

Title: “Encountering the God of Grace” NSAC July 4, 2021

Series: “Wilderness Wanderings” Pastor Dave Sattler

Texts: Exodus 34:1-11a; Cf. Ephesians 2:8-9a; 2 Corinthians 3:18

Sources: Bible Gateway, NIV Life Application Bible. Exodus Commentaries: Peter Enns & Frank Gaebelin. Book: “*Themes in Old Testament Theology*” by William Dyrness. Sermon: Mark Peters (June 13, 2021, NSAC). Wikipedia: *Minties*. Old Concert: Dana Key (1980s).

I. <Slide> Review & Introduction

- Hi, everyone. I’m Dave Sattler, one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance Church. Thank you for joining us.
- Today we continue our Series, “*Wilderness Wanderings*”—God, and the people of God, post-Egypt.
- A few weeks back Pastor Mark said, Q: “Though we have been made for worship, we are all prone to wander.” — MP (NSAC, 6/13/2021)
- The Exodus through Deuteronomy narratives highlight the power and presence of God. In **encounter** after **encounter**, God shows up amongst the people ... to reveal Himself, to rescue them from their wanderings, and to redeem His people back to Himself.
- <Slide> ILL — If I was to ask the question, “*What is God like?*”
 - I venture a guess most of you would respond with ‘God is ...
 - Eternal, creator, loving, majestic, awesome.’ Or perhaps you’d pull out one of the omni’s: ‘God is omnipotent, all-powerful, or, God is omniscient, all-knowing.’
 - However, if someone instead, were to name an attribute of God such as ...
 - Prone to change His mind, sometimes argues, God is willing to forget, regretful of past actions, or at times gets frustrated with His people, you may consider throwing that person out of church!
 - Because, these less-marketable qualities of God, especially the very-human, emotional ones don’t exactly square with Who we think God ought to be. Nonetheless, these too are actual qualities God possesses, and reveals to humanity!
 - And, these attributes of God pop up throughout Scripture—especially in the book of Exodus.
- <Slide> ILL — When I was a kid, my grandparents would often ...
 - Ship us their favourite candy, Minties, a famous brand of confectionery originating in Australia. — *Wikipedia, Minties*
 - Minties are a “hard, white and chewy, rectangular mint-flavoured lolly.” Tasty. But honestly, they’re a little rough on the teeth—and so sticky, they’ve been known to rip out your dental work!

- But what grabs me most about Minties is the grandiose slogan on the wrapper: Q: “It’s moments like these you need Minties!”
- **<Slide>** Today we turn our attention to Exodus 34.
- While Moses was taking his sweet time on the mountain with God, back in camp, the people were boiling down their jewelry to make a golden image to worship.
- The impatient Israelites turn against God—and their leader, Moses.
- Eventually returning to camp and seeing the peoples’ idolatry, in a fit of rage Moses smashes God’s precious stone tablets.
- Frustrated and angry too, God threatens to destroy the people for their rebellion—sending a plague and allowing the Levites to rampage through camp with swords killing people.
- Moses pleads with God for mercy and grace—even offering his own life as a sacrifice.
- Still what Moses repeatedly cries out to God for is a fresh **encounter** with God’s presence. For, after the Golden Calf Debacle, all apparently seems lost.
- Like one commentator puts it, Q: “It’s safe to say a heightened vision of God [was] required.” – *Enns, p.584*. In other words, ‘In moments like these you need [not ... Minties but ...] God to show up!’

II. **Biblical Text: Exodus 34:1-11a (NIV)**

<Slide> The Lord said to Moses, “Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. 2 Be ready in the morning, and then come up on Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain. 3 No one is to come with you or be seen anywhere on the mountain; not even the flocks and herds may graze in front of the mountain.”

<Slide> 4 So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones and went up Mount Sinai early in the morning, as the Lord had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands. 5 Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. 6 And [God] passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, 7 maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”

<Slide> 8 Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshiped. 9 “Lord,” he said, “if I have found favour in your eyes, then let the Lord go with us.

Although this is a stiff-necked people, forgive our wickedness and our sin, and take us as your inheritance.” 10 Then the Lord said: “I am making a covenant with you. Before all your people I will do wonders never before done in any nation in all the world. The people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the Lord, will do for you. 11 Obey what I command you today ...”

[Pray] Lord, please move me out of the way. Come and speak to us from Your Word by Your Spirit. We are hungry to hear from You. Amen.

III. Bible Teaching:

1. <Slide> God: Present But Still Somewhat Distant (v.2-3)

- Moses has seen God’s feet, gotten a glimpse of God’s back, spent 40 days and 40 nights with God on Mt Sinai. Now again the Lord beckons Moses, “Present yourself to me ... on top of the mountain.”
 - But not without some caution: “No one is to come with you.” ‘Even the flocks and herds are to keep their distance.’ (v2b-3)
 - Again God makes His presence remarkably accessible.
 - God’s appearances throughout the Bible express God’s genuine nearness.
 - God walks with humanity as naturally as any other companion.
 - On the other hand, God is also high and lifted up—not completely safe for human consumption; the world itself cannot contain Him, humanity can never fully grasp God’s immensity—or the magnitude of God’s being.
- *Dyrness, p.36*

2. <Slide> God Gives Moses A Second Chance (v.1 & 4)

- Since he shattered the originals God had made, it seems appropriate Moses now be commissioned by God to “chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones.” (v.1) God kindly offers Moses, and His people, a second chance.
- This beautifully illustrates the completeness of God’s redemptive work.
- The covenant that was nearly annulled by Moses breaking the first set of tablets is reinstated with a new set masoned by Moses and written on by God.
- APP — Perhaps you’re sitting in church, or watching today, and ...
 - You think you’ve really messed up and there’s no way God could ever forgive you. Oh boy, have I been there—just this week even!
 - In a fit of rage, you’ve said something or done something that’s caused damage—hurt others, your loved ones, yourself, and God.
 - And you’re beating yourself up for it, replaying it over and over in your mind—almost paralyzingly so. When, truth is: the God of the Christian Story is a God of second chances.
 - Today receive God’s kind offer of another chance.

3. <Slide> The Lord Comes Down (v.5-6a)

- ‘The Lord came down and stood there and passed in front of Moses.’ (v.5-6a)
- APP — This is Who God is and what God does.
 - Central to most world religions is some form of human achievement often hidden in the rhetoric: that people must work their way up to God ... by performing good deeds by striving to measure up ... to earn the approval of a god.
 - But, in Christianity, humanity is forever reliant on God coming down to us. And, in His amazing **grace**, the Christian God has designed it that way! We can never ever work our way up to God, so our Lord is always willing to come down to us.

4. <Slide> **The Lord’s Self-Revelation (v.6b-7)**

- The Lord’s incredible self-disclosure comes next.
- Notice God’s revelation of Himself begins not with a display of power?
- Even after witnessing the sickening rebellion of His people, the Lord does not come in hot, Q: ‘Do you know who I am?! I’m tougher than you!’?! I made it all! What are you people doing?!
- No, God begins not by pulling rank, but by expressing His unfailing love and deep compassion for all humanity.
- Yet God still keeps the other side of His character in plain view.
- God is no cosmic pushover, no dodderly old grandfather who makes it easy for us to pull the wool over His eyes. No, “[God] does not leave the guilty unpunished.” (v.7a)

5. <Slide> **Response: Worship & Covenant Renewal (v.8-11a)**

- How does Moses respond to what must have been another overwhelming display of God’s presence?
- He “bows to the ground ... and worships.” (v.8) Moses also petitions God, Q: ‘Don’t abandon us. Forgive our sin. Keep taking us as your people.’ (v.9)
- And the Lord listens. And changes His mind. As a consequence for their rebellion, God had every rite to severely punish His people. Instead, God renews the covenant He struck with them prior to the Golden Calf debacle.
- Fresh **encounter** with God always leads to opportunity for renewal of relationship. Still Israel is called to remain obedient to God. (v.10)

IV. **Life Applications**

- Time to ‘land the plane’ now with a few life applications.

A. <Slide> ***We must take sin seriously.***

- Following a spectacular display of His character and presence, God goes on to say of Himself, in v.7, Q: “Yet He does not leave the guilty unpunished; He punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”

- And this is a tough preach in our world these days.
- ILL — In the early days of my career as a pastor ...
 - Most people generally acknowledged they were sinful.
 - But today, particularly here in the west, most believe in the basic goodness of humanity. Pile onto that, the incredible drive toward individualism in our culture—you be you, I be me. ‘You do what you want, I do what I want—passionately follow whatever you desire and let’s hope it turns out well for all of us.’
 - Well, it’s not that simple. Sin often fuels our desires. Sin runs deep—it’s systemic to the human race.
- **<Slide>** APP/ILL — And reality is: we never sin in a vacuum. Our sin has...
 - Consequences: on us, our loved ones, and the entire human race.
 - This, I believe, is one of the reasons why we second or third generation Euro-Canadian settlers find it difficult to know what to do about, or how to feel about the grave sins of our ancestors ... that have been the cause of undue, and until recently, previously untold trauma to Indigenous peoples of Canada.
 - And, Euro-Canadians are not communal by nature. We have a hard time owning our own sin, let alone owning the sins of our forefathers.
 - Plus, Euro-Canadians are generally fixers. And the sin of our ancestors is too big a problem for us to fix. We can’t fix it! But we mustn’t ignore it either. We need to acknowledge it, sit with it, grieve it. And bring it to Jesus.
- **<Slide>** ILL — Years ago, I was summoned to the bedside ...
 - Of my dying grandmother. I walked into her room at Surrey Memorial Hospital to find her breathing but not communicating.
 - Alone with her, I had a powerful experience with the Lord that day.
 - For years, my grandmother had willingly practiced the sin of alienation. When someone did something, or said something, even innocently, that put her off, she cut them out completely.
 - Once I too fell victim to her habitual sin when I was a teenager and falsely accused by her of eating all her Christmas shortbread. She barely spoke to me, or even looked at me for years after that; it’s like I was dead to her!
 - And sadly I had seen that sin of alienation manifest in my life too.
 - And it weighed me down.
 - Far from gracious, I was quick to break ties with people who disagreed with me, or hurt me. It was blowing up my relationships and I feared I would pass this sin onto my children.

- But that day, at my grannie’s bedside, the Lord said to me,
 - ☐ Q: “Repent and put your trust in me and the sin of alienation stops right here.”
 - Powerful. And something only God could do.
 - And thankfully, I can say today that God has halted this generational sin in our family!
- APP — Sin is not to be dealt with casually or sloughed off as no big deal.
 - **We must take sin seriously.** Children and grandchildren suffer for the sins of their parents and grandparents. It doesn’t seem fair, I know, but this is how deeply broken our human condition is.

B. <Slide> With God’s grace, there’s always more.

- To Moses the Lord describes His character: “compassionate and **gracious**, slow to anger, and abounding in love and faithfulness.” (v.6b-7a)
- This is the primary description of God in the Old Testament—pops up at least a dozen times. And, in the New Testament, God the Son Jesus completes the picture of God we see here.
- This profile is not of a God who is vengeful—prone to turn against His people at any moment. The God of the Christian Story is not one who gets a kick out of His subjects walking around on eggshells before Him.
- Readers are encouraged to see Exodus, the Bible, and indeed all of history as following a single script: God creates, people fall because of sin, then God redeems, and God restores. Creation by God. Then Re-Creation also by God.
- **<Slide>** This pattern, repeated over and over and over again, flows from the gracious character of God. Q: “For it is by **grace** you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God.”
— cf. Ephesians 2:8-9a
- APP — God the Son Jesus came to earth to live, to die, to rise again for us ...
 - To satisfy all the righteous requirements of the law, to pay for and win our forgiveness on the cross, to invite us back into loving relationship with our Creator.
 - And when we sin and mess it up, God keeps inviting us back—with open arms.
 - People of NSAC, receive God’s wonderful, boundless gift of **grace** for you. I know it doesn’t make sense. Stop trying to figure it out!
 - Yes, we’d rather earn God’s favour. But we can’t! That’s impossible—why God offers **grace** freely to us.
- **<Slide>** ILL/APP — I took this photo a few weeks back on a rainy visit ...
 - To Brandywine Falls ... just up Highway 99 from here.

- The immense flow of water I witnessed that day impressed me. Made a lot of noise. Its power thundered in my chest. Seemed an endless supply. And I was reminded ...
- **With God's grace, there's always more.**
- This is the crux of the Christian Story.
- Recently a church friend quipped, 'Sattler, why are you on about **grace** all the time?!' "Well," I replied, "**Grace** is super important."
- When we haven't rested in God's grace, we're driven to try and win approval. And, when haven't truly allowed ourselves to embrace **God's grace** for us, we have little grace to dispense to others.
- APP — So, how gracious a person are you?
- How much do you strive? How do you handle mistakes? How quick are you to forgive?
- A sure sign of the Christian faith taking root in one's soul is how freely **grace flows in** and through us—to self and others.

C. <Slide> Carry God's presence and let God's presence carry you.

- It's clear Moses enjoyed a unique relationship with the Lord.
- Time and again, he pleads with God, "Go with us." (v.9) 'Don't take your presence from us, Lord—even though we don't deserve it!'
- God makes appearances in history, not for God's sake, not to boost His ego, but as an act of redemption—as a summons for creation to follow and obey.
- As one commentator suggests, an appearance of God is Q: "a boost of God's presence for the task that lies ahead." — *Enns, p.583*
- ILL — Nothing compares to God's presence.
 - Why Paul emphasizes in Cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18, "And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory [or encounter God's presence], are being transformed into His image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."
 - Nearly 40 years ago I attended a Christian concert featuring the band DeGarmo & Key. I don't remember much of the music, but I'll never forget what Dana Key said that night. He said this,
 - Q: "I'd rather be in the storm with Jesus, than safe at home without Him." — *Dana Key*
- **<Slide>** APP — Friends of NSAC, right now we need God to show up.
 - Maybe more than ever—if that's possible to say.
 - Like the people of Israel, our sins, and the sins of our ancestors have been exposed recently: misuse of power, greed after money and land, racism, cultural genocide.

- And, also like the people of Israel, we've just come through a terrible plague that's rocked our planet. We've suffered many losses. We are grieving. We are reeling.
- We don't know what the future holds.
- Our church needs a new Lead Pastor. And what we really need is God to show up ... anew and afresh among us!
- It's moments like these we need Jesus. No One else will suffice.
- Nothing else will satisfy apart from God's Presence. **Carry God's presence and let God's presence carry you.**
- For when we **encounter the God of Grace in life with us**, there's always reason for hope. No matter our circumstance. Amen.