

Moses

Series: Heroes: Amazing Stories of Faith

Exodus 33:12-23

October 1, 2017

Welcome again everyone to worship. October 1st is here. I thought the summer went fast; someone simply stole September. Don't look now, but Advent and Christmas is just around the corner.

There were three people in heaven who decided one day to play a round of golf at the heavenly country club. The first man stepped up to the tee, hit his drive, and watched as it headed straight for the water hazard. Just as the ball was about to land in the water, he raised his club, pointed it out over the water, and the waters parted, allowing the ball to land on dry ground. He walked out between the two columns of water, and hit a perfect second shot, right in the middle of the green. One of his partners said, "Wow, good shot, Moses!"

The second man walked up to the tee, hit his drive, and watched as it took a nearly identical flight path, straight toward the water. But when the ball hit, it landed and stayed right on top of the water. He walked out across the water and hit a second shot which was also identical, landing at the center of the green. Moses told him, "Hey, that's a pretty good shot yourself, Jesus!"

Then the third man came to the tee box, teed up and hit his drive. The drive took a nasty slice and went straight into the trees, caroming off in the wrong direction, heading for the out-of-bounds marker. Right at that moment, a squirrel who happened to be nearby saw the ball and thought it might be good to eat, so it grabbed the ball and started running towards the fairway. When the squirrel was about halfway across the fairway, suddenly an eagle swooped down out of nowhere and grabbed the squirrel in its claws, flying away with both squirrel and ball. Just as the eagle's flight took it across the green, it lost its grip on the squirrel and dropped it. The squirrel landed flat on its belly, jarring the ball loose, which then took two bounces and landed squarely in the center of the cup.

Moses cast a disgusted glance at Jesus and said, "That's why I can't STAND to play golf with your Dad."

Based on the telling of this joke, you can surmise two things: I played golf yesterday in the Valley View Drug Free Coalition golf outing and had a wonderful time with Kent Genslinger, his son Kyle, and granddaughter Kylie. Secondly, today's hero and his amazing story of faith obviously is Moses.

I want to invite you to turn to page 5 in your bulletin as we consider this incredible man of faith. I'm sure you could think of several different stories of Moses that we might examine this morning: his face-off with Pharaoh, the greatest political leader in the region; the story of the Red Sea; you would think that this being World Communion Sunday, we would be looking at the giving of manna. No, I want to look at what I believe is an absolutely incredible passage in Exodus 33.

But first, I want to give us some background into the story.

- The Israelites have been freed after 400 years of Egyptian bondage. They are a people who do not know how to govern themselves, so they rely on Moses and his brother Aaron a great deal.

- They have escaped Pharaoh's army through the parting of the Red Sea.
- They became hungry in the wilderness and saw the introduction of manna every morning except the Sabbath.
- They witnessed water come from a rock when they were thirsty.
- They have arrived at the foot of God's mountain, Mt. Sinai. Exodus 19:16-20 tell us the story:

On the morning of the third day, thunder roared and lightning flashed, and a dense cloud came down on the mountain. There was a long, loud blast from a ram's horn, and all the people trembled. Moses led them out from the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. All of Mount Sinai was covered with smoke because the LORD had descended on it in the form of fire. The smoke billowed into the sky like smoke from a brick kiln, and the whole mountain shook violently. As the blast of the ram's horn grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God thundered his reply. The LORD came down on the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses climbed the mountain.¹

- While on the mountain, Moses received a number of directions from God regarding community life of this new nation and people, including the most famous of all: the Ten Commandments.
- Yet, below, at the base of the mountain, the people grew restless of waiting. It was kind of like when you were in elementary school, and the teacher had to leave the room for some reason. They would say, "Be quiet and study!" However, we also remember that as soon as the teacher left the room, the paper wads would begin to fly! Erasers would be flung across the room while someone would draw caricatures of the teacher on the blackboard. And then, she would return. There was always that last minute adjustment as we scurried back to our seats and pretended nothing had been going on.
- After 40 days, the Israelites assumed that Moses was dead. They hadn't heard or seen neither hide nor hair from the guy who went up the mountain into the firestorm up there. So they convinced Moses' brother Aaron to fashion for them a golden calf. And they began to worship it with all sorts of debauchery.
- God sent Moses down from the mountain because of what the people were doing.
- Moses was so upset about what he found that he tossed the tablets with the Ten Commandments written with God's own hand and broke them into pieces.
- He stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me." And of all the people, only the tribe of Levi rallied to him.² The rest was done with Moses and God.
- God punished the people for their wickedness with at least 3,000 people dying and others suffered from a plague.
- Then God says this incredible thing in the beginning of Exodus 33. He tells Moses, "Go ahead and lead the people to the Promised Land, but I'm not going with you. I've had it with them. You go; I'm not."

¹ Exodus 19:16-20 (NLT)

² See Exodus 32:26

This is the background of our passage today. After everything God had done for the Israelites, God is sick and tired of their continued whining, lack of faith, and wickedness. He is ready to abandon them.

And here is where we will focus today, as Moses tries to pick up the pieces after an incredibly colossal failure of the people, to coax God back to them, and this is what we will learn today. Write this down in your bulletin:

Moses: Depended on God and His presence.

Let's look at Exodus 33. We are only going to have time to focus on verses 12-14 this morning:

Moses said to the LORD, "You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.' If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people." The LORD replied, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."³

To help us get a handle on this passage, I've put a chart in your bulletin. Let's break down this passage.

We see a back and forth between Moses and the Lord – Moses saying what he believes God said, then says something to God, to which God replies.

First, Moses says in verse 12:

"You have been telling me, 'Lead these people,'..."⁴

So put in the first empty box at the top left, "Lead the people (v. 12a)."

Moses is right here. After the golden calf incident, God is done with them, so He tells Moses to lead the people.⁵ So that is what Moses said God said.

Next, Moses says something. In the second part of verse 12:

"You have been telling me, 'Lead these people'... but you have not let me know whom you will send with me..."⁶

Moses is appealing to God. "You've always been there for me. Now, if You leave, who is going to go with me? I can't do this by myself." Write in the top middle box, "Who will go with me? (v. 12b)"

So often, we try to go through life on the power, resources, wit and wisdom of ourselves. It is, in essence, THE original sin. God says one thing, but I know better. I can do a better job running my day-to-day life. If a bad time does come, well then I'll say something to God.

COMMENT.

But Moses is appealing to God here. He is calling upon God's compassion. "Lord, You said before You would be there and I have depended upon You all this way. If You leave, who will go with me now?"

This is profound folks, even heroic. Every single one of us must realize and admit that we cannot tackle this life on our own, and our money, our marriage, our job, our health, our status, our wisdom, will not lead us into any Promised Land. On the contrary,

³ Exodus 33:12-14 (NIV)

⁴ Exodus 33:12a (NIV)

⁵ See Exodus 32:34; also Exodus 3:10

⁶ Exodus 33:12a-b (NIV)

left to ourselves, we will not find a Promised Land, but like the prodigal son, we will find ourselves in such a lowly place that the slop we are feeding the pigs looks good to us.

Moses is telling God, "I need somebody, and that somebody is You."

God responds in verse 14:

*"My Presence will go with you..."*⁷

Write that down in the top right box: "My Presence will go with you (v. 14a)"

COMMENT

Let's keep going here. Moses repeats the formula. Back to verse 12:

*... You have said, 'I know you by name and you have found favor with me.'*⁸

Write in the bottom left box, "I'm known and favored by God (v. 12c)"

I want you to think about that for a moment. I'm known and favored by God. How many times have you wondered if God knows what's going on in your life, if He cares? Moses believes God does.

Then Moses says something. Verse 13:

*If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways so I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.*⁹

Write down in the bottom middle box, "Teach me Your ways (v. 13)."

When was the last time you prayed that prayer? "Lord, teach me Your ways."

That should be our prayer every morning when we rise: "Lord, teach me Your ways."

That should be our petition every time we open our Bible: "Lord, teach me Your ways."

That should be our desire as we come to church: "Lord, teach me Your ways." That should be our cry through each and every moment of our lives: "Lord, teach me Your ways."

God responds in verse 14:

*... I will give you rest.*¹⁰

Write that down in the bottom right hand box: "I will give you rest (v. 14b)."

That sounds like an odd statement, but it is absolutely true. When we seek God and only God, all the other things of life fall to the wayside. Our worries, our anxieties, our plans, our striving, our pride and prejudices, our need to control – all fall away, because God gives us rest from those things.

So the decision you and I need to make is this: will we put all this work into trying to live and figure out life, or will you and I focus our moments in seeking God's ways? Which sounds like an easier and more fruitful way of living?

I need to wrap this up today, but I want to leave you with this closing thought.

Write this down:

Practice the presence of God to prepare for His plan for tomorrow.

Don't focus on what tomorrow brings; practice God's presence today.

Jesus said it as well, and I will leave you with this.

*But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.*¹¹

⁷ Exodus 33:14a (NIV)

⁸ Exodus 33:12c (NIV)

⁹ Exodus 33:13 (NIV)

¹⁰ Exodus 33:14 (NIV)

¹¹ Matthew 6:33 (NKJV)