

Exodus 33:1-23

“Presents without presence?”

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Intro.

It is interesting how often we look for something to give us a better perspective instead of Someone! We all seek to hide our frustrations and disappointments in things; as we substitute presents for presence! When I was a kid and I got in trouble I was always concerned with what the consequences of my actions were going to be. How many weeks with out seeing my friends or not watching T.V. was it going to cost me? Now there were times when I had done something really bad and I was expecting not to see day light for months when I got off rather lightly. We are prone to think of the consequences of our actions in terms of what it costs us outwardly, the loss of pleasure, possessions etc. Here in Exodus we see that the worship of the golden calf did not cost them a thing outwardly but inwardly they were going to pay a far greater price!

II.) Vs. 1-11 A promise without His presence

Vs.1-3 We have all probably faced a scene like this in our life if you have siblings. You were horsing around doing something that you were told that you were not suppose to do, warned repeatedly but you went ahead anyway. You've been caught red handed and hauled off into a back room. Time goes by and when you come out everyone wants to know, “What happened?” How much trouble are you in for disobedience? Now in my back ground there are few times that

I can remember that I did not get what was coming to me, but that's not the case with Israel. Israel has fashioned an idol and began to worship it like the heathens do and God caught them in the act. Three thousand of their countrymen were into it so much that they refused to stop and rioted; costing them their lives. They were all forced to drink their god and there was some sort of plague but still that seems to be awful light punishment. We know that God is angry with them because of their sin for in 32:10 that He says, *"let Me alone, that My wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them. And I will make of you (Moses) a great nation."* Further more even after Moses intercession God says, *"Whoever has sinned against Me, I will blot him out of My book."* And again He says, *"in the day when I visit for punishment, I will visit punishment upon them for their sin."* Yet, before this chapter we read, *"go, lead the people to the place of which I have spoken to you."* If I was God I would say, *"You know what? You don't want me then I'm not going to bless you like I was!"* I bet you could hear a pin drop as they waited to find out what their punishment was going to be. We are told here in these three verse what their punishment was **NOT** going include.

- a.) Vs. 1 **I'm still going to keep My promise that I made to your forefathers:** These guys had proven to be unworthy of God's blessings by their actions, but God says here that He is still going to do what He promised. God keeps His promises not based upon our faithfulness but rather on the basis of His! Their disobedience and rebellion had no effect on God's promise. If I was Moses, I would have looked at God a little funny here. *"So God what are you going to do to them?"* "Wait a minute I was with you right up to the point where you said that you were going fulfill your promise.
- b.) Vs. 2a "And I will send My Angel before you": **I'm still going to make sure that My power and strength will lead you.** God is going to keep His promise and even do so by His power and strength. The messenger of the Lord is going to still guide them to the promise land. It's not as if I would say to my child, *"Yeh, were still going to the park but your going to have to get there by yourself and pay your own way!"* No, God says, *"Were still going and I'm taking you and paying for it My self!"* Now wait a minute here I think God is being far to hard on these guys don't you?
- c.) Vs. 2b-3a **I'm still going to protect you and make sure that you have a great time once you are their:** God says that He is still going to protect them and that the land of promise is still going to the greatest earthly blessing they could have ever imagined.

So far it does not look like their actions has changed any of the benefits of the relationship with God. “So what’s the deterrent for doing this again and again?” We might think as Aaron did

in verse 22, “*It’s not as bad as you think!*” That would all be true if it were not for the words, “*I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.*”

The Lord is saying here, “***You are going as I promised and I’ll make sure you get there and have a great time but I’m not going to hang out with you on the way or once we get there!***”

God does not take away His promise, power, or protection but He does say that His presence won’t be with them. How about you respond if God said, “*I will give you all the benefits of a relationship but I won’t be around?*” This is kind of like some of the divorces that I’ve heard about. Now if you go back to their sin it was impatience at Moses delay. They wanted gods to go before them; they wanted the benefits of a relationship with God without His presence. So God gives them just what they asked for. If you have ever lost a loved one I’m sure that you would agree with me that you would gladly give back everything they ever gave you to have one more minute with them! What it cost them was intimacy with God who called them His special treasure. Ask any child what they would rather have a parent in the house or all the trappings with out the parent?

Vs. 4-7 **How they respond will indicate whether they love the Lord or whether they only love what the Lord gives them!** I’m not so sure we can tell by our actions at times. As long as we are getting what we think we deserve we are singing, “I love you Lord and I left my voice!” But what happens when we don’t get what we think we deserve? Do we still sing this praise?

Look at their response to these words:

- a.) Vs. 4 **They mourned:** They understood that **the promises of God are empty with out the presence of God!** The first thing that they did was act as if God had been lost to them. There is probably not a day that goes by that you miss the relationship that you had with your departed loved one. How about your

relationship with God? Does your heart ache, or do you not care as long as you still get all the stuff you wanted?

- b.) Vs. 4b-6 **They repented**: Suddenly no one was into decorating their flesh. It is an interesting thing as these ornaments were no doubt some of the earrings that they had given to make their idol. We know through archeology that these earrings and other ornaments had stamped on them pictures of different idols. There was a genuine repentance as they no longer wanted to identify themselves with idols. There was that kind of action that says, *“I don’t want any of this stuff of the world if it means I can’t be with you!”* Oh to God I pray that we too would come to this in our lives!
- c.) Vs. 7 **They sought the Lord**: It is interesting to me that what caused them to go towards idols, the absence of Moses, they now have to deal with every single day as they have to go out to him. Any amount of the Lord was better than none at all. **They began to value His presence more than His presents!** God’s plan for the tabernacle was that He was going to dwell among them, now He was outside the camp.

Vs. 8-11 Did they ever understand what they had thrown away? Well I think we can see in these verses that they did. We are not told but we know that this is not the tabernacle but rather just a tent, perhaps Moses, outside the camp. Every day they would watch Moses go out to hang out with the Lord and they would stand at their tent doors until Moses went inside. Can you imagine having that kind of fellowship with the Lord? The depth of intimacy Moses had with the Lord could be theirs as well, but they had loved what He gave them more than His presence. You see Moses did not need a fancy building or anything else He just wanted to spend time with the Lord. They watched as the visible presence of the Lord upon the tent where Moses was. In verse 9-11 we are told they talked as best friends free and openly is the meaning of *“face to face”*.

As Moses went into fellowship with the Lord the Israelites worshiped God. Moses’ relationship with the Lord encouraged the nation to have a relationship with Him as well. One last closing thought on this section, look at Joshua. We are told that he did not depart from the tent where Moses was at! Oh that is what I want to be like! I want to be so into hanging out with God that I don’t want to go anywhere else. As I looked at this section of scripture personally I’ve

realized that my maturity with the Lord is best measured by how I love Him, not how long I've gone to church. And on that basis I've got a lot of growing up to do!

III.) Vs. 12-17 The presence of His grace

Vs. 12-13 I love this prayer of Moses on behalf of the people. Moses had already been assured that God was going to keep His promises to the nation, but Moses wants more for the nation than this. He again wants the people to have a relationship with the Lord. *"Oh Lord don't just bless them and give them what they want, come and dwell among them."*

Vs. 14-15 God says, *"Moses My presence is going with YOU, and I'm going to give YOU rest."* It's all based upon grace and God honors Moses relationship with Him, but notice that in verse 15 Moses uses the word US, instead of the YOU that God used. Moses says, *"Unless you're with us I don't want to go at all!" "I don't care about all the stuff that you promised for it is nothing with out You there to enjoy it with!"*

Vs. 16-17 *"In fact no other nation will know you love us if it is not the presence of you in our lives!"* It is not what God blesses us with that reveals the presence of God in our lives it is only being in constant contact with Him that separates us from the world. God says that He will restore the relationship with Israel based upon Moses prayer and the relationship that He has with him. Indirectly God is showing us what separates us from the world is the presence of His grace in our lives! Do you want to go anywhere the Lord's grace and presence is not? What if you could go there and still have all you want but not with His presence and grace? This to me becomes a great source of prayer, *"Lord I only want to go where you are and where I can experience more of you."* Even if that means that I don't get all that I want when I want it. My prayer is that all of us will want a deeper relationship with the Lord and you know what that is what He wants as well.

IV.) Vs. 18-23 The glory of His goodness

Vs. 18-20 As deep as Moses relationship was he still wanted more! A deeper relationship with the Lord is the one thing we can be greedy for! Moses asks God to reveal more of Who he is to him. Specifically, he asks to see His glory. I believe that in these verse before us God is going to reveal how we can grow in our relationship with Him. Clearly God does not mean for Moses to see Him face to face as verse 20 points out that no man can do so and live. Moses asks to see more of the Lord and the Lord shows Moses how to do that. In verse 19 which is God's reply to Moses request He gives three things reveal God's glory.

- 1.) **Goodness:** Before a person can see the glory of God they have to realize that God is good all the time and not just when He does what we want Him to. God can not any more separate Himself from His goodness then we can from our heart. God by His very nature is good. When you think about it that is why the Israelites struggled and made the idol, as they were not convinced of God's goodness. When Moses delayed his returning they thought that God was not going to fulfill His promise. Had they realized that God is god they would have waited for Him to do what He is by very nature Goodness! God is very different then you and I, we are good some of the times but God is always good He is never not good. You will see the glory of God when you recognize this truth.
- 2.) **Character:** God says to Moses you want to see my glory it is found in my name. Proclaiming one's name always meant declaring one's character. So God is saying that you will understand His glory as you grow in your understanding of His character. Again Israel struggled with God because they did not grow in their understanding of Who He is.
- 3.) **Sovereign Will:** Lastly, God reveals that to Moses that he will see His glory when he realizes that God has a sovereign will that will never be altered. God's purposes and plans can not ever be altered.

All of these cause us to see His glory. Simply put it is when we take the time to meditate on the Lord that we see more of Him. What a great thing for Moses to want, more of the Lord.

Vs. 21-23 So God hides Moses in the cleft of a rock and reveal the "afterglow" of the Lord's glory for that is all He could handle. We too have been hidden in the "rock" which is Christ and it is in Him that we are told in John 1:14 that "*we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.*"

This verse that Augustus Toplady drew the inspiration to write the hymn “Rock of Ages”.

When the world sees you and God’s goodness towards you, His character in you and His will guiding you then they will God’s glory on you! So Moses is shown not only how to grow closer to Himself but how others will do the same!