

**MOSES, A MAN OF PRAYER**

Moses - Part 14

Exodus 32, 33

**Intro:** I am making a big jump today in our consideration of the life of Moses, from chapter 19 to chapters 32 and 33. As I have explained a number of times, it is not because chapters 12 through 31 are not important. There are no unimportant chapters in all of the Bible. It is because I am concerned with Moses as a man, as a man of God, or should I say, as a child of God, so that we may learn from God's dealings with Him how we can count on the faithfulness of God to us today, during our time here on earth. We live in a totally different time from the days of Moses. We are in a completely different part of the world. We even speak a different language. But God is the same. And basically our needs are the same as Moses' needs – the need to trust in the Lord and not in ourselves, and the need to obey the Lord whatever our circumstances might be.

Actually chapters 20 through 31 in Exodus are very important chapters. In chapter 20 we have God giving the ten commandments to Moses, and in the following chapters we to chapter 31 we basically see how the Lord wanted His people to live if they were to enjoy His blessing.

It is in these chapters that we first learn about the Tabernacle and the priesthood that were to be so important in the lives of the people of God, especially in their relationship to God. Chapter 24 is a chapter that we could well include in this series because it tells about going up into mount Sinai where he was with the Lord for forty days and forty nights, thus setting the scene for what we are going to learn in chapters 32 through 34. I am not going through these chapters verse by verse, but I have chosen certain parts of these chapter to deal with specifically.

Chapter 31 ends with the Lord giving Moses the tables of stone upon which the Lord had written the ten commandments. Chapter 32 begins by telling us what had gone on among the people of God because Moses had been so long on Mt. Sinai. We see this in verses 1 through 6. The people were tired of waiting for Moses to come down from the mount, and so they pressured Aaron to make gods for them, which he did, and they proceeded to give that golden calf the glory for leading them out of Egypt. It seems incredible to us that they would do such a thing, but it shows the way that the Israelites had been influenced by Egyptian culture and their

religious practices.

The Lord, of course, was very angry, and He declared that He was going to wipe out the whole nation, and raise up another people from Moses. (In Deuteronomy where we have the messages that the Moses gave to the children of Israel during the last days of his life, Moses recounted this incident in the latter part of Deuteronomy 9. You might want to read that to go along with what we are learning today. Obviously Moses did not want the people to forget what they had done so that they would not do the same thing again.)

How did the Lord's words affect Moses? And before you answer that question, remember how much trouble Moses had experienced thus far with the children of Israel. Did they deserve to be destroyed, totally? The answer to that question is a resounding, Yes! They were guilty of the worst kind of blasphemy, saying that all that God had done in Egypt and to the Egyptians, plus all that He had done in opening the Red Sea, and providing food and guidance for the people, was done by the god, or gods, represented by that golden calf!

How easy it would have been for Moses to approve! If there had been in his heart any desire to get even to the Israelites for what they had done to him, and the misery they had caused him, Moses would have gone along with what the Lord said. How a person like Moses handled a situation like this, tells us volumes about Moses. And we can see this in the way Moses prayed. While he was still on the mount, before he had seen the sinful behavior of the people, and heard their blasphemous speech, we are given the words of his prayer.

### **I. MOSES' PRAYER FOR THE NATION (Ex. 32:11-13).**

If we want to know the heart of Moses at this time, there is no better way to find out than to listen to him pray.

Look at verses 7-11 where the Lord announced to Moses what the people had done while he had been with the Lord in the mountain. It surely must have been beyond what Moses had conceived what the people would do. But they had done it, and the Lord was very angry. His words seemed to indicate that praying for the people at that time was not an option that was open to Moses. Nevertheless, Moses prayed, pouring out his heart to the Lord.

The first thing that Moses did was to ask the Lord two questions. And then he reminded the Lord of promises that He had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The prayer was not long, but it was very powerful, and very prevailing with the Lord.

His first question had to do with all that the Lord had done in delivering the children of Israel from the land of Egypt. It had been a time when the Lord had overcome the most impossible obstacles to set His people free, that is, impossible to what either Moses or the children of Israel could have done for themselves. Why had the Lord done all of that if now He was going to destroy them.

This is a question that we can ask the Lord even today when it comes to all that He has done through the Lord Jesus Christ in saving us from the penalty of our sins, even sins we commit after we have been saved.

Moses second question had to do with the Egyptians, and how they would explain what God had done for His people, if now He were to destroy them. We need to remember that as far as the Egyptians were concerned, all the plagues and the ultimate deliverance of the people of Israel from the power of Egypt, was to teach the Egyptians that God, their God, was the true God, and the only God. Now, in spite of what the people had done, would God give them the opportunity that the Lord really had other purposes, to destroy His people from the face of the earth?

Think about this. God is always jealous for His own glory. He is jealous about His testimony to the nations of the earth. Does it look like God is doing one thing when in reality He is doing something else, something that is just the opposite of what He had said that He was doing?

But then there was a third part to Moses' prayer: the promise that He had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. And it had not been three different promises, but the same promise which concerned two things: first, the nation itself, and second, the land that He had promised to give them. The first had been fulfilled. They had become more numerous than the nation from which God had delivered them. Would God now forget the second?

This is an important lesson for all of us to learn when it comes to prayer. It is not that God ever forgets anything. Most important of all, He never forgets His Word. But obviously He loves *for us* to remember His pro-

mises, and to remind Him of what He has promised to do for us. We need to remember His commandments and to do them. But even when we fail, we can come to the Lord, or others can come for us, to remind the Lord of those promises God has given to us that are unconditional, that is, not dependent upon our faithfulness to God, but upon His faithfulness to us.

What was the outcome of this prayer? See it in verse 14: “And the Lord repented of the evil which He thought to do unto His people.” There is no question but that they deserved to die, but God would not forget, nor would He disregard, His promises. There was nothing that the children of Israel could do that would nullify the promises of the Lord. And there never is! Paul even went so far as to tell Timothy, “If we believe not, yet He abideth faithful: He cannot deny Himself” (2 Tim. 2:13). If we understand this as we should, it should not mean that the door is open for us to do anything that we want to do, but it is truth that will serve to keep us from sin. God judges sin. And He judged Israel for what they had done. But He will never, never go back on His promises. What a lot of ground our Lord was covering when He told the Jews who were out to get Him, “My sheep hear my voice . . .” (John 10:27-30).

But what is this about God repenting? Can God sin? Absolutely not! Had He already sinned so that He needed to repent? No. He had certainly expressed to Moses His deep displeasure at what the children of Israel had done. Can our prayer change the mind of God, change the purposes of God? These questions all draw negative answers. Keil, in the Keil and Delitzsch commentary on the OT, quoted Augustine who explained the repentance of God as “an unexpected change in things which God has put in His own power.” Barnes said in his commentary on the repentance of God that when God’s prevailing love seems to overrule God’s declared judgment against sin, the Scriptures describe this as God’s repentance. It is not that God would sin, or that He might sin, but that His love for His people is so great, that when you would fully expect Him to judge His people for what they have done, His love for them prevails over the judgment which they, or should I say “we,” deserve.

The Cross of Christ in this sense is an amazing statement of the repentance of God. It is perfectly expressed in the words of John 3:16. You and I would not be on our way to heaven, and secure in that way, if it had not been for the repentance of God. And this truth is designed by God, and used by the Holy Spirit, to keep us from sin. And so it means that Moses, who is known as the law-giver, gave evidence in his prayer that he

understood the grace of God.

This prayer of Moses was prayed, and it prevailed with God, before he, Moses, has the opportunity to see firsthand what the people had done.

Before we leave this amazing chapter I want you to notice another prayer that Moses prayed. It is in Ex. 32:31 and 32. This comes very close to the way that the Apostle Paul prayed for the people of Israel in Romans 9:1-3:

- 1 I say the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost,
- 2 That I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.
- 3 For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:

I doubt if any of us could honestly say this, but Paul said it with God as his witness, knowing that he could not possibly have added to what the Lord had already done. The work that the Lord had done in Moses' heart, and the work that He did in Paul's heart, are expressed in such self-sacrificing love of these servants of the Lord.

Before I close I want to spend just a few minutes on another prayer of Moses, or prayers, found in Exodus 33. We need Exodus 32 to prepare us for his prayer in Exodus 33. We can call this:

## **II. MOSES' PRAYER FOR HIMSELF (Ex. 33:12-23).**

It was impossible for Moses to go through what he had experienced in connection with Israel's sin, without it having a deep impression upon his own heart in connection with his relationship with God. The Lord uses trials that touch the lives of those we love as a means of ministering to our own hearts. Moses saw in the needs of his people that the Lord was exposing to Moses, not to the people about Moses, but to Moses himself, the need for an even closer relationship between himself and the Lord. So although Moses had not turned away from the Lord, yet the Lord used the sin of Israel to awaken in Moses' heart a deeper sense of his own need for the Lord and the blessing of the Lord.

As you read through this passage, you can see that Moses presented two requests to the Lord for himself. The first is in verse 13; the second is in verse 18. The first is, "Show me now Thy way." The second is, "Show me now Thy glory."

Actually Moses used two different words for “show” in verses 13 and 18. The verb in verse 18 has a wide variety of meanings, but there it means that Moses was asked the Lord *to teach* him the Lord’s way. The ways of the Lord often confound us. The Christian life is really a life-long time of becoming better and better acquainted with the ways of the Lord. They are different from our ways, but as David recognized in Psalm 18:30, God’s ways are perfect.

In Moses’ case it had to do with the way to Canaan. It had to do with all of the obstacles that stood in the way. It had to do with a people whose hearts were not always submissive to the Lord’s way. But basically what was it that Moses needed to know about *the way of the Lord*? The answer to that question may surprise you.

Verse 14 gives us the answer. Here it is: “My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.” What Moses needed to learn, and what we need to learn, is that it is always the Lord’s way that He will be with us. Under no conditions will He ever forsake us. We may not always recognize His presence like we should, but He will always be with us. And this always means “rest,” or *peace*, for us. Oh, the wonderful presence of the Lord! He is with us during every hour that we are awake. He watches over us while we sleep. He guides us. He protects us. He provides for us. And He does all of that because He loves us. Isn’t that wonderful truth? As Psalm 46 tells us, the Lord is “a very present help in trouble.” The Lord is here this morning. And one wonderful thing about the Lord is that when we leave here, He goes with everyone of us just like He was nowhere else in all of this universe.

That is the basic truth that Moses needed for himself. The Lord would always be with him. Moses was Israel’s leader, but the Lord was Moses’ leader. This was truth that Moses need to learn. This is truth that I need to learn. This is the truth that you need to learn. We are always learning more and more about the presence of the Lord.

But what about the second request? It is translated in our Bibles, “Show me Thy glory.” The word “show” here means, *Let me see your glory*. What is God’s glory? God’s glory is God. So Moses was praying that He might *see, actually see*, the Lord. The Lord spoke to him, and He spoke to the Lord. But Moses wanted more; He wanted to see the Lord Himself. Haven’t you felt that desire in your heart? You can imagine the joy of the Apostles when after our Lord’s resurrection *they saw the Lord*. But even

they did not see the full display of His glory. That is reserved for a time that is yet to come. “We shall see Him as He is.” Moses was allowed to see more than most of us see. He saw God from the back, but He did not see God’s face.

What was God’s answer to this request that Moses made? Notice there are four I will’s of God in verse 19 of Exodus 33. They are not just for Moses, but they are for all of us: the Lord’s goodness, the Lord’s name, the Lord’s grace, and the Lord’s mercy. Every one of those is deserving of a message, or perhaps better, a whole book. We see evidence of them everywhere and all of the time. And the four all add up to the love that the Lord has for each one of us.

**Concl:** There was a lot of spiritual food for Moses to feed his soul upon in these times of fellowship that he had with the Lord. But the Lord has had it all written down in His Word so that we would know that the blessings that the Lord gave to Moses, are for us too. And Moses was responsible to pass on these good words to all of the people of Israel. What a wonderful God we have! Let us give ourselves to fellowship with the Lord like Moses did, so that we may profit from the blessings of the Lord like Moses did.