

Session 4

February 12, 2023

DOES IT ALIGN WITH GOD'S CHARACTER?

Exodus 34:1-9

We all know the story of Moses and the stone tablets. We know about his trek up Mount Sinai to receive the Ten Commandments written in stone by the finger of God (Ex. 31:18). We remember all about the fiasco that ensued when the people goaded Aaron into creating a pagan idol (the gold calf) to replace the One True God who delivered them from Egypt (Ex. 32:1-4). But just as grievous as that sin was, God's grace was greater. God's second chance was based on a reinforced covenant relationship, spelled out by God Himself, enforced by God's divine attributes, and signed in His designated covenant name: *Yahweh*. The second-chance scenario can be outlined in three key words.

Preparation (vv. 1-5). Throughout the Bible, meeting with God required some type of preparation. Altars had to be made, priests had to be consecrated, sacrifices had to be dedicated, and worshippers had to be clean. Preparation normally affected two areas. First, there was some type of *physical preparation*. Here, Moses was given specific instructions. There were certain things he was required to *do* (v. 1) with regard to the stone (v. 1), the people, and the flocks (v. 2). God could easily have provided stone tablets, pre-cut and pre-printed with the law. But He didn't. Moses had to put some effort into the meeting. Second, there was *personal preparation*. At a given time (morning) and a given place (the mountain top), Moses had to *stand before God*. The phrase is rich with meaning. It means to *present oneself*; but it also means to *establish one's ground*. In this context, God was not simply inviting Moses to meet with Him. Rather, He was establishing the *proper order of things*. Moses stayed in his spot. And the Lord came before Him in a cloud (v. 5). Notice: they were together...but yet apart. For reflection: *Do we still need to prepare ourselves for worship? Can you find biblical instructions for preparing ourselves to enter God's presence?*

Explanation (vv. 6-7). Here again, God manifests Himself to Moses. British theologian John Ellicott (1819-1905) rightly pointed out that God's manifestations are actually demonstrations of His character. At the burning bush (Ex. 3), He was the self-existing One. At His descent at Sinai (Ex. 19:16ff), He displayed His terrifying power. Here, He shows Himself as the covenant keeper; merciful yet just. But notice how the scale is tipped in our favor! He is *reluctant* when it comes to anger but is *abundant* in love and truth (v. 6). And while His judgement stretches to the *third and fourth* generations (v. 7), His redemptive love and forgiveness stretch to a *thousand* generations. For reflection: *Covenant agreements require two parties, with set boundaries and clear obligations. Yet God always seems to tilt the promises in favor of His people and remains faithful to His covenant even when His people are not. Why do you think that is?*

Dedication (vv. 8-9). When God does the speaking, what He says will reflect His character. While God is merciful, He never changes His mind or contradicts Himself. And when God presents Himself—as He does here to Moses—His declaration requires an appropriate response. At the burning bush, God told Moses how to respond (Ex. 3:5). By this time, no prompt is needed, as “Moses *immediately* bowed down to the ground and worshiped” (v. 8). It's interesting to note that while God reminded Moses that He was the *LORD* (*Yahweh*) in verse 5, Moses

entreated Him as *Adonai* (Master) in verse 9. This was not a slight on Moses' part; rather it too, was an appropriate response. As the covenant-making/covenant-keeping God, Moses worshipped Him as *Yahweh*, then submitted to Him as *Master*. For reflection: *If God doesn't change His mind (and He doesn't!), how would you explain what happened in Exodus 32:9-14?*