

May 14, 2023

Exodus 33:1-6

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.

Scriptures for further study:

Hebrews 7:25

“Stiff-necked is a farming metaphor for an animal unwilling to bow its neck to receive the yoke and so be usefully employed on the land.”

– John Mackay

“The secret of freedom from anxiety is freedom from our perceived sense of control and abandonment of our own plans. It’s about entrusting ourselves once again into the hands of our Father who controls all things.”

-Sinclair Ferguson



Delivered to An All-Sufficient Intercessor Exodus 33: 1-6

BIG IDEA: Because sin causes a breach in relationship, let us look in faith to the intercessory work of Jesus when we fail in order to experience the fullness of fellowship with God.

OUTLINE

1. Problem
2. Solution
3. Response

“An intercessor is one who makes ‘contact’ with God as opposed to the many who simply dabble in prayer.”

-Victor Hamilton

“Prayer as it comes from the saint is weak and languid; but when the arrow of a saint’s prayer is put into the bow of Christ’s intercession it pierces the throne of grace.”

-Thomas Watson

“The motive for repentance is not only sorrow for sin but also a sense of the mercy of God in Christ. We have zero motivation to repent, unless we see the mercy of God awaiting us. Not the slap of God, but the embrace of God. Repentance is not just turning from sin, not even that primarily. Repentance is primarily turning to God, moment by moment, because He has promised His mercy to the penitent.”

-Ray Ortlund

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Up to this point in Exodus, Israel has grumbled, quarreled, and tested the Lord (15:24; 16:2; 17:2, 7), even refusing to keep his commandments (16:28). And yet Israel had not rebelled in such a way that they drew God’s wrath—until now. What makes this scene so shocking is that Israel had heard God’s voice (19:19) and twice pledged themselves to obey him (19:8; 24:7). Though they had said they would obey, when Moses “delayed” in coming down the mountain (32:1), they proceeded to break many of the Ten Commandments. The problem was not with the law; the problem was with the people’s hearts. Moses intercedes for the people after the incident with the golden calf (32:1–35). The sermon text (33:1–6), narrates the tension of the events as the Lord says He will not go among His people. It is in this context that Moses continues to mature in the role of covenant representative as he intercedes.

ESV Gospel Transformation Study Bible; ESV Study Bible

Praise to Jesus. Praise God! Christ lives to intercede for you. He has closed the distance between you and God. Jesus is interceding for you. Offer praise to Jesus because He has made the way for you through repentance to enjoy life-filling and restoring merciful embraces from God each and every moment your stiff-neck gets in the way.

Repentance through Jesus. Jesus has freed you to live a life which is characterized by greater repentance. Be moved by the gospel to repent through Jesus who died, rose, and lives so that repentance is as natural to you as breathing.

Consecration for Jesus. Because sin causes a breach in relationship, look in faith to the intercessory work of Jesus when you fail to experience full fellowship with God.

DISCIPLESHIP DURING THE WEEK

These “Sermon Discussion Questions” are designed for study during the week for believers in a wide variety of ages & stages in their walk with Christ.

1. Does a pet have a conscience? Have you ever seen how a pet responds when it has been disobedient? If you don't have a pet, ask a friend who has a pet (other than a snake, or an iguana). Does your pet walk towards or away from you when it has disobeyed (golden retriever or lab owners don't answer...they are always gonna come a waggin')? How has the pet's offense impacted its perception of your relationship? Is there anything that your pet could do (short of biting the neighbor's child) which would cause you to get rid of it?

2. What product or experience over promised and underdelivered? What desire or need did it claim to fulfill and how did it miss the mark? Was it considered a failure because it didn't function as promised or did you consider it a failure because it worked the way it was designed but didn't fulfill the hope you had in it? When have you chosen your own plan rather than God's because you believed that it would bring you the more life and peace?

3. Have you ever been stiff-necked towards God? What about your posture towards God changes when you figure out that your plans land you in a place of opposition to God and His plan? In other words, does your perception of God's presence with you change when you sin? In those moments do you feel closer or more distant from God? What solution is found in today's message?

4. What did Moses do in response to God's refusal to go with the Israelites? Is Moses' response to God's declaration what you would do? How can this enrich and challenge your understanding of intercession?

5 Do your plans line up with God's plans for you? The word “sin” is not mentioned in the passage, but isn't that what Israelites have done? Moses modeled for the Israelites what must be done for them when they sin. There is an incredible scene in the show Les Misérables. Remember the scene with the Bishop, Jean Valjean and the policeman? The Bishop interceded for Jean Valjean. How can this image cause you to praise God, lead you to repentance, and cause you to consecrate your life for Jesus?

FOR FAMILIES AND YOUNG CHILDREN

1. Read Exodus 3:8 and Exodus 23:20-30. Compare those verses with Exodus 33:1-3. How are these verses all similar? (God promises in all three passages that He will bring His people into the Promised Land.)

- How is Exodus 33:1-3 different? (*God is now saying in verse 3 that He will not go with them.*)
- What reason did God give to Moses for why He would not go with them? (*God told Moses that if He went and the Israelites kept on disobeying, then He would end up destroying them. This was because God is a holy God and therefore must punish sin.*)

2. What was the reaction of the Israelites in verse 4? Why did they react this way? (They mourned and took off their ornaments just as they would at a funeral. They were sad because God said that He would not be present with them.)

3. Read Exodus 33:7-11. What did Moses do in these verses? (*He would meet with God, but it was outside of the camp and that showed that God was no longer in the midst of the people.*)

4. Exodus 33:12-17 once again shows Moses as the mediator between God and the Israelites.

- Review with your children what a mediator is. (*A mediator stands between two parties or people and helps them find a way to settle their conflict.*)
- Talk with your children about how Jesus is the perfect mediator because of His death for our sins and how He forever stands between us and God to plead for our forgiveness.

5. How does God live among us today? (*God lives in us as believers through God the Holy Spirit that is in our hearts.*)

- Talk with your children about the difference it makes to know that God will always be with us through the good times and tough times.

Some of the content for these questions and answers were taken from the book entitled Long Story Short by Marty Machowski. This is an excellent resource on the Old Testament for family devotions or Bible study.

FOR STUDENTS

1. What was your one main takeaway from the sermon? How would you summarize the big idea of the sermon in one phrase or sentence?
2. What instruction did God tell the people of Israel through Moses?
3. How did they take that word from God?
4. Compare Exodus 33: 3 to Exodus 19:5-6. Do you think these two verses relate to each other? Why or why not?
5. What is the relationship between our understanding of God's goodness and the power of idols in our lives? Can you recall a time when you shed an idol that was hurting your relationship with God?
6. Read and discuss God's description of himself in Exodus 34:6-7.
7. How was Moses' intercession for the Israelites a foreshadowing of the work of Christ for us?
8. In what way is the privilege of Christians today greater than that of Moses who spoke with God "face to face"?

FOR NON-BELIEVERS OR NEW BELIEVERS

1. It is popular in our culture today for people to define themselves according to who they think they are, or what we want to believe about ourselves. But this is not for us to determine. It is God's prerogative alone. He defines who we are. He tells us what we are truly like. Notice here (verse 3), the people of Israel are defined and described by God as a "stiff-necked people." Not very flattering, right? But what is true of the Israelites is also universally true of us: we are corrupt and crooked in disposition, unwilling to allow God to rule over us.

Question: How is this truth counter to today's culture? Even though this is tough news to hear, why do you think God wants us to first understand this truth about ourselves?

2. If the first truth in this passage is that we are a stiff-necked people, the second truth is even worse: that what we deserve for our sins is to be consumed by God (verse 5) and cut off from his presence (verse 3). This is perhaps the most significant consequence of all: that our sin separates us from God.

Question: Many in our culture today believe that most people are basically pretty good, and that we are all headed to heaven. What does this passage teach instead?

3. Verse 4 says that when the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn because of how they had sinned against God and the consequences they had brought upon themselves.

Question: Will you, too, acknowledge the dire consequences of your sin? Will you, too, mourn and confess your sin against God?

4. As a demonstration and proof of their confession, the people laid aside their "ornaments" and jewelry?

Question: If your confession of sin is real, in what tangible ways would you now demonstrate the genuineness (and "fruit") of your repentance?

5. The "ornaments" or earrings were most likely associated with foreign gods. In other words, to give up these things was to signify their giving up their idols as well. It was a way of saying that they were now dedicating or re-dedicating their lives to God and Him alone.

Question: You cannot worship God while worshipping other gods besides. What are those other "gods" or idols in your life? What do you need to lay aside in order to worship exclusively the Lord God Almighty? Are you truly ready to commit your life to Christ? If you are already a believer, is God perhaps calling you right now to a re-dedication of your commitment to and love for Him?



The Seventh Plague of Egypt, John Martin, 1823

About the artist and painting: The English Romantic painter John Martin was no stranger to death and despair. Out of the 13 children born to his mother and father, John was one of only 6 that survived childhood. He grew up in poverty, the son of a farm laborer. In 1813, John lost his grandmother, mother, father, and youngest son all in the same year. Despite his popular appeal to English society, he was never really celebrated much less even accepted by the art community. Yet he was somewhat of a revolutionary by choosing to paint very fantastic, biblical scenes and landscapes. One can't help but think John looked to the extraordinary aspects of the bible to deal with the harsh realities of life in a broken world.

His 1823 work, *The Seventh Plague of Egypt*, helps to capture the deliverance theme so prevalent in the Book of Exodus. In the painting you have these mighty structures of Pharaoh's palace, city, and pyramids all displayed in their grandeur. In Moses' day this represented to God's people Pharaoh's power and oppression towards them as he ruthlessly made their lives harsh. Yet God is breaking into these circumstances, "showing up" to bring about His deliverance. In this painting, over and above the Egyptian structures is something more magnificent, the storm of God: thunder, hail, and fire being poured down upon the oppressor and persecutor of His people. And your eye is drawn to the man standing on the left side of the painting, Moses, with outstretched arms looking to the LORD and His deliverance.

The purpose of Exodus:

“The original purpose of Exodus was theological, to teach God’s people about himself and their relationship to him.” - Peter Enns, NIVAC, 25.

“Exodus is about a man, Moses. He is central to the narrative in a way in which no single character, not even Abraham, dominates Genesis...Exodus is about a nation, Israel, moving from slavery in Egypt into freedom...but ultimately Exodus is about God, about the God of the covenant who has instituted a new relationship between himself and those whom he has called to be his people.”
- John Mackay, Exodus, 9.

“The whole story of Exodus is a covenant narrative. The God who pledged himself to Abraham and his descendants remained the faithful God. He had made promises and intended to honor them, and when his moment came, honor them he did...in a word, Exodus cannot be described simply as the book of the holiness of the Lord, nor simply as the book of the presence of the Lord, but as the book of the holy God present in all his holiness at the heart of his people’s life, their provident savior and friend, who makes provision whereby they, in all their unworthiness, may live safely with him.” - Alec Motyer, The Bible Speaks Today: The Message of Exodus, 20, 23.

The setting for Exodus 1:1-2:25 is Israel in Egypt. The opening section sets the stage for the rest of the book by describing: the connection to the narrative of Genesis (Ex. 1:1–7), the oppression that has arisen under a new pharaoh (1:8–22), the preservation of Moses at birth (2:1–10) and later in Midian (2:11–22), and the declaration of God’s intimate knowledge of Israel’s suffering and God’s faithfulness to his covenant with Abraham and his descendants (2:23–25).

Exodus is a journey in two parts.

Part One: Egypt Exodus 1-15 Aug. 7th – Oct. 30th

Part Two: Sinai Exodus 16-18 Nov. 6th – Nov. 20th

Pause for Advent: Nov. 27th – Dec. 18th

Part Two Cont. Sinai Exodus 19 - 39 Jan. 8th – June 25th

Pause for Capital Campaign Series: Jan. 22nd-Feb. 12th

Pause for DNOW: February 19th

Pause for Missions Sunday: March 26th

Resources for further study:

Exodus: A Mentors Commentary by John Mackay

Exodus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture
(Volume 2) (The New American Commentary) by Douglas Stuart