

## EXODUS 34

### INTRODUCTION

If we are honest we so often as God's people fail to honour and obey his commands. But how does God treat us when we treat him so carelessly? If we treated other human beings in the way that we often treat God then at best we would be ignored by those that we treat so foolishly. But are we not so thankful that God does not treat us the way other human beings treat us?

God would have every right to condemn us, judge us and have nothing more to do with us because of our sin towards him but He is compassionate and gracious and slow to anger abounding in love and faithful; towards his erring and sinful people (v 6). In this chapter we will see that God reveals these marvellous attributes to Moses but we will also see these attributes demonstrated in God's dealings with his people.

### 1. GOD'S GRACE TO HIS SINNING PEOPLE (vs.1-28)

This is seen in two ways:

a) Replacement of the tablets and the revealing of his character (vs. 1-9) - Moses is ordered by God to chisel out new tablets of stone. God then writes upon them the 10 commandments that He gave before. Moses is to meet God alone on the mountain and the pattern is almost the same as the first time the commandments were given. So Moses ascends to the top of the mountain while God descends (vs. 4-5) this language ascending and descending shows the massive gap between God and the people at the foot of the mountain. But God is gracious and came down in a cloud and stood with Moses and proclaimed his name (Yahweh) to him.

Now as we know names in the Bible are always very important and the name of the Lord God almighty is especially significant because it stands for his whole being and character. So his name Jehovah or Yahweh would be enough for Moses but God now spells out the significance of his name he lists here a number of his attributes

He is gracious and compassionate therefore He feels for our needs in a similar way that a mother can sense the needs of her helpless baby. It is interesting to note that the name 'Lord' is translated in the Greek version of the Old Testament by the word that is used for 'Jesus' in the New Testament; the word is Kurios (Lord). Now in Jesus we see God's attributes of compassion and grace manifested.

Just as God came down to stand with Moses and meet with Him and reveal his character so Jesus came down to earth to stand with us and to reveal to us the nature and character of God. He being God showed compassion and grace on many occasions, God knows what it is like to be a human being living in this earth of ours.

Therefore we are rightly told in Hebrews 4:15 that as our High Priest He is able to sympathise with our weaknesses for we have one who was tempted in the same way we are tempted; yet unlike us He did not sin. Therefore our God perfectly understands what we suffer in this world. If we suffer physical pain He knows what that is like for He suffered the pain of the crucifixion.

If its mental anguish we suffer from then surely no one has suffered like Jesus for on that cross He knew the desertion of his Father and his cry of dereliction is one that expresses his great mental anguish and distress that He felt on that cross. If it's financial stress that we have to endure then even our Saviour had nowhere to call his own; He had nowhere to lay his head.

If its pressure of work that we are under then we can turn to our compassionate and gracious God for Jesus knew hard work and if you simply study how much He put into a day then He was surely

under pressure from work. Whatever our situation is today; whatever our need maybe, we have a great compassionate and gracious God who understands the pressures of life. He knows what it is like to live in this world, He is able to sympathise with us therefore we have no reason not to come before him and pour out our hearts to such a compassionate God. But He is also so gracious towards us isn't He? He shows us such great kindness, kindness that we do not deserve.

He lavishes upon us gifts that our beyond our wildest imagination and He does so out of his grace towards us. Of course his greatest act of graciousness towards us was the death of His Son on the cross. While we were still in our sins and rebels towards him, Jesus came and died and granted us forgiveness and mercy.

We do indeed have a gracious and compassionate God, One that we can turn to at any time and one that we should turn too in praise and thanksgiving for His attributes and for his gifts that He has lavished upon us as his people. My dear friends if you do not know this God then you are missing out on having such a kind friend. Why not come to him in repentance and in faith and you will soon discover something of his graciousness and of his compassion towards you.

In fact He is being gracious and compassionate to you now; even while you are still in your sins but you simply do not see it you do not realise it.

Next God says He is slow to anger (v 6). God is not quick tempered and immediately displays his anger every time we sin. No! He is patient with his people but we must not mistake his patience with indifference towards sin. He is never indifferent concerning our sins, but he controls his anger, patiently dealing with us and working in us in order to bring us to repentance.

For those of us that have not yet come into a saving relationship with this God through Jesus then God shows tremendous daily patience with you. O he would have every right to wipe you from the face of this earth but O he longs that you might come to know him and seek his forgiveness.

He has done all that is necessary to accomplish your salvation in Jesus and He does not want you to perish in hell but He wants you to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9). Next we learn that God is abounding in love and faithfulness (v 6). These two attributes express one main idea; they are both covenant words so what is meant here is that God will keep his covenant because He has promised to do so. Our God is a God who keeps his word. God is here saying to Moses don't worry about your journey or those who now occupy the Promised Land for I am faithful to my covenant.

If I have promised to take you into the land I will keep my word; I will drive out those enemies. Moses simply keep trusting me and obeying me. This faithfulness is not just for a moment but God remains faithful to his people generation after generation (v 7). God is not like us; He does not keep changing his plans depending on his mood. No year after year, generation after generation He demonstrates his covenant commitment to his people he shows his love to them by his faithfulness towards his people.

Have not our forefathers proven the faithfulness of God to his church? Life is difficult now as Christians but there have been periods in the past when things have been much worst for his church and yet God has remained steadfast and faithful to his covenant and to his people.

So whatever difficulty we may face personally or whatever difficulty we may face as a church we can know and rely upon the covenant love and faithfulness of God. He will not fail us or let us down.

Furthermore our God forgives wickedness, rebellion and sin (v 7). What a blessing these words must have been to Moses. There he was trying to cope with the waywardness and rebellion of the

Israelites knowing that his God is holy and pure. Yet in the midst of what seems to be a total disaster (chapter 32) God shows himself to Moses to be a forgiving God? The three words used here for sin sum up all evil that man is capable of.

'Wickedness' is a word, which speaks about our natural tendency to sin. 'Rebellion' is an act which transgresses and breaks God's law and the word 'sin' is the failure to live up to God's standard.

These are three categories of sin into which we all fall and therefore the truth that our God is a forgiving God should be a tremendous comfort to our own souls. Christian, are you aware of your tendency to sin. Have you broken God's law this past week? Have you failed to live up to God's standard? Then turn to him again seeking his forgiveness and his grace to live for him.

But if you are not a Christian and by that I mean you have not come to Jesus as Saviour then you may not know it but you are a sinner. You have a sinful nature that leads you to break God's law. You cannot live up to God's standard by your own efforts. You might try but you fail time and time again. Let me point you to God who is willing to forgive you.

He has provided the means of forgiveness in Jesus and He will not only forgive but will grant to you the gift of his Holy Spirit and will grant you grace so that you can begin to live a more God honouring life. You cannot do it by yourself or by your own efforts you must come to the One who did it for you by dying on that cross and He will grant you grace so that your life can and will be changed through the power of God. Don't delay come to Jesus today?

However there is a little warning here that comes as a shock to us after reading about God's willingness to forgive, God now tells us that He does not leave the guilty unpunished (v 7). There is no contradiction here for while it is absolutely true that God is ready to forgive; He does not forgive automatically.

We must humbly turn to him in repentance realising we are sinners but we have a God who willingly forgives such sinners. But if we refuse to humble ourselves or acknowledge our guilt and sin before such a Holy and awesome God then our sin and rebellion will not go unpunished.

It is not only the guilty ones who suffer as a consequence of their sins but also the future generations often follow the example of previous generations and copy the actions of their fathers. This shows us that sin must never be taken lightly. What we do in our generation affects other people and the consequences of our sins will affect them as well. Our sinful rebellion might lead others into sin and therefore bring God's punishment on that future generation.

This is why how we live now is not an isolated thing. If the church lives in a rebellious state now then it will affect the gospel witness in the next generation. If our children see us take sin lightly now then they will do so in the next generation. So let us all deal with sin we need to regularly repent and seek God's forgiveness for our daily sins.

But unbeliever, do not think God will not punish sin, He will and does both in this world and ultimately in eternity; therefore repent now, turn to God and seek his forgiveness and his grace to live a new life in Christ.

For remember our sin affects others, God's punishment often extends to future generations because those generations simply have followed in our own sinful and rebellious footsteps. Is it any wonder that Moses responds to God's overwhelming and awesome presence by immediately bowing down and worshipping God (vs. 8-9)? That surely is how we ought to respond to the character of God as it has been revealed to us in his word.

We should bow down in our hearts if not literally and worship our God for being so gracious and compassionate and forgiving. In the process of his worship Moses pleads with God for his

presence with them. Remember the last chapter God had withdrawn from his people now Moses pleads for his forgiveness. He confesses the sin of the nation and includes himself in their sins. Lord you are a forgiving God please forgive us and go with us from here into the Promise Land.

Lord take us as your inheritance (v 9), Lord may we be your private property. Lord we do not deserve to be your people we are stiff necked but O you are a forgiving God so please take us to that Promised Land and own us as your people. This is what Moses is praying for and that surely ought to be our prayer as well. Lord we have sinned, we are rebellious people but Lord we thank you that you are a gracious compassionate and forgiving God.

Please forgive us and grant us grace and own us as your own precious people in spite of our rebellion. Perhaps if we had a bit more praying like that in our churches then perhaps we would see a bit more blessing within our churches.

The second way that God's grace is displayed is his people is:

**b) By the renewing of the covenant with his people (vs.10-28)** – God renews the covenant he had previously made with the people of Israel. In this section we have covered most of this material before and I don't have time to cover it again. God summarises some of the most important laws of the covenant here. He is reinforcing them because the people of Israel were just like us they so easily forgot his word and constantly needed to be reminded.

As evidence of the covenant God would do wonders (v 10) this obviously refers to the extraordinary events during the wilderness wanderings and the conquest of the land. Just think of the conquering of Jericho; was that not God performing wonders? These wonders would also prove that God is with his people the very thing Moses was desperate should happen.

God will grant the people victory but they must obey him by destroying the false gods that they will encounter and by refusing to make a treaty with the inhabitants of the Promised Land. There is to be no compromise, for God is a jealous God; He is jealous for his own glory and honour and therefore no other god can be tolerated (vs. 11-15). They are not to let their children marry the people of Canaan; for if they do their children will be led into false worship because of their pagan partner (v 16).

If there are things they are not to do then there are things that they were to do. They were to keep the feast of unleavened bread, which was of course linked, to the Passover. A reminder to the people of who was their Redeemer; who was it that brought them out of Egypt? They were reminded about their need to present every first born to the Lord (vs. 19-20). This reminded the people that they belonged to the Lord and that they were a distinct people because of God's covenant to the people; they must never forget that fact.

Because they are God's covenant people they must keep the Sabbath (v 21) all the other feasts (vs.22-24) and sacrifices (vs. 26-27) these are all the things that make the people distinctive from the other nations. If they are to know God's presence they must obey wholeheartedly. But to do that they needed reminding of these regulations and privileges, so Moses is commanded to write down the words given to him; they are the covenant regulations.

Moses spent another forty days and nights with God as God gives him the 10 commandments for the second time (v 28). But let me finish by trying to apply this covenant renewal to us all.

We like Israel must obey God wholeheartedly. This means that we must destroy in our lives anything that is taking the place of God. We must root out of our lives false gods whatever they might be. As the Israelites were not to marry or make treaties with the pagan nations so we must not get too close to the world. We cannot adopt the ways of the world or the standards of this

world but must simply be distinctive. As there are things we must not do; so there are things we ought to do.

We ought to be diligent in the means of grace that God has given to us. The feasts etc. were to strengthen Israel's faith and so in the same way, prayer, and bible study, worship the Lord's Supper etc. are to be observed so that our faith might be kept strong.

Here is the key to knowing God's presence with us as a church. Destroy false gods, hang loose with the world and observe God's means of grace. We know that we cannot do this by ourselves we are too sinful and weak but we are thankful to God that He will give us the grace that is necessary to root out false gods and to be wholeheartedly committed to the means of grace.

Remembering that when we do sin and fail the Lord we have a great compassionate and gracious God who is willing to forgive us and to give us grace to start again.

Amen