

I think it just means when you sin, it has ramifications that flow down the line, but not a curse that comes from God. What He's saying, though, I don't think this is a paradox or anything like that. I don't think He's undoing anything He said before. He's saying, I think what He's saying is the Lord will pour out His mercy and grace on those who stumble again and again and again who turn to Him. But those who try to take His grace and mercy and go their own way, He will not forgive, and He won't clear.

[31 : 01] I think in so many ways. It's a setup for the gospel. It reminds us that what we need is not merely to know these things, but to know the person, Jesus Christ.

Turn completely to Him. Repentance is just not, is a complete change. It's faith in Jesus Christ, but it's also a turning of your whole life to Him and giving everything over to Him. And I think that's what's unpacked in these verses.

And so the Lord says, this is who I am, Moses. This is who I will be for a thousand generations. I'll be a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

You know, in so many ways, these words are just repeated again and again throughout the Old Testament to underline how God relates to His people. And in the psalm book of Israel, they sang of His love.

Psalm 103, I just love this. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love. There you see it. You see those verses again. Psalm 25 says, all the paths of the Lord are steadfast love and faithfulness for those who keep His covenant and His testimonies.

[32 : 10] And as they return to Jerusalem, they're rebuilding the house and they're worshipping in the new temple with Nehemiah and he's recounting all the history. Nehemiah 9, 17 says, they refuse to obey.

They stiffen the neck. But you are a God ready to forgive, gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and did not forsake Him. This revelation right here, Exodus 34, is in so many ways, well, it's the highest point of the Old Testament.

It's the character of God on display that we unpack the whole thousands of years of the Old Testament. But interestingly, in several points, even though this promises in so many ways just to the people of Israel, there's several points where these words are picked up to whisper of steadfast love and faithfulness going to all people.

Do you remember the story of Noah? We studied that 18 months ago. He was called to preach in Nineveh, the capital city of Assyria, and a bitter enemy of the people of God. That would be like me getting called to Gainesville.

I would refuse to go if I didn't have the book of Jonah. He refuses to go. The big fish swallows him whole.

[33 : 27] Jonah comes to his senses, decides to go. When he arrives, after he's barely begun the introduction of his sermon, the whole city repents and turns. And Jonah, he doesn't learn his lesson or he didn't learn the unfathomable mercy of God yet.

And so he got angry. And listen to what he says when he got angry. And we have it for you. He prayed to the Lord and said, I'm angry with you. Oh God, oh Lord, is this not, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country?

That why I made haste to flee to Tarshish, for I knew you were a God, a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and relenting from destruction.

Now you got to understand what's going on there. We're beginning to see that this love is not just a love that's bound by a promise to a particular people.

But this is love that's about to break the bounds to all the people of the world. And you get a whisper as all of Assyria repents.

[34 : 48] Do not fear the Lord is quick to forgive and gives more grace than we can imagine.

Finally, point three, the reflection. this plan of showing steadfast love and faithfulness comes to fulfillment like all of Scripture in Jesus Christ.

The image of the invisible God, the radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of His nature and the reflection of His character. John's Gospel begins with a dramatic introduction to the Son of God who was with God, facing Him in the beginning and is God.

And then He tells us the Son of God, the second person of the Trinity became man and in so doing unveils Him to be the one Moses prayed to see. John 1, 14, Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

We've seen the glory. We've seen His glory. Glory is of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth. For the law was revealed 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. Now, that passage should explode in your mind right now because of all that we've just studied. Literally, it reads, the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us.

[36 : 04] You remember, Moses, the only thing he longed for was the Lord to tabernacle with Him, to be with Him, to go with Him. That's what he's praying for. That's what he's arguing out. And so Moses longed to know that the presence of God would never leave His people and Jesus came as a man to tabernacle with us to make that promise true.

To be with us, to live among us, to never leave as we studied several weeks ago. And then he continues, we have seen His glory. Isn't that what Moses prayed for?

To see the glory of God. 2 Corinthians 4 says, it's the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

We've seen it. He's talking about the eyewitnesses, the people that were around Jesus.

They saw His glory. And it continues. Verse 17, the law was given through Moses' grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

We see those there. We see them also in verse 14. Full of grace and truth. What's going on here? What is this grace and truth? He's so full here. And what John's doing, he's very consciously referencing Exodus 34.

[37 : 11] These words, grace and truth, are John's translations of steadfast love and faithfulness. What he's saying is a God who's introduced to you. And Exodus 34 is introduced to you more fully in person in Jesus Christ because He's the one that's full of grace and truth.

And from His fullness, that's where you receive it as the Son, the only Son, from the Father. Finally, he concludes, no one has seen God, the only God, who's at the Father's side.

He has made Him known. And the Lord, He covered Moses' eyes. He concealed His ability to see. Moses did not see. Jacob did not see. David did not see.

Ruth did not see. But Jesus Christ has made God known. That word literally means He's explained Him. He's unpacked Him.

He's exegeted for us who God is in His life in the way He never turned away anyone for food or for healing or for anything. He lays out who God is.

[38 : 22] He paints it in broad brush so that we might never forget this is Him, this is God, this is the Lord. No wonder. Now think about this. The last reference to Moses or the last picture of Him in our Bibles is at the Transfiguration.

All that He longed to see, He did see. That's incredible. He's barred from the Promised Land, but the Lord opened His eyes to see Jesus.

Christmas is about the glory of God in a baby. Glory to God in the highest and on peace with those with whom He is pleased.

But if you've read John's Gospel, now John's Gospel is called the Gospel of Glory. Glory. And if you've read it before, you know the greatest display of the glory of God is not in the birth of Jesus Christ, but in His death.

J.I. Packer says, the crucial significance of the cradle at Bethlehem lies in its place in the sequence of steps down that led the Son of God to the cross of Calvary.

[39 : 43] And we do not understand the cradle at Bethlehem until we see it in this context. So just moments before Jesus' betrayal, He said, Father, the hour has come.

Glorify Your Son. Glorify Me in the presence of Your glory with the glory I had with You before the world began. And the Father does.

The Father glorifies the Son by lifting Him up and crushing Him under the full weight of His furious wrath. What glory is this?

And yet God knew this is what it would cost for His people to dwell with Him forever and ever. This is what it would cost for Him to show steadfast love and mercy again and again and again and again when we fail and sin.

This is what it would cost for God to cancel the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands and silence forever. The wrath of God and the cries for justice that we deserve.

[40 : 54] And so Jesus Christ was lifted up for you and for me to end forever the doubt that God doesn't love us when we sin.

In 1728, a young 14-year-old boy named Howell Harris sat by his dying aunt perhaps in a hospital room or something like that.

She lay there taking her final breaths and thinking she had passed away. The family was weeping and said, Poor Aunt Lizzie. His aunt suddenly blurted out, Who calls me poor?

She was not dead. She says, I am not poor. I am rich. And I will stand before him as bold as a lion. That's what the gospel purchases for us. No surprise, years later, Howell Harris would write the hymn that says, Well may my accuser roar of sins that I have done.

[42 : 02] I know them all and a thousand more. Jehovah knoweth none. So do not fear.

The Lord is quick to forgive and gives more grace than we can imagine. So while the accuser and when the accuser roars this week and this Christmas and says, What are you doing?

Gathered around that tree. Look to the cradle. Look to the cross and look to the grave and take in the glory.

This is how far God has gone to show His grace for you and that He will never fail. Let us pray.

Father in heaven, we cast ourselves before You.

We worship You and praise You. We thank You for Jesus Christ. We pray, Lord, that You would come and work in our hearts that which is pleasing in Your sight.

[43 : 06] Lord, we confess we need You. Oh, Lord, come by Your Spirit. Anything that's helpful, I pray that it would be remembered and treasured, that we would love You more.

Anything unhelpful would be forgotten quickly, that we might rest in the mercy of God alone. This day, this week. In Jesus' name, Amen.

You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.