

THE HOPE OF RECONCILIATION WITH GOD

33 Then Jehovah said to Moses, "Leave this place, you and the people you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, and go to the land I pledged to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, promising them, 'I will give it to your descendants.' ²I will send an angel ahead of you and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ³Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up in your midst, or else I might consume you along the way, for you are an obstinate* people." ⁴When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn and no one put on any ornamental jewelry. ⁵Jehovah had said to Moses, "Tell the children of Israel, 'You are an obstinate* people; if I were to go up in your midst for just one moment, I would consume you. Now then, discard your ornamental jewelry, so that I may know what to do with you.'" ⁶So the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornamental jewelry at Mount Horeb [and for the remainder of their journey].

⁷Now Moses used to take the tent and set it up outside the camp, at a distance from the camp. He called it "The Tent of Meeting." Anyone who sought Jehovah's counsel would go out to the Tent of Meeting located outside the camp. ⁸Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrance of their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. ⁹When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud descended and stayed at the entrance of the tent; and Jehovah would speak with Moses. ¹⁰Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, they all stood and worshipped, each one at the entrance of his tent. ¹¹Jehovah would speak with Moses face to face, like a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but Joshua his aide, a young man, the son of Nun, did not leave the tent.

¹²Moses said to Jehovah, "See, you have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Furthermore, you have said, 'I know you intimately** and you have found favor in my sight' ¹³Now, therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me your ways, so that I may know you, so that I may find favor in your sight. And consider the fact that this nation is your people." ¹⁴He replied, "My presence shall go with you and I will give you rest." ¹⁵Then Moses said to him, "If your presence does not go with me, do not carry us up from here; ¹⁶for how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not by the fact that you go with us, so that we are distinguished—I and your people—from all the other people who are on the face of the earth?" ¹⁷Jehovah said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have requested, because you have found favor in my sight and I know you intimately.**" ¹⁸Then Moses said, "Please show me your glory." ¹⁹And he said, "I will cause all my goodness to pass before you and I will proclaim the name of Jehovah before you; I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy to whom I will show mercy." ²⁰But he said, "You may not see my face; for no man can see me and live." ²¹Then Jehovah said, "Look; there is a place near me, and there you may stand upon the rock. ²²While my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³Then I will remove my hand and you shall see my back; but my face must not be seen."

34 Jehovah said to Moses, "Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones. I will write on them the words that were inscribed on the first tablets, the ones you broke. ²Be

ready in the morning and then come up to Mount Sinai. Present yourself to me there on top of the mountain. ³No man shall come up with you, nor is anyone to be seen anywhere on the mountain; and do not allow the flocks and herds to graze in front of that mountain.” ⁴So Moses chiseled out two stone tablets like the first ones. He got up early the next morning and ascended Mount Sinai, as Jehovah had commanded him; and he carried the two stone tablets in his hands.

*⁵Jehovah descended in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed the name of Jehovah. ⁶Jehovah passed before him and proclaimed, “Jehovah, Jehovah, a God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and truth, ⁷maintaining his covenant relationship for thousands [of generations,]*** forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. But by no means will he leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.” ⁸Moses quickly bowed his head to the ground and worshiped. ⁹He said, “If I have now found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord travel with us in our midst, for they are an obstinate* people. Pardon our iniquity and our sin, and receive us as your inheritance.”*

*Or, “stiff-necked”

**Literally, “I know you by name”

***Literally, “keeping lovingkindness for thousands”

Introduction

As the train drew closer and closer to his hometown, Gary wondered what kind of Thanksgiving this would be. He had committed a crime and had been sentenced to prison; he had betrayed his family’s trust and had brought disgrace to the family name.

While serving his time in prison, Gary had had a change of heart: he felt remorse over what he had done, he intended to change his ways; most of all, he wanted to be reconciled to his family. As the date of his release approached, Gary decided he would write a letter home: admitting his wrong doing, asking their forgiveness, and expressing his desire for reconciliation.

He closed his letter by saying,

On Thanksgiving Eve I’ll be arriving home on the four o’clock train. As you know, the train passes by our backyard on its way to the station.

If you are willing to forgive me and receive me back into the family, please tie a yellow ribbon from the old oak tree standing in our backyard. If I see no yellow ribbon, I’ll just stay on the train and keep going.

I do wish you a happy Thanksgiving and do hope it will be a happy one for all of us.

Your repentant son,

Gary

The long hours aboard the train were passed with anxiety: the anticipation of coming home for Thanksgiving, the fear of not being welcomed back home. Four o'clock was rapidly approaching, so was Gary's hometown station, so was the backyard of his childhood home and so was the old oak tree. By now the young man's stomach was tied in knots: Would his family receive him back? Would there be a yellow ribbon on the old oak tree? When he felt that he could no longer bear the anxiety by himself, Gary turned to the stranger seated next to him, related his whole story to the man, and asked, "Sir, when we enter my hometown, would you look to see if there is any yellow ribbon on that old oak tree? I can't bear to look myself."

The conductor called out the name of Gary's hometown as the next stop; the train began to slow down as it approached the outskirts of the town. As they passed the backyard of Gary's childhood home, the helpful stranger peered out the window, looking for a yellow ribbon dangling from the branch of the old oak tree.

Just like that the house and the yard and the old oak tree were passed as the train pulled into the station. Hesitantly, Gary uncovered his eyes, looked over at the stranger, and inquired, "Did you see a yellow ribbon?"

"No," replied the man, "I did not see a single yellow ribbon. I saw a whole tree full of yellow ribbons!"

For Gary, it proved to be a Thanksgiving not to be forgotten.

For the people of Israel, there was a similar experience in the wilderness of Sinai. After what they had done, (worshiping the golden calf), they, too, wondered if their relationship with the LORD could be restored. What they found is that the repentant sinner's reconciliation to God is possible, and it is possible because the LORD does not despise a contrite heart.

When your fellowship with the LORD has been broken, repentantly return to Him, knowing that the LORD will not turn you away when you seek reconciliation with Him.

I. Seek Reconciliation with the LORD Your God, by Coming to Him with a Repentant Spirit

Although the LORD instructed Moses to continue to lead Israel to the land of Canaan, the people recognize that they were still estranged from their God. The LORD does not identify them as His people, but rather as *"the people whom (Moses) has brought up out of the land of Egypt"* (vs. 1a.) Canaan is identified as the land the LORD promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, not the land the LORD

promised to the people of Israel (vs. 1b.) It is as though the LORD wants nothing to do with these people, He is merely tolerating them in order to fulfill His promise to their faithful forefathers. But yet, His "aloofness" is also an act of mercy to Israel. The LORD declares, *"I will not go up in your midst, or else I might consume you along the way, for you are an obstinate people"* (vs. 3.) The LORD is maintaining His distance from them so that their stubborn and rebellious conduct will not incite His holy anger against them.

When the people heard this distressing report *"they mourned, and no one put on his ornamental jewelry"* (vs.4.) This was an indication of their sorrow and remorse over the fact that their relationship with their God had been broken and they were estranged from Him. Their jewelry reminded them of the golden calf that had been made by their gifts of jewelry (Ex. 32:2-3.) Now, experiencing the awful consequence of their sin, the people wanted nothing to do with such things. In response to the people's action, the LORD issues the command, *"Now then, discard your ornamental jewelry, so that I may know what to do with you"* (vs. 5.) That is to say, "Don't just take off your ornamental jewelry for a little while, discard it altogether!" Why? As a demonstration that the people were not just experiencing a passing sense of sorrow, but a genuine change of heart. Just as the contribution of their ornaments made the golden calf, so now the discarding of those ornaments was tantamount to an act of repentance. In response to the LORD's command, the people of Israel discard their ornamental jewelry from this point on and for the remainder of their journey to the Promised Land (vs. 6.)

The people's estrangement from the LORD their God and their regret is also seen in the provisional tabernacle Moses erects. Moses pitched this tent outside the camp, at a distance from the camp (vs. 7,) whereas the LORD's tabernacle was supposed to be erected in the very midst of the people, so He had instructed Moses, *"have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them"* (Ex. 25:8.) Whenever Moses would go out to the tent, all the people would arise, stand at the doorway of their tents, and longingly watch Moses as he entered the tent (vs. 8.) This was an indication of their remorse and their desire for a restored relationship with their God.

Seek reconciliation with your God, by coming to Him with a repentant spirit. Consider the case of the Prodigal Son:

When he came to his senses, he said, "How many of my father's hired men have food to spare, and here I am starving to death! ¹⁸I will set out and go back to my father and say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. ¹⁹I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me like one of your hired men." ²⁰So he got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. (Lk. 15:17-20)

Consider, too, such passages as ...

The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and contrite heart, O God, you will not despise. (Psl. 51:17)

The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who have a contrite spirit. (Psl. 34:18)

He who conceals his sins does not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them finds mercy. (Prov. 28:13)

II. Seek Reconciliation with the LORD Your God, Knowing that the LORD is Gracious

The LORD commands Moses, *“Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones. I will write on them the words that were inscribed on the first tablets”* (Ex. 34:1.) This fact demonstrates the Lord’s graciousness, His willingness to renew His covenant, His willingness to receive His people back into His covenant—but on His terms.

While Moses is there atop Mt. Sinai the LORD comes to him and reveals Himself to him, declaring, *“Jehovah, Jehovah, a God who is merciful and gracious”* (Ex. 34:6a) The LORD is a God who is compassionate and who takes pity upon us when we cry out to Him for forgiveness. Note, again, the parable of the Prodigal Son, a parable in which the Lord Jesus is vividly revealing the forgiving character of God: *“[the prodigal son] got up and went to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.* (Lk. 15:20.)

The LORD further reveals Himself to Moses as a God who is *“slow to anger.”* He is a God of great patience and long-suffering and restraint, as the Apostle Peter asserts, *The Lord is not negligent with regard to the promise* [i.e.; the warning of judgment], *as some consider negligence; on the contrary, he is exhibiting great patience toward you. He does not desire anyone to perish, but all to come to repentance.* (2 Pet. 3:9.) Hear, too, what the LORD Himself declares to the prophet Ezekiel, *“Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Lord Jehovah, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?’”* (Ezek.33:11.)

The LORD goes on to assure Moses that He is a God who is *“abounding in lovingkindness and truth.”* He is a God who is full to overflowing with goodness, kindness and love; and at the same time is whole-heartedly committed to truth, note the teaching of the Apostle Paul, *“God presented [Christ] as a sacrifice of atonement ... ²⁶he did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be both just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus* (Rom.3:25-26.) At Calvary God displayed both His mercy and His justice, neither attribute was sacrificed for the sake of the other.

The LORD is a God who maintains *“his covenant relationship for thousands [of generations].”* Because He is perpetually faithful to His covenant, the LORD stands ready to forgive repentant sinners and receive them back into His fellowship. David found this to be true when, after having grievously sinned, he returned to the Lord in repentance, *“I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, ‘I will confess my transgressions to Jehovah’— and you forgave the guilt of my sin”* (Psl.32:5.)

“But by no means will he leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation” (Ex. 34:7b.) As Exodus 20:5 indicates, this is referring to the third and fourth generation of those *“who hate me.”* What is being spoken of here is a generational hatred against the LORD, one that is passed on from father to son. If you reject, or abuse, the divine mercy of God and the atoning work of Christ, you will be confronted with the justice of God and His holy wrath in full measure. The Peanuts’ cartoon character, Lucy, once made the statement, “Ask for forgiveness? Admit I’m wrong? I’d rather die!” Such, indeed, is the attitude and the fate of stubborn, unrepentant sinners. The Apostle Paul poses the question,

... do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, forbearance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness is intended to lead you to repentance? ⁵But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God’s wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. ⁶God will give to each person according to what he has done. (Rom. 2:4-6)

The revelation of God’s character given on this occasion (Ex. 34:6-7) is the same as that revealed to Moses on the first occasion (recorded in Ex. 20:5-6), but with one distinction. In Exodus 20:5-6 the LORD’s justice receives the pre-dominant emphasis while in Exodus 34:6-7 His mercy is foremost, as becomes evident when the two passages are set side by side:

... I, Jehovah your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the iniquities of the fathers to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶but showing lovingkindness to thousands [of generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Ex. 20:5-6)

Jehovah passed before him and proclaimed, “Jehovah, Jehovah, a God who is merciful and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in lovingkindness and truth, ⁷maintaining his covenant relationship for thousands [of generations], forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin. But by no means will he leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sins of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.” (Ex. 34:6-7)

A people who are aware of their sin, have experienced something of its consequence in separating them from their God, and truly desire to be reconciled to the LORD, need to be assured of His mercy.

Seek reconciliation with the LORD your God, knowing that the LORD is gracious. The Lord Jesus assures us, *"I tell you that ... there is more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent"* (Lk. 15:7.)

III. Seek Reconciliation with the LORD Your God, and Rely upon His Transforming Power

Bear in mind the word spoken by the LORD in Exodus 33:3, *"I will not go up in your midst, or else I might consume you along the way."* Now listen to Moses' prayer in Exodus 34:8-9, *"If I have now found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord travel with us in our midst, for they are an obstinate people."*

This is the LORD's argument presented in Exodus 33:3: I cannot tolerate your stiff-necked nature; it will aggravate My righteous indignation and incite My anger against you. This is exactly what would happen to the rebellious, unrepentant nation in the future: *"They made their hearts as hard as flint and would not listen to the law, ... therefore great wrath came from Jehovah of hosts"* (Zech. 7:12.)

But this is Moses' counter argument in Exodus 34:9: Only You, O Lord, can change our stiff-necked nature. If You do not come among us and apply Your transforming grace to our hearts, we will be doomed to live and die with our stiff-necked nature.

Seek reconciliation with the Lord your God, and rely upon His transforming power. Do not come to Him with the promise: If You take me back, I'll never do it again. Sincere as that promise may be, you do not have within yourself the ability to keep it. On the contrary, return to the LORD with the plea and petition presented by David:

"Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. ¹¹Do not cast me away from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. ¹²Restore me to the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit" (Psl. 51:10-12.)

Claim the promise the LORD makes to His people in Ezekiel 11:19-20 and Ezekiel 36:25-27

I will put a new spirit within you and I will take the stony heart out of their flesh and I will give them a heart of flesh; ²⁰so that they may walk in my

statutes and keep my ordinances and do them; and they shall be my people and I will be their God. (Ezek. 11:19-20)

... I will cleanse you from all your idols. ²⁶I will also give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh and I will give you a heart of flesh. ²⁷And I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my ordinances and do them. (Ezek. 36:25-27)

Conclusion

When your fellowship with the LORD has been broken, seek reconciliation; because the LORD, who is merciful and gracious, will not turn you away when you come with a repentant spirit. As the Apostle John assures us, *"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (1 Jn.1:9.)