

Exodus 33:7-11

1. Following on the story of the Golden Calf, this brief description is about “how things used to be” with Moses, God, and the People – and it gives some sense of hope about how things might one day be again, even in the context of the bad disruption of relationship between God and People
2. Israel can be faithful – and perhaps can be again
3. Moses’ own status is elevated here – and perhaps the future restoration of the relationship between God and People will depend all the more on Moses
4. If the people are to find a way back to God, it will be because of the quality of the relationship between God and Moses

Exodus 33:12-17

5. Moses now intercedes on behalf of the people
6. Moses challenges God to remember and consider God’s own words
7. Moses clearly believes that Israel continues to be God’s special people
8. In v14, God reveals his intentions: He will continue to be with and to lead the people
9. God reveals that he will be a constant presence with the people: he will continue to be their God

Exodus 33:18-23

10. Moses presses God even further: he wants to see God directly, to see “God’s very self”
11. Moses’ request is for further assurance of God’s presence
12. God grants the request – partially
13. God does not reveal his glory, but perhaps reveals something more important: his character
14. God is good and gracious
15. God’s glory is in his character, not in his ability to dazzle or impress
16. Though God is partially hidden, God is also partially revealed!
17. There is an anthropomorphic element to this: God uses his hand
18. There may be an implication here that, had the people not sinned by making the Golden Calf, they would someday have been able to behold God in God’s full person and presence – but for now, it is enough for the people to know of God’s benevolent nature toward them

Exodus 34:1-8

19. Here, finally, God’s grace and goodness are revealed in the restoration of the relationship signaled by a new edition of the Commandments
20. Here is a summary statement of who God is: merciful, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, forgiving, but also dealing with sin
21. God’s dealings with sin are mentioned at the end of the list, indicating that the prior and more telling aspect of God’s character lie in his mercy and grace
22. This statement becomes an overarching and often-quoted affirmation of the scriptures about who God is and how God deals with us

Exodus 34:9

23. As response to the affirmation about God, Moses prays for forgiveness and for the continued presence of God
24. The future of Israel depends on God and God alone
25. Here, as in Genesis 6-8, God backs away from total destruction of the people, and instead continues to love and be present
26. Echoing Genesis, this is not only God’s way with Israel, but also God’s way with the whole world

27. It is as the Creator that God also now acts as the Redeemer
28. For the first time in the Old Testament, forgiveness is mentioned as God's way of dealing with sin
29. God forgives "iniquity, transgression, and sin" (from v7) – the three most often used words for "sin" in the Old Testament
30. Note that there is a progression here in the relationship: Israel sins, God responds with justice/judgment, but then gradually, God responds with mercy and forgiveness, indicating that:
 - a. Sin is real and has real consequences
 - b. The first response to sin is always judgment
 - c. But the longer-term response is / becomes mercy
 - d. God freely chooses mercy...but not before judgment is acknowledged as a real and even necessary consequence

Exodus 34:10-28

31. God's mercy & forgiveness are not given grudgingly, but willingly, and furthermore, now God will do mighty and amazing things for Israel
32. There is a new covenant established by God, with real blessings now granted to the people
33. The restored and even strengthened relationship involves exclusivity: no other gods are allowed into the mix
34. The relationship is strengthened by various forms of worship and devotion
35. Finally, God writes the Ten Commandments...again

Exodus 34:29-35

36. Moses returns to the people with a "shining face"
37. This shining gives prominence/credence to Moses as the mediator, and even more to the new word from God that Moses brings
38. This shining also indicates the power and significance of the restored and strengthened relationship
39. The human response to God (and what God does for us) is never mere belief or word, but has tangible and lasting consequences in real life
40. Here is "embodying the word in the world"
41. This reminds us of the Aaronic benediction in Numbers 6:25 where God's face shines on the people
42. The divine glory and presence with the people is assured

Questions for Your Life Today

- A. Think of a time when a relationship of your own was damaged or broken. How was it restored? Does the story of Exodus correlate with your own experience?
- B. How does this story give us clues about our relationship with God: how we maintain and "repair" it from time to time?
- C. What does God's mercy, forgiveness, and presence mean to you?
- D. How does God's stance toward us inform our stance toward others?

Notes by The Rev. Dr. Jack Baca, Senior Pastor, The Village Church, Rancho Santa Fe, California

Resources:

- a. Interpretation Commentary on Exodus, Terence E. Fretheim, John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1991
- b. The Communicator's Commentary Series, Old Testament, Exodus, Maxie D. Dunnam, Word, Inc., Waco, TX, 1987
- c. The Old Testament Library: Exodus, Brevard S. Childs, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, PA, 1974