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Exodus: Delivered By God, For God / Grace; Mercy / Exodus 33:1–11

This sermon draws from Exodus 33:1–11 to reveal the tension between God’s faithfulness and man’s rebellion. Though God promises to lead Israel to the land, He declares He will not dwell among them because of their sin. Yet even in judgment, His mercy remains. The people’s sorrow over His absence illustrates the necessity of true repentance. The message calls believers to examine whether they treasure God’s presence above His blessings, reminding us that through Christ—the true Mediator—God now dwells within His people. Without His presence, all else is loss; with Him, we have life, hope, and eternal joy.

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## Introduction

The book of Lamentations is actually a collection of five poems attributed to Jeremiah and marked the devastation of Jerusalem and Judah as the Babylonians invaded and conquered. The text itself consists of four poems written in an acrostic style of the Hebrew alphabet that catalogues the events and in a series of laments or expressions of sorrow and regret interspersed with passages that seek to call to remembrance the faithfulness and promises of God. The final poem, marked as the fifth chapter, contains a cry to Yahweh for Him to remember His people. In the middle of this book we find the following verses: Lamentations 3:22-23

### **Lamentations 3:22–23 LSB**

The lovingkindnesses of Yahweh indeed never cease,

For His compassions never fail.

*They are new every morning;*

Great is Your faithfulness.

Verse 22 here contains what is known as a textual criticism, meaning that depending on if you translate this according to the Aramaic or the Hebrew text you get slightly different wording. Because of the structure of the poem itself and its use of parallelism most theologians agree that the

correct interpretation is that of the Aramaic, however, it is helpful to also understand the Hebraic version as well because the difference between the two is literally one letter. The King James Version contains the Hebraic stance which reads,

**King James Version Chapter 3**

22 It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not.

23 They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness.

What is important to note here is that although the passages are worded slightly different, the end, the meaning is the same, but what I want to call your attention to is the wording of the first clause of verse 22 in the KJV version... where it reads "It is of the LORD's mercies that we are not consumed." It reminds me of a rather well known quote by the late Voddie Baucham where he says "Do you know that it was His mercy that work you up this morning! Because His judgement should have killed you last night."

What sobering reality. As you may recall from our recent studies in the book of Exodus, this is exactly where the people of Israel find themselves as they stand at the foot of the mountain awaiting Moses' return. Last week we looked at Moses going back up to the top of Sinai with the express purpose of attempting to make an atonement on behalf of the people. As we discussed we saw that it was not within Moses' ability to atone for the sins of the people as he serves to point us forward to the One who could and did make that atonement on behalf of His people. This morning we begin taking a look at the text of chapter 33. Over the next two weeks we will look at the first 11 verses in two parts, this morning we will look at verses 1-7 and then next week we will look at verses 7-11. Each week we will read the text in its entirety so that we get the full picture of what God is accomplishing in this place. With that being said, please take your copy of God's word, make your way to the 33 chapter of Exodus and...

## Text

Stand for the reading of God's Holy, Inerrant, Infallible, Authoritative, Sufficient, Complete and Certain Word

**Exodus 33:1-11 LSB**

Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, "Go! Go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'To your seed I will give it.'

"And I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite.

"Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst because you are a stiff-necked people, lest I consume you on the way."

Then the people heard this sad word and went into mourning; and none of them put on his ornaments.

So Yahweh said to Moses, "Say to the sons of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people; should I go up in your midst for one moment, I would consume you. So now, put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what I shall do with you.'"

So the sons of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, a good distance from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought Yahweh would go out to the tent of meeting which was outside the camp.

And it happened whenever Moses went out to the tent, that all the people would arise and stand, each at the entrance of his tent, and gaze after Moses until he entered the tent.

And it happened whenever Moses entered the tent, that the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent; and Yahweh would speak with Moses.

And all the people would see the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent. And all the people would arise and worship, each at the entrance of his tent.

Thus Yahweh used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, and his attendant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

Our prayer this morning is adapted from "The Valley of Vision: The Deeps":

Most holy and merciful Lord, we ask that we have a deeper repentance, a greater horror of sin, and a deep dread of sins approach. Help us, we pray, to flee from sin, and to jealously resolve that our hearts are Yours alone. Grant us a deeper trust, that we would lose ourselves to find ourselves in You, the ground of our rest, and the spring of our very being. Grant us a deeper knowledge of our Lord Jesus as our Savior, Master, Lord and King. Give us deeper power in private prayer, more sweetness in Your word, and a stronger grip upon it's truth. Lord we pray for a deeper holiness in our speech, our thoughts, and out actions. Let us not seek moral virtue apart from You alone. We pray that we are deeply laid bare by the work of You that we may be fields prepared with roots of grace spreading far and wide, until You and You alone are all that is seen in m, Your beauty golden as a summer harvest and the fruitfulness that of the harvest. Gracious Father we have no Master but You, no law but yours, no delight but You, no wealth but the riches of Your glory, no good but that of Christ, and no peace but the peace that comes from our Lord Jesus. Lord remind us that we are only what you make us, have nothing but that which you provide, and apart from Your grace are without hope. WE pray that Your Spirit would root out all sin, to the very depths of us and then fill us to overflowing with Your living water. We ask these things in the precious name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Amen.

## Go!

Exodus chapter 2 concluded with these words Exodus 2:24 "So God heard their groaning; and God remembered His covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." It was not that God had forgotten His covenant with His people but that as a result of that covenant, God's eternal plan moved forward with the purpose to deliver His chosen people from the land of Egypt. The purpose of which, as He instructs Moses to inform Pharoah, is so that Exodus 5:1 "...they may celebrate a feast to Me in the wilderness." Once the people have been freed from bondage in Egypt God declares to Moses

on the side of Sinai Exodus 25:8 ""And let them make a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them."

As you may recall, it was while Moses was on Sinai receiving the instructions from God on the construction of this sanctuary that they so grievously sinned. Which is why, after making his plea before God, Moses is commanded by God to go. The first word here is an imperative that is usually translated as go, or depart, or leave and can even be translated as vanish or die. Although, as we saw last week, God has demonstrated His mercy by withholding their immediate destruction does not mean that there is no consequence for their actions. The relationship that they had enjoyed with the Lord God had changed.

It is important to note here that throughout these events the reaction of the people. We have seen God's anger burning, we have seen Moses' anger burning, we have seen the destruction of 3,000 people as a result of these events, but what we have not yet seen is a people who are aware of the grievous nature of their sin and sorrowful that they have done this thing. The only mention we have of any shame at all in the people comes from verse 25 of chapter 32 which is a comment on their sin, not by them, but by Moses as he records these words under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The people, however, the people are not filled with sorrow at their sin, they do not recognize the depths to which they have fallen and they have shown no intention of repenting.

How true is this of people today. The world is filled with people who are living their lives in accordance with their wishes and desires with no regard for the One who created them. They live without fear of God, they have no desire to turn from their ways. Rightly it is the responsibility of the church to stand up and call these people to repentance. This is the charge that we have been given. I cringe when I hear people who profess to be Christian say that it is not our place to say anything, when this is clearly the command. So many believers rightly point to the Great Commission as our biblical mandate from Christ, yet fall short of accomplishing that task because we are unwilling to stand on the very principles upon which the gospel is built. Matthew 28:18-20 emphatically states:

**Matthew 28:18–20 LSB**

And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.

“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit,

teaching them to keep all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.”

But how can we make disciples, how can we teach them all that has been commanded when we ignore those very commands. Our problem, often, is that although we are willing to proclaim the good news to the world, we are unwilling to proclaim the bad, we are unwilling to call them to the standard that is set forth in the word of God. I have made the statement in the past that we cannot expect the world to behave as Christians and that is true, the problem becomes when we allow that truth to respond “well, since we cannot expect the world to act as they should then we should not call them to live according to the standards that God has given us in His word, which is to deny that the moral law of God is written on the hearts of ALL men. The root of the problem, however, is not even that we are unwilling to call the world to repentance. The root of the problem is that we are unwilling to call those who profess to be the “church” and those who profess to be “Christians” and even those who truly are Christians to repentance. AW Pink was absolutely right when he wrote:

**Gleanings in Exodus Chapter 63: Outside the Camp**

Most solemnly does this speak to us, and timely is its warning. How readily neglected is this truth today! if there be little or no preaching of “repentance” to the unsaved, there is still less to those who are saved. Yet, concerning the one we read “But, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3); and of the other, it is to be noted, that the very first admonitory word of Christ to the seven churches in Revelation 2, 3 is, “Remember therefore from whence thou are fallen, and repent” (2:5)! It is because there is so little repentance among God’s people today that His chastening hand is laid so heavily on many of them.

The call to repent does not stop when you become a Christian, if anything it should grow heavier, your sins should feel more grievous, because you have the truth of Christ’s death on the cross for those very sins. Last week we celebrated the Lord’s Supper and we were reminded of the words we find in 1 Corinthians 11:26 “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until He comes.” We remember His

death, we remember the cost of OUR sin and we should be grieved to the point of repentance.

## The Promise

The situation of the people of God is bleak but God is still faithful. Notice God's promise here to fulfill His promise. Exodus 33:1-2 "Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, "Go! Go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up from the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, 'To your seed I will give it.' "And I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, the Hittite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite." As a rebellious people who have broken the covenant they are again no longer called God's people. Recall, this theme began back in verse 7 of chapter 32 and it is to demonstrate their unfaithfulness, that they are no longer worthy to carry His name. But God is God and God does not change, His is ever faithful and His promises are sure and because they are so, He tells Moses to take the people to the land He has promised.

It is easy to read quickly past this and miss the beauty, mercy and grace on display here. To understand this we must first look to the original promise of God to Abram. In Genesis 12 we see the call of Abram to leave his land, family, and father's house to go to a place that God will make known when he arrives. In the midst of this, as Abram travels God tells him in Genesis 12:6-7

### **Genesis 12:6-7 LSB**

And Abram passed through the land as far as the site of Shechem, to the oak of Moreh. Now the Canaanite *was* then in the land.

Then Yahweh appeared to Abram and said, "To your seed I will give this land." So he built an altar there to Yahweh who had appeared to him.

Later in chapter 15 we see the formalization of this covenant with Abram regarding the land, we read these words: Genesis 15:8-21

### **Genesis 15:8-21 LSB**

And he said, "O Lord Yahweh, how may I know that I will possess it?"

So He said to him, "Bring Me a three year old heifer, and a three year old

female goat, and a three year old ram, and a turtledove, and a young pigeon.”

Then he brought all these to Him and split them into parts down the middle and laid each part opposite the other; but he did not split apart the birds.

Then the birds of prey came down upon the carcasses, and Abram drove them away.

Now it happened that when the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell upon Abram; and behold, terror *and* great darkness fell upon him.

Then *God* said to Abram, “Know for certain that your seed will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years.

“But I will also judge the nation to whom they are enslaved, and afterward they will come out with many possessions.

“As for you, you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age.

“Then in the fourth generation they will return here, for the iniquity of the Amorite is not yet complete.”

Now it happened that the sun had set, and it was very dark, and behold, *there appeared* a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces.

On that day Yahweh cut a covenant with Abram, saying,

“To your seed I have given this land,

From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates:

the Kenite and the Kenizzite and the Kadmonite

and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Rephaim

and the Amorite and the Canaanite and the Girgashite and the Jebusite.”

This covenant is based on God and God alone. Notice that the only thing that Abram supplied was the animals that God commanded him to supply, the rest of the work was done by God Himself.

Earlier in Exodus 23 we see God repeating this particular covenant to Moses before He goes on to cut the covenant with the people in chapter 24. The covenant that they broke was the one in chapter 24. It is important to keep these two covenants in mind because they are different. The covenant that the people broke was conditional upon them living up to and obeying the commands of God, in other words, they had a role to play. The covenant that God entered into with Abram and later repeated to Moses was conditional upon God alone, it was never an if/then covenant between God and man based on the performance of man, but a covenant between God and Abram, conditioned on the steadfast faithfulness of God.

Just as there was nothing that Abram did to enact this covenant in Genesis 15, there is nothing the people of God can do to break this covenant. This is the same as the promise to believers that they will enter New Jerusalem, not based on our merits, but on the merits, on the righteousness of Christ alone. Beauty in that God chose His people before the foundation of the world, mercy in that He, Himself took the punishment for our sins, grace in that by faith in the finished work of Christ on the cross of Calvary we are imputed with His righteousness so that we can stand in the presence of God, that we can receive the promises of Revelation 21:1–5 “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain. The first things passed away.” And He who sits on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” And He said, “Write, for these words are faithful and true.””

# But without ME

Even though God will still provide the land, just as He promised, nevertheless He would not go with them. Verse 3 marks a dark reality that the people find themselves in, God will go before them and drive out the people of the land, God will provide the land, but God will not be with them. He will not dwell in their midst and the reason He gives, they are a stiff-necked people. We first encountered this reference to the people in chapter 32 when God refers to them the same way and hopefully you recall that this phrase has agricultural roots. It was a term that was used regarding oxen and it described a condition that they would get when either they were loaded with a yoke or a burden that was too heavy for them to bear or they fought the yoke that they had. Either way, the results were pretty much the same, they would develop this condition that would make them difficult to work with... they became in a word, stubborn, hard-headed. God knew that these people, too, were stubborn, they demonstrated no sign of remorse, no desire for repentance, and were bound to repeat their failure. Notice that the words used here are that because they "are a stiff-necked people, lest I consume you on the way."

How far they have fallen, one theologian writes:

## **Gleanings in Exodus Chapter 63: Outside the Camp**

"At the beginning of this book. when the people were in the furnace of Egypt, the Lord could say, 'I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows.' But now he has to say, 'I have seen this people, and, behold. it is a stiffnecked people', An afflicted people is an object of grace; but a stiff-necked people must be humbled. The cry of the oppressed Israel had been answered by the exhibition of grace; but the song of idolatrous Israel must be answered by the voice of stern rebuke"

In less than 6 weeks, because of the reaction of the people, it has gone from a situation of God dictating to Moses the instructions for His dwelling place so that He could dwell among His people, He could be with them, to removing Himself from their midst, in an act of incredible mercy and grace. It is this, which finally seems to have a true affect on the people of God. Seldom do we realize what we have until it is gone and at that point, unfortunately, it is often too late to do anything to change the situation.

We need to take heed to the truth that is proclaimed here, in more ways than one.

First, in the grand scheme of things. Several times as we have worked through 32 and now into 33 we have referred to the letters of Christ to the churches in Asia. Seven letters to seven real churches facing real issues that have real consequences. Theologians and scholars disagree on how this is to be interpreted, some say as seven different church ages, some as seven different types of churches, I believe it goes deeper than either of those and contains truths that we need to understand and apply, one of which is the statement that Christ makes regarding the removal of the lampstand. If we recall back to our study of the tabernacle, you may recall that the construction of the tabernacle was such that very little to no light would have been able to enter into the holy place and the lampstand was the only light by which the priest could conduct their duties. When we study that we talked about how the lampstand was a type of Christ. Christ is the only light by which the church operates, remove the light and operations cease. The power of the church is not the pastor, the people, the singing, the structure, it is Christ, without Christ at the center, without His light, without the power of the Holy Spirit, we have nothing more than a social gathering dealing with worldly issues which have no eternal consequence.

Secondly, in the lesser scheme of things, most Christians today are quick to point out the flaws of the people of Israel without allowing the truth of the situation to affect us. They took for granted God's presence, they felt as though they could live in any way that they wanted with no punishment, after all we have trained people well in saying "once saved, always saved" without helping them to understand the depth of that reality. We make converts, not disciples. Paul, writing to the church at Galatia writes in Galatians 1:6-7 "I marvel that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ for a different gospel, which is really not another, only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ." If Paul writes this to a church that he labored with to bring them to an understanding of the gospel, making disciples of them and yet they are so quickly falling away, how fast do we think those who are a victim of easy believism and this idea that there is no cost to being a disciple will fall away.

# Grieved

Here, we finally see the first signs of sorrow from the people, with these words of God proclaimed to them by Moses the people responded in verse 4 with signs of lament. Pink writes:

## **Gleanings in Exodus Chapter 63: Outside the Camp**

The removal of their ornaments was for the purpose of evidencing the genuineness of their contrition. Outward adornment was out of keeping with the taking of a low place before God. Contrariwise, external attractions and displays show up the absence of that lowliness of spirit and brokenness of heart which are of great price in the sight of God. The more true spirituality declines, the more an elaborate ritual comes to the fore. All around us Christendom is putting on as many "ornaments" as possible.

Verses 4, 5 and 6 contain some interesting phrases, note in verse 4 that the people who did not have on ornamentation, did not put it on. There were some who immediately heard these words, felt the sting of what God had said and reacted. Then Moses recalls the words of God to the people in verse 5 Exodus 33:5 "So Yahweh said to Moses, "Say to the sons of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people; should I go up in your midst for one moment, I would consume you. So now, put off your ornaments from you, that I may know what I shall do with you.'"" commanding those who had put on ornamentation to repent, Matthew Henry writes in reference to this verse:

## **Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume Exodus 33:1-6**

"Put thyself into the posture of a penitent, that the dispute may be determined in thy favour, and mercy may rejoice against judgment," v. 5. Note, Calls to repentance are plain indications of mercy designed. If the Lord were pleased to kill us, justice knows what to do with a stiff-necked people: but God has no pleasure in the death of those that die; let them return and repent, and then mercy, which otherwise is at a loss, knows what to do.

To which the people responded in verse 6. In verse 7, which we will cover in greater detail next week, however, we see that although the people began to show remorse and sorrow, God still dwells outside of the camp. This takes us back to the truth that sin has consequences. As a believer, the

eternal consequence for our sin has been paid, but there are still consequences here and now.

## Conclusion

As we stand at the close of this passage, we are confronted with a sobering truth — God’s people had received His mercy, but their sin still carried consequence. Though Yahweh would fulfill His covenant promise and send them into the land He swore to their fathers, His presence would no longer dwell among them. What greater tragedy could there be than to inherit the blessing but lose the presence of the Blessor? The people of Israel had received the revelation of His power, seen the cloud of His glory, and heard His voice thunder from the mountain, yet they became a stiff-necked people — unrepentant, unmoved, and unbroken by their sin.

And yet, even here, we find grace upon grace. The same God who said, “I will not go up in your midst,” would later condescend to dwell among His people through the tabernacle, and ultimately, through His Son, who “tabernacled among us” (John 1:14). Christ is the perfect Mediator who bridges the gap our sin has created. He is the true Moses who intercedes for His people, not with the blood of goats or bulls, but with His own precious blood.

This text calls each of us to examine whether we, too, have grown stiff-necked — unrepentant in heart, presuming upon the mercy of God while neglecting the presence of God. Has our walk become religiously routine while our hearts have grown cold toward Him? The question before us today is this: **Do we desire the blessings of God more than the presence of God Himself?**

The people mourned when they heard that God would not dwell among them. Would we do the same if His Spirit were removed from our midst? Let this passage remind us that repentance is not a one-time act but a lifelong posture. May it drive us to our knees in confession and thanksgiving, rejoicing that through Christ, God not only leads us to the promised land but also dwells within us by His Spirit. Let us not be content to go forward without Him — for all the blessings of this life are meaningless apart from His abiding presence.

# Closing Prayer

Gracious and merciful Father,

We come before You humbled by the weight of our sin and awed by the depth of Your mercy. It is indeed of Your lovingkindness that we are not consumed, for Your compassions fail not. Lord, forgive us for the times we have desired Your gifts more than Your presence, for the moments when we have walked according to our own stubborn hearts rather than in submission to Your Word.

We confess that we are often stiff-necked — slow to repent, quick to justify, and prone to forget the holiness of the God who saves us. Yet You, O Lord, are faithful even when we are faithless. Thank You for the intercession of Christ, our greater Moses, who bore our sin and bridged the chasm between a holy God and a sinful people.

Renew in us a spirit of repentance and faith. Restore the joy of our salvation, and let us never grow comfortable without Your presence. Teach us to walk in obedience, to tremble at Your Word, and to trust wholly in the righteousness of Christ.

We thank You, Father, for the mercy that woke us this morning and the grace that sustains us this hour.

In the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.