

Message #65

Exodus 33:1-23

There is one thing God's people ALWAYS need to remember; when God's people sin it will affect their relationship with God. It will change the dynamics of everything. Sin is no light matter when it comes to God and when His people sin, they damage the relationship. The sooner we learn this and apply this principle, the better things will be.

As chapter 32 came to a close, we learned that God had "smote" His own people because of the sin of worshipping an idolatrous calf. Many believe God sent some form of Ebola-type disease as a smiting plague which reached epidemic levels among those who were guilty. Probably this smiting occurred over several days or weeks.

Because of the serious nature of the sin that had been committed in the worship of the idol, the relationship between God and His people had changed in several ways:

- 1) Originally all the people were to be priests (Ex. 19:5-6); now only Levites would be priests (Ex. 32:29).
- 2) Originally God sent His angel to destroy Israel's enemies (23:23); now God sent His angel so He would not destroy Israel (**33:2-5**).
- 3) Originally the tabernacle was in the center of the camp where God would meet His people (Num. 2:2); now the tent was outside the camp where God would meet Moses and Joshua (**33:7**).
- 4) Originally God displayed His glory for all the people to see on Mt. Sinai (24:16-17); now only Moses could see God's glory partially (**33:18-23**) and the people saw Moses' face (34:29).
- 5) Originally God revealed His glory to test His people and keep them from sinning (20:20); now God revealed His glory to show His grace and compassion (**33:19**; 34:6-7).

This sin had really messed things up. God's people knew they had blown it and they needed to know God was still with them. The plan was for God to take them to a Promised Land, not live in Sinai the rest of their lives and it was time to get moving. They had been hunkered down at Sinai for about ten months and it was time for them to move out. Sinai was not their permanent place of residency. In these ten months they had really made a mess of things and now it was time to regroup and refocus. What we see here is this:

IN ORDER FOR GOD'S PEOPLE TO ACCOMPLISH WHAT GOD WANTED THEM TO ACCOMPLISH AFTER THEY HAD GROSSLY SINNED AGAINST GOD, THEY NEED THE PRESENCE OF GOD AND IN ORDER TO HAVE THE PRESENCE OF GOD, THEY NEED TO MOVE IN PRECISE ACCORDANCE WITH HIS PRECIOUS INSPIRED WORD AND THEY ALSO NEED SOME DISPLAY THAT THEY TRULY HAVE GOD'S PRESENCE.

This text is encouraging because it teaches us that it is possible to accomplish the will of God even after we have blown it. It is possible to accomplish the will of God even after you have really messed up, but in order for that to happen, you will have to get real serious about God and His Word. Now there are five main facts revealed in this chapter about the relationship between God and His people in view of the fact that His people had greatly sinned.

One of the most gracious things God can do in the aftermath of the failure of His people is to show His people that He is still with them. This can have a tremendous stabilizing effect on the people of God. It really should prompt a desire to never again do what you did to make God angry.

When you have sinned and then go to God and confess the sin, and then God does something that shows He is on your side again and that you have great fellowship with Him, it is uplifting. That is what Moses wanted to see and that is what Israel needed to know.

FACT #1 – God would permit His people to accomplish His will, but He would not Personally stay in their midst because He might destroy them if He did. **33:1-3**

The plan that God had for Israel was to take them to a Promised Land. God made that promise to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob and God was not about to go back on His Word. God intended to Personally travel with His people in their midst; but since they were so stubborn and sinful, He would no longer do that because He would destroy the people along the way as they kept sinning.

So in many ways, not having God with them is merciful. If He Himself were there dealing with them, He would have to keep killing His own people because they were so obstinate.

He would, however, send His angel who could be His mediator. This mediator could handle things so He would not have to always destroy His people. This mediator is none other than Jesus Christ. He would be with this sinful group of people and would, in fact, help them and drive the enemies out of the land.

If it were not for Jesus Christ, we would all be doomed and damned. He is the mediator that makes it possible for us to have a relationship with the Holy God.

FACT #2 – God’s people mourned at this news and immediately began obeying the Word of God. **33:4-6**

When the people heard that God had made a shift in the relationship, they “mourned.” They felt bad about their idolatrous revelry and they realized the relationship had changed. Now notice carefully the text does not say they repented. They were emotionally sorry. There is a big difference between saying we are emotionally sorry for our sins and saying we need to carefully study and obey God’s written Word.

Now these people were known to have their religious ornaments. As J. Vernon McGee said, they liked to wear their crosses which are meaningless when it comes to having a real relationship with God.

God told them that He did not want them wearing ornaments. They had sinned. If you have sinned you cannot strut around adorned with a worldly mindset. There needs to be a change. God demanded that there be a break from the old world if they wanted Him to think in terms of blessing them.

The particular Hebrew word used for ornaments refers to various items of jewelry which were probably taken as spoils when they left Egypt. This would have included rings, earrings, nose rings and any other form of ornaments that were connected to their old life.

Not only did they take off the ornaments here at Horeb (Mt. Sinai), but they kept them off for the next 40 years. From Horeb onward, these children of Israel put away the ornaments. The reason they did this is because of the threat of God. God had not decided what He would do just yet because His people had so rebelled against Him; but if they were serious about having Him do good things they needed to make a break from the world.

There is a principle here that is very important to see and that is once we sin, God will test us to prove how serious we are about obeying His Word. He will see how much we are interested in Him and if we are willing to make some breaks with the world.

FACT #3 – God’s sacred place of worship will now be moved outside the camp. **33:7-11**

Now the tent referred to here cannot be the completed tabernacle, because it had not been completed yet. Moses had just been given all of the specs concerning the tabernacle, the furniture and the courtyard and to this point it had not been completed.

Apparently Moses had a smaller worship tent that was used as a central meeting place for Moses, the people and God. When Moses would go into this tent, the glory of God would physically descend and stand at the entrance of the tent and the LORD would speak with Moses.

When the people saw the glory of God standing on the entrance to this tent, each person would worship God at his own tent.

Moses moved this tent outside the camp, which in this context symbolized the relationship between God and Israel had changed.

Even though God moved a distance away from His people, He did not abandon them. When we sin against God, we break fellowship with God, but we do not break our relationship with God. We still belong to God, even though the relationship has been strained.

One thing is clear and that is the people realized that God had a special relationship with Moses. If they wanted the presence of God, they did need the presence of Moses. In fact, **verse 8** says that Moses would go out to this tent and the people would stand in his presence and they would watch Moses enter that tent. After he entered, apparently they would sit or stand

According to **verse 9**, when Moses would enter the tent the glory of God would visibly come as a “pillar cloud” and it would stand at the entrance to it. When the people would see that, they would all arise and worship God at the entrance of their own tent (**verse 10**).

Now it is clear from **verse 11** that Moses had a very intimate relationship with God. **Moses and God talked together just as a man would speak to a friend.** When the text says they talked “face to face,” it is qualified by the fact that what this means is there was communication taking place in the same fashion like friends would speak. This has to do more with presence than form.

Now the idea behind the concept “face to face” (paynim el paynim) does not necessarily mean physically looking at each other. A better way to understand this is these two talked “person to person.” We know from what is stated in **verse 20** that no one can see the face of God and live. In fact, John 1:18 says, “no man has seen God at any time.” Jesus would later say you have seen Me and the one who sees Me has seen the Father (John 14:9). But God was communicating with Moses Person to person.

A couple of good ways to illustrate the point is telephone and texting. You can actually talk personally to someone in a person to person way without actually seeing the person face to face. You can have face to face communication without actually seeing the person physically.

The point of this is that there was still a very personal connection between God and Moses. There was very personal communication between God and Moses. Moses still had a close relationship with God even though most of them had blown it. Moses still had an up and close personal relationship with God.

Apparently when Moses would return to the camp after meeting with God, Joshua would stay behind as kind of the custodian of the tent.

FACT #4 – God decides to reassure Moses and Israel that He would continue to be their God.
33:12-17

Moses was very concerned that things had so changed because of Israel’s sin that perhaps Israel would no longer be God’s special people. Even though Moses had walked with God and had seen God do some very amazing things, he himself needed assurance that God was still with these people.

In these verses Moses wanted assurance that God would, in fact, lead Israel, not just him, through the wilderness (**v. 12-13**). There is a place for praying like this.

There is a place to ask God to answer prayer if we have found favor in God's sight. Now this prayer request is based on the fact that God had revealed through His Word that Moses had found favor in His sight (**v. 12, 17**).

Now Moses did not use this knowledge as a basis for some name it and claim it request for himself. He wanted God to show that He was once again with Israel. He wanted God to remember that Israel was God's nation and he wanted assurance of that.

In **verse 14**, God assured Moses that His presence would be with him and with Israel. God had said He would no longer be in the midst of His people and Moses wondered how it would be known that we are the people of God.

Moses wanted God to go with them and in **verse 17**, God promised He would.

FACT #5 – Moses asks God to show him His glory in greater ways to prove that He was still with Moses and still with Israel. **33:18-23**

Moses wanted God to directly display His glory and apparently show His face. But God informed Him that no sinful man can see God and live. In order to see God, you must die. This is another reason why these people who claim they get to go to heaven and see God and then come back are delusional. God will not allow any to see His glory and live. If you actually die and go to heaven and see God, you are not coming back to this sinful world as a sinful person. If you see God, you are dead.

Now God says in **verse 19** that He will be gracious to whom He decides to be gracious. He will show compassion to whom He decides to show compassion. Paul cites this very verse in Romans 9:15 to teach the N.T. believer about election and grace. God does not owe grace to anyone. In fact, what He owes us is condemnation and wrath. But in pure grace He chooses those who believe. We did not choose God; He chose us.

What God decided to do was to give Moses a very unusual display of His glory. He would pass by and let him see His back, but not His face. Moses was on a rock. In fact, the Hebrew reads "the rock" which probably refers to Mt. Sinai. God said He would put Moses in the cleft or the crevice of the rock and cover Moses with His hand until His Personal Presence was gone. He would take away His hand and Moses would see His back.

Think about this for a moment. God's protective hand would be on Moses. What a comforting thought that is.

All of this said you have really blown it bad, but I want you to know I am still your God and I am still with you.