

25. A new beginning

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Whenever I do a ride-along with the Sheriff's Department deputies as a department chaplain, I cannot help but notice an extra layer under their uniforms . It is a bullet-proof vest. One of the companies that produces these vests for the brave men and women of law enforcement field that is known as "Second Chance Armor" boasts that their vests saved over 981 lives. I am so glad that we have this technology to protect these good guys.

I am sure that many of you can tell me a hair rising story or two of your own near death experience. I am also sure that none of you wants to go through that experience all over again for anything in the world. Being saved from any horrible situation is great and important. But there is more important thing after a person get saved from that kind of traumatic experience – what that person have learned and what he or she is going to do from that valuable lesson. That is far more important than that exciting story itself.

The Israelites blew their good standing with God by worshiping the golden calf that was nothing but a worthless idol. On behalf of these people, Moses interceded to the Lord to forgive and be with them throughout their journey to the Promised Land.

Just like these Israelites, we also blew our opportunities to live for our God time after time. But our God is so gracious and patient with us to forgive us from our sins and shortcomings. He extends His mercy to us time and time again.

A. GET THE TABLETS READY

Exodus 34:1-4 And the Lord said to Moses, "Cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on these tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke. 2 So be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself to Me there on the top of the mountain. 3 And no man shall come up with you, and let no man be seen throughout all the mountain; let neither flocks nor herds feed before that mountain." 4 So he cut two tablets of stone like the first ones. Then Moses rose early in the morning and went up Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him; and he took in his hand the two tablets of stone.

Moses broke the first set of tablets of stone, the ones written with the finger of God as an expression for the broken covenant by the Israelites. Now that Israel's heart was in a place to restore the covenant, God provided a new set of tablets of stone as a sign of a new beginning.

B. THE ATTRIBUTES OF GOD

Exodus 34:5-9 Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. 6 And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, 7 keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation." 8 So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped. 9 Then he said, "If now I have found grace in Your sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray, go among us, even though we are a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance."

But before God did anything with the tablets, God proclaimed the greatness of His attributes, a declaration that is basic to all Jewish and Christian theology. Moses repeated these words to God at Kadesh-Barnea in Numbers 14, the Jews used them in Nehemiah's day in Nehemiah 9, and Jonah quoted them when he sat pouting outside Nineveh in Jonah 4.

God does not extend mercy by shutting His eyes to the guilty or by saying, "I will just forget that sin." Sin must be punished and a penalty must be paid. God by no means clears the guilty. What happens then? How does He keep His mercy and take care of iniquity at the same time? A sacrifice has been provided. The sacrifices Israel made in that day did not take away sin but they pointed to that "Perfect Sacrifice," the Lord Jesus Christ, who, when He did come, put away sin by His death on the cross.

'Merciful' can also be translated as "full of compassion." The word translated 'gracious' comes from the idea "to bend or stoop in kindness to an inferior; to favor, or to bestow." It is grace, giving to the undeserving. The word 'Grace' – there is no greater word in the language than the word that stands for the undeserved, free gift of the Love of God.

The idea behind the word 'longsuffering' means that God is slow to anger. He doesn't have a short fuse and is patient with us. There is not one sin that God wouldn't and cannot forgive except the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit which means completely rejecting salvation through Jesus Christ's atoning sacrifice.

If His love and forgiveness are rejected, God will punish, and that punishment will have repercussions through the generations that hate Him.

Many people receive God's gracious forgiveness and second chances to restart their relationship with Him. I would be a naive person to believe that everyone becomes a firm believer of Jesus Christ and devotes his or her life to follow after Him. But I find that some people who were given second chances, some of them, literally from the brink of death, not only went back to their selfish attitudes and lifestyles, but also got worse than before.

I don't know where you are for this matter, if you are the one who was given a second chance, please do not waste it. Become a dedicated believer of Jesus Christ. If you don't, you may not be given the third chance to make it up. Take this as a warning, please.

If you continuously abuse God's mercy, but not repent from your disobedience, there will be a time when God says, "Enough," because your heart has gone too far to hear from Him. When that happens, don't complain that God didn't give you an opportunity to make it right. His loving, gracious, and giving character do not "cancel out" His righteousness.

C. A NEW BEGINNING

Exodus 34:10-11 And He said: "Behold, I make a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels such as have not been done in all the earth, nor in any nation; and all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the Lord. For it is an awesome thing that I will do with you. 11 Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I am driving out from before you the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite.

This was God's covenant, that Israel was invited to join. He did not negotiate the terms with Israel. Instead He dictated the terms to Israel.

It is the same with us. When we come to Him, we come to Him in His term, not ours, since we were spiritually bankrupted and there was nothing for us to negotiate with God. After all God is the One who saved our lives from eternal damnation in hell.

D. HOW TO HAVE A GREAT NEW BEGINNING

Exodus 34:12-16 Take heed to yourself, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land where you are going, lest it be a snare in your midst. 13 But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images 14 (for you shall worship no other god, for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), 15 lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they play the harlot with their gods and make sacrifice to their gods, and one of them invites you and you eat of his sacrifice, 16 and you take of his daughters for your sons, and his daughters play the harlot with their gods and make your sons play the harlot with their gods. 17 You shall make no molded gods for yourselves.

The fact that God renewed the covenant is evidence that He forgave His people and gave them a new beginning. But God also repeated the essential elements of the covenant, especially the laws about idolatry.

The culture of the Canaanites was so corrupt that it was beyond redemption. They had 400 years to repent from their corrupted lifestyle, but they didn't. God did not want Israel to assume any of the sinful practices found in the culture of the Canaanites. They had temple prostitutes for their idol worship and used human babies as sacrifices to their gods, especially Baal.

Israel was to either destroy them or drive them out of the land. The Bible critics down through the years have decried this. Apparently they have not investigated the reason for this extreme measure. Of course the obvious reason is that God was protecting his own from the horror of idolatry. But there is another reason. It is known today that venereal disease was in epidemic proportions among the inhabitants of Canaan. God was attempting to protect His people from the ravages of disease.

Let's make one thing crystal clear here. Our God is a jealous God. He is not some possessive, obsessive and insanely jealous freak. He is not jealous of us, rather He is jealous for us. He doesn't want us to get involved with idolatry that anything takes away our love from God, because idolatry hurts us and destroys us in the end. Our God doesn't want us to experience that horrible thing, that is why He is jealous for us.

Since we already studied the Ten Commandments in our previous studies, we will go ahead skip v17-v27 like we are going to do from chapter 35 to chapter 39. Next week we are going to finish the Book of Exodus. From December 17th, we are going to study 1 John from the New Testament.

E. GOD'S GLORY REFLECTED ON MOSES

Exodus 34:28-35 So he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights; he neither ate bread nor drank water. And He wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments. 29 Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses'

hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him. 30 So when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned to him; and Moses talked with them. 32 Afterward all the children of Israel came near, and he gave them as commandments all that the Lord had spoken with him on Mount Sinai. 33 And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil on his face. 34 But whenever Moses went in before the Lord to speak with Him, he would take the veil off until he came out; and he would come out and speak to the children of Israel whatever he had been commanded. 35 And whenever the children of Israel saw the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face shone, then Moses would put the veil on his face again, until he went in to speak with Him.

Again, the Bible critics would argue that no one can survive on the mountain top for forty days and nights without food and water. How true they are! But there is one thing they didn't include in their puny equation is God. If God chose to have Moses' tumtum full all the time and not thirsty with His supernatural power, Moses wouldn't think about having a Big Mac with Mountain Dew. With God all things are possible.

The Book of Exodus opens with Moses seeing God's glory in the burning bush, and it closes with the glory of God descending into the camp and filling the tabernacle.

The presence of the glory of God in the camp of Israel was not a luxury. Rather it was a necessity. It identified Israel as the people of God and set them apart from the other nations, because the tabernacle was consecrated by the glory of God. Other nations had sacred buildings, but they were empty without the real God. The tabernacle of Israel was blessed with the presence of the glory of God.

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the believers' lives is not luxury, rather it is necessity for us to have the guarantee of our salvation. Having the Spirit of God who is God Himself in our hearts makes our bodies the temple of the Holy Spirit which means we have to honor Him with our bodies, minds, souls and spirits.

2 Corinthians 1:21-22 Now He who establishes us with you in Christ and has anointed us is God, 22 who also has sealed us and given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee.

1 Corinthians 6:19-20 Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? 20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

Why did Moses wear a veil? Not because he was frightening the people, but because the glory was fading away.

2 Corinthians 3:13 unlike Moses, who put a veil over his face so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the end of what was passing away.

The Jews saw this glory as something wonderful and exciting, but what would they say if they knew it was fading away? Who wants to follow a leader who is losing his glory? So Moses would go into the tent of meeting to talk with God, and the glory would return, but then he would wear the veil so the people wouldn't see the glory disappear.

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul made several applications of this remarkable event:

1) The glory of the Mosaic legal system was fading away, but the glory of the Gospel of God's grace was getting more glorious.

2 Corinthians 3:7-11 But if the ministry of death, written and engraved on stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not look steadily at the face of Moses because of the glory of his countenance, which glory was passing away, 8 how will the ministry of the Spirit not be more glorious? 9 For if the ministry of condemnation had glory, the ministry of righteousness exceeds much more in glory. 10 For even what was made glorious had no glory in this respect, because of the glory that excels. 11 For if what is passing away was glorious, what remains is much more glorious.

2) The event to the lost Jews of his day whose hearts were covered by a veil of unbelief so they couldn't see the glory of Christ.

The only way to remove that veil was to believe the Word and trust in Jesus Christ.

2 Corinthians 3:14-16 But their minds were blinded. For until this day the same veil remains unlifted in the reading of the Old Testament, because the veil is taken away in Christ. 15 But even to this day, when Moses is read, a veil lies on their heart. 16 Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away.

3) Moses' experience to Christians who by faith see the glory of Jesus Christ in the Word and experience a spiritual transformation.

This is why Christians read the Bible and meditate on it, because when the child of God looks into the Word of God and sees the Son of God, he or she is transformed by the Spirit of God into the image of God for the glory of God.

2 Corinthians 3:17-18 Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. 18 But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) With God, we can have a new beginning in Christ.

The situation may not change the way we want, but our hearts will be changed according to His will if we let Him.

2 Corinthians 5:17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.

2) With God, we can have the glory of God in our heart that gives the assurance of salvation in Christ.

I don't know how non-believers make another day without God. That is why they are at each other's throat to get more.