

Dartmouth

Bible Notes



Notes from the Pulpit Ministry of Dartmouth Bible Church

Series: Who is God/Who God Is Lesson 19

Scripture: Exodus 33:19 etc

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A God Who is Merciful

Exodus 33:17-23 (ESV) 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 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.” 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.”

Introduction If ever there was a moment when the “Who is God?” question went from the theoretical to the practical in a flash it is our Scripture passage for today. There is nothing theoretical in Moses’ encounter with God at the ***tent of meeting***.

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.

(Ex. 33:9.10)

No one was sipping a latte in the coffee shop speculating whether there IS a God or whether He is a He or a she or an it. No one was singing along with John Lennon (1970), *God is a concept by which we measure our pain...* They were worshipping him—each at his tent door.

Exodus 33 has got to be one of the strangest, wildest, scariest, most awesome encounters any human being has had with the living God. It is God talking to Moses. Just THAT is wild! He says ***I will put you in cleft of the rock*** to protect you. And according to Exodus 33, God says some *other* fascinating things to him. We are seeking to understand WHO IS GOD? What is of interest to us today is God’s proclamation (vs. 19): ***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.

The very old commentary by Carl Keil and Franz Delitzsch, (1861), has a deep and moving exegesis of this verse, which is an endnote at the end of this manuscript.¹

It has often been said: “Grace is getting what you don’t deserve and mercy is NOT getting what you *do* deserve.”

But things between God and humankind are deeper than that. His very goodness is at root, His grace is something that compels Him and which He loves to exercise in finding *ways to dispense* to people who are open to it and His mercy is necessarily attached to both His goodness and His grace. It is not an inappropriate analogy (though surely inadequate) to consider a human parent and his or her child.

- He cannot help but love his child (or her child).
- He wants what is best for the child. He delights to give good things to the child (grace) and
- so often he must also let the execution of judgment pass (mercy) even though the child has truly violated the rules.

Mercy is a COMPASSIONATE AND GRACIOUS HOLDING BACK OF JUDGMENT. It is not really just leniency, because God’s justice is still *always satisfied*. But it is a restraint born out of love and patience. These are things that God is too, of course (loving and patient).

God’s goodness and grace and mercy are not detached from each other any more than a Dad or a Mom can be only one thing towards their own child. Each attribute is connected to the others and they work in tandem.

And oh, how we love that He is merciful. He doesn’t delight in meeting sin with retribution. He delights to be merciful! Paul quotes Exodus 33:19 in Romans 9:15. God had not changed from Moses’ day down to Paul’s and He has not changed yet!

Here is the heart of the Gospel we offer to people today: the mercy of God. And there are many other places in the Bible (although these are just isolated quotations) where it is proclaimed:

2nd Samuel 24:14 (ESV) Then David said to Gad, “I am in great distress. Let us fall into the hand of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but let me not fall into the hand of man.”

Psalm 145:9 The LORD is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.

Luke 6:36 Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.

Romans 12:1 I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Ephesians 2:4,5 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, ⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—

Titus 3:5 He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit,

Hebrews 4:16 Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

1st Peter 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead...

It is essential though for people to *know* that they need God's mercy for their sins. It isn't just to agree intellectually that "perhaps God is merciful." If a person doesn't think they need it, they do not get a pass. They will answer for their own sins. The Son of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, came to BE that mercy for us. That is why a person has to receive it personally. To think otherwise is folly. To think that the Church can broker God's mercy by my "obeying" the rules and ceremonies of the church is folly. To think that God's righteousness can be bypassed by any cocktail of human philanthropy or good deeds and human learning is absolute folly. Only by personally, at any age and at any point, appropriating the mercy of a merciful God

PRACTICAL EFFECTS FOR US OF GOD BEING MERCIFUL

1. I do not receive the justice that I completely deserve for any and every sin.
2. I am equipped to show mercy to others.

3. Room is made for love and even affection which would not otherwise be possible.
4. Repair and restoration to fractured relationships is made possible.
5. People can “move on” from mistakes they have made and not be overridden with guilt.
6. People can “move on” to a new level of peace in relationships when they have been shown mercy.
7. Focus can be redirected BACK to where it should be in a person’s life, rather than always drawn to the past with feeling violated, abused or neglected.
8. We can be proud of God, proud of the good news of Jesus Christ and proud to TALK about the Gospel because it is a joy to learn that God is merciful and that is why we talk about Him so much!

We may fail each other often. We may have received failure and disappointment quite a bit along the way. But because God is merciful and not always blasting people for their mistakes and selfishness, we can learn this too. He is a good God. He loves us and as He promised Moses and Paul, we delight in His mercy too.

Let’s remember this chorus together today...

Oh how He loves you and me
Oh how He loves you and me
He gave His life what more could He give?
Oh how He loves you.
Oh how He loves me.
Oh how He loves you and me!

¹ As so great a stress had been laid upon his own person in his present task of mediation between the offended Jehovah and the apostate nation, he felt that the separation, which existed between himself and Jehovah, introduced a disturbing element into his office. For if his own personal fellowship with Jehovah was not fully established, and raised above all possibility of disturbance, there could be no eternal foundation for the perpetuity of his mediation” (Baumgarten). As a man called by God to be His servant, he was not yet the perfect mediator; but although he was faithful in all his house, it was only as a servant, called εἰς μαρτύριον τῶν λαληθησομένων (Heb. 3:5), i.e., as a herald of the saving revelations of God, preparing the way for the coming of the perfect Mediator. Jehovah therefore granted his request, but only so far as the limit existing between the infinite and holy God and finite and sinful man allowed. “I will make all My goodness pass before thy face, and proclaim the name of Jehovah before thee (קָרָא בְשֵׁם) see at Gen. 4:26), and will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. Thou canst not see My face, for man cannot see Me and live.” The words וְיִחַי וְרָאָה, although only connected with the previous clause by the cop. ו, are to be understood in a causative sense, as expressing the reason why Moses’ request was granted, viz., that it was an act of unconditional grace and compassion on the part of God, to which no man, not even Moses, could lay any just claim. The apostle Paul uses the words in the same sense in Rom. 9:15, for the purpose of overthrowing the claims of self-righteous Jews to participate in the Messianic salvation.—No mortal man can see the face of God and remain alive; for not only is the holy God a consuming fire to unholy man, but a limit has been set, in and with the σῶμα κοῖκόν and ψυχικόν (the earthly and physical body) of man, between the infinite God, the absolute Spirit, and the human spirit clothed in an earthly body, which will only be removed by the “redemption of our body,” and our being clothed in a “spiritual body,” and which, so long as it lasts, renders a direct sight of the glory of God impossible. As our bodily eye is dazzled, and its power of vision destroyed, by looking directly at the brightness of the sun, so would our whole nature be destroyed by an unveiled sight of the brilliancy of the glory of God. So long as we are clothed with this body, which was destined, indeed, from the very first to be transformed into the glorified state of the immortality of the spirit, but has become through the fall a prey to the corruption of death, we can only walk in faith, and only see God with the eye of faith, so far as He has revealed His glory to us in His works and His word. When we have become like God, and have been transformed into the “divine nature” (2 Pet. 1:4), then, and not till then, shall we see Him as He is; then we shall see His glory without a veil, and live before Him for ever. For this reason Moses had to content himself with the passing by of the glory of God before his face, and with the revelation of the name of Jehovah through the medium of the word, in which God discloses His inmost being, and, so to speak, His whole heart to faith. In v. 22 “My glory” is used for “all My goodness,” and in Ex. 34:6 it

is stated that Jehovah passed by before the face of Moses. טוב is not to be understood in the sense of beautiful, or beauty, but signifies goodness; not the brilliancy which strikes the senses, but the spiritual and ethical nature of the Divine Being. For the manifestation of Jehovah, which passed before Moses, was intended unquestionably to reveal nothing else than what Jehovah expressed in the proclamation of His name.

The manifested glory of the Lord would so surely be followed by the destruction of man, that even Moses needed to be protected before it (vv. 21, 22). Whilst Jehovah, therefore, allowed him to come to a place upon the rock near Him, i.e., upon the summit of Sinai (Ex. 34:2), He said that He would put him in a cleft of the rock whilst He was passing by, and cover him with His hand when He had gone by, that he might see His back, because His face could not be seen. The back, as contrasted with the face, signifies the reflection of the glory of God that had just passed by. The words are transferred anthropomorphically from man to God, because human language and human thought can only conceive of the nature of the absolute Spirit according to the analogy of the human form. As the inward nature of man manifests itself in his face, and the sight of his back gives only an imperfect and outward view of him, so Moses saw only the back and not the face of Jehovah. It is impossible to put more into human words concerning this unparalleled vision, which far surpasses all human thought and comprehension. According to Ex. 34:2, the place where Moses stood by the Lord was at the top (the head) of Sinai, and no more can be determined with certainty concerning it. The cleft in the rock (v. 22) has been supposed by some to be the same place as the "cave" in which Elijah lodged at Horeb, and where the Lord appeared to him in the still small voice (1 Kings 19:9ff.). The real summit of the Jebel Musa consists of "a small area of huge rocks, about 80 feet in diameter," upon which there is now a chapel that has almost fallen down, and about 40 feet to the south-west a dilapidated mosque (Robinson, Palestine, vol. i. p. 153). Below this mosque, according to Seetzen (Reise iii. pp. 83, 84), there is a very small grotto, into which you descend by several steps, and to which a large block of granite, about a fathom and a half long and six spans in height, serves as a roof. According to the Mussulman tradition, which the Greek monks also accept, it was in this small grotto that Moses received the law; though other monks point out a "hole, just large enough for a man," near the altar of the Elijah chapel, on the small plain upon the ridge of Sinai, above which the loftier peak rises about 700 feet, as the cave in which Elijah lodged on Horeb (Robinson, Pal. ut supra).

Keil & Delitzsch *Commentary on the Old Testament*, 1861