

## Friend of God Exodus 33:1-34:9

### Introduction

**Will It Ever Be the Same Again:** Have you ever done something to jeopardize a relationship? (cf. John Adams and Thomas Jefferson). Maybe you lied, stole, tricked, used, etc., and your friend found out. You wonder, how can I fix it? Will it ever be the same again?

- The Israelites, after the golden calf, felt this.
  - These are not Aesop's Fables or isolated rules, but a story (with beginning, middle, end, context, etc.). \*It's why we preach the way we do in sequence, through books, etc. This isn't like Law and Order or The Simpsons, where you can just watch whatever episode in whatever order, and it doesn't matter. This is more like Stranger Things, The Mandalorian, or Breaking Bad, where subsequent episodes relate to and build on previous ones. \*This is *one reason* you should show up every week.
- They were separated, at odds with, on the wrong side of the God who had rescued them. What could they do to receive his blessing again? What could they do to be made right? Could they ever be friends again?

Restoration with God is possible when you desire and pursue him above everything else.

### 1. The Problem We All Face: Separation (vv. 1-11)

<sup>33:1</sup> The LORD said to Moses, "Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your offspring I will give it.' <sup>2</sup> I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. <sup>3</sup> Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people." <sup>4</sup> When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. <sup>5</sup> For the LORD had said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, '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.'" <sup>6</sup> Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward. <sup>7</sup> 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. And everyone who sought the LORD would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. <sup>8</sup> Whenever Moses went out 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. <sup>9</sup> 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. <sup>10</sup> And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. <sup>11</sup> 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.

**Bovine Ramifications:** The sin of the people, evidenced so clearly in the calf-cident, has created a problem. **They are separated from God** (I will not go up among you).

**Outside the Camp:** In the instructions for the Tabernacle, the “Tent of Meeting” is included as something **within** it. The Tabernacle (the visible manifestation of God’s presence) includes a means to meet with him. Now, however, Moses must go meet with God **outside** the camp, far off from the sinful people.

- The presence of God is no longer in their midst, he is far away.

**Religion vs. Relationship:** God offers to Israel the very religion that the average American most wants: peace, prosperity, and success, military, political, and economic victory but not his presence. He is giving them territory and triumph but not tabernacle.

- The diagnostic question: **If God gave you everything you wanted but you didn’t have him, would you be happy?** You actually *couldn’t* be happy, but that’s not what I’m asking (yet).
- We often ask, “**will this make me happy?...** The presence of God is so great that it utterly transforms the question. You don’t ask that question anymore because the secret of happiness, a Christian comes to understand, is to want the presence of God more than happiness. It’s beyond being happy.” (Keller, *adapted*).
- For the moment, they see that it is of no use to get “stuff” if they don’t get God. They mourn, they don’t celebrate. **It’s not enough to get what you want, you are called to want the right thing.**
- You will not have God until you want him more than you want success, until you want him more than anything else.

**Moses Has What They Need:** From their perspective, they would see a talking cloud (strong burning bush vibes) between them and Moses. the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent

- They would be at their respective tents looking at the Tent of Meeting. **They worshipped but from a distance. They stood far off.**
- Only Moses is welcomed into the presence of the Lord. Moses has what they desire: the LORD used to speak to Moses **face to face**, as a man speaks to his friend.
  - Moses has what we all need. Communion with God like he intended, like we saw in the garden when he walked with Adam and Eve (cf. Gen 2-3).
  - I imagine, if some of you were honest, you’d say, “I’m still a stranger to God.” Maybe, to you, he’s just an abstract concept, a benevolent genie, or a despotic taskmaster. But he wants to be your friend.
- They need what Moses has, so they must desire what Moses desires and pray for what Moses prays.

## 2. The Prayer We Should All Pray: Presence (vv. 12-23)

<sup>12</sup> Moses said to the LORD, "See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not 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.' <sup>13</sup> 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." <sup>14</sup> And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." <sup>15</sup> And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. <sup>16</sup> For 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?" <sup>17</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." <sup>18</sup> Moses said, "Please show me your glory." <sup>19</sup> And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. <sup>20</sup> But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." <sup>21</sup> And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, <sup>22</sup> and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. <sup>23</sup> Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

**Knowing God:** <sup>13</sup> 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.

- Notice his **deep desire** is to know God. He is not content with the favor of God, he wants more. Knowledge in this context is more than information. It is **intimate** and **relational**.
  - It's not less than knowing "about" him (e.g., it's hard to say I know my wife well if I don't know her favorite color, TV show, food, etc.). This is G.I. Joe knowledge ("Now you know, and knowing is half the battle"). I'm talking about the other half of the battle.
  - But knowing the answers to trivia is not *knowing* someone (e.g., showing up at the White House). It is possible to know a great deal *about* God without much knowledge of Him. You can know a lot *about* godliness without being godly. I hope, I pray, that you can tell through my life that I **commune** with God.
- **Knowing God changes everything.** When you know God personally and intimately, you can live by his power and for his purpose: "But the people who know their God shall stand firm and take action" (Dan 11:32).
- Notice **how** we know God: **he has to make himself known** (show me). We can only know God because he has made himself known.
  - We should go to God and ask him to reveal himself to us. He is not a puzzle to be deciphered but a personal God who wants to show himself to us. God has made it possible for us to know him.

**Others Focused:** Consider too that this nation is your people."... so that we are distinct, I and your people Notice that Moses wants this intimate relationship **not just for himself** but also for the entire nation. We see throughout Scripture, that the godly desire is not simply to know God more themselves but for **others to know and experience God intimately** (cf. Paul, Eph 1:15-23).

- A succinct purpose statement of Christianity: **to know him and make him known.**
  - What can we give people? The opportunity to know God. But we can only give them what we have. **Do you know God?**

**Presence:** “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. Moses goes “all in” on what matters most. “Show me or leave me” (100%). Following God is an all-or-nothing proposition. Until you get to this point, you’ll always struggle to see God. **You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart** (Jer 29:13).

- **Autostereograms aka Magic Eye.** You can’t see it until you focus, you don’t catch it by simply glancing. The image is there all along. What’s missing is your focus and attention.
- I’ve always wondered if it was a call back to one of the great movies of my childhood (*Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade*, 1989), which I watched countless times (because we didn’t have cable, but we did get the Pizza Hut VHS deal). The blond-haired villain (Elsa), is hanging over a giant crevice holding on to Indy for dear life yet reaching for the famed chalice. He tells her to “let it go” (coincidence?!?), but she can’t. Rather than life, she gets death.
- **Christianity makes a terrible half-hearted hobby.** If you’re not all in, it’ll only frustrate you. If you’re not 100% dependent on God, you don’t have his power, etc. There is no such thing as “just enough God” to fix your life.

**Home:** Don’t take me to the Promised Land if you won’t be there. Don’t take me to heaven if you won’t be there. “Home is wherever I’m with you” (Edward Sharpe and the Magnetic Zeros). “The critical question for our generation—and for every generation—is this: If you could have heaven, with no sickness, and with all the friends you ever had on earth, and all the food you ever liked, and all the leisure activities you ever enjoyed, and all the natural beauties you ever saw, all the physical pleasures you ever tasted, and no human conflict or any natural disasters, could you be satisfied with heaven, if Christ were not there?” (Piper, *God is the Gospel*).

**Glory:** Please show me your glory. Please reveal yourself to me. Glory is a complex word. It literally means “heavy” (כבד). The word can be used to mean honor, heavy, wealthy, valuable, etc. (cf. Ex 20:12, “Honor your father and mother”). E.g., a large man is heavy, thick hair is heavy, liver of an animal is heavy. Can also mean valuable (more gold or silver is heavy; money is weight; pounds). E.g., “He or she carries a lot of weight” (power).

- This word can be positive or negative. Sin can be heavy (i.e., burden), idols can be heavy (i.e., weigh you down), or **God can be heavy** (i.e., honored).
- We give weight to the opinion of that which we love and worship, but only God can rightfully bear the weight of our honor and worship (weight limit of a hammock).
- **We need God to be heavy in our lives.** We need to feel the weight of it all. We need to appreciate the value of God. We need to see God’s importance in our lives.
  - Too many of us are blind to God’s value. In 1867 the U.S. bought Alaska from Russia for \$7.2 million at the prodding of Sec. of State William Seward (only 2¢ an acre, 1/8 size of the rest of the U.S.). Most Americans and members of Congress thought it useless and called it “Seward’s Folly,” “Seward’s Icebox,” and “President Johnson’s Polar Bear Garden.” Little did they know it would be a

strategic geopolitical location and contained vast natural resources, including gold and oil.

**Revival:** Repentance is possible. Renewal is possible. Revival is possible **when** you want God more than anything else. “Your satisfaction in Christ alone should run so deep that no pain can shake it and no pleasure compete with it” (Piper).

**Revelation:** We don’t imagine God as we want him to be, we long to see God as he is, as he reveals himself to us. “God is not who we *think* he is, he is who he *says* he is.” And the beauty of the gospel is that he has revealed himself to us.

- Volumes have been written about this peculiar scene. The anthropomorphic language makes it a challenge (because God doesn’t have a face, hand, or back). But anytime God wants to speak to us, he has to condescend to human language.
- We learn about our relationship with God through this scene. We learn that God is **inaccessible**, but he makes himself **accessible**. He is **transcendent** (beyond us) but makes himself **imminent** (comes close).
- He shows Moses as much as he can bear. And how much can Moses, the friend of God, the one who has found favor in his sight, bear? Barely anything.
  - He hides him in the cleft of the rock (not the optimal view; cf. pole in the way at FedEx field), then he covers the opening!
  - After he passes by, he shows him his “back,” the trail of his glory. The point seems clear, for man shall not see me and live (e.g., the reflection of the sun on the water because a direct view will blind you, it’s too strong).
- Does he do this because he has to? No. He is completely free, sovereign, and good. He does this because he wants to. He does what he wants, and what he wants is completely good. At the end of the day, we can ask, but God has to show us. He has all the power and prerogative. And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy.
  - The truest condescension of God is Jesus. We cannot know God, but he makes himself known. We cannot see God, but he makes himself seen.
  - “We long to know who God is and what God thinks and does. In Jesus, his most personal Word, God has ‘spoken’ to us in the most human way possible, giving us his innermost thoughts and heart, in [actions]... as profound as his words” (Bruner). “Do you want to know what God is like? Do you want to know what God does, how he feels, what he delights in, and what he is harsh toward? Look to Jesus” (Chandler).
    - **God is a mystery, but not an unknowable mystery**, a mystery that has been revealed (unveiled) in the incarnation, in Jesus. When you see Jesus, you see God because he is God.

### 3. The Name We Should All Know: YHWH (vv. 1-9)

<sup>34:1</sup> 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. <sup>2</sup> Be ready by the

morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain. <sup>3</sup> 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.” <sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. <sup>6</sup> The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.” <sup>8</sup> And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. <sup>9</sup> And he said, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.”

**Second Chances:** The goodness of God is seen in his *rewriting* the tablets that were broken by Moses in anger at the people’s idolatry. He meets with Moses again on the mountain. This is grace. He is giving the people a second chance they don’t deserve (e.g., Wedding Ceremony vs. Vow Renewal; one is a promise based on hope; the other is a promise based on reality; you know what you’re getting into).

**Name:** <sup>19</sup> And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The LORD.’”

- What’s in a name? Names in the Bible are not simply familial, cultural, or aesthetic, but their meaning corresponds to the story of the person who they describe.
  - No longer shall your name be called Abram (exalted Father), but your name shall be Abraham (Father of a multitude), for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations (Gen 17:5).
  - Isaac = Laughter
  - Then he said, “Your name shall no longer be called Jacob (heel grabber” or “deceiver), but Israel (wrestle with God), for you have striven with God and with men, and have prevailed” (Gen 32:28).
- YHWH (LORD): <sup>5</sup> The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. <sup>6</sup> The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, “The LORD, the LORD,
  - We don’t worship a generic deity but a personal God.
  - I Am who I am” (Ex 13); three words based off the “to be” verb. YHWH comes from the word “to be” (God is; before anything else was, God was).
  - “I am who I am” (Does it matter? I am not changing). “He is who he is whether they acknowledge it or not.” Fundamental, authoritative, personal (I), unchanging, self-sustaining, ever-present, inexhaustible, comprehensive, independent God.
- What comes to mind when we think of God is the most important thing (why theology matters, not to pass a quiz but to know God, love him, and obey him). E.g., believing the wrong thing causes wrong behavior, Buzz thinks he’s a real space ranger.

- <sup>10</sup> So that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup> and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil 2:10-11).
- <sup>11</sup> This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. <sup>12</sup> And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:11-12).

**Character:** He goes on to tell us his character: “The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, <sup>7</sup> keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children’s children, to the third and the fourth generation.”

- Mercy, grace, patience, steadfast love (not fickle love). This becomes one of the summary themes of God’s character in scripture, that “YHWH is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love.” (e.g., Ps 103:8, 145:8, 86:15; Joel 2:13, Jonah 4:1-2; Nahum 1:3; Num 14:18).
  - His love is **steady** (unmoving) and **overflowing**. This is our God.
- A lot of people have a problem with the last part of this description. How can God be gracious and forgiving if he is also punishing?
  - (1) If he didn’t punish sin, he wouldn’t be just.
  - (2) His love is metaphorically for thousands (of generations) and his wrath is for 3-4 (generations).
  - (3) “God’s wrath is the rightful expression of his holy love in the face of sin and evil. Before the foundations of the earth, the triune God had perfect love, joy, holiness, and peace. There was no wrath because there was no sin. God’s wrath arises from his holy love in opposition to wickedness. Wrath only exists where sin exists.” (Treat).
  - (4) Anger toward sin is born out of love for his people. Sin will destroy us. If God loves us, he must destroy sin.
- In one of the strangest U. S. Supreme Court cases in 1833 George Wilson was offered a pardon by President Andrew Jackson but refused it (don’t know why). The Supreme Court ruled, “A pardon must be received to be valid. It is an act of grace that cannot be forced.” Wilson was subsequently executed.<sup>1</sup> No one wants you to escape God’s wrath more than God. In Christ, your sin is punished and your salvation is secured. He offers perfect justice and overwhelming grace. But the gift must be received.

**Back on Track:** <sup>8</sup> And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. <sup>9</sup> And he said, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.” The festivals are renewed, the tablets are rewritten, the people are invited again into fellowship with God. The tabernacle will be built and God will dwell among his people. Restoration with God is possible when you desire and pursue him above everything else.

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<sup>1</sup><https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/brief-history-10-essential-presidential-pardons-arent-watergate-related-180964286/>

## Conclusion

**Grace:** Exodus has many lessons about sin, idolatry, and suffering, but at its core, it is a story about salvation by grace.

- Before the law and commandments, the people were slaves in Egypt, and God saved them. Before they obeyed a word of his command, he sent a rescuer to lead them out of bondage.
- Moses is the great rescuer, prophet, mediator, and leader of Israel. But we've seen all along that he is still imperfect, sinful, and weak. Moses was always pointing toward another prophet, a greater leader, a perfect mediator who would not only lead the people but redeem them (cf. Deut 18:15).

**Glowstick Moses:** Later at the end of ch. 34, Moses comes down the mountain and his face is glowing from God's glory, to the point that he has to put a veil over his head. Paul tells us (1 Cor 3:18), that in Christ we see God's glory unveiled. We have access to God's glory.

**Outside the Camp:** Moses took the dwelling place of God away from the people, and even when the Tabernacle and Temple were constructed, the presence of God was mediated by a priest. But in Christ, we are made priests of God who have bold access to him.

- In Jesus, you don't have to worship far off, you are made a son and daughter, you are invited to be a friend of God.
- Jesus says in Jn 17 that the glory the persons of the triune God share (Father, Son, Spirit) is given to us.

**Draw Near to God:** What I want you to do right now is, through faith in Jesus, draw near to God.

- Set all of your affection, desire, and hope on him.
- Come to him as a friend. A friend listens. A friend sits. A friend loves.