

## **GOD HAS NOT GIVEN UP ON YOU**

**Exodus 34:1–35**

**Dr. George O. Wood**

This morning, Exodus 34, we have a chance to rest a little today taking a rather short passage of Scripture. The theme is “God has not given up on you.” When we looked together at the Scripture last week we saw how Moses successfully interceded with God, that He not destroy His people and secondly that He not abandon them. I think these fears are very real human fears—the recognition that God has the awesome potential to destroy us, the feeling that arises in our hearts from time to time that He has every right to do so. We are unworthy. If we would come in our human presence into the pure blazing presence of the majesty of God we would be consumed. If we have not faced the fear of destruction, we may have faced the fear of being abandoned. When God had made the assurance to Moses that He would not destroy the people, He had indicated to Moses He would not go up with them. It was Moses’ task to intercede again that God not abandon His people.

What Moses intercedes for on behalf to Israel is what Jesus Christ has interceded for with the Father on our behalf, that we according to 1 Thessalonians 5:9 have not been appointed to wrath. Also it is our Lord who promises us that we will never be abandoned. Thus in the last verse of the Gospel of Matthew it is He who speaks to us that He will be with us always.

When we come to the text for today we find five divisions to it.

**I. First we note the renewal of the law which is brought to Moses and to Israel, Moses having previously broken the tablets of the law when he came from Sinai, Exodus 34:1–4.**

We see the Lord in renewing the law telling Moses what to bring up to the mountain, telling him when to come to the mountain, and telling him as well who may come to the mountain. It is

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always the Lord that is giving directions pertaining to worship. There is nothing left for human initiation. It is not in the Old Testament *man* who makes the appointment with *God*. It is *God* who makes the appointment with *man*.

How different therefore, is the freedom of access we have in Jesus Christ where we may boldly come into His presence at any time? And the initiative is left with us.

Previously in the giving of the law the Lord had furnished the tablets and the writing. According to Exodus 32:16 the tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God graven upon the tablets. Now, however, as the Lord sets out to give again the law and the tablets to Moses, Moses is told to cut out two tablets of stone. These would be hewn by man rather than by God. We also find in 34:28 that the writing upon the tablets was to be Moses' as well. Thus he wrote upon the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.

A substantial difference is made between the first giving of the law and the second. More of man's participation is seen in it. Yet it is the word of God. We see, by the way, in the second giving of the law something of the nature of how Scripture came to be written and given to us.

Although it is appropriately called the Word of God, it nevertheless has come through the process of man's writing. I realize that in inspiration there is, as with Moses, the situation where God simply dictates a message as a modern businessman would dictate a letter to his secretary.

That appears to be the nature of the law. With, however, the giving of much of other parts of the Scripture, God inspires and works through the unique personality of His prophets and apostles.

But whatever process He uses in the writing, the Word is ultimately His. Man takes it and hews the tablets. As it were it is still God's writing. The Lord tells Moses to come on the day after he hews the tablets and He tells him as well that the restrictions in approach to the mountain are to be kept as they were in the first giving of the law, where neither man nor beast might come or

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touch lest they be struck. For such was the majesty of God and the splendor of God, that He could not be approached.

**II. As Moses prepares for this incredibly awesome occasion, his meeting with God again at the mount, he comes into the mount and in Exodus 34:5–9 we see God revealing Himself to Moses.**

This revelation which is spoken of in verses 5–9 is evidently a fulfillment of what Moses had prayed for at the end of Exodus 33. He had asked that he might see the glory of God. The Lord had indicated to him that he would not see His pure essence. But nevertheless he would see that which no man before him had seen. He would see the glory and beauty and splendor of God as no man had ever viewed. It is now, in fulfillment of this promise of the Lord, that Moses ascends the mount. There the Lord indeed meets with him. In fact, the text of Exodus says that Moses cut the tablets, he rose up early in the morning, and went up to the mount as the Lord commanded him. The Lord descended in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed before him.

Notice that the standing of the Lord with Moses was not to be kept as a permanent experience. The standing would quickly be a passing, as if to suggest within the text itself that fixed views of God are reserved for the eternal state of being with the Lord. The best views of God we have in this world are transient. We've all known the experience of having an incredible experience with God, an experience in which He has revealed His splendor to us more than at any other time. We like to capture that experience. We like to have that kind of quality of dialogue with God every moment of every day. But we come down from the mountain. The Lord is but passing by and He is in that special revelation to us giving us a glimpse of what it is like when we will have that fixed gaze in His presence forever.

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The Lord appearing to Moses reveals His name and His nature. Again to Moses he proclaims the name of the Lord. It is that name which at the beginning of Exodus, Exodus 3, that Moses had wanted to know “Who is it that I shall say to the children of Israel has called me? And who is it who will bring the people forth?” The Lord at that moment reveals His name. Not the general name “God” but the name by which He will become known to His people, “Yahweh” or “Jehovah” in the English. It is a word which simply means “I am what I am” or “I will be what I will be.” Moses had come to learn that God had indeed kept that aspect of His name. God had proven Himself in the course of events. The term “God” is kind of a static term, when we think of God as someone who rules over all. But the term “I will be what I will be” shows that God is actively involved in our affairs. Actively involved in the human scene. And he has become that to Moses.

Just as when the president calls a press conference and as he walks into the room the crier calls out “Ladies and gentlemen, the president of the United States,” and everyone stands, there is a proclamation first of his name that there might be an awe and an aura associated with the office which the president fills. Then when the president has entered the room and bidden everyone sit down when they have become aware of his presence, then it is that he speaks.

So it is that God declares His presence to Moses. He proclaimed His name there. That, of course, is the meaning of a name in Scripture. The meaning of the name is that it represents the essence of what a person’s character is. Thus, for example, the name “Jesus” represents the essence of who He is. His name means “one who saves.” The name “Jehovah” therefore is “I will be who I will be. I will be free. I will redeem you, I will bring you out, I will prove myself to you.”

After the Lord proclaims His name, then He reveals His nature, in the middle of verses 6–7, a God merciful and gracious. Here is one of the most elevated passages in the entire Old

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Testament. For in verses 6 and 7 God is telling us what He thinks of Himself. Amazing autobiographical passage, which tells us of God's character.

If I were to ask you to write down five or six terms to describe yourself what would you write? The things I think about are my failures, rather than my good points. When the Lord speaks out of His own self-consciousness, He really tells us and discloses an awful lot of the mystery of the being of God. The first word of the Lord's lips to describe Himself is that He is merciful. What an opposite to a human dictator who, the more he is elevated, the more merciless he may become toward individuals. The Lord's whole approach, as He sees his approach to mankind, is one of mercy and one of grace. Even in the Old Testament God sees Himself fundamentally as a God of grace and we have seen this in the Exodus experience. How in spite of Israel's repeated failures God has allowed them to be His people and has forgiven and restored them. So to you God is also a God of mercy and a God of grace. He is slow to anger. Or as the King James puts it, "longsuffering." Another way to describe it is He has a long fuse. He's not easily provoked even as love is not easily provoked. Israel really had to try hard to get God provoked. The Lord is longsuffering. He is abounding, therefore, in steadfast love and faithfulness. That steadfast love is a very deep word. It expresses a love which does not go up and down from day to day, as our human love is tempted to do. It is in a steady and growing position toward us. His steadfast love and faithfulness extends to the thousands. He is not simply able just to love a few but He is able to love the many and still not lose sight of the one. Whereas his judgment is visited to the third and fourth generation, His love is for the thousands and some translators have suggested that this can also mean to the thousands of generations. His love, as it moves across the landscape of human experience, is able to diffuse itself across a generation and love the many. Yet His love

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through time is able to telescope down through the ages and the many to the thousands are loved by God.

There is a vastness to His love, but in that vastness there is no loss of individuality. No loss of our individual standing in His presence. He is abounding. The word “abounding” is an interesting word. Always full and overflowing. There is no need of running out.

And forgiving. What does the Lord forgive? The text says He forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin, three words which are closely related to one another. “Iniquity” perhaps stands for a concept of a twistedness in our character. Inequity. An imbalance. An unfairness. A distortion. Something which is the opposite of straight that describes the sinfulness in our human experience. “Transgression” may be a term applied to apostasy. The kind of over sin which Israel does in the wilderness when it makes the golden calf. And “sin”; sin has simply been described by some as “a missing of the mark.” Missing our goal. It is an indication of failure. Indeed, all sin is a failure to be what God has called us to be or what truly in our inner man we have wanted to be.

All of this forgiven. Yet with that forgiveness comes a rather strong statement in verse 7: “Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished” (NIV). Here are the two sides of God: One upholding forgiveness, the other side of God or the other aspect of God upholding justice. This relationship of forgiving and yet not clearing the guilty is essential to the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. For it says to us that God will never clear the guilty unless here is some satisfaction given to His justice. When God has the guilty standing in His court, although He seeks to forgive, for the sake of His own justice He will not forgive except as we see in Jesus Christ He offers the person who stands there a substitute—His own Son. He is willing to say, “The penalty for your sin is now taken by My Son who will die for what you have done. If you will accept Him as your substitute

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you can walk away changed. You can walk away different.” The purpose of offering the substitute is not simply that we walk away pardoned, but that we might walk away changed because of responding to the love of the Judge who has let us go. Any human comparison, when it comes to the nature of God, always falls short in some respect.

What a transforming thing is the fullness of God’s forgiveness. But His forgiveness is such to not make Him soft in regard to justice. He will by no means clear the guilty except through the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ. This strange text then occurs, that He will visit the iniquity to the third and fourth generation. What does this mean? Simply this that the Lord recognizes the inevitability in human processes that bad parents tend to produce bad children. Studies being done on child abuse show that those who turn out to be child abusers were themselves once children who were abused. Once you open the floodgates of pornography, the next generation to come along and the next generation after that becomes more deeply mired in the mud. It is this kind of thing here which the Lord in His wisdom is speaking of. Open the gate to evil and it opens a host of things to happen in succeeding generations.

What the Lord is saying in this revelation of Himself is that we may meet God in government or when we come to the New Testament we may meet God in the gospel. If we meet God in government it means He will by no means clear the guilty. But when we meet God in the gospel it means that Jesus Christ has stood in our place and accepted the penalty that was to have been given us. To this revelation of God Moses makes a response, verse 8. He worships. Notice, by the way, how he worshipped. Evidently there is a period that goes by when he is just simply silent in God’s presence. He is simply bowed. Worship is first an inner attitude toward God. Here Moses expresses it by an outward reverence. His bowing is as a servant to his Lord or as the created to his Creator, or the redeemed to his Redeemer. He worshipped. As he was

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worshipping he was praying, verse 9. He prayed for God's presence. And he prays it uniquely. He prays that God would go with them, this "stiff-necked people" (NIV). When we looked at this term last week we found God using it in 32:9. Now Moses turns that right around and uses their stiff-necked condition as the reason for his plea; in essence, "Lord, go up *because* the people are stiff-necked." What he is saying is this, "Lord, a people as stubborn as this absolutely have to have you. I can't handle it alone." What a recognition to attribute that trait not just to Israel but to ourselves: "Oh, Lord it is because I am stiff-necked that you must go up with me. Leave me not alone lest in my stiff-neckness I break my neck because of its stiffness."

### **III. Having pled once more for God's presence Moses looks to God for His pardon and then also looks to God that the people will be the Lord's own possession.**

In response to this prayer the Lord renews the covenant which He had made at Sinai. In verses 10–11 the Lord restores promises. He is going to treat Israel as the father of the Prodigal Son treated him when he returned home. There is going to be a full restoration of privileges and promises. Israel is not only being *pardoned* by God himself, but again they are to be *preferred*. In our quarrels which we have with God we bear all blame for the quarrels. But if there be peace with God, God must have all the glory. It is God who initiates the peace in this moment. With the promises which the Lord makes to Israel in verses 10–11 He will give them the land as their inheritance. He also in verses 12–17 requires of Israel certain obediences. He tells them in verse 12 to avoid other covenants. He tells them also in verses 13–17 that they are to destroy worship centers which had been built up to the gods of Canaan. They were to tear down their altars, associated not only with the worship of the consort of Baal but as well with immorality. These things were to be destroyed. For God knew the heart of the people and recognized that if at the foot of Mount Sinai with nobody to blame but themselves the Israelites had lapsed into

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idolatry, what would be the dangers of apostasy in a place like Palestine? Everywhere they looked there was not Sinai consumed with the presence of God. Instead there were false worship centers.

The tragic failure of Israel is etched upon the remainder of the Old Testament in showing its failure to keep what the Lord instructed it in this renewal of the covenant. Psalm 106 is one example of the psalmist reflecting on Israel's failure to keep God's word. Thus they became unclean by their acts and played the harlot in their doing.

These buttress the whole contention which is reflected in the New Testament that Christ's coming is absolutely necessary because under the law man was found to be deficient in God's presence and instead of becoming freer became more caught up in his sin.

**IV. In verses 18–26 we see God making a repetition to Israel of duties which had been previously given them.**

Since we have looked at them before we will simply note they're there and go on to verses 27–35.

**V. Exodus 34:27–35 speaks of the return of Moses to the people.**

A summary of his experience at Sinai is noted in verses in 27–28 where the Lord in speaking to him has an experience with Moses for forty days and forty nights, during which time Moses neither ate bread nor drank water. He is evidently spiritually and supernaturally sustained by the Lord during this period of time. There are three individuals in Scripture who have similar fasts: Moses, Elijah and the Lord Jesus Christ. Of course, in the character of our Lord is combined the witness of the law and the prophets of whom Moses and Elijah speak. As Moses come down the mountain his face is shining. So great does it radiate the glory of God (even as stone may at

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times radiate a light that has been shed upon it), so Moses' face reflected the glory of God and he did not know, the text says, that it shown. What a lesson on spirituality.

What things are suffered by the body of Christ when persons try to inform us that their face is shining!

What a difference is Moses. His face shown and he did not know it. What a contrast later to Samson who in Judges 16:20 rose up to go out and do as he'd done before and he did not know that the Lord had left him. How easy it is to sometimes attempt to do things for God and go out doing it in your own strength rather than in the strength of the Lord. How beautiful is Moses' pattern of coming down and he did not know that his face shown. From that time on the text of Exodus indicates to us that Moses, whenever he went into the presence of the Lord, took the veil off his face in order that he might communicate with God. Then when he came out to the people and spoke to them officially he also had the veil off. But except for those two times he kept the veil on his face, that his face might not be seen by Israel. Paul has an interesting commentary on this in 2 Corinthians 3. He lets us in on a secret. He says to us the real reason why Moses left the veil on his face was that after he met with God His face would glow for a time and then he discovered that the glory was a fading glory. So he put the veil on his face, not that Israel would not see the glory, but that Israel would not see the fading of the glory. Paul uses this as an illustration to say that in reference to the new covenant which Christ makes, the old covenant has a fading glory. But the new covenant in Jesus Christ has a splendid glory. If on the giving of the law at Sinai there was such splendor, how much more on the giving of our Lord Jesus Christ is there splendor and glory!

Paul takes off on this theme of the veil of Moses and indicates as well that for his fellow countrymen there is a veil on their eyes whenever they read the Old Testament, 2 Corinthians

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3:14–15. A veil of disobedience and unteachableness. But then, Paul still building on this theme of what happened to Moses, says that when we come to Jesus Christ the veil is removed, 2 Corinthians 3:16. When a man turns to the Lord the veil is removed. The Lord is Spirit and where the Spirit of the Lord is there is freedom and we all with unveiled face beholding the glory of the Lord are changed into His likeness from one degree of glory to another. It is the law of life that we become whatever we look at. That we become whatever we admire. That we become like the personalities we esteem. It's not surprising that when Moses comes down from the mountain, his face was shining with splendor because he was becoming like something of the glory and the light that shown from the face of God. When Jesus was on the Mount of Transfiguration, His earthly visage also on one occasion reflected that glory of God where He was shown dazzling and bright. Paul says when we gaze at the Lord with our spiritual eyes, we also are changed from glory to glory. Why? Because we become like whoever we are gazing at.

We see this in the youth culture of our day, becoming like those pop leaders on the scene who are admired. We put on the kind of attitudes and clothing even, which may be reflected in those we look up to and admire. So saint Paul is saying if we look into Jesus Christ we will be changed into His glory. We will look, for example, at how He faced the needy and we'll be changed in our own personality of having that response as well. If we understand something about how He forgave people then we'll understand something about forgiveness in our own life. If we understand something about how He prayed then we'll become that in our own life. We will change from glory unto glory.

As we take the cup and the bread today we have another chance to be changed from glory unto glory. For as we take it the Spirit will again be suggesting to us that witness of the Lord Jesus Christ who thought not equality with God a thing to be grasped. But humbled himself. Took

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upon himself the form of a servant, emptied himself. Died on the cross for you and for me. It is that kind of gaze into the character of Jesus that helps us to become more fittingly His servants. His people. Let us be changed into His glory.

### **Closing Prayer**

Our Father, we come to You in this moment recognizing that we are Your people. You have chosen us not for wrath, and neither have You chosen us to abandon us, although You have every reason to do so. We simply are here by virtue of the fact that You are merciful and gracious. We who see that manifestation of Your personality—merciful, gracious, slow to anger, full of forgiveness and faithfulness, not clearing the guilty but showing steadfast love to the thousands—we who see these things in You, seek also ourselves to be changed into Your nature. To be like You. To reflect Your glory. In the giving of the bread and the cup today may our radiation of You be enhanced. May You rise up as Lord of each one of our lives. May we give ourselves in a new way to truly being Your servants. Through Jesus we pray. Amen.