

Sermon 112, Because I Know You, Exodus 33:12-17

Proposition: The Mediator appeals to God on the basis of his (the Mediator's) own relationship with God, and in so doing learns God's ways and finds even greater favor.

- I. Moses' Presentation, vv. 12-13
 - A. Moses' Complaint: I Don't Know Who You're Sending with Me
 - B. Moses' Premises
 1. You know me by name
 2. I have found grace in your sight
 3. Consider that this nation is your people
 - C. Moses' Request
 1. Show me your ways
 2. That I may find grace in your sight
- II. God's Response, v. 14
 - A. My presence will go with you (singular)
 - B. I will give you (singular) rest
- III. Moses' Further Request, vv. 15-16
 - A. Moses' Premises, v. 16
 1. Your grace will be invisible to the nations unless you go with all of us
 2. Your presence distinguishes us from all other nations
 - B. Moses' Request: Don't lead us up from Sinai unless you come too, v. 15
- IV. God's Response, v. 17
 - A. I will do what you ask
 - B. Because you have found grace in my sight
 - C. Because I know you by name

Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we come this evening to an absolutely incredible account of the Mediator's work. What we see is that Moses dares to make his requests of Yahweh on the basis of Yahweh's covenant — as he has before. But then he takes it further, and also appeals on the basis of God's gracious attachment to him, Moses. "Save them because you know me and are gracious to me!" That's the core of the Mediator's appeal. It's jaw-dropping, firstly because knowing Moses seems like such a shaky basis on which to save 2 million people, and secondly because it's not shaky at all. Instead, it's a preview of Christ's own mediatorial intercession. Jesus pleads with His Father to save us, and the argument that He has is "You know me and trust me." Wow. Double wow! Moses is already thinking, acting, and arguing like the ultimate Mediator. He is prepared to go to bat for Israel on the basis that God knows him by name and has shown grace to him. In the process of mediating like this, Moses learns God's ways, and finds even greater favor in His sight.

I. Moses' Presentation, vv. 12-13

As we saw last time, the Lord rebuked Israel about wearing their ornaments when they ought to be mourning their sin with the calf. Moses then went and pitched a tent outside the camp so that he could meet with Yahweh there. The tent was available for all Israelites who wished to seek the Lord. But its role in the narrative is primarily as a place where God met Moses. The curtain rises, as it were, on their conversation here in v. 12. They are talking face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. Moses is inside the tent and Yahweh is outside it; Moses is not seeing the face of God while they have this conversation. But they are having it!

A. Moses' Complaint: I Don't Know Who You're Sending with Me

Moses' opening conversational gambit returns to the Lord's promise to send His angel before Israel to clear out the six nations from Canaan. Moses' complaint is that he is being asked to bring the people into the promised land with an unknown companion.

Now, what does this mean? Probably the best way to understand is this: like us, the readers, Moses thought he knew who the Angel of Yahweh was. He knew that the angel is Yahweh in person. That was already clear from the burning bush, where the angel called to Moses and is clearly Yahweh. But in the beginning of this chapter God says "I will send the angel but I will not go."

Hence Moses' complaint: What exactly is going on? Is the angel Yahweh, or not? We are getting close to Israel's question at Massah and Meribah, "Is Yahweh among us or not?" Moses doesn't phrase it that way, of course. He speaks not from unbelief but out of faith seeking understanding.

That said, then, Moses is gradually going to address the question of whether God Himself is actually going with Israel. But he starts by bringing up premises we might not expect. He doesn't say "I thought you and the angel were one." He doesn't argue with God over how to understand the angel. He approaches it a different way.

B. Moses' Premises

That way is through the three things that he premises.

1. You know me by name

First, Moses appeals to something God told him: "I know you by name." God said this to Moses.

What does it mean?

It means that God is on exceptionally intimate terms with Moses. Let's consider the opposite. To say "I know you by sight, but I don't know your name" indicates that you actually don't know the person very well. There are people who are at the gym with me on a regular basis. I recognize them, and I'm sure they recognize me. But I don't know their names; I've never spoken to them.

But that's not how it was between God and Moses. God knew Moses not only by sight, but by name. Now, obviously God knows everyone's name. But Moses is the only person in the Bible to whom God said "I know you by name." To talk about how closely you know someone is a sign of intimacy, of relational closeness. God and Moses are very, very close in their association with one another.

2. I have found grace in your sight

Secondly, Moses reminds the Almighty, God has admitted to favoring Moses. Moses is a recipient of the grace of God. What does that mean? It means that God likes him. God is going to give him blessings just because.

Both of these statements are Moses-centered. They are not about the covenant. They are not about God's promises. They openly trade on the closeness of the relationship between God and Moses.

3. Consider that this nation is your people

The third premise, however, returns to the covenant. To say that Israel is God's people — something God has refused to say since the golden calf incident — is to appeal to God's covenant promise to take Israel as His people. Moses will not let God distance Himself from His covenant people. He insists that whatever God says about the calf, the nation is still His covenant people.

C. Moses' Request

Now, based on these three premises, Moses presents his requests. Again, notice the request is not (at first) "So tell me exactly what the relationship between you and the angel is." Rather, the request is premised on intimacy and is a request for greater intimacy.

1. Show me your ways

The first thing Moses asks is for God to show him His ways.

What does that mean? This, after all, is the very point at issue in Massah, Meribah, and the refusal to enter the land. According to Psalm 95, God swore that the wilderness generation would be excluded from His rest precisely because they did not know His ways. To know God's ways is to be familiar with who He is and how He does things. Moses wants to be even more intimate with God, even more familiar with the Almighty's character and works.

Is this your response to greater knowledge of God? And do you see why it is Moses' response to greater knowledge of God?

The better you know the Lord, the more satisfying and beautiful and perfect He is to you. The God you barely know may seem to be forgettable, unimportant, drab. But God when you know Him is nothing like that. He is altogether lovely. He is the most satisfying and joyous being in the universe or out of it. In other words, let me assure you that if you find God boring, you simply don't know Him very well. Moses, on very intimate terms with God, indicates that his dearest wish is to know Him even better.

2. That I may find grace in your sight

And what happens when you know God well? I just posited that you are more and more delighted with who He is. But our text stunningly posits the counterpart of that statement. The better you get to know God, the more attached He is to you. The more you favor Him, the more He favors you. The better you know Him, the better He knows you and the more He will do for you.

The benefits of relationship do not come apart from the relationship. God is not a vending machine, nor a cow to milk or an apple tree to pick. He is a friend. And a close friendship with

Him is not only possible, but runs both ways. He asks more from you the closer you are to Him — but He also gives more. Moses says “When I know your ways better, I will find even more grace in your sight.”

Do you need God’s grace? Yes. You do. The better you know Him, the more acutely aware of your own lack of grace you will be. The more you know Him, the more you know you need His grace. And the more of His grace you have, the more you know Him, and the more you draw on His grace.

It’s a wonderful spiral that rises directly up to Heaven. God has made us for deeper and deeper intimacy. We recognize that couples who have been married for fifty years have a level of intimacy that those married for five years can’t match. They know each other really well. And they have developed unlimited grace for each other. This is just a poor image of how close with God the believer should get. The longer you live with Him, the more you should study and learn His ways, and the more you should gain grace in His sight so that you can know Him and find even more grace in His sight.

II. God’s Response, v. 14

Well, God responds to Moses’ complaint. Rather than saying “Yes, Moses, I will show you my ways and you will gain favor in my sight,” He says “My presence will go with you.” He answers Moses’ statement “You have not shown me who will go with me.” Yahweh assures him that yes, the angel is in fact the personal presence of God.

A. My presence will go with you (singular)

That said, though, the Lord’s response seems to limit this promise strictly to Moses. God will not deny His intimacy with Moses. He will not say “No, Moses, you misunderstood the relationship. We’re not as close as you thought we were.” He acknowledges that He and Moses are as close as Moses thought. But He says “I will do for you personally what you asked. I will go with you, but not with all Israel.”

Now, how can that be? Isn’t God’s presence with Moses at least sort of His presence with all Israel? Perhaps so. But as we will see, that “sort of” and “perhaps” are not enough to satisfy Amram’s son.

B. I will give you (singular) rest

God also promises to give rest, again just to Moses. This seems to refer to settled life in the land — an odd promise, to say the least, for Moses never did enter Canaan and find rest there. In fact, the Hebrew writer adds that Joshua did not give the Israelites rest in Canaan either. Solomon had rest on every side for a few years, but soon the Lord raised up adversaries who attacked him as well. The rest, in fact, must be understood as being truly fulfilled only in Heaven. In that sense, Moses entered the heavenly rest upon his death. God promised it to him and kept his promise. Israel, meanwhile, is definitely excluded from this promise of rest. In fact, God would go on to swear about this wilderness generation that they would not enter His rest.

III. Moses’ Further Request, vv. 15-16

Moses is very sensitive to this. He does not ask that all Israel be granted rest — but He does ask for God to accompany all Israel.

His requests traded originally on God's attachment to him personally. When God says "All right, I will go with you alone and give you rest alone," Moses has to play the rest of his cards. It was not about God's attachment to him and blessings for him. It was about God's people — Moses' people — the Mediator's people — all along.

A. Moses' Premises, v. 16

Thus, he shows his cards by making two arguments that trade both on God's attachment to him as Mediator and on God's attachment to His glory before the nations and to the distinctiveness of His people.

1. Your grace will be invisible to the nations unless you go with all of us

Thus, Moses first argues that Yahweh's grace will be invisible to the nations unless He goes up to the Promised Land with Israel. Why would he say that? I would compare it to his statement in the previous chapter — that the Egyptians would say "God failed. He couldn't get them into Canaan and had to kill them in the wilderness." If God doesn't save His people all the way, His grace has not done its job. Even a pagan can see that.

Moses believes this, which is why he argues it. God also accepts this premise, which is why He relents in response to Moses' arguments.

That is good news, brothers and sisters. Why do we believe in the perseverance of the saints? One reason is that God will not be shamed in the presence of a watching world. He will forgive and accompany His people. He will forgive and accompany you.

2. Your presence distinguishes us from all other nations

The second argument Moses makes is that God's presence makes Israel different. It is their distinctive. Without God among them, they are just like the nations. This is something that we as a church can too easily forget. Without God among us, we are just another NGO. We are the Nature Conservancy or Doctors Without Borders.

Moses refuses to accept the status of NGO for the children of Israel. They are more highly favored than that, because they are not united around a charitable earthly purpose, but around a heavenly calling symbolized by the tabernacle in their midst.

Brothers and sisters, God also accepts this premise. He is willing to go with us so that we stand out, so that we are set apart. Can you worship and delight in Him for this?

B. Moses' Request: Don't lead us up from Sinai unless you come too, v. 15

So his request is that God accompany them, showing His grace to the nations and showing Israel's distinctiveness to the nations. The Mediator says "We are willing to sit in the desert forever if we cannot travel with you."

That's how much the Mediator loves God. That's how attached to the Almighty he is.

IV. God's Response, v. 17

And God loves him back.

A. I will do what you ask

He responds positively to Moses, and promises to go with the people — not just with Moses, but with all the people. Brothers and sisters, the God who would consume them in a moment promises to restrain His anger and wipe away their sin.

B. Because you have found grace in my sight

In fact, He says that He is willing to do all this, to forgive Israel's sin, precisely because He knows Moses. He does not mention the covenant. He does not mention His commitment to national Israel. He mentions only His commitment to the Mediator. Because *Moses* had found grace in the eyes of the LORD, the LORD will go with Israel. God's grace for the Mediator is God's blessing for the Mediator's people. God's grace for Jesus Christ is His blessing for you and me. God forgives us because He loves us — but in another sense, He loves us because He loves Christ.

C. Because I know you by name

Not only does He love the Mediator; He knows him. God has known Moses, not just by face, but by name. What an incredible statement!

God accompanies Israel from Sinai to the Promised Land not because Israel is so wonderful, but because God knows and favors Moses.

God knows and favors Jesus Christ. That's why He will never leave or forsake you or anyone who is united to Christ. Brothers and sisters, can you love and admire and adore the Mediator? Can you thank Jesus that He leverages His connections with the Father not on His own behalf, but on yours? He didn't use His influence to cut you out of the inheritance, but to get you in. He doesn't keep the Father away from you; He brings Him to you. He is not far from you, but close to you — and even closer to the Father, for God knows Him by name and He has found grace in His sight. Trust, love, believe, obey Him for who He is and what He has done as your Mediator and mine. Amen.