

Sermon 115, What the Mediator Asks For, Exodus 34:9-10

Proposition: The Mediator requests God's favor for the people on the basis of God's favor for the Mediator, and God responds by making a covenant to work in an awe-inspiring, miraculous way.

- I. The Basis for the Mediator's Request: God's Grace to the Mediator, v. 9a
- II. The Substance of the Mediator's Request
 - A. God's Tabernacling Presence
 - B. God's Willingness to Work with His Stiffnecked People
 - C. God's Forgiveness
 - D. God's Taking Us as His Own Possession
- III. God's Response to the Mediator's Request, v. 10
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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we have seen throughout these chapters that the relationship between God and Israel is utterly dependent on the relationship between God and Moses. Like it or not (and you should like it), the Almighty's attitude toward Israel is a function of His attitude toward the mediator who stands between Him and Israel. That theme has surfaced in a major way in the previous sections of the golden calf narrative, but it is, if possible, even more prominent in the verses before us. God speaks to Moses and tells him that what God is going to do He is going to do for Moses in particular, on the basis of His grace toward Moses as an individual. God's work for His people is predicated on His grace toward the Mediator.

I. The Basis for the Mediator's Request: God's Grace to the Mediator, v. 9a

That becomes clear right off the bat here in v. 9. Remember, Moses has not spoken since 33:18, when he said "Please show me your glory." God has done all the talking since that request, and, of course, has actually shown Moses His overwhelming glory. The next thing that Moses says, his response to the display of God's glory, is to remind God that God has shown favor to him, Moses. Incredibly, he does not say "Thank you, God, for letting me see your glory. I am satisfied."

No. The Mediator, on the basis of the extreme favor that God has shown towards him, dares to ask for yet another favor. Actually, he dares to ask again for the same favor that he has requested already — the favor that God go with them to the promised land. Again, as we have talked about, this request is a request that the tabernacle be built and God's tabernacling presence dwell in the midst of Israel. Notice that Moses uses the key word "midst" in his request this time. God has already said that He would go with Moses. But Moses, appealing unabashedly to the

favor that God has already shown him, specifically predicated his request for God's tabernacling presence on God's favor towards him personally.

It's not "If we have found favor in your sight," but "if I have found favor in your sight." We want to say, "Moses, God showed you all His goodness! Of course you have found favor in His sight." But that is exactly the point. Moses knew that God had favored him. And in that knowledge he asks for additional favor from God.

Why does God take care of you? In a very real sense, because He loves Jesus. Why is He always gracious to you? Because He is always gracious to Jesus. The benefits that we enjoy as the people of God come to us through the Mediator's perfections, through the Mediator's grace, through the Father's love for the Mediator.

II. The Substance of the Mediator's Request

So what specifically does Moses ask for? He has already seen the glory of God. Now he requests four things.

A. God's Tabernacling Presence

The first of these is God's tabernacling presence. He wants God to go with them. He hinted at in 33:12-13, said it pretty explicitly in 33:16, and now asks for it outright. He wants God to live among them, to dwell in the tabernacle that has been so lavishly described in chs. 25-31.

B. God's Willingness to Work with His Stiffnecked People

But that's not all the mediator asks for. His next admission/request is breathtaking: he picks up God's word, "stiffnecked," and fully admits that God is right. God has called Israel "stiffnecked" three times in the previous two chapters. Now Moses essentially says "Yes, we are. Please work with us anyway. Go with us *even though* we are stiffnecked."

That is boldness right there! Moses does not promise that the people will improve. He does not say "God, there is reason to believe that they are getting better at bowing their necks and placing them under your yoke." He just says "Yep, they're stiffnecked, and I would like you to accompany us anyway."

He is asking the LORD to exercise incredible self-restraint. After all, at the beginning of the precious chapter He said that if He were in their midst for even a moment He would consume them precisely because they are stiffnecked.

How is this possible? How can God go with a people who are asking to be destroyed?

C. God's Forgiveness

The answer is in the next petition, of course: only through God's forgiveness can Israel be delivered from God's wrath. The Mediator dares to ask that God not hold Israel's sin against them.

Obviously God must favor Moses very highly indeed for Moses to dare so much. Even in our conversations with other human beings, we know that there is a limit beyond which people cannot be pushed. Asking for too much too quickly is a great way to get rejected. But Moses asks for huge favors here. He has been silent for a long time, listening to the proclamation of Yahweh's name. But, more confident than ever in the God who called him to lead the people out of Egypt, Moses asks for God's accompanying presence and forgiveness.

D. God's Taking Us as His Own Possession

He also asks that God would take Israel as His own possession. Moses wants them not only to be God's people, but to be God's special people. He is not asking to be on the side, but to be at the center.

These four requests sum up what Moses desires. He desires an intimate relationship where God commits to Israel as His people, forgives their sins, puts up with their stiff necks, and travels with them in the tabernacle.

They are bold, and they are beautiful. But are they successful? How does God respond to these requests?

III. God's Response to the Mediator's Request, v. 10

In a truly astonishing fashion. He does not say "Yea" or "nay" to Moses' bold requests. He says, rather, that He is going to do through Moses something so great, so unparalleled that it will reveal Him to Israel in an unmissable way. Israel will see His work, but Moses will do His work.

By the way, I think we can take this as a "yes." Yes, God says, I will take you as my possession, I will go with you, I will forgive you, I will put up with your stiff-necked ways. But even though I'd say the narrative ultimately reflects a positive answer to Moses' petition, brothers and sisters, clearly the fact that God answers in other terms indicates His freedom, His unwillingness to be caught in human categories and requests. He says, essentially, "I will do more than you can possibly ask. Just you watch, Moses."

A. He Enters Into Covenant

The first thing He promises is to make a covenant. A covenant, as we already know from reading Genesis, is a bond in blood sovereignly administered. It is a promise to take Israel as His people, and to be their God. And thus, God's first statement is indeed a direct answer to Moses' final request.

What covenant is this? Another one, replacing the one that was destroyed when the tablets were broken? You can think of it that way if you want. I prefer to regard this as simply a continuation of the one act of covenant-making that took place over the whole course of the events at Sinai. Moses had sealed the covenant and the Israelites had accepted it when they allowed him to sprinkle them with the blood of the covenant back in ch. 24. God is not making a covenant with different terms than the ones described in chs. 19-23. He is not issuing different promises and different conditions, or changing the design of the tabernacle to make it more obviously different from the golden cow. In short, God is *still* making a covenant, even after the people's sin, even after their horrific display of stiff-necked rebellion. The calf has not stopped God from entering into a covenant bond with His people.

B. He Performs Unparalleled Miracles

Second, God promises to perform unparalleled miracles, marvels never wrought before. What are these miracles? We can presume that they are the things the narrative goes on to describe, chief among them being the erection of the tabernacle and God's moving in to it, the wilderness wanderings, the conquest of Canaan, the setting up of the monarchy, and the preservation of Israel through wars, exiles, and foreign imperial rule. The ultimate fulfillment of this promise, of

course, is the incarnation and resurrection of the Son of God, the marvel of marvels, the greatest thing that God has ever done and that the world has ever seen.

Moses asked God to travel what today is a 313-mile route from Mt. Sinai to Jerusalem, tabernacling with the people the whole way. It's a big request. But God promises to do something orders of magnitude larger. The tabernacle of God is with men — that is a marvel never seen by any nation in the days before Moses wrote.

C. He Shows His Works to the Mediator's People

But God promises something else: to the people who did not know His ways, who were ignorant of what fate had befallen Moses in the glory cloud on the smoking top of Sinai, He is going to show His ways. All the Mediator's people will see God's work. "He sheweth his word unto Jacob, his statutes and his judgments unto Israel. He hath not dealt so with any nation: and as for his judgments, they have not known them. Praise the LORD" (Psa 147:19-20)!

D. He Performs an Awe-Inspiring Work with the Mediator

I know I've emphasized this a lot, but I'm going to emphasize it one more time: God does not say that He will do marvels with Israel, but with the Mediator. Israel is going to see something utterly awe-inspiring, something borderline terrifying, that God will do with Moses. What is that? The text does not say. Again, I would point to the rest of the narrative. God is going to reveal Himself through Moses, particularly through the Exodus events, the tabernacle, the passover — but above all, through the five books of Moses and their unparalleled majesty in describing the ways of our God.

Of course, even greater than the revelation through Moses is the revelation through Jesus Christ. If you love Jesus, love Moses' work which foreshadows and prepares for it.

God showed Moses His glory, and consented to accompany Israel to the promised land, overlooking and forgiving their sins. Ultimately, that was possible only through the work of Jesus Christ, the one who died so Israel's stiff neck could be forgiven and healed. So can yours, through the same source. Jesus' work saved Israel, and it will save you. Amen.