

# CONTRITION & COMMUNION

## EXODUS 33:1-23

We are drawing close to the end of the narrative of Exodus. These next two chapters really detail out God's eventual reconciliation with His people after their breaking of the covenant. We will see this reconciliation happen in two stages: Contrition and Covenant Renewal. We will take a look more closely at the Covenant Renewal next week.

This week we will be studying the first part of the reconciliation between the Israelites and God, through contrition.

**Big idea: God's love for us leads us to contrition for our sin, but also a longing for greater communion with Christ**

Read Exodus 33.

### **Contrition**

The scene that we see is that this is post the judgement against the idolators. The people are basically waiting to see what God will do with them as a nation moving forward now that Israel had broken the covenant and passed judgement on the individuals who led them in their idolatry. What we see in terms of the contrition of the people are two things: the sorrow of the people, the separation of God.

### **Sin Separates**

Example of Adam and Eve: separation from self, one another, from creation, from God

God removes the promise of His special presence. Whenever God was with His people, they were successful. They had experienced God being with them in Egypt, protecting them from the plagues; with them in wilderness shading them by day and warming them by night; with them against their enemies the Amalekites, helping them win the battle...

Now God is declaring that He will not go with them into the promised land, even though He promises to send a helper. It is unclear what/who this helper is, as He does not elaborate on that and the word "angel" in the Hebrews here simply means a messenger of God, not necessarily God Himself.

**Sorrow Compels: Separation actually ought to compel a sense of sorrow...**

The people show emotional sorrow for their sin. They are mourning the word that God had given that He would not be going with them into the land. This is in contrast to the singing that they were doing while worshiping the golden calf. Lesson for us is that when conviction of sin occurs it ought to produce a sorrow for sin, an emotional grief for the sin. Not grief or sorrow for the consequences, but true sorrow for having broken the relationship with God

Difference in my kids of being sorrowful for hurting our relationship vs. being sorrowful because of the consequences that their disobedience brings...

The first is focused on God, valuing the relationship with God. The second focuses on the self and protecting the self over and above relationship with God.

***Are you repenting because you want to “stop feeling guilty” or are you repenting because you see how this has hurt your relationship with God?***

The people demonstrate acts of sorrow and remorse for sin

*“When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said, ‘Repent’, He willed the entire life of believers to be one of repentance. This word cannot be understood as referring to the sacrament of penance, that is, confession and satisfaction as administered by the clergy; yet, it does not mean solely inner repentance; such inner repentance is worthless unless it produces various outward mortifications of the flesh” —Martin Luther*

Outward signs of change need to take place. Just as outward change cannot change the inner heart of a man, so inner change should and will always eventually, produce outward expressions of contrition. For the Israelites this looked like taking off all of the decorations they were wearing in worship of the golden calf. They no longer wore those decorations because it reminded them of their sin and the shame of their sin.

*“For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret, whereas worldly grief produces death.” - 2 Corinthians 7:10*

How do we define godly vs. worldly sorrow? Ultimately, true contrition for sin will lead us to Christ. If we do not take our sin to Christ, confessing it to Him and seeking His forgiveness and cleansing, then we are not demonstrating godly grief, but worldly, for the one we go to to help us navigate our sin is what defines godly vs. worldly sorrow. We must first and always turn to Christ for true forgiveness, cleansing, and transformation that comes through restored communion with Him!

## **Communion**

The biggest section of this chapter is devoted to the descriptions of Moses and Joshua meeting with God outside the camp, and even gives us a glimpse into the kind of conversations that Moses and God had with each other in that time of communion. The descriptions we have of the kind of meetings that God and Moses had are difficult to truly grasp with our minds, but they certainly stir the soul with a desire to have that kind of communion with God! There are four aspects of communion that we can see demonstrated here in vs. [7-23]

## **Leaving**

The first thing that we notice in [vs. 7] is that Moses set up the Tent of Meeting (which was a temporarily different thing than the tabernacle) outside the camp. Remember, God had desired to dwell in the midst

of the camp in order to be close to His people, but this is what sin does, it separates us from God. God would not dwell in His people's midst for now, so Moses would go out to meet with God. This was an obvious and consistent reminder to the people of the gravity of sin and how it produces separation. However, we also see glimpses of repentance in that there were some of the Israelites who would go out to inquire of the LORD, possibly worship or seeking spiritual guidance.

This is the first thing we must remember in communion with God, we must leave the world in order to be close to Him. Not the world in the physical sense of the word, but in how the Apostle John uses it in his first letter

*“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world.” - 1 John 2:15-16*

We see that John defines the world as the system of belief, love, and purpose which is set against God revealed in the Trinity Godhead of Father, Son, Holy Spirit. We must leave the worldly ways of living and loving and pursue God in Christ's way of living and loving.

*“So Jesus also suffered outside the gate in order to sanctify the people through his own blood. Therefore let us go to him outside the camp and bear the reproach he endured.” - Hebrews 13:12-13*

This means that we will most likely endure reproach for our commitment to following Christ. But our communing with Jesus is a far greater and sweeter reward than anything the world can offer, for it is passing away along with its desires.

*Communion with Christ first requires leaving the ways of living and loving according to the world. It will set us apart, it will be visible and it will be strange in the eyes of the world. But take heart, Jesus has overcome the world!*

## **Lingering**

Notice the second part of communion has to do with not wanting to leave God's presence too quickly, or lingering with Him. We see this in [vs. 11] with both Moses and Joshua.

Moses. He spoke with God as would to a friend. I don't know about you, but I love friends, especially friends that I can talk with for hours and hours. There is familiarity, security, love, grace, ease. My best man in my wedding is one of the guys in my life that I spent much time with in college, talking and talking and talking. It didn't matter what we were doing, we just had fun together, grew together in the LORD, and worked through very difficult and trying circumstances together. Friendship is a gift of God and must not be taken lightly or taken for granted. But that friendship did not grow up overnight, it took a lot of time and effort.

Our relationship with the LORD needs to be the same. God desires for us to come to Him as His friend, and have the kind of familiar discourse as a friend does when face to face.

*“but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you.” - John 15:15*

Joshua would not leave the tent of meeting. We see the character of the man who chose not to identify with the world, but stay close to God. Already we see the character of the man who would take over for Moses later in Israel's history. Here is man who is faithful, who is full of love for God, who sits and listens to God even when He doesn't need to. His habit was one of communion with God, instead of it being a once in a while thing. If someone were to follow you around for a week, what would they say of your communion with Christ?

History of Joshua quickly. ***His character is grown through his communion***

Private prayer/communion with God

Notice also, the private nature of prayer with God. Moses is not standing in the middle of the camp praying or speaking to God, but is privately in communion with Him. This shows us the importance of private prayer. Prayer is not something that just happens, but is something which we must also cultivate in our lives. ***How we pray in private affects how we live in public.***

*“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.” - Matthew 6:5-6*

What is the reward Jesus is referring to? God Himself is the reward! Prayer is not to impress God, but to know God. Knowing God and being known are two of the main themes of Moses' prayer that we have recorded for us in this chapter. Why is this so important? We all long to be known, because in that knowing there is a sense of self. But the kind of knowing that Moses and God are referring to here is not an acquisition of information, but a growth in relationship. Of giving and receiving.

*“Knowing is less about information and more about transformation; less about comprehension and more about being apprehended.” Esther Lightcap Meek Loving to Know*

The goal of knowing God is transformation into Christlikeness. In any relationship there is a give and take, and always transformation. But in our relationship with God, this transformation is us being transformed more and more into His image; and it takes our whole lives

*“For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.” - 1 Corinthians 13:12*

Some of us don't really like the idea of being fully known. Whether due to insecurity, shame, fear, guilt... but being fully known by God by name is one of the most wonderful truths that ought to encourage us in our walks. All that we are in our personalities, our history, and our most intimate part of us, are all known and held in Christ's love. That means that God loves us, not despite our sin (as some Christians

like to say), but including our sin. Jesus knows and holds all of it in Him! What a wonderful truth! Yet, this is not a license to sin, but to long for deeper communion with Christ.

## Longing

Moses desired to see and know more of God Himself. This is the chief motivation behind Moses' desire to "see God's glory". Moses had already seen the terrible majesty of God on the mountain, but now he desires to see the glorious beauty of God's incomprehensible light. This glory is described as God's goodness, grace, and mercy. And Moses longed for more of it! The more we spend time with God, the more we will long for time with God!

## Looking

Moses got to see God! He looked upon the glory of God and was satisfied, but not satiated. There will never be a time when we will have a full fill of God, nor should we expect to, for He is infinite and we are finite.

To truly see God, with the eyes of our souls, is to know the acceptance of God. Even though we cannot see God with our eyes here and now, we still look upon the face of God in the face of Christ.

*"not that anyone has seen the Father except he who is from God; he has seen the Father." - John 6:46*

*"And whoever sees me sees him who sent me" - John 12:46*

***Isn't it amazing that the face that we cannot see and live is now the face that we must look at in order to truly live!***

Why did God have Moses just look at His back and not His face? God is graciously giving Moses what He knows Moses can handle. The same is true for us. We must remember that God is purposefully growing each of us in our spiritual lives, and He knows what of Him and His ways we can handle in the moment and where we need to grow. Sometimes some of us need spiritual milk, others have had enough milk and need to start eating more solid spiritual food.

Where our gaze is at determines where we go and how we live. If we are looking at this world, it will begin to affect how we view our circumstances. It will cause us to become jealous, or fearful, anxious, or regretful. The world is constantly shifting and changing, we must not look to the world, must not fix our gaze on the things of this world, for we will lose our footing and fall away!

We must fix our eyes on Jesus!

Notice God's making a way for Moses to see just a glimpse of His glory and goodness: through the cleft of the rock, covered by the hand of God.

God has made a way for us to truly know Him, perceive His glory and goodness, all through the Rock that was cleft for us, His Son Jesus.

In Jesus we can see the full glory of God made manifest. We can see the grace of God freely given. We can see the justice of God fully satisfied. We can see the love of God perfectly expressed. We can see the purity of God given to us. We can see the hope of God secured for His people. And we can see the truth of God made plain for all to see.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter helps us to see the kind of reconciliation that we can have with God, which begins with true contrition for sin, but ends with this communion with Christ. Communion with Christ is the greatest gift and treasure we can have both now and into eternity. But in the now, we must be content with the tastes that we can have of the richness and beauty of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

*“The path of those who rise to God is unlimited. This is what is experienced by one who fixes his gaze on the infinite beauty of God. It is constantly being discovered anew and is always seen as something new and strange, in comparison with what the mind has already understood. And as God continues to reveal Himself, man continues to wonder. And he never exhausts his desire to see more, since what he is waiting for is always more magnificent, more divine, than all that he has already seen. So he feels wonder and amazement at what he is beginning to see. Yet he never, for all that, puts an end to his yearning for further vision.” —St. Gregory of Nyssa (4th Century)*

## **Lord’s Supper**

At the table we drawn into the heavenly vision of God. We see the fullness of God’s grace and mercy at the cross, Christ’s blood being poured out for the forgiveness of sins, His body being broken to take the punishment of our sin. At the table we sit and commune with the Living Redeemer, as ones who are fully known and fully loved. Let us consider this now as we prepare to partake of the Lord’s Supper.