**The Covenant Renewing God**

Exodus 33:1-23

**Good Morning Beloved,**

* Imagine going back one year ago…
  + And this is being your experience in 2020
    - Instead of Coronavirus ever happening, a cure for cancer is found.
    - Instead of there being social tensions associated with ethnicity, the Summer Olympics that were planned to take place in Tokyo is the greatest display of shared humanity in your lifetime.
    - Instead of the drama associated with national politics, a candidate so distinguishes themselves by their forthright boldness, genuine love, and decisive leadership that the November election would be the great landslide victory since George Washington’s second term.
    - Instead of financial volatility, a season of prosperity, like Pharaoh’s dream of the fat oxen in Genesis 41, set every man to dwell in his own home in peace and eat from his own vine (Mic. 4:4).
    - Instead of holiday plans or vacations being canceled, it never rains on weekends, it snows on Christmas Eve, siblings never fight, spouses never disagree… and the College Football team that you love is ranked first in the Playoff standings.
* Would you say to that alternate timeline…
  + NOT GOOD ENOUGH!!
    - Would you say… NO! I want… I demand more… than that.
      * I want the BEST… I crave one thing… in the words of the Prophet Isaiah…
        + *Yes, Lord, walking in the way of your laws,*

*we wait for you;*

*your name and renown*

*are the desire of our hearts. (Isa. 26:8)*

* That is the point of our passage today.

**The Reading of God’s Word** – Exodus 33:1-23 (P. ??? in the Pew Bible)

*33:1 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.’ 2 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. 3 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.”*

*4 When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. 5 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.’” 6 Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.*

*The Tent of Meeting*

*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. 8 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. 9 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. 10 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. 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.*

*Moses' Intercession*

*12 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.’ 13 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.” 14 And he said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” 15 And he said to him, “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. 16 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?”*

*17 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.” 18 Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” 19 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. 20 But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” 21 And the Lord said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, 22 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. 23 Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”*

**The Preaching of God’s Word**

1. The Holy Justice of God (vs. 1-11)
   1. This chapter opens with God speaking to his people in line with just about everything they could ever want…
      1. *33:1 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,* 
         1. These are people who have known whip-cracking slavery for 400 years…
            1. They have been rescued from brutal taskmasters.

Now there hear.

* + 1. *to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘To your offspring I will give it.’*
       1. Amen. We are the heirs of the COVENANT. It’s about time.
          1. Not only will they receive the long awaited land… there is supernatural help.
    2. *2 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.* 
       1. There will be angelic beings to comfort you and drive out all your enemies.
          1. No weapon formed against you will prosper.

And the place where you are going…

* + 1. *3 Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey;* 
       1. My translation… “unto the earth oozing milk and date-grape syrup”
          1. The first three verses sound like the greatest summary of the benefits of the covenant that those gathered would have ever heard.

All your past problems… Gone.

Settlement in the Promised Land… Done.

Supernatural and Social Victory…. No Problem.

Gushing Financial Prosperity… EASY.

* + - 1. Then we read…
    1. *but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.”*
       1. Here is the distinction between…
          1. Poverty and Wealth
          2. Cursings and Blessings
          3. Instability and Peace
          4. Worldly Religions and Christianity
       2. Do you PRIMARILY want benefits from your CREATOR OR communion with your BENEFACTOR?
          1. If God were to be like a blue genie that emerged from a magic lamp and grant your wishes… would that be enough?
  1. Look at how the people understood these words.
     1. *4 When the people heard this disastrous word,* 
        1. A life without God is… “disastrous”… “bad”… “distressing”… “Evil tidings”… “OMINOUS”
           1. Like a family at a picnic in the open field with a tornado approaching…

The people dreaded these words.

* + 1. *they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. 5 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.’” 6 Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.*
       1. The inner posture of their heart was seen in tangible acts of repentance.
          1. When God reaffirmed His Covenant with Jacob in Genesis 35, we read…

*So they gave to Jacob all the foreign gods that they had, and the rings that were in their ears. Jacob hid them under the terebinth tree that was near Shechem. (Gen.35:4)*

* + - 1. Here the people are stripping off their jewelry with the same intensity that the Egyptians had their valuable seized by the Israelites when they left the iron furnace ((Ex. 3:22; 12:36).
         1. Because if the Lord God were to be in their midst… His glorious presence would annihilate them.
    1. So what hope is there for a people who craft, adore, and become like an idol.
       1. How do you go from being a “stiff-necked people” (vs. 5) to once again being a “kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Ex. 19:6)?
          1. Do demonstrations of repentance just solve all the problems… or to say it another way… can man save himself by working harder… trying harder… doing more?
    2. The only hope for a people distracted by idolatry is if GOD himself would provide a mediator.
  1. *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.* 
     1. This is not the Tabernacle that we have heard described.
        1. The Tabernacle was to be in the center of the Covenant community…
           1. This tent is outside the camp.
        2. The Tabernacle was to filled with priests serving…
           1. This tent only has Moses interceding.

The other people would stay by their own tents and anticipate the Lord meeting with Moses and worship at a distance.

* + 1. These first 10 verses show us the HOLY JUSTICE of GOD!
       1. Think about who God is…
          1. “He is the alone fountain of all being, of whom, through whom, and to whom are all things…
          2. He has most sovereign dominion over them, to do by them, for them, or upon them whatsoever Himself pleases.
          3. In His sight all things are open and manifest; His knowledge is infinite, infallible, and independent from all creature, so as nothing is to Him contingent, or uncertain.
          4. He is most holy in all His counsels, in all His works, and in all His commands.
          5. To Him is due from angels and men, and every other creature, whatsoever worship, service, or obedience He is pleased to require of them.”[[1]](#footnote-1)
    2. God has all rights over all people.
       1. JUST and HOLY God is distinct and separate from a people who do two things in these verses….
          1. Vs. 1-6 – when they put away their jewelry… they demonstrate repentance.
          2. Vs. 7-11 – when they worship from their tents… they declare reliance.
  1. Yet the actions on not enough to renew the Covenant…
     1. But we are not left without hope….
  2. *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.*
     1. Because the Holy and Just God meets with a man face to face as a companion…. A friend…
        1. As the rest of the chapter highlights…

1. The Merciful Goodness of God (vs. 12-23)
   1. The story now moves to a conversation.
      1. Verses 12-13 recount Moses pleading with God to understand his “ways” (vs. 13).
         1. Moses is asking for more than just technical instruction like with Ikea furniture is assembled.
            1. Moses is pleading to understand the Lord’s purposes… His grand vision for this nation…

(notice the pronoun) in verse 13 for “your people”.

* + - 1. Moses is praying just like when we sing…
         1. May the mind of Christ, my Savior,

Live in me from day to day,

By his love and pow'r inspiring

All I do and say.

* + 1. God responds by saying…
       1. Vs. 14 - *And he said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”*
  1. Amazingly, with the tone of a friend pleasing with his companion, Moses mediates for “your people”.
     1. The one thing that makes this people distinct from all the other nations…
        1. Not land… not architecture… not wealth…
           1. BUT the PRESENCE of I AM WHO I AM.
     2. God answers the man in the tent of meeting…
        1. “you have found favor (or grace) in my sight… and I know you by name.”
           1. BELOVED, wouldn’t it be easy to close the Bible at this point.

As a representative, Moses just got everything…

God says… “This very thing that you have spoken I will do.”

And the basis for the blessing is grace.

* 1. But then there is one last thing…
     1. Moses says… “Please show me your glory” (vs. 18).
        1. But Moses you were at the burning bush (Ex. 3).
        2. You saw the plagues.
        3. You ate with God and the elders on the Mountain (Ex. 24).
  2. So the Lord God clarifies…
     1. Verse 19 - *19 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. 20 But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.”* 
        1. The Brightness and Loveliness of God’s goodness will not be manifest.
        2. The ONE who knows Moses name will not make HIS Name known.
        3. The One who displayed His sovereignty over Egypt now makes known that salvation in the words of the Prophet belongs to the LORD (Jonah 2:9) or in the words of the Theologian salvation is monegistic (Rom. 9:15).
        4. The One who called Moses into intimate friendship also reveals that the eternal beauty of God’s nature would consume you like a fire in its full display.
           1. Therefore…
     2. *21 And the Lord said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, 22 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. 23 Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”*
        1. Moses asks for something so dazzling and brilliant that it would be without a doubt the greatest moment of his life.
           1. God responds… you can’t comprehend all that you ask for, but I will hid you in the cliff.

1. Conclusion
   1. Beloved people hear these commands….[[2]](#footnote-2)
      1. *Seek the Lord and his strength; seek his presence continually! (1 Chr. 16:11)*
      2. *You have said, “Seek my face.” My heart says to you, “Your face, Lord, do I seek.” (Ps. 27:8)*
      3. *Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. (Ps. 105:4 NIV).*
         1. Looking for refuge or blessing in any other place or person is like trying to get fresh water from a broken cistern (Jer. 2:13).
   2. Beloved friends remember how the Lord has made his glory known.
      1. It came from the better mediator who said…
         1. *Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. (John 14:9)*
   3. Jesus Christ is the True Prophet who reveals to you that God has not abandoned you, but has moved toward you in grace.
      1. *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth. (John 1:14)*
   4. The Majestic and Eternal Savior reveals the Full Holy Justice of God as he died on the cross for our sins by praying…
      1. *I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began. (John 17:4-5)*
   5. The Only Begotten Son knows the most intimate fellowship possible, the fellowship of the Triune God, has risen from the dead and reigns above to make known the glory of God.
      1. *But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. (acts 7:55).*
   6. Jesus Christ, who is Fully God, enables you today to become a friend of the Most High.
      1. For what you could not do for yourself, God has done for you.
         1. The Most High became a baby born in Bethlehem so that we would know God.
            1. The One who came is also the one who is returning.
      2. As one of Jesus dearest friends tells us…
         1. *Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. (1 John 3:2)*
   7. Nowhere is this more clearly celebrated than at the LORD’S Table.

**Prayer**

*To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.* (Rev. 1:5-6).

**Benediction – Numbers 6:24-26**

*The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace.*

1. Westminster Confession of Faith, II.ii [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. For more see Victor P. Hamilton’s *Exodus: An Exegetical Commentary*, 569 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)