

Exodus 32:30 – 33:6

30 The next day Moses said to the people, "You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." 31 So Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. 32 But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written." 33 But the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. 34 But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them." 35 Then the LORD sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made.

1 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.' 2 I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 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." 4 When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. 5 For 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.'" 6 Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

Exodus 33:12-23

12 Moses said to the LORD, "See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' 13 Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." 14 And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." 15 And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. 16 For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"

17 And the LORD said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." 18 Moses said, "Please show me your glory." 19 And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show

mercy. 20But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." 21And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, 22and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. 23Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

Introduction

1. Today, we celebrate the 44th year of Singapore's independence. Looking at the success that the nation has achieved, you may be tempted to think that it has always been this way. But Singapore's story began in moments of pain and anguish. Given our small size, lack of resources, and absence of a hinterland, the leadership of Singapore saw it as imperative to be a part of Malaysia. Yet, it was not to be. 44 years ago, Singapore was expelled from the Federation of Malaysia over fundamental differences. So while nations declare independence with great fanfare, it was different for Singapore. Lee Kuan Yew, the Prime Minister at that time, said this on national television during the declaration of independence - **"For me, it is a moment of anguish. All my life, my whole adult life, I have believed in merger and unity of the two territories..."**

2. The next day, The Sydney Morning Herald, made this comment **"An independent Singapore was not regarded as viable 3 years ago. Nothing in the current situation suggests that it is more viable today"**. Such was the anguish that the Prime Minister fell sick a few days after Singapore's independence. When the British Prime Minister Harold Wilson expressed concern, Mr Lee Kuan Yew replied **"Do not worry about Singapore. My colleagues and I are sane rational people even in our moments of anguish. We weigh all possible consequences before we make any move on the political chessboard... Our people have the will to fight and the stuff that makes for survival"**. Singapore's most defining moments were birthed out of moments of deep anguish.

3. In Exodus 33, we find another nation at a moment of deep anguish and pain. The year is not 1965, but 1446 B.C. The nation is ancient Israel, the people of God. The episode begins with the nation in great anguish because of their grave sin against God. It ends with God showing His glory and turning their anguish into one of the most defining moments in their history. Perhaps, you are also at a painful place in your life, and you're wondering if there is hope. Perhaps God wants to show you today, that there really is. Let's get into the text today and see what God is saying to us. Come with me to Genesis 32:30.

(I) Moses speaks to God and God shows him the severity of Israel's sin (Exodus 32:30-35)

4. **30 The next day Moses said to the people, "You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin."** Moses goes to talk to God in the hope that 'perhaps' God would forgive their sin. He says to God, **"Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. 32 But now, if you will forgive their sin—** "If you will

forgive their sin...” his sentence hangs in mid air, he doesn’t finish it. Because he realizes that there was no basis for God to forgive the sins of the Israelites. Nothing in them merited forgiveness from God. They were guilty as charged.

5. So Moses moves to offer himself as a sacrifice in the place of Israel. He said **please blot me out of your book that you have written.**” Punish me instead of them, Moses is saying. Wipe me out instead of them. Let me take their place! But God says, an emphatic ‘No’. **33 “Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book.** No. Each individual who had sinned had to be personally responsible. God makes this clear in verse **34**, where he says **in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them.** He speaks about a future day of judgment, the ‘Day of the Lord’, a day of reckoning when God would punish sin decisively. In the mean time, God sends a plague, as an immediate and visible expression of judgment upon his people. We read that in verse 35. It is a foretaste of the wrath of God to come.

6. But what made the sin of the Israelites so terrible anyway? In verse 35, it says that the Lord sent the plague **because they made the calf.** Verse **31** says they had made for themselves **“31 gods of gold”**. In Exodus 19:4. God declared, **“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself”** God, the LORD was the one who had brought them out of the land of Egypt to bring them to himself. He had parted the Red Sea, quenched their thirst, and filled their tummies, all in order to bring them to Himself, to be His treasured possession. The ONE who created them, was also the ONE who redeemed them, provided for them, and the ONE who would ultimately satisfy them. He rightly deserved their worship, adoration and trust. He was their God, they were His people!

7. But when Moses was delayed in coming down, instead of continuing to trust in the goodness and care and faithfulness of God, they decided to take matters into their own hands, gave their ornaments to Aaron, and made **‘gods to go before them’**. Aaron of the calf: **Exodus 32:4: “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt”** Instead of acknowledging God, they turned their trust, affection, devotion and worship to a holy cow! **Romans 1:22 “Claiming to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles”**. You see sin isn’t just breaking God’s commandments. At the most basic level, sin is refusing to acknowledge God and worship Him for who He is – it is IDOLATRY. It is replacing God with something else. It is spiritual adultery!

Application I: See the sinfulness of your own sin

8. When we read about idols, for those of us from an Asian upbringing we perhaps remember the idols or deities that our parents or grandparents worshiped. Since we don’t do that ourselves we think that we are free from idols. But God said in **Ezekiel 14:3** that the elders of Israel had **‘set up idols in their hearts’**. Jesus said in **Matthew 6:21**, **“Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”**. Idols are not just physical objects that we physically bow down to. No. They are first and foremost,

objects of affection that we bow down to, in our hearts. Martin Luther explains that, **“A god (idol) is whatever we expect to provide all good, and in which we take refuge in all distress... whatever you set your heart on and put your trust in, that, I tell you, is your true god”**.

9. What are those things you turn to in your moments of uncertainty, or pain, or discomfort? Where do you turn to give you a sense of fulfillment, significance and safety? Do you look at the wealth that you have amassed? Or the career that you have built? Perhaps, it is the children that you have raised? God forbid, do you look to the faithful service that you have rendered to the LORD, as a sort of payment to God to gain his favor? You know, you may say with your lips that God is your only true God, that Jesus is your only hope, and sing it loud with gusto, but still deep in your heart, treasure something else instead of God. What are the real gods you are worshipping? What have you taken into your heart that is not the LORD? Allow God to surface them today, so that we can smash them together and exalt the true God in our hearts. **Do we see the sinfulness of our sin, in the light of the glory of a Holy God?**

10. But, there is a surprising twist at this point in this story. Alongside the perfect justice of God, we find God saying in verse 34 that **my angel shall go before you**. He would still give His sinful people some semblance of his presence with them. Where does this come from? It's His perfect love. His mercy. His desire to be with His people.

(II) God speaks to Israel, they mourn & lay down their ornaments (33:1-11)

11. As we go on, **Exodus 33:1** shows God speaking to Moses saying, **“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.’ 2 I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 3 Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey.** This promise goes back hundreds of years to the time of Abraham, where God had promised Abraham in **Genesis 17:8** **“I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojourning, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God”** In spite of their sin against God, God would still be bringing them into the land that he had promised. He would still drive out their enemies. In spite of the faithlessness of his people, God was faithful to his promises!

12. His faithfulness is an expression of his perfect love towards his people. But, at the same time his faithfulness also points to his faithfulness to his own perfect justice. And so, we also read, **Exodus 33:3b** that, even though He will give them the gifts that he has promised, He still has say **“I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people”** . He can't go with them in his full glory because his holiness would consume them, it would destroy them.

13. How did the people respond? They laid down their ornaments, as a sign of mourning, a sign of humility before their God. **Exodus 33:4** **When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments.**

Application II: Humble yourself before God

14. When you see the holiness and perfect justice of God in light of your own sinfulness, you get humble before him. You mourn. You cast yourself on his mercy, and wait for Him to do what He wants with you. You begin to see that you don't have it all together – and even if you did, it isn't really 'all together' because it will unravel when God judges. Have you come to that place of mourning in light of God's holiness? You have to. It is the first step towards spiritual rebirth, renewal and revival. It is the first step towards a deep and lasting experience of God. It is an invitation for God to do as he pleases with you. **Humble yourself before your creator, your Master.**

(III) Moses speaks to God (again), and God shows him His glory (33:12-23)

15. So Moses speaks to God again, on behalf of Israel. Come with me to verse 13. ***If I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people.***

16. Moses pleaded with God, not on the basis of his own righteousness, but on the basis of God's righteousness. Moses' prefixes his prayer with "**If I have found favor in your sight**". This favor was not a favor that he had earned because of something that he had done to please God, but rather a favor that God had bestowed on Moses out of His sovereign grace. Remember that when God first called Moses, he was a fugitive on the run for murder. Remember God's anger against Moses for constantly refusing to speak on God's behalf and for not circumcising his son? No, Moses was a sinner like everyone else. But God, in His grace, chooses to '**know Moses by name**' and bestow '**favor**' upon him. In verse 19, God says "**I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy**" (Exodus 33:19). That is why the King James Version has verse 13 as "**...if I have found GRACE in Thy sight, show me now Thy way, that I may know Thee**".

17. Pleading on the basis of God's grace, God gives Moses a surprising answer: **verse 14 He said, "My presence will go with you."** Moses can hardly believe his ears. So He appeals to God again - **verse 15, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here"** God affirms that he meant what he said. He said, "**This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name.**" Although Moses had heard it twice, he still could not believe it. There was really no basis in the character of the people for God to do this! Moses could not grasp it fully, but He knew that the answer had to be in God's character. So he takes a risk and prays a bold prayer. He cries "**Show me your glory.**" In effect, Moses was crying out "**Show me who you are. Tell me what you are really like. I need to know!**"

18. And God replies, **verse 19, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The Lord.'** God agrees to do this. But he has to warn Moses, **verse 20 "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live."** Moses was still sinful and would perish in the presence of the full glory of God.

19. How does he reconcile these two aspects of His glory for Moses? By providing a place for Moses to hide. **verse 21**“Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, **22** and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by” God hides Moses in the rock so that he could see the glory of God and yet not perish. And on this basis, Israel is forgiven. The book of Exodus ends with God’s glory filling the tabernacle (**Exodus 40:34**). But the story gives you a nagging feeling that it isn’t over just yet. Turn with me to Exodus 40:35. It says that “**Moses was not able to enter the tent of meeting because the cloud settled on it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle**” Moses still could not be in the full glory of God. Something more had to come to fully reconcile God’s perfect justice with His perfect love.

20. BB Warfield once said that the "**The Old Testament is like a chamber richly furnished but dimly lighted.**" It’s like there are pieces of furniture in this chamber, but because of the dim lighting, we can’t really see clearly what they are. We can more or less make out the silhouette of a chair or a table, but we don’t know for sure. The New Testament is like a bright light that shines into this chamber and suddenly, we see clearly what is there. And as we shine the light of the New Testament into Exodus 33, we see Jesus Christ reconciling the perfect justice and perfect love of God.

21. At the end of Chapter 32, God does not accept Moses’ offer to die in the place of Israel because Moses had his own sin to deal with. **Hebrews 3:5** tells us that “**Moses was faithful in all God’s house as a servant... but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a Son**”. Jesus Christ is the true and better Moses. The sinless one, who, when he offered himself to God in the place of the people, unlike Moses, God accepted it as a worthy and perfect substitution and sacrifice for our sin.

22. 1 Corinthians 10, Paul says. “**For I want you to know, brothers, that our fathers were all under the cloud, and all passed through the sea, 2and all were baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea, 3and all ate the same spiritual food, 4and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ**. Paul says that the Rock that followed the Israelites represented Jesus Christ! Moses was hidden in the cleft of the Rock and was shielded from the wrath and anger of God. We are hidden in Christ and thus also shielded. That’s why Paul can say in Ephesians 1:7 “**IN HIM we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace**”. God has placed us into Christ, into Him, into the Rock!

23. Finally, let's look at **2 Corinthians 4:6**. Talking about how we get saved Paul says "**For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ**". When we see Jesus Christ and what he has done for us on the cross, we see the glory of God. We see God as He is really like!

Application III: See the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ

24. When Moses had an encounter with God, when he saw God's glory, it wasn't just a nebulous experience. There was content, there was solid doctrine involved. Martin Lloyd Jones once said, "**99% of our problems as Christians arise out of our ignorance of God**". When Moses was hidden in the cleft of the rock, God declared to him, God spoke to Him, God gave Moses His Word, when he said, "***The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty,***" This is profound doctrine! God's encounters with his people are never separate from a revelation of who He is. So don't ever undermine the importance of knowing your Bibles, or of knowing doctrine. How do you know whether the burning in your heart is a work of the Holy Spirit, or the curry that you had for lunch? By the revelation of God in the Holy Scriptures, where God declares, as He did to Moses, "This is who I am! This is what I am like!"

25. Yet, encountering the glory of God IS an experience. A deep and profound experience. Moses encountered God "**passing by**"! When we gaze into the gospel, God shines a light into the darkness of our hearts to reveal His glory in Jesus Christ. Romans 5:5, says that God's love is "**poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit**". So, don't undermine the need for a deep and personal experience with God either. The same Martin Lloyd Jones also said this, "**We must not be content until we have had some manifestation of the activity of God... Here is the crucial matter. Do we individually and personally really believe that God still acts, can act and will act - in individuals, in groups of individuals, in churches, localities, perhaps even in countries? Do we believe that He is as capable of doing that today as He was in ancient times - the Old Testament, the New Testament times, the book of Acts, Protestant Reformation, Puritans, Methodist Awakening? Do we really believe that He can still do it? If He is the great Jehovah - I am that I am, I am that I shall be, unchanged, unchanging, unchangeable, the everlasting and eternal God - well, He can still do it.**" So, don't undermine true doctrine, and don't undermine true experience either. See them drawn together in the Gospel! **See the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ!**

Conclusion

26. How does God turn Israel's pain and anguish into their defining moment. How does God do that for an individual, a society or a people? Tim Keller said, "**[The gospel] is the solution to each problem, the key to each closed door, the power through every barrier... All our problems come from a failure to apply the gospel.**" It's

through a revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. It's seeing God as He really is. It's a revelation of the Gospel.

27. Perhaps you are a non-Christian, sitting in our services and searching for God (if he's really there). Or perhaps you're a Christian, you've been attending church all your life, but you've never had an experience of the reality of God. Or maybe some of you come with hurts, or disappointments with God and the church. Or perhaps, some others long for a deeper walk with God, a greater victory over sin.

28. Whatever needs you bring, and whatever questions you have. God brings you to the same place, and it happens more than once - an encounter with Him through the Gospel. He brings you to that place where you see the sinfulness of your sin. He brings you to that place of humility, where you cast yourself completely on His mercy. And, he shows you His glory, in the face of Jesus Christ. So come, acknowledge the sinfulness of your sin, lay down your ornaments and humble yourself, and pray that God would show you His glory in the face of Jesus Christ.