

# “God With Us?”

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## **Christ Presbyterian Church**

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If you have a Bible, you can be turning to the book of Exodus. We're in chapter 33. If you don't have a Bible the passage is printed for you. I think it takes up at least five pages of your worship Guide. We're going from Romans 8, where we're looking at one verse a week to, I don't know, a hundred verses, something like that. But we are spending some time looking at a few Old Testament passages that get us to the idea of God with us, central theme of the Advent season.

Last week, Steve preached about the temple and what it would mean for God to dwell with man in that sense then, of course, then we looked at what does it mean for him to dwell with us now as well. We're going back further today, back to the Exodus account. This is the time when God's people were on the journey from Egypt to the promised land. And specifically, the passage we're looking at, they had just blown it royally. They made a golden calf out of their earrings and they called it Yahweh, the Lord, and they worshiped it. And after that, we hear an interaction between Moses, their leader, and God himself. So let's read Exodus 33, and remember this is the word of the Lord.

*The Lord said to Moses, depart, go up from here, you and the people whom you've brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob saying, to your offspring, I will give it. I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Parasites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey, but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way for you are a stiff-necked people. When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments for the Lord had said to Moses, say to the people of Israel, you are a stiff-necked people, if I for a single moment should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments that I may know what to do with you. Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments from Mount Horeb onward. Now Moses took the tent and pitched it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting, and everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the Lord would speak*

*with Moses. And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship each at his tent door, thus the Lord used to speak with Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent. Moses said to the Lord, see, you say to me, bring up this people, but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight. Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people. And he said, my presence will go with you, and I will give you rest. And he said to him, if your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us so that we are distinct? I and your people from every other people on the face of the earth. And the Lord said to Moses, this very thing that you've spoken, I will do. For you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name. Moses said, please show me your glory. And he said, I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you my name, the Lord. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But he said, you cannot see my face. For man shall not see me and live. And the Lord said, behold, there's a place by me where you shall stand on the rock. And while my glory passes by, I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I've passed by. Then I'll take away my hand. And you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.*

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Would you pray with me?

*Father, we do need you to help us now to understand this very old account. We pray for understanding. We pray for illumination by the help of your spirit. We ask you to help us, Lord, in your word, to see from these places of shadow the substance that's found in the new covenant with your Son, our Lord Jesus. Help us with all this, we ask, in Christ's name, amen.*

We're in the time of year where I long to have a fireplace in my house because it's cold. And I would like to have the ability to heat our family the way that humans have heated their families since the beginning of humans. We've always had fire until last 70, maybe to 100 years. And some cheapskate builder decided, you know what? We've got a heat pump. Let's see if we can get by without building a fireplace. We can sell them cheaper. So for thousands of years of human history, the one thing that we've needed for survival, to not freeze to death in the winter, to be able to cook our food, to be able to boil water, and all of the things that we use fire for, some guy decided, you know what? Unnecessary. It's not needed anymore. Let's see if we can do without it. I have a personal vendetta against that guy as is evident. Every time I do think about what would it be like to have a fireplace in my house, I have also another very different set of thoughts. We're going to build a fire inside our house, which means you're only as good as the safety features of your particular fireplace, because one spark, that's all it takes. One spark, to lose everything that you have. So here we have this thing that humans have always needed. In a sense, we were made to depend on it and to require it for warmth and for health and life, and it might kill us and destroy everything that we have.

I thought of that historic reality this week, looking at this passage, a couple of different reasons. There's a place in the book of Hebrews where God is described as a consuming fire. God has this tendency in Exodus to show up as a pillar of fire. There's just a lot of fire going around here. And it kind of works. There's the possibility that to be near God could mean that you lose yourself and everything that you have and you're consumed. It's also the fact that all of creation and the people of God then and now, the whole point of existence is to be near God and to know Him and to not be consumed by Him.

So we might find ourselves a little bit like that builder in the 60s saying, yeah, we might need fire. Can we get by without it? We might be made for the presence of God, but we have so many other things in our lives now and so many other sort of God-like things that give us comfort and peace. Do we really need Him? As we look at this passage, we're going to see, simply put, we need God with us. Get the question then and now is, but do you want Him? So we're going to look at two what-ifs to make up our sermon outline here. What if He's not with us and what if He is?

So what if He's not with us?

As I said, this passage comes right after the famous account of the golden calf. You'll recall the details. Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the law from God. It was taking a while and the people got impatient and grumbly as they tended to do. They finally come to Moses' brother Aaron and they say, look, we've got to get going and we have to have a God to go with us. So we're going to bring you our jewelry, our ornaments, same idea, our golden ornaments. Make for us a calf that we can call Yahweh and we'll carry it with us. That way we make sure we have a God going with us through the wilderness. Moses comes down, he's furious, he breaks the tablets of stone, he burns the golden calf, and grinds it into powder, he makes the people drink the water that the powder was thrown into and that's not even the worst thing God shows up and says, I'm going to kill them all because of this breach of faith. It's over until Moses steps in and intercedes on behalf of the people and the Lord relents from that disaster.

So this passage comes immediately after that. They've been rescued from slavery in Egypt. They've been led through the wilderness and rescued at the Red Sea when their backs were to the water from the Egyptian army. They've seen the Lord descend on Mount Sinai in thunder and lightning in such fright that they said, Moses, you talk to him, we're pretty terrified. And they're on their way to the land of promise and at the beginning of chapter 33, the Lord comes to Moses and says, essentially, I'll tell you what I'll do. Look at verse 1. Go up from here. Go to the land that he swore to the patriarchs, the land that he promised to give them in Genesis. He's going to give them the land. Verse 2, he's going to send an angel before them. And that angel is going to drive out the Canaanites and the Amorites and all of the enemies, terrifying peoples that lived in that land. The angel will take them out, clear the land, they'll have it. And it'll be good land. Look at verse 3, it's a land flowing with milk and honey. That's hyperbole. But it just means that it's prosperous, it's abundant, it's got everything that you would ever need. So far so good. He'll give them what they want, he'll give them what they need, he'll fulfill all the

promises that he's made, he's going to drive out their enemies and it's going to be abundance and prosperity. One caveat, verse 3, I will not go up with you, lest I consume you on the way.

So he'll give them everything that he promised them. He'll make their way smooth, he'll deal with their enemies, but he's not going. That would be very different from what they'd experienced so far in the story of the Exodus. God had been accompanying them from the time of the plagues in Egypt and the Passover through every movement of the wilderness, leading them pillar of fire by night, pillar of cloud by day. He had just given them in the previous chapters if he went backward in the Book of Exodus. He just gave them the details of how they were to build this structure called the tabernacle, which was essentially a mobile tent where the Ark of the Covenant would dwell, where God would dwell with his people in symbol, and literally the camp of Israel would be all the way around it. In the center of the camp is the presence of God, because he promised to go with them. And now he says, because of this breach of faith, I am not going with you. In verses 7 through 11, we see how Moses would consult with the Lord. He built a tent, not the tabernacle, a sort of a proto tabernacle, and he put it way outside the camp. He has to move it to the far reaches where the people would have to look and see what Moses was doing because now there's distance. The Lord is not near his people. And it says in verse 4, they mourned. They took off their gold again, this time not to make a golden calf representing the Lord who they thought would go with them, but this time to show humility before the Lord who said he is not going with them.

Think about their situation though. Their sin is so serious that if God gets near them, he'll consume them. Why? Because he didn't stop being holy, and they didn't stop being rebellious. In this situation, God's presence would be their harm, not their good. God's presence is a danger to his people. This is not dissimilar to how in the story of Adam and Eve and that account how God kicked them out of the garden after their sin. It's true that that was judgment, that this was a penalty that they were getting. That's true, but it also, do you remember what it says? Less they eat of the tree of life and live forever. And what's often missed there is live forever in a fallen state apart from grace, apart from God. So it's judgment and it's mercy. Just like it is here, it's judgment and it's mercy. It's a bleak setup. I'll give you every good gift, the Lord says, but you don't get me.

Let's ask a few questions about that. We don't know the spiritual condition of the people of Israel necessarily in this passage and it's always unwise to psychologize an ancient people. They did have to be told to take off their ornaments in verse 5, so that's interesting. But God is telling them, you're going to get every good gift, but you're not getting me, let's think of how they could have responded. We see what they do respond. It could go the way that it happens where they repent and we're not sure the quality of their repentance, but they repent at some level. And Moses is their mediator and intercessor and they get God and his stuff. But imagine this. What if they said, okay, we get the land, you're going to send your angel to drive out all of our enemies, you're going to give us the land flowing with milk and honey and you're going to make sure that we're protected along the way and we're going to get all of these good gifts? Fantastic. Thanks for the lift out of Egypt. See ya.

That sounds a little crazy until we realize that millions of people, perhaps billions of people, do this exact thing every single day. This is what happens when a human being experiences and has good gifts from God. And let's not talk about the specific good gifts that are particular to the people of God. Let's just talk about good gifts from God that every human being gets. Every day, billions of people experience rain that gives them crops or they go to a job and they get paid or they buy groceries and supplies and clothes and vehicles, they send their kids to school. They enjoy their families. They have friends, they're wealthy or successful and they might say to God, appreciate that, but don't feel like you need to stay around, right?

Let me argue that if you're here and you're not yet a Christian, we're really glad that you're here. Even if you would not say that this is what your life is like and it may sound extreme, this is exactly what you're doing. Every good gift that God has given you and every good gift comes from the God who made you, to enjoy that thing without realizing that you were made for the one who gave you the thing. Here's what it is. It's evidence that something's gone horribly wrong. It's evidence of a heart level rebellion and it would be a good day to finally, for the first time, wake up to that and to realize, oh no, God has been so gracious to me and I have absolutely shunned him and to consider what it would mean to be restored to him through faith in Jesus.

We'll talk more about him in a moment. I'd love to tell you that only non-Christians live this way, right? Only people who don't know Jesus love his gifts and reject the giver. You, unfortunately, we do this too. Now my guess is that most of us don't go around saying, Lord, I'll take a healthy life and money and a good spouse and family, but just keep your distance, right? You probably don't say that. But what about this? What if God came to you and he offered you, this is hypothetical, so I hope that's clear, what if he came to you and said, you can be forgiven of your sin and that means you're not going to go to hell? And then you get to go to a place called heaven where there's no more sin, none of your sin, and other people are good now too, and they don't do bad things. And oh, and stuff works. Your house doesn't rot and your car never breaks, and the things that are supposed to grow, grow, and things that aren't supposed to grow, don't grow, and everything is just really great. One caveat, there's no God there. Would you take it?

Would you take that?

Could it be enough?

Could we even call it heaven?

The trouble for me, and I assume it's the trouble for you, is that I don't know when my heart has taken that turn. I can't always see it. What's a diagnosis that that's actually what I believe and think at the core of my being right now? What's a diagnostic for me? Here's one, there's lots, but take a look at the gratitude grumbling continuum.

We've all got a gratitude, grumbling continuum going on. And so when was the last time that you genuinely saw the good things that God was doing in your life? And you actually didn't just feel grateful, but you actually stopped, and you prayed, and you said to God, thank you, thank

you for this good thing, thank you for this blessing, thank you that you're the God who gives those things to me. Do you realize what happens when we are thankful? We're going back to God, we're giving proper credit for the good thing that we've experienced, but what it's doing is it's bringing us back to the one who gave it. And we're having to grapple with the fact that the good gift was great, but the one who gave it is greater, it's a really good practice, it's why we're called to gratitude.

What about the other side, grumbling? C.S. Lewis has a character in a book that evaporates into what he calls an infinite grumble, which is what I fear for my future, that's where I'm going to end up. I just turn into a grumble that never stops throughout all eternity. How much is it more often that you say, why won't my children just do what I want them to do? Why can't I make ends meet yet again? Why am I still sick and I can't get over this illness? That one is particular for me this week. What about for you? Where are you at on the gratitude, grumbling, continuum, and what might that diagnosis say about how you're feeling about the giver versus the gifts?

So a lot can go crazy if he doesn't go with us, it's a big what if. Again, it's hard to know the state of Israel's heart, they've grumbled a lot. But what would happen if they go the other direction? And they say, no, no, no, we want God to go with us. We can't do this without him. So let's look at that what if.

What if he does go with us?

Verses 12 and 13 is Moses' intercession. And he pleads on behalf of the people, the story here says that he met the Lord in the tent of meeting outside the camp and the pillar of clouds stood at the door of the tent. Moses would speak to the Lord like a man speaks with his friend, it's intimate language. Already you can see, this might make you think of a point in the gospel where Jesus wakes up early in the morning and he goes up on the mountain and he prays, this shadow here with Moses, a man speaking to God like it's his friend, substance in the New Testament, the Lord Jesus speaking to the Father.

Content of the discussion, verse 12, Moses lays out the problem, you're telling me to bring these people up to Canaan and you're not telling me who you're going to send with me, which is a humble way of saying, you're sending me with these people up there without you? He appeals to what the Lord has apparently already said to Moses, you've said, I know you by name, you found favor in my sight. So again, you tell me that you know me and that you're for me and you say, go up with these people without you, how can that be?

That word favor is the key to the entire passage, it's the word in the New Testament that we translate grace. He appeals in verse 13 to the grace of God. If I have in fact found grace in your sight, show me your ways that I may know you. There's a personal side of this from Moses, don't leave me, Lord, if you leave me, how can I know you? If you don't go with us, how can I know your ways? And then he appeals on behalf of the people, consider too that this nation is your people.

Why should he help them and go with them? He doesn't say, Lord, consider that this is a really great group of people, they're fantastic. He doesn't even say, this is a really numerous and strong and mighty group of warriors and you should consider them. He appeals to what just happened at the Exodus in Mount Sinai where the Lord made Israel his special covenant nation. He made them his own treasured possession. So Moses is simply saying, you've called them your people, don't forsake your people, and it builds on a previous covenant with Abraham where he said to Abraham, members of your family will be as numerous as the stars in the sky.

So he's saying, you've given me your favor, these are your people, you entered into a covenant with them and we see it, it teases out, verse 14, the Lord replies, my presence will go with you, singular, and I'll give you rest, singular, Moses, but that's not enough.

Moses appeals further, if your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. How will it be known that I have found favor in your eyes, I and your people? It's just not enough for God to be gracious to Moses. He's saying, no, no, no, no, this is about us.

He also appeals to God's reputation, if you see that in verse 16. How shall it be known, known by whom? All of the surrounding nations, how shall it be known that we have your favor? Is it not in your going with us?

That's what makes them distinct from every other nation on the face of the earth. It's the presence of Yahweh with his people that makes them distinct, and his reputation here is on the line. They are the covenant people that God rescued from Egypt, that he's led through the wilderness, the people that the nations fear because they've heard the works of the Lord. And he's saying, if you don't go up with us, the nations will mock your name and there will be nothing special and distinct about us. We will become a mockery too.

So the Lord responds and says, okay, verse 17, everything that you've asked, I'll do. We feel like that ought to be the end of the passage, right? That Moses interceded, he's the good mediator, the Lord responds to the request of the mediator. He's going to go with them, everything's going to be fine. And then it honestly feels like Moses gets greedy. Look at verse 18. Couldn't leave well enough alone. Please, show me your glory. Why is he asking him that question? Was there something lacking?

This is a practical way to ask the Lord to let Moses know his favor and to know his ways and to confirm his promise. You say you're going to go with us. You say we have your favor. You say we are special and distinct. Show us something of your, the word glory is the Hebrew idea of weight and substance and essence. Let me see something of your substantial weightiness. Show up, in other words, let me see you.

And you know how there could do 15 sermons on this alone, but you know how this goes. The Lord gives him as much as he can handle. Humans can't see the face of God and live. So it's this, he passes by, he proclaims his name. He hears more of his character. I'll be gracious to whom

I'm gracious. I'll show mercy to whom I have mercy. And then the Lord covers him in the cleft of a rock. It's a great way of speaking. God doesn't have hands in this passage, right? God is the spirit, doesn't have a body like man. And yet he says he's going to cover him with his hand. That's great language for humans because we know what that means. God is going to shelter and protect him in the rock. And he's going to pass by. And then he's going to remove his hand. And Moses is going to be able to see just a glimpse of the backside of the glory of God. And you just get the sense that that would be more than Moses would ever need for the rest of his life.

The end of this passage, because of Moses' intercession, the Lord will go with a rebellious obstinate people. The Lord will do for those people what he promised he would do for Moses. He will be gracious and he'll give them his presence and he's going to give them every good gift and he's going to give them his very self.

What if God is with us?

If he is, you don't just get his gifts. Those are great. You get his grace. You get his favor. You don't just get his protection against all of your enemies. You actually get the presence of the God who made you with you. And you don't just get a land of milk and honey. You get the one who thought up what milk and honey is, spoke it into existence and provides it as a good gift for his people, which means he must be so much better than milk and honey. He has to be.

We don't go to a proto tabernacle, tent of meeting, or a temple. So how can we see the glory of God like that? How can we behold the one who in his very presence is everything that we've ever needed?

We read it earlier. It's John the gospel writer who takes some of these themes and makes them really clear to us.

We read earlier. It's Jesus who's called the word. The word became flesh and he tabernacled among us. Literal Greek. He tented among us. There is a tent of meeting where the Lord shows up and it's in the person of Jesus Christ.

But do you remember what he said after that? It's not just that Jesus is the dwelling of God with man. John says, and we have seen his glory. Glory is of the only Son from the Father full of grace and truth. Do you realize what that means? That when those people in that day looked at the face of Jesus, they saw the glory of God. No man can see God and live and yet God in his great condescension and mercy puts on a body so that we can actually behold him and not just live but live.

After his ascension, we're told that he has sent the Holy Spirit now to indwell us. So we actually walk around not just beholding the Lord but indwelt by the Lord.

And every time we see the Lord Jesus on the pages of Scripture, you are looking into the face of the glory of God. It's an amazing thought.

Jesus is the mediator better than Moses.

He pleads based on better promises.

He pleads based on better works.

He pleads based on his own blood.

His own work is a high priest.

He pleads based on the fact that he came to take the justice owed to us who have preferred the gifts of God to God himself. We're the ones who've made a little golden calves as well. And he came to take God's justice in our place for it.

He took wrath and we get favor.

He is the one who is the radiance of the glory of God, the exact imprint of his nature.

So, do you realize what you have?

Yeah, God's good gifts.

Forgiveness of sin.

If you trust in Jesus, you're not going to go to hell when you die.

You will go to heaven.

And all the other blessings that he throws in throughout your life, and they're many. They're everywhere. But you get him.

You get God himself.

And you get him in such a way that his face is toward you and radiating in glory in such ways that we can't really contemplate. I don't know that we understand that we have been made and redeemed with capacities for glory and joy that we don't quite understand.

When we are finally before the Lord, we will have joy that we can't even imagine now.

We will see glory and it will hit something deep within us that we've never understood before.

It's why even people who have no knowledge of Jesus can see a great athletic performance or a ballet or go to a concert and they know there's something that's about this that's transcendent.

There's something here that's deep, it's hitting me at a place that needs to be hit. That's what it means to be made in the image of God. And when we come to faith in Christ, what we realize is that all of that longing has one proper fulfillment, and it's in God made flesh. Our Lord Jesus, we were made to behold him.

He is the fire that warms and gives life and keeps us forever and doesn't consume us because the Lord Jesus was consumed in our place.

That is the good news of the gospel and if you're here and you're not yet a Christian, that's what we need to talk about. What does it look like for you to trust Jesus to have stepped in your place and have taken God's judgment for you? Could you trust him to do that? Because here's the hard reality, it's as I said earlier, until you're united to God the Son, the presence of God is a danger for you.

That's what we miss.

To be in the presence of God apart from the mediator is our peril. It is a consuming fire. It's a good day to throw yourself on the Lord Jesus who took that fire for you and to know that if you're in Him, there's none of that fire remaining. We can see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, but we do have to look at His face.

Brothers and sisters, we talk about this at Advent, but we could talk about it in June. We could talk about it in September, it really doesn't matter. This is the point of creation, this is why you and I exist. It's why we have children, it's why the world carries on like it does, it's so that human beings made in the image of God can be restored to that image and can behold Him in His glory. That's what we were made for. So receive God's good gifts with more thanksgiving and less grumbling. He gives us so many good gifts, but realize that that's not the whole point. We have to have Him. To know Him and to enjoy Him, and we have His presence with us because of the work of His Son. We have the answer to the question, the request, show me your glory.

This season I hope that you will take opportunities to behold Him, to look in the Word, to be at worship, and to have the simplicity of getting your eyes on the Lord Jesus so that you might worship and know the presence of God with us. Let's pray.

*Lord you know what blinds us, you know what distracts us, you know the things that hijack our hearts, you know the reasons we grumble, you know the reasons we're not very thankful. Lord we can be just a mess. So by your Spirit's power according to your Word, because of your good purposes in Jesus, help us, change us, help us to see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. I pray that specifically for anyone here that doesn't know you yet, would you be gracious and open their eyes, and for all of us would you remove the cloudiness and remove the scales and help us Jesus to see you, and to find in you life and light. We pray in your name, amen.*