

Ministry of Grace Church

Exodus 33 – Speaker Notes

A couple of weeks ago we went through Exodus chapter 20 in which we learned about the giving of the Ten Commandments. In chapter 21, *Yahweh* told the Israelites about His laws concerning slaves and about restitution for unintentionally causing damage or causing another person to suffer loss. Then, in chapter 22 *Yahweh* informed the children of Israel about the laws that pertain to a person who intentionally cause damage or loss to another person. In the end of chapter 22 and the beginning of chapter 23 *Yahweh* told the people about the laws of social justice. Then He informed them about the laws of the Sabbath and other festivals. Then, at the end of chapter 23 *Yahweh* talked to them about their upcoming conquest of the Promised Land. In chapter 24, *Yahweh* invited Moses, Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu along with 70 of the elders of the people to come up the mountain. I'm giving this summary because we did not study through these chapters.

Then, before they went up Mt. Sinai, Moses came and told the people all the words of *Yahweh* and all the rules. And all the People answered with one voice and said, "All the words that *Yahweh* had spoken we will do. Moses wrote down all the words of *Yahweh* and then read this Book of the Covenant in the hearing of the people. The people said, "All that *Yahweh* has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient. And Moses sprinkled sacrificial blood on the people to confirm the covenant that they had just made with *Yahweh*, a covenant that the children of Israel promised to keep.

Last time we were together we learned that as soon as the Israelites made this covenant with *Yahweh*, Moses went back up the mountain to receive the rest of the Law. But when he did not come down for more than a month, the people broke the covenant and had Aaron make an image of a golden calf for them to worship. When Moses came back down with the two tablets of the Law, he saw the idolatry of the people which caused him to get angry and he broke the two tablets of the law and destroyed the golden idol.

Moses immediately returned up the mountain to make confession and intercession for the Israelites in hopes that *Yahweh* would forgive them their sins. But *Yahweh* send a plague upon the people and many of them died.

Exodus 33:1-3

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.' 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. 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."

Yahweh's command to Moses was, "[Depart; go up from here.](#)" Although the command is given to Moses here, the Israelites don't actually depart from the mountain for about another ten months (see Timeline of the Exodus from Egypt).

Notice that God makes a distinction between Moses and the children of Israel. He also refers to the people as "the people whom you have brought ..." rather than "my people." Even though the children of Israel are God's covenant people, fulfilling His promise to Abraham, these particular individuals have broken that covenant and are now referred to simply as "the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt."

There is also a very subtle, yet distinct, change in God's dealing with the Israelites at this point. Up till now, God has been leading the children of Israel out of Egypt. From this point on, God will be leading the Israelites toward the Promised Land. They are no longer coming out, they are now travelling towards.

Yahweh now informs Moses that He will send an angel before them. He also told him this back in [Exodus 32:34](#) and in [Exodus 23:20-23](#).

There are some who believe that this Angel is Michael the archangel. Others believe that this is a reference to The Angel of the LORD, the pre-incarnate Christ Himself. However, we are never told who this "messenger" is.

Why does *Yahweh* continually refer to the promised land as, "[a land flowing with milk and honey](#)" The Israelites were primarily an agrarian society, living off their flocks and the fruit of the land. One sign of a healthy flock was one that produced offspring abundantly and, therefore, produced much milk, both for the young animals and for the people. Additionally, a land that produces much fruit will, necessarily, have lots of bees to fertilize the fruits and vegetables. Hence, it would also be a land that has an abundance of honey. The fact that God referred to the Promised Land as a land flowing with milk and honey implies that it is fertile and rich in the things which would bless the people the most.

Thus far on the journey, *Yahweh* has been represented as being in the midst of the camp. However, because the people have broken the covenant with *Yahweh*, from this point on, he will only meet with Moses at the "tent of meeting" which Moses will pitch outside the camp.

Also, notice that *Yahweh* reminded them that they were a people who refused the yoke which *Yahweh* had placed on them (a stiff-necked people). They were more interested in their own desires than in *Yahweh's* desire for them. As we will see later at Kadesh-Barnea, *Yahweh* will eventually kill all those who are adults at this point in the travel because they refused to submit to His authority and do as He told them to do. This will cost the Israelites forty years of wandering in the wilderness.

Exodus 33:4-6

When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. 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.” Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

When the children of Israel heard that *Yahweh* was angry with them, they mourned. Remember, they had just finished celebrating and partying as part of their idolatry. That had involved putting on their best clothes and adorning themselves with the riches which they had plundered from the Egyptians. But, after Moses destroyed their idol, they were told to remove their ornaments. So, it appears that those who still had their ornaments on, finally took them off and those who had already taken them off, did not put them on again.

Keep in mind that idolatry is the same as adultery to *Yahweh*. His displeasure with the idolatry of the Israelites was so great that He was ready to destroy all of them. As a result of Moses’ intercession for them, *Yahweh* relented and agreed not to slay them all right now, but He reiterated the fact that they are stiff-necked and that if He were in their midst, He would consume them. As a result of their adultery and unwillingness to yield to His will, *Yahweh* instructed them to take off their ornaments. This is equivalent to dressing in sackcloth. It is a sign of mourning in the presence of God.

It is interesting to note that they did not mourn when Moses confronted them for their sin, nor did they mourn when the Levites killed three thousand of their brethren because of their continued partying. However, now that they realized that *Yahweh* was withdrawing His presence from them, they mourned. It appears that the Israelites no longer wore their ornaments from this point on throughout the journey to the Promised Land.

Exodus 33:7

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.

This tent is not the Tabernacle which God had described in Exodus chapters twenty-five through twenty-seven. This is a separate tent which Moses used when meeting with God. It was pitched outside the camp at some distance, demonstrating to the Israelites that God was no longer in their midst.

Moses was not the only one who went out to the tent of meeting, anyone who wanted to seek the LORD and His direction for them also went out to the tent. It appears, however, that Moses was the only one who was permitted to go into the tent and meet directly with *Yahweh*.

Exodus 33:8-10

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. 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. 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.

The text tells us that, “all the people would rise up ... and watch Moses.” This is a clear sign that the Israelites considered Moses to occupy a position of reverence with God and man. When Moses walked out to the tent, the news spread quickly, and all the people watched until he entered the tent.

As the people stood watching, the visible representation of *Yahweh* (the pillar of cloud) came down and remained at the door of the tent while the LORD talked with Moses.

Now we see that as a result of the events of the previous few days, the children of Israel had a new reverence both for Moses and for *Yahweh*. Upon seeing the visible representation of *Yahweh*, the people worshipped from the front of their tents. The word here translated as “worship” literally means, “to bow down.”

Exodus 33:11

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.

This shows the very intimate relationship that Moses had with God. Of none of His other prophets is it said that God spoke with them face to face. God and Moses spoke, not as a master does to his slave, but as a man speaks to his friend. This is equivalent to God declaring that Moses was a friend of God. The only other person in the Bible who is said to have been the friend of God was Abraham. James declares this fact:

and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”—and he was called a friend of God. (James 2:23)

Exodus 33:12-13

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.’ 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.”

In verses one and two of this chapter Jehovah had told Moses that His presence would not go with the people but that He would send His angel before them into the Promised Land. It is clear from verse thirteen that Moses did not know the way to go. Up to this point Moses had simply followed the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. Without the visible manifestation of *Yahweh* to lead the way, Moses would not know where to go. He was asking for a guide to be sent from *Yahweh* Himself.

Yahweh declared to Moses that, “I know you by name” The Hebrew verb “to know” is *yadah*, which refers to intimate, personal knowledge. This is yet another indication of the very privileged position in which Moses was held by God.

Notice that Moses does not simply say “show me the way,” that is, to the Promised Land. He says, “show me **Your** ways.” The word translated “ways” literally means “roads” or “highways.” Remember that Moses had spent 40 years wandering this area as he tended his

father-in-law's sheep. There were numerous routes through the wilderness leading to the Promised Land, but Moses was only interested in going via the roads that God had chosen. This is emblematic of us asking God to show us His way as we travel through this life.

Exodus 33:14

And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

This is a declaration by God that the covenant relationship between Him and His people had been restored. This came about only because Moses humbled himself before God and confessed the sins of the people.

The Hebrew word for "presence" is *pāniym*. Although it is plural in form, it refers specifically to "the face." However, it is used symbolically to represent God's presence, God's blessing, the surface of something, or the front of something. God assured Moses that His presence and His blessing would accompany Moses and the Israelites.

Yahweh also promised Moses that He would give him "rest" This is from the Hebrew word meaning "to settle down, to rest from labor." The clear implication is that God would lead Moses to his resting place. Symbolically, that was the Promised Land, although Moses was not permitted to enter the Promised Land. It is used here to indicate the final place of settling and resting, i.e. Heaven.

Exodus 33:15-17

And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. 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?" 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."

Moses now makes it clear that it is not sufficient for God to be present with him. *Yahweh* needs to be present with the entire Israelite nation. Moses asks for a unique position for the children of Israel, distinct from all other people on the face of the earth. This is a sign of a great leader. He is not simply concerned for his personal welfare, but for the welfare of all those under his care.

Exodus 33:18-20

Moses said, "Please show me your glory." 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. But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."

Moses now asks for something beyond comprehension, a glimpse of the Glory of God. Consider that Moses had already seen the glory of God in the burning bush which was not consumed. He had seen the glory of God in the ten plagues that Jehovah brought against the Egyptians. He had seen the glory of God when He passed-over the homes of the Israelites that had the lamb's blood on the door-posts and the lintel. He had seen the glory

of God in the parting of the Red Sea and the returning of that water to destroy His enemies. He had seen the glory of God in the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. He had seen the glory of God in the daily provision of bread from heaven. He had seen the glory of God in the rock that split open to provide water for the people. He had seen the glory of God in Jehovah's awesome display of his majesty as He spoke the Ten Commandments to the people from Mt. Sinai.

Nonetheless, Moses asked *Yahweh* to allow him to see His personal glory, not just the manifestations of His glory, but the actual Shekinah glory itself. This is the same glory that Christ displayed a portion of on the mount of transfiguration:

Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. (Matthew 17:1-3a)

Remember that God is light:

... God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. (1 John 1:5)

and that men love darkness rather than light because their deeds are evil. This glory that Moses is speaking of is that light which is part of what *Yahweh* is. It is the total absence of evil, it is His holiness which shines forth like the noon-day sun.

Therefore, *Yahweh* told Moses, "I will make all my goodness pass before you." Notice that God did not say, "I will make my glory pass before you." It is His goodness that He was to display. This is from the Hebrew word *tūb*, which refers to "possessions, goodness, or beauty." The root concept of this noun is that of desirability for enjoyment.

And – *Yahweh* promised Moses that He would, "... be gracious ... and will show mercy..." It is the prerogative of God to show mercy when none is deserved and compassion when none is earned. It is an integral part of who He is. Nonetheless, *Yahweh* did not let Moses actually see His face because, "man shall not see me and live."

Exodus 33:21-23

And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, 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. Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

"there is a place by Me" – This is an apparent reference to a cave or fissure near the rocky summit of Mt. Sinai where *Yahweh* would place Moses as He passed by, allowing him to see no more than His afterglow.

So What?

God knows those who are His children, and He knows them intimately!

In verse twelve, Moses reminds *Yahweh* that He has had intimate knowledge of Moses:

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.’” (Exodus 33:12)

Compare this with Jesus’ description of those expecting entrance into heaven:

On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never **knew** you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.’” (Matthew 7:21-23)

The ones who are not known intimately by God will not be allowed entrance into the kingdom of heaven. The people in this story think that they are saved and will naturally have entrance into heaven, but they are rejected. Compare this with what Paul had to say in the eighth chapter of the book of Romans:

For those whom he **foreknew** he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified. (Romans 8:29-30)

The Greek word translated “know or knew” in these verses is *ginōskō*, meaning “absolute or thorough knowledge which has been acquired.” The word translated “foreknew” is *proginōskō*. The foreknowledge of God does not mean that He knew ahead of time who would accept Christ as Savior. Everywhere in the Bible that *Yahweh’s* foreknowledge is spoken of it is foreknowledge of a person, not of an action! It means that before God created the universe He acquired intimate, thorough knowledge of those whom He would call. Obviously, God did not have such intimate knowledge of all men because as Paul tells us in this passage from Romans, those who He foreknew He predestined and those He predestined He called and justified (declared as righteous). Since the only ones who are declared as righteous are the ones who believe God’s message, it is apparent that it is only the saved members of the body of Christ who God had foreknowledge of. And, according to the first chapter of Paul’s letter to the Ephesians:

even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption to himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, (Ephesians 1:4-5)

He who foreknew us also chose us even before the world was created. And since He chose us and predestined us to be conformed to the image of His Son - He has already justified us just as He did Abraham, and He has already adopted us as His children. Therefore, we should live each and every day with a grateful heart. We should pass our time on this earth in humble fear knowing that He knows us even better than we know ourselves – and He chose us and saved us in spite of who we are!

We need to know Him better

In verse thirteen Moses asked God, “[show me now your ways, that I may know you.](#)” As was pointed out in the notes above, Moses was asking *Yahweh* to show the way into the Promised Land. But in addition to that, he was asking God to teach Him how to live in a manner that would be pleasing to God and that would glorify Him. He was asking *Yahweh* to help him gain a more thorough knowledge of the God who saw him as an intimate friend. Just as God has gained complete intimate knowledge of those He has chosen; we should work hard to gain an ever increasingly intimate knowledge of our God.

God has provided us with His written Word, the Bible, so that we can get to know Him better. As we read and study the Holy Scripture, we learn more about God and how he interacts with those whom He loves. We see over and over again how God wants to have an intimate relationship with us and He wants us to walk this life with Him by our side. But even the Christian with the best of intentions eventually wanders off down a path that God is not on. When we leave His side, we wonder why things are not going so well for us. We strain and struggle with our difficulties until, in our own desperation, we cry out to our loving Heavenly Father to rescue us from the path we have independently taken. And He is always willing to take our hand and raise us up out of the muck we have gotten into, asking us once again to follow Him, to know Him more intimately, and to go His way.

Notice that God does not prevent us from wandering off down the wrong paths. If He did so, we would not learn how desperately we need Him. At the same time, if our faith were strong enough, we wouldn’t want to wander away from Him. Unfortunately, we have an adversary, and we have a sin nature, both of which are continually calling us down paths different from the one that God would have us travel. When we learn more about Who our God is and how much He loves us, we recognize His desires for our fellowship, our worship, and our praise.

Notice, however, that the Israelites, in their effort to be “religious,” like the Egyptians had been, they lost sight of *Yahweh*’s majesty and holiness. And when we learn more about His majesty and holiness, we learn more about our own unrighteousness. The Israelites had not yet learned to submit to the Lordship of *Yahweh*. Let us not be guilty of the same thing!

Keep in mind what Solomon said at the end of his search for the meaning of life?

[The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. \(Ecclesiastes 12:13\)](#)

The more we come to know God, the more we will learn to fear Him. The more we learn to fear Him, the more we will want to follow Him. The more we want to follow Him, the more we want to submit to Him and do His will rather than our own.

Let’s pray.