

A Man Named Moses
"A God Who is Grace-Giving"

Introduction: The text before us today is one of the most important in the whole Moses saga. (Speaks to God's holiness and demand for justice, man's sinful and frail nature, and the grace of God.

- Out of 400 years of bondage
- Miraculously delivered across the Red Sea
- Here—One of the most crucial moments for Israel's history
- Story of Israel's fall as God's covenant people
- The fall of humanity (Genesis 1-3) which follows God's good creation is paralleled here
- In Exodus 25-31 God is instructing Moses on the mountain on how they can maintain their covenant relationship with God
- Before God is done speaking to Moses, the people have already rebelled

— They had already committed to covenant with God (Exodus 24)

So Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the judgments. And all the people answered with one voice and said, "All the words which the Lord has said we will do." Exodus 24:3 NKJV

- Then Moses went to the mountain to receive the tablets.
- Here, the story of Israel's failure begins

I. Israel Asserts its Independence

A. While Moses was on the mountain 40 days the people grew impatient

1. On one hand he is indispensable
2. On the other, they aren't sure he is their man (delayed=shamefully lost)

B. They ask Aaron to make gods (elohim) to go before them

1. Replace Moses, not God
2. Calf would be a link between God and them instead of Moses
3. An image would bring God near

C. Aaron makes the calf

1. People's freewill offerings

2. Had been instructed to receive offerings for tabernacle in 25

NOTE: Tabernacle would assure God's presence—this would forfeit it

D. Aaron and the altar

1. Do the people see the calf as replacement for Yahweh?
2. Does Aaron now try to do damage control by directing their image worship to Yahweh?

E. The feast of mockery

Then they rose early on the next day, offered burnt offerings, and brought peace offerings; and the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. Exodus 32:6 NKJV

It is clear—Israel has asserted its own independence—autonomy—much like Adam and Eve

II. God's Presence is Jeopardized

A. God's wrath

And the Lord said to Moses, "Go, get down! For your people whom you brought out of the land of Egypt have corrupted themselves. 8 They have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them. They have made themselves a molded calf, and worshiped it and sacrificed to it, and said, 'This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!'" 9 And the Lord said to Moses, "I have seen this people, and indeed it is a stiff-necked people! 10 Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation." Exodus 32:7-10 NKJV

1. No reason to give more covenant instruction—the covenant is broken—"Get Down!"
2. He is ready to consume this rebellious people
3. He will make a new start with Moses
4. God seems to hint of His grace and reveal a loophole—Moses had a chance to refuse intercession

Now therefore, let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you a great nation." Exodus 32:10 NKJV

Therefore He said that He would destroy them, Had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, To turn away His wrath, lest He destroy them. Psalms 106:23 NKJV

QUESTION: What if Moses does not leave Him alone? What if instead he intercedes?

5. Moses, taking the hint—intercedes

Then Moses pleaded with the Lord his God, and said: "Lord, why does Your wrath burn hot against Your people whom You have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? 12 Why should the Egyptians speak, and say, 'He brought them out to harm them, to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from Your fierce wrath, and relent from this harm to Your people. 13 Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, Your servants, to whom You swore by Your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your descendants as the stars of heaven; and all this land that I have spoken of I give to your descendants, and they shall inherit it forever.'" Exodus 32:11-13 NKJV

- a. Moses to God—your people YOU brought out—see verse 7—God said, “you people.”
 - b. Egypt will misinterpret
 - c. Promise to Abraham
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6. God relented—“nocham”
 - To sigh, breathe, strongly
 - To be sorry in a favorable sense
 - To pity or console

NOTE: Will return to this later

B. Moses confronts Israel's sin (32:15-20)

1. Moses comes down the mountain—possibly didn't know how bad it was—2 tablets in hand
2. Joshua hears the sound
3. Anger of Moses
4. No reason for covenant tablets—covenant broken

C. Moses confronts Aaron

And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought so great a sin upon them?" 22 So Aaron said, "Do not let the anger of my lord become hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. 23 For they said to me, 'Make us gods that shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' 24 And I said to them, 'Whoever has any gold, let them break it off.' So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out." Exodus 32:21-24 NKJV

1. Moses implicitly blames people
2. Aaron goes with that excuse
3. Almost humorous explanation (24)
4. Will later be commissioned priests, he and sons

NOTE: Reveal danger of institutional ministry—compromise for what people want

D. Moses ordered the judgment of people for idolatry

Now when Moses saw that the people were unrestrained (for Aaron had not restrained them, to their shame among their enemies), 26 then Moses stood in the entrance of the camp, and said, "Whoever is on the Lord's side — come to me!" And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together to him. 27 And he said to them, "Thus says the Lord God of Israel: 'Let every man put his sword on his side, and go in and out from entrance to entrance throughout the camp, and let every man kill his brother, every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.'" 28 So the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And about three thousand men of the people fell that day. 29 Then Moses said, "Consecrate yourselves today to the Lord, that He may bestow on you a blessing this day, for every man has opposed his son and his brother." Exodus 32:25-29 NKJV

1. Sin is heinous
2. Judgment is necessary
3. About 1/2 of 1% killed
4. Levites set apart

E. Moses intercedes for the people

1. Blot me out

Then Moses returned to the Lord and said, "Oh, these people have committed a great sin, and have made for themselves a god of gold! 32 Yet now, if You will forgive their sin — but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written." Exodus 32:31-32 NKJV

2. God said, “no”

And the Lord said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book. 34 Now therefore, go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you. Behold, My Angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin." Exodus 32:33-34 NKJV

3. God said, “Go without me.”

Then the Lord said to Moses, "Depart and go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your descendants I will give it.' 2 And I will send My Angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. 3 Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people." Exodus 33:1-3 NKJV

- a. Still keeps His promise
- b. Calls them Moses' people

4. Chapters 25-31—giving tabernacle instructions for His presence to dwell in their midst
 - a. This now seems to be coming to an end
 - b. The people mourn

And when the people heard this bad news, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. Exodus 33:4 NKJV

- c. Lowest part in history at this time in Israel's covenant-breaking

III. God's Grace Abounds

A. Moses stays close to God

Moses took his tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of meeting. And it came to pass that everyone who sought the Lord went out to the tabernacle of meeting which was outside the camp. 8 So it was, whenever Moses went out to the tabernacle, that all the people rose, and each man stood at his tent door and watched Moses until he had gone into the tabernacle. 9 And it came to pass, when Moses entered the tabernacle, that the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses. 10 All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the tabernacle door, and all the people rose and worshiped, each man in his tent door. 11 So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle. Exodus 33:7-11 NKJV

1. Tabernacle plans suspended
2. Outside the camp
3. Israel not totally abandoned by God
4. Israel's relationship with God hung on the thread of Moses' mediation

B. Moses' intercession is successful

Then 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 grace in My sight.' 13 Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people." 14 And He said, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." 15 Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. 16 For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth." 17 So the Lord said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name." Exodus 33:12-17 NKJV

1. Moses finally broaches the subject
2. God agrees to go with them

C. Moses desires even more

And he said, "Please, show me Your glory." Exodus 33:18 NKJV

1. God reveals Himself to Moses

Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." 20 But He said, "You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live." 21 And the Lord said, "Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. 22 So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. 23 Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen." Exodus 33:19-23 NKJV

2. I will be gracious and have compassion on who I will

NOTE: "Not to primarily undermine divine sovereignty, as if God and God alone arbitrates who is in the Kingdom and who misses it. It is God's willingness to forgive a sinful people and accompany them on their further journey." (Victor Hamilton)

D. The intercession of Moses restores the broken relationship between Israel and God.

1. Israel broke covenant—relationship broken
2. Renewal of covenant, like the making of covenant will be initiated by a theophany
 - a. All Israel before
 - b. Only Moses now
3. Private theophany and reduced immediacy of revelation

NOTE: Sin, even when forgiven, still carries with it consequences

4. God's presence overcame Moses (34:5-7)

- a. Moses worships

So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped. Exodus 34:8 NKJV

- b. Moses intercedes

Then he said, "If now I have found grace in Your sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray, go among us, even though we are a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance." Exodus 34:9 NKJV

c. God responds

And He said: "Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord. For it is an awesome thing that I will do with you. Exodus 34:10 NKJV

5. God calls for renewed obedience (34:11-26)

NOTE: He unpacks the Word

6. God's glory reflected by Moses

- a. At beginning of story—Moses absence was central
- b. Now his presence is focus

Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses' hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him. Exodus 34:29 NKJV

- c. His absence cost them God's presence
- d. Now his presence mediates it

So when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned to him; and Moses talked with them. 32 Afterward all the children of Israel came near, and he gave them as commandments all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. 33 And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face. 34 But whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with Him, he would take the veil off until he came out; and he would come out and speak to the children of Israel whatever he had been commanded. 35 And whenever the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone, then Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with Him. Exodus 34:30-35 NKJV

Conclusion: This narrative reveals a God who is grace-giving

Two Instructive Insights Regarding Grace

1. God's grace, demonstrated by His relenting from His plan to destroy those who break His covenant, does not mean that sin would go unpunished. Rather, it means that the recipient of divine wrath would be transferred from the offender to the mediator. (Moses chiseled his own tablets, risked his life on the mountain, lost his chance to enter the Promised Land until after the resurrection.)

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. 2 Corinthians 5:21 NKJV

God's grace doesn't mean no punishment. It means Jesus took it for us.

(ILL) The Cross: Christ Descends Into Our Sin

Theologian James R. Edwards retells the following true story to illustrate our need and Christ's response to our need. In August 1957 four climbers—two Italians and two Germans—were climbing the 6,000 foot near-vertical North Face in the Swiss Alps. The two German climbers disappeared and were never heard from again. The two Italian climbers, exhausted and dying, were stuck on two narrow ledges a thousand feet below the summit. The Swiss Alpine Club forbade rescue attempts in this area (it was just too dangerous), but a small group of Swiss climbers decided to launch a private rescue effort to save the Italians. So they carefully lowered a climber named Alfred Hellepart down the 6,000 foot North Face. They suspended Hellepart on a cable a fraction of an inch thick as they lowered him into the abyss.

Here's how Hellepart described the rescue in his own words:

As I was lowered down the summit ... my comrades on top grew further and further distant, until they disappeared from sight. At this moment I felt an indescribable aloneness. Then for the first time I peered down the abyss of the North Face of the Eiger. The terror of the sight robbed me of breath. ...The brooding blackness of the Face, falling away in almost endless expanse beneath me, made me look with awful longing to the thin cable disappearing about me in the mist. I was a tiny human being dangling in space between heaven and hell. The sole relief from terror was ...my mission to save the climber below.

That is the heart of the Gospel story. We were trapped, but in the person and presence of Jesus, God lowered himself into the abyss of our sin and suffering. In Jesus God became "a tiny human being dangling between heaven and hell." He did it to save the people trapped below—you and me. Thus, the gospel is much more radical than just another religion telling us how to be good in our own power. It tells us the story of God's risky, costly, sacrificial rescue effort on our behalf.

James R. Edwards, Is Jesus the Only Savior (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2005), pp. 160-161

2. God's grace is demonstrated to us by revealing God's presence to us, even when we all our answers are not found.

(ILL) Seeing Jesus in the Dark

When I was a student at Harvard Divinity School, I learned preaching from Dr. Gardner Taylor, a pastor in New York City. I'll never forget those lectures. I remember him telling us a story from when he was preaching in Louisiana during the Depression. Electricity was just coming into that part of the country, and he was out in a rural, black church that had just one little light bulb hanging down from the ceiling to light up the whole sanctuary. He was preaching away, and in the middle of his sermon, all of a sudden, the electricity went out. The building went pitch black, and Dr. Taylor didn't know what to say, being a young preacher. He stumbled around until one of the elderly deacons sitting in the back of the church cried out, "Preach on, preacher! We can still see Jesus in the dark!"

Sometimes that's the only time we can see him—in the dark. And the good news of the gospel is that whether we can see him in the dark or not, he can see us in the dark.

Taken from Timothy George's sermon "Unseen Footprints"

- a. Show me your glory
- b. I must hide you in the cleft of the rock—I'll pass by, but my face you cannot see

Us—Give me answers! Tell me why so I can see you!

"God's holiness (otherness) must never be pushed aside"—Waldeman Janzen