

March 18

Scriptures: Read Exodus 33

Key Verse: And He said, “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” (Exodus 33:14)

Overview

What a beautiful chapter of the grace of God! Upon the fervent intercession of Moses, the Lord consented to let the Israelites live, instead of destroying them as they deserved (33:5), and He permitted them to continue their journey to the Promised Land. The difference this time in their traveling was that His own presence would not be among them, only a created angel would go with them, not the same Messenger as before in whom was God’s name (Ex. 23:20-22), the second person of the trinity, Jesus Christ. Even permission to enter the Promised Land did not bring joy if God did not go with them. Certainly true joy only comes if God is present in our midst. The Israelites were grieved by this judgment upon them for their apostasy.

Finally, they began to realize the gravity of their sin, its consequences, and the weight of God’s judgment. Moses felt that if the very presence of God would not go with them, then it was best not to go on at all (33:15). The people must have felt the same way, for they mourned at the thought of it (33:3, 4). In His mercy, the Lord called them to repentance by asking them to remove their jewelry (the sign of a penitent and mourner). The golden calf had been made from their jewelry, now they were asked to remove them in token of their shame and remorse. After they obeyed, God would decide the extent of mercy He would grant them. (33:5).

The tent which Moses pitched outside the camp was the one from which he would counsel the people and where He would commune with God. It was a temporary sanctuary until the permanent tabernacle was built about seven months later (Ex. 40:2, 17). It seemed the removal of this tent from among the people meant they were not longer worthy of it. It also served to symbolize God’s judgment of separation from Him, because of their sin. However, anyone who sought the Lord with a pure heart was welcome to go there. God is not too far that it is impossible to reach Him, for He has always provided a way for those who sincerely seek Him. Those whose hearts go up to meet God, can be sure that He will graciously come down to meet with them, just as the pillar of cloud, signifying His presence, descended to meet with Moses (33:9). This separation seemed to have stirred a longing in the hearts of the Israelites to restore the closeness with God they once had. When Moses went to this tent the people washed him and stood in respect. They must have had a hope of restoration, for when they saw the cloudy pillar they worshipped God while standing outside their tents. This act served as an important public confession of faith in God.

Moses was so close to God that they communed “face to face” like friends (33:11). This expression may mean a form, or similitude of the lord, but it was not the actual sight of the full glory of God which Moses later desired to see (33:18). Before he was bold enough to ask such a favor to God, he was first encouraged upon hearing that he found grace in His sight (33:12), and, with his persistent intercession, the Lord’s agreement to once again make Israel His people by accompanying them with His presence (33:14). The text seems to indicate that previously the

Lord had disowned them because they had broken the covenant (32:7; 33:14). Moses' continued intercession resembles that which Jesus Christ does for us before God; He procures the removal of the curse, thus saving us from destruction, and obtains for us assured life of blessing and everlasting happiness in the presence of God from which comes true peace and rest.

Such grace and mercy should encourage us in our faith and cause us to desire an even closer relationship with God, as Moses did in his request to see His full glory. This request was not totally possible, as God in His understanding and mercy explained: no mere mortal could see His full brilliance and survive (33:20). This privilege reserved for the believer's future life in eternity (1 John 3:2). God answered Moses that His sovereign goodness and mercy alone, which He brings upon those whom He chooses (cf. Romans 9:15, 16, 18), should be sufficient to see his glory (33:19). God did permit Moses to catch a glimpse of the afterglow of His splendor as He passed by, but His full glory was so great that He had to place Moses in the cleft of the rock and shield him. That was the Rock of Horeb, which is said to represent Jesus (1 Corinthians 10:4). In the cleft of this Rock, God protects those who are hid in Jesus and from this Rock, Jesus Christ, we have the sight and knowledge of the glory of God (cf. John 1:18).

Prayer

Lord, we throw ourselves on Your mercy. Please let us see Your glory. We have heartfelt thanks for Your gift of Your Son. In Him we have beheld Your glory.