

EXODUS: The Person, Promise, and Power of God

Exodus 33, pt 1. – Our God is a Consuming Fire

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.”
Exodus 33:3

Recap: If God is sovereign, why pray?

- a) God sovereignly _____ the world. (Eph. 1:11)
- b) God _____ us to pray. (1 Thess. 5:17; Phil. 4:6-7; Eph. 6:18)
- c) God has _____ to us our prayers for His purposes – concurrently. (Ephesians 3:20)

“... prayer is not intended to change God's purpose, nor is it to move Him to form fresh purposes. God has decreed that certain events shall come to pass through the means He has appointed for their accomplishment. God has decreed the means as well as the end, and among the means is prayer. Even the prayers of His people are included in His eternal decrees. Therefore, instead of prayers being in vain they are among the means through which God exercises His decrees.”

Here then is the design of prayer: not that God's will may be altered, but that it may be accomplished in His own good time and way.”

A.W. Pink

Prayer ... is a human act that God has ordained and which he delights in because it reflects the dependence of his creatures upon him. He has promised to respond to prayer, and his response is just as contingent upon our prayer as our prayer is in accordance with his will. “And this is the confidence that we have toward him, that if we ask anything according to his will he hears us” (1 John 5:14). When we don't know how to pray according to God's will but desire it earnestly, “the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God” (Romans 8:27).

John Piper

“Prayer assumes the sovereignty of God. If God is not sovereign, we have no assurance that He is able to answer our prayers. Our prayers would become nothing more than wishes. And so having trust in God's sovereignty is our foundation, and prayer is our expression of that trust.”

Jerry Bridges

“... it is not our task to try and determine what God's sovereign will is, but rather we are to pray for what is good and right according to Scripture, and continue to pray for the desires of our hearts. Within these chapters of Exodus 32–34, Moses asked for some very extraordinary things, and they were granted because those things were ordained of God. So, keep praying for extraordinary things in Christ, your loved ones to be saved, for the Lord to bless your ministry, church, family, friends, and for you to continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of God. We can be assured that our Lord will bring about His sovereign will, and He does so through the prayers of His people. So, “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess 5:17), “Pray at all times in the Spirit” (Eph 6:18), and have confidence that “if we ask anything according to His will, he hears us” (1 John 5:14). The prayers of the righteous accomplish much because God uses them to bring about His will ...”

Joshua Banks

Life Without God?

33 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.' ²I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ³Go 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." (Exodus 33:1-3)

After showing incredible grace and mercy after their egregious sin at the base of Mount Sinai, God now sends His people forward to the place He's promised them.

But their defining character trait remains: They are "_____".

The only reason they are not totally consumed is because of God himself. He is faithful to his _____ and he is ever consistent in his _____.

⁶"I the Lord do not change; therefore you, O children of Jacob, are not consumed. ⁷From the days of your fathers you have turned aside from my statutes and have not kept them." (Malachi 3:6-7a)

To go before them and ensure their success in the journey God promises them an accompanying _____. His promise to Abraham and then to Moses will be accomplished. But something significant has changed. It is only an angel that goes with them now, not God himself.

Don't miss the tragic and fitting irony of God's _____ here. The great sin of the Israelites in the previous chapter was the building and worshipping of a golden calf, in part *so that their "god" could be physically with them!*

And remember that God had given them the very means by which He would dwell with them! He commanded that a _____ would be built where He might *dwell* with them.

⁸And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst. ⁹Exactly as I show you concerning the pattern of the tabernacle, and of all its furniture, so you shall make it. (Exodus 25:8-9)

Every meticulous detail was meant to reflect him and his glory. It was designed to remind them of their sin and his grace. It was a means of his being _____ with them.

And now that beautiful _____ is gone.

That was the price of their _____.

There would be no divine presence in their camp – no tabernacle. And without the tabernacle, there would be no altar for sacrifice, no laver for cleansing, no lampstand for light, no table for bread, no incense for prayer, no ark for atonement, and no glory in Israel.¹

"The significance of this turn of events cannot be stressed too highly. The whole purpose of the Exodus was for God and his people to be *together*. God's presence with them will be firmly established in the proposed tabernacle. By saying "go ahead, but you're going without me," the events of the previous thirty-one chapters are being undone. This is not merely a setback; it means the end of the road."²

God would still be protecting them. He would still be providing for them. He would still be watching over them. But now he is at a _____.

¹ Philip Graham Ryken and R. Kent Hughes, *Exodus: Saved for God's Glory*, 1020.

² Peter Enns, *Exodus*, NIV Application Commentary, p. 578.

Loss and Repentance

⁴When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. ⁵For 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.' " ⁶Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward. (Exodus 33:4-6)

The Israelites seem to finally grasp the great consequence of their rebellion - the loss of God's very presence. If you choose to live outside of God's _____, then you also choose to live outside of His _____.

Their repentance appears legitimate because they respond exactly to God's command - "take off your ornaments".

Again, don't miss the great irony! When they constructed the Golden Calf, they did so with the gold from their earrings. Whatever treasures they had left, they were now instructed to take off from here on. _____ sin can have _____ consequences.

This consequence was not merely _____. It was graciously _____.

They will not _____ their transgression. And they will not _____ it.

They (and we) are also reminded of the consuming fire of God's _____:

It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? ⁸If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? ¹⁰For they disciplined us for a short time as it seemed best to them, but he disciplines us for our good, that we may share his holiness. ¹¹For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

¹²Therefore lift your drooping hands and strengthen your weak knees, ¹³and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be put out of joint but rather be healed. ¹⁴Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. (Hebrews 12:7-14)

²⁸Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, ²⁹for **our God is a consuming fire.** (Hebrews 12:28-29)

In his holiness, God exhibits his fitting (or righteous wrath) for human sin.

The sin of the Israelites - like our sin - is not depicted as minor mistakes, but as _____.

In His righteousness, He _____ His children, and He _____ His enemies.

His _____ is an outpouring of His holiness, not an _____ He possesses.

It is ..."the rightful expression of his holy love in the face of sin and evil. Before the foundation of the earth, the triune God had perfect love, joy, holiness, and peace. There was no wrath because there was no sin. God's wrath arises from his holy love in opposition to wickedness. Wrath only exists where sin exists. Therefore, we should uphold the priority of God's love - and the necessity of God's wrath to safeguard his love in a fallen world."

Jeremy Treat

From A.W. Pink:

"... the wrath of God is as much a Divine perfection as is His faithfulness, power, or mercy. It must be so, for there is no blemish whatever, not the slightest defect in the character of God; yet there would be if "wrath" were absent from Him! Indifference to sin is a moral blemish, and he who hates it not is a moral leper. How could He who is the sum of all excellency look with equal satisfaction upon virtue and vice, wisdom and folly? How could He who is infinitely holy disregard sin and refuse to manifest His "severity" (Rom. 9:12) toward it? How could He who delights only in that which is pure and lovely, loathe and hate not that which is impure and vile? The very nature of God makes Hell as real a necessity, as imperatively and eternally requisite as Heaven is. Not only is there no imperfection in God, but there is no perfection in Him that is less perfect than another.

The wrath of God is His eternal detestation of all unrighteousness. It is the displeasure and indignation of Divine equity against evil. It is the holiness of God stirred into activity against sin. It is the moving cause of that just sentence which He passes upon evil-doers. God is angry against sin because it is a rebelling against His authority, a wrong done to His inviolable sovereignty. Insurrectionists against God's government shall be made to know that God is the Lord. They shall be made to feel how great that Majesty is which they despise, and how dreadful is that threatened wrath which they so little regarded. Not that God's anger is a malignant and malicious retaliation, inflicting injury for the sake of it, or in return for injury received. No; while God will vindicate His dominion as the Governor of the universe, He will not be vindictive.

The wrath of God is a perfection of the Divine character upon which we need to frequently meditate. First, that our hearts may be duly impressed by God's detestation of sin. We are ever prone to regard sin lightly, to gloss over its hideousness, to make excuses for it. But the more we study and ponder God's abhorrence of sin and His frightful vengeance upon it, the more likely are we to realize its heinousness. Second, to beget a true fear in our souls for God: "Let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear: for our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:28, 29). We cannot serve Him "acceptably" unless there is due "reverence" for His awful Majesty and "godly fear" of His righteous anger, and these are best promoted by frequently calling to mind that "our God is a consuming fire." Third, to draw out our souls in fervent praise for having delivered us from "the wrath to come" (1 Thess. 1:10).

Our readiness or our reluctance to meditate upon the wrath of God becomes a sure test of how our hearts' really stand affected toward Him. If we do not truly rejoice in God, for what He is in Himself, and that because of all the perfections which are eternally resident in Him, then how dwelleth the love of God in us? Each of us needs to be most prayerfully on his guard against devising an image of God in our thoughts which is patterned after our own evil inclinations. Of old the Lord complained, "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether as thyself" (Psa. 50:21), If we rejoice not "at the remembrance of His holiness" (Psa. 97:12), if we rejoice not to know that in a soon coming day God will make a most glorious display of His wrath, by taking vengeance on all who now oppose Him, it is proof positive that our hearts are not in subjection to Him, that we are yet in our sins, on the way to the everlasting burnings.

Pink, Arthur W.. *The Attributes of God*, ch. 16

Next week: Exodus 33, pt. 2 – The Glory of God and the Good of Man