

Longing for God

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[0 : 0 0] So please turn back to Exodus chapter 33. Now, just to mention something just as we start, I think in many ways, lots of life can be defined by a couple of things that is important, I think, to most of you.

Most of you would recognize that these two things are very important to you. And that is people and travel. People and travel are the people you spend your life with and the places you go.

These are important, aren't they, many different ways? Maybe particularly in our very visual media age nowadays. Think about adverts. All kinds of adverts rely on people and places.

You could sell a car or a camera or a kind of Pepsi on an image of some fun-looking people in a very fun-looking place.

That's really all you need. And then you just stick your product in there and you've got a perfect recipe for an aspirational-looking advert. So people and places, and you know, you may be considering, and they're good. People and places are good.

[1 : 1 5] I'm not critiquing this in any way. It's just an observation. At the start of the year, maybe these are some of the things that are on our minds. Where will I go this year? So literally, where will I go?

Where will I go in my experiences? Where will I go in my career? Who will I go there with? Equally important. Who will be with me in general terms?

Who will I surround myself with? Who are the people that will be with me in these actual experiences? For good or bad, maybe. But places are huge to you and I at a very basic human level.

This is a section of God's Word that has to do with those very things, people and places. You may have picked up from the reading, it's a very, very integral part in the, if you like, the development, the growth of God's people, the Israelites.

Because at this point, God says to them, go to a place that I have promised you. So there's some people going to a particular place with a very key question for these particular people in this time and space in history is, who will go with them?

[2 : 3 3] Because the very sobering thing that God says to them through Moses right at the start of his communication is, I will not go with you. Now that's a shattering thing for God to say to these people.

I will not go with you. So it's a very dramatic passage. You may have not felt that when I was reading it, but think about these people and who they are. Just as we begin this section, let's just consider for a moment, who are these people and what does it mean for God to say this?

Well, these are, just to remind ourselves, the covenant people of God. These are the people who were becoming the covenant people of God. They were supposed to be on their way to the promised land with their God, who had said to them, I will be your God and you will be my people, and I will establish you in a land very significant for them.

And in that land, they were to be the people who were separate from the other nations because they knew the one true God. They worshiped him. They loved him.

They, amongst all the people, surely should have been those who longed for God in a consistent, ongoing way in their individual and collective lives and experience.

[3 : 47] They were to be those set apart to honour God and to be like a light amongst the nations, proclaiming him for who he was. But rather than longing for God, it had been their recent experience to have taken God and to say, thank you very much.

You can stay here on the margins of our collective existence, or worse. We're just going to forget about you. As I mentioned, the previous chapter is a chapter where they lost the plot.

Moses was with God, receiving the Ten Commandments and different instructions that he was giving him. As a preparatory thing, these people were supposed to be hearing from their God as they were about to set out on this journey to the Promised Land.

And they completely forgot about God, and they said, we're going to make this statue our God. It will serve our needs. It will become our identity. It will become the thing that we worship. It will become the idol, literally, and the idol of our hearts.

So they didn't long for God at that particular time in their existence. They put God completely to one side. You and I can do that, can't we?

[5 : 04] We can do that in a big way by saying, I want nothing to do with God. Or we can do that in incidental ways, almost. It would seem incidental throughout our daily lives. Just make one decision at a time just without reference to God.

Making decisions about the people that we spend time with, or the places we go. Or whatever it is, most significantly, of course, just the very fact of having him in our lives longing for him because he is worthy of that, because he is God, but we put him to one side.

Because we think, well, frankly, there are more interesting things. There are more significant things. There are more fulfilling things than God. And so we constantly have to ask ourselves the question, is my heart set on this God who is worthy of my worship?

Do I long for him? That's the question I want you to ask yourself tonight. And amongst all of that you have to do, the places you have to go, the people you will be with, who you are as a person, do you long for him?

So the consequences of what the Israelites had decided to do were disastrous, weren't they? Just one more thing, just in thinking about these people as we get into this chapter.

[6 : 18] What's the significance of them becoming a people under the Lordship of God? Is that they were to be his people. They were going into this place, the Promised Land of Canaan, not just because it was a nice place and God wanted them to have a nice time, but because there they would set up a tent, a tabernacle.

There in time they were to set up a temple, because there amongst them God was to come and to dwell with them. That's what's so significant, isn't it? That he was to be there with them and were to have centrally in their consciousness and in their city the Lord God dwelling with them as he came down and dwelt on the tabernacle over the most holy place.

That was the key thing, but he was there. And that's what's pivotal in this chapter. And so for him to say to Moses, we start off the chapter, depart, go from here, off you go, off to the Promised Land.

Which I promised to you? To Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. And then he says in verse 3, but I will not go up among you. Don't miss that.

To not have God go up with them to the Promised Land was shattering. Just say that again. Because then they could have no tabernacle. Why would they go to the Promised Land, build a tabernacle, build a temple?

[7 : 45] There was no God to be there to dwell with them. They were just going there by themselves. Maybe they would have a nice time. Maybe they would have lots of crops. But there would be no God.

He says, I will not go up with you. I will send an angel, he says, to make sure you get there. He's saying, I'll make sure you get there. I will send my angel to be with you. But I will not go up with you.

Now, if you can just put yourselves in these people's shoes for a minute, that's fine. But if you can then think about that for yourself just for a minute, does that strike you as a significant thing that you look forward in your life into what may be coming?

You think about yourself now. And think about this thing. Do you have the presence of God now? How does it sound to you that you would go forward in your life without God?

He's not there. Maybe because you say, I don't want you, God. Maybe because you say, I want other things more than you. To not have the presence of God is to not have life.

[8 : 52] To not have life, because we are those who are made in His image, to know Him and to worship Him. That was the purpose of these people, to be those who knew Him and who held Him out as their God.

So this thing that God says to them at the start of this chapter is absolutely devastating. And for you and I, the prospect of not having God in our lives is absolutely devastating.

So I want to then pick out something that comes to the fore, and that is a person. Moses is very significant in this chapter. And he's a very significant person in this chapter because of a particular role he has to play.

Now Moses already had this role, but I want to just bring it out a little bit and see the significance of it. So having looked at this situation that the people find themselves in with this devastating word that comes from God, I want to look at Moses, the mediator.

That's the role he had. He was the mediator. So we'll look at the mediator at work. What does Moses do in this chapter? And then I want to finish by looking at the mediator's longing, just to come back to that idea again of longing.

[10 : 07] So first of all, the mediator at work. Moses comes to the fore, doesn't he? And it's very significant what he has to do in the role that he has to play. God has, after all, delivered this message to him.

He is the one who, in a sense, has this priestly role, prophetic role in that he hears from God and he makes known to the people what God would say to him. There's that section in the middle of the chapter, remarkable section, even in and of itself, which I'll not spend a lot of time on, which describes how, apart from the tabernacle, Moses used to set up a smaller tent outside the camp.

Now, maybe significantly outside the camp, at a time when the Israelites were in rebellion against God. The relationship was fractured. It does describe them, in a sense, repenting.

They take off their ornaments as a sign of dismay. But still, there is this sense of fragmentation in the relationship between themselves and God. Moses is the one who sets up this tent outside the camp because he is the one who goes there and it speaks about him meeting God face to face, as it were.

He's actually able to communicate with God as a friend, wonderfully intimate relationship Moses has, very unique relationship that Moses has, not just for his own benefit, because he is the one who acts on behalf of the people.

[11 : 31] He's the mediator. Now, mediator is very significant. It is always the case that people need a mediator before God because God is God.

He is so extraordinarily holy, perfect. You and I can't just come into His presence by ourselves because we feel like it. The people always had a mediator who represented them before God.

God always spoke through a mediator, through a prophet, various people throughout His Word so that they could hear from Him. And of course, this role, just to bring this out a little bit more, this role of mediator is so significant to you and I still today because the role that Moses fulfilled here was ultimately itself only possible because of Jesus and His mediatorial role.

He is now your mediator based on what He has done as He took on our sin, as He paid the penalty for our sin. He satisfied all righteousness.

And the Bible describes Him even now as interceding at the right hand of God for you if you trust. So even now this concept of the mediator is so significant because if you know the Lord as your Savior, you have one in heaven who knows you by name and who speaks on your behalf in the throne room of heaven.

[13 : 01] And He does that because He wants you to be in relationship with God and to know salvation and to know Him and His goodness. So this idea of mediator is so significant.

Moses operated on behalf of the people. Just to consider the role that Moses played for a minute, there's been a lot of kind of consternation in the press, maybe in your thinking at the moment about negotiators or mediators to do with Brexit.

So one of the big who has that we have at the moment is do we as a nation have enough skilled negotiators, mediators to operate in this national situation we find ourselves in where we've got to work out what it looks like to leave Europe and all the rest of it.

So don't worry. Now, in that particular role, what happens? Well, certain people represent a nation, but the key thing there is they're trying to see what kind of a deal they can get.

And the key thing with that is that the terms are uncertain. We don't know. We don't really have all the... If you like the benchmarks in place, it kind of seems like it's down to the skill or however it turns out at the time in terms of how these negotiators are going to get on.

[14 : 21] That's not the kind of negotiator, mediator, intermediary that Moses is to be here. It wasn't like the Israelites said, okay, Moses, please go and speak to God on our behalf. See how you get on.

Moses didn't have to have a good day before God in order to speak on behalf of the people because it was never about him and his skill. It wasn't about how God was feeling, whether he was feeling benevolent or not towards the people, because he's not a capricious God.

It was always about... And this is what Moses was always able to go to God in the terms of the covenant that God had made himself with his people.

That's so significant for these people. God himself had said to them in time in history, I will be your God and you will be my people.

I want you to be my people because of his love and his grace. He wanted them to be a people for himself. He had set the terms of the covenant. So this is what Moses does remarkably.

[15 : 23] He goes to God and doesn't just say, please, he doesn't just say, let me give you a bunch of reasons why I think it would be a good idea for you to do X, Y and Z. He goes to him and he speaks to him based on the terms of what God has promised.

And that's what I want to bring out just as we look through a few examples of what Moses says. That also is always the foundation upon which you and I go before God.

You don't have to wake up tomorrow morning and think, I really hope God will accept me today because God has said to you that if you come to him in the name of Jesus, recognizing your need of him, based on the finished work of Jesus, you have a solid foundation.

Those are the grounds, those are the terms upon which you come to God. And so you can come to him with confidence, though you may feel anything but confident because you are maybe very aware of your own sinfulness, how far you've been away from God, for how long you've been ignoring God.

God will never accept me now, nor he will because he said to you that if you come, recognizing all he has said to you, the promises he has made to you in Jesus Christ, where Jesus Christ himself became the sacrifice and himself the mediator of this new covenant, those are the terms upon which you can be assured that he will now accept you.

[16 : 47] That is the wonderful promises of God. Hebrews speaks a lot about this work, this new mediatorial work of Jesus. I won't go into that just now, but you can go there if you're interested.

Now let me just now pick out a few aspects of what Moses does. Let's see this actually at work now. I have four things I just want to pick out briefly. Moses is obviously distressed by the situation.

He realizes this is a very significant thing because he, as the covenant mediator, as the one who represented the people before God, and he knew thoroughly what it was that God intended for his people, Moses wants that for the people.

He wants them to remain God's people. He wants them to remain within the covenant. Now Moses himself wasn't perfect, and I'm not suggesting that, but at this point in time, Moses is operating according to his role.

He's operating how God wants him to. So the first thing that we see is this. Verse 16, let me just say this. In verse 16, I'm really just going to be focusing in on this kind of latter section of the chapter now.

[17 : 56] And this is obvious, but Moses recognizes that it's no good for them to go up to the promised land if God does not go with them.

It's no good. It may be beautiful. It may be a whole new world, a brave new world for them to explore, but if God is not there, it's no good.

And so he says that to him, for how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I on your people, is it not in your going with us?

This is what he wants. He wants God to remember that he is to go with his people. And so that immediately comes back to the personal question for you and I, about any kind of venture that we face in our lives, any situation that we have.

You yourself right now, and who you are, the situations you face, the places you have to go, do you know that it's no good unless God goes with you, unless he's your God, he's your personal God, that you can say, he is my Lord, he knows me by name, and I will trust in him wherever he will take me.

[19 : 11] Just that, just to start off. Sometimes we think in terms of life like God blesses us if we get to do lots of really great stuff, and the way we think about blessing is, well, all these things have happened, and they were really exciting and really fun, therefore I must be blessed.

But think in terms of if nothing remarkable happens to you this year, it's just an ordinary year, which is absolutely fine. You just go about your work, and maybe you see the same people.

But you know the Lord with you, that's what makes the difference. And so we can go to the ends of the earth and have all kinds of experiences, or we can stay in the same place and do the regular stuff.

But the question is, is the Lord with you? Second thing Moses does, in verse, let's go back to verse 13, and again, I've kind of already brought this out, but the persistence that he shows in prayer is based on the promises that God has made.

Moses goes to God on his terms. So verse 13, I'll read from verse 12, Moses said to the Lord, see, you say to me, bring up these people, but you've not let me know whom you'll send with me.

[20 : 29] Then he goes on to verse 13, and I say to you, I'm not going to find favor in your sight. Please show me now your ways that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight.

And here's the thing, consider too that this nation is your people. See what he's saying there? He's bringing God back, not that God had forgotten, but he's bringing God back to his established terms of this.

These people were God's people, because God had said they were his people, and Moses is coming to God according to these terms. So remember your promises, be faithful to your promises.

These are your people. Moses is representing these people to speak to God and say, remember these people, desperate though they are.

What Jesus does for you, if you're trusting in him, though we sometimes go off the path, when we come back we have Jesus saying, Jesus is operating as an advocate on your behalf, based on his finished work, always based on what he has done.

[21 : 35] So his persistence in prayer isn't just because he's being stubborn, isn't just because he's a determined kind of guy, it's because he recognizes what God had said he would do, and he's saying, God, do what you have said you will do.

Establish your people, go up with them to the land. Third thing, verse 14 to 15, this is interesting.

God speaks to him because he finds favor with him, Moses. Now, God recognizes that Moses is operating according to his job.

He's the covenant mediator, and he's being faithful to that. And so God recognizes that about Moses, and he speaks to Moses favorably. So in verse 14 and 15, we read these words, and God said, my presence will go with you, and I will give you rest to Moses.

And then he goes on, and he said to him, if your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. Now, do you see what happens there? He goes on to Moses and says, I find favor with you.

[22 : 51] Moses continues by saying, you must still go up with us. He's still operating on behalf of the covenant promises of God to the people.

Moses is being faithful to the job that he had been given, but his regard, if you like, the breadth of his thinking, and his praying, and his concern, is for God's covenant promises for his covenant people.

So that has something to say to you and I about the way we consider the way we think about ourselves and the church, so that we don't just think individualistically and personally and potentially selfishly.

We seek the blessing of God for ourselves in that we want him to know us, and we want to be found by him. And we seek that for our brothers and sisters in Christ.

So the question, just in applying this right now, is are your prayers covenant to prayers? Are they kingdom prayers? Are you praying on behalf of your brothers and sisters who you sit next to?

[23 : 55] Are you praying for the outreach initiatives that are going on? All the different works of the church. We're not doing this just for the sake of it. We're doing this to honor the Lord and because of his commission, go and make disciples.

So in the same sense that Moses went to the Lord and said, according to what you have revealed that you wish to do with the people, I will pursue you in prayer. So you and I go to the Lord and say, Lord, I seek you with all my heart, and I will pray for my brothers and sisters because I want them to be established in Christ's likeness.

I want them to grow in grace. I want my neighbors and my friends to come to know Jesus. And we have these big prayers that are kingdom focused prayers and that are more than just the incidental things, important though they are, that we go through in our lives.

So that's the third thing. Kingdom focused prayers, covenant focused prayers. And then the fourth thing, just under this umbrella of the mediator at work, is that God responds favorably because he is pleased with Moses.

This ties in very much with the work of Jesus. And I just want us to bring that back again to the work of Jesus, how this ties into what Jesus did on our behalf and how it is that God accepts you and I.

[25 : 19] So see what God says in verse 17, and the Lord said to Moses, this very thing that you have spoken, I will do, for you have found favor in my sight and I know you by name.

Now again, Moses wasn't a perfect human being, but in his role at this point in time as a covenant mediator, he's acting faithfully. And because of that, God says, I am pleased with what you have done.

And because of what you have done, acting on behalf of these people, I will hear your prayers. And he accepts and he recognizes the prayer that Moses makes. That is always the way that we come before God and are accepted because of what, because when God looks at the work that Jesus did, he sees perfection.

And because he sees the perfection of Jesus, if you or I are covered by the perfection of Jesus Christ, then that is how God sees you or I. And therefore we have relationship with him.

And we know peace and we find favor with him. And we are, you are, his covenant people based on the work that Jesus Christ has done on your behalf.

[26 : 31] So the persistence of Moses in prayer was so key, wasn't it? This covenant based prayer that he makes to God, the mediator at work.

So we've seen this general situation that the people face, the dreadfulness of it, the way that Moses has interceded on their behalf and God's response, his favorable response.

I'm going to finish with this. I haven't seen the mediator at work. The mediator's longing. Just to bring that back to that issue of longing again.

The mediator's longing in the very last section, Moses' longing as he goes on to describe it, is God himself.

He's not just feeling particularly benevolent himself towards the Israelite people, his people. Moses isn't just kind of working out his nine to five. He's not just doing his job.

[27 : 27] He's not just being a good mediator. He wants the people to know the presence of God. And it's rooted in this. He himself wants to know the presence of God.

That is the important thing for him, because see what he goes on to say. This is what he goes on to say in these verses. The Lord said to Moses, it's the very thing that you've spoken I will do if you've found favor in my sight.

Show me your glory. Show me your glory. Moses has this innate understanding that the thing that he needs, maybe think about it like this, a moment in time, this crystal clear point that Moses gets to where he sees, what I need right now, as I have to go on in this role as the covenant mediator, not an easy job, lead these people, all the things that are coming my way, he's thinking, I've got a really clear sense of the glory of God.

That's what I really want. That's what I really need to be able to do this thing. And so then we get this wonderful passage that I'm not going to go into. You can go home again and read it, where he asks to see God.

And in this amazing condescension, God in part reveals something of his glory to Moses. This wonderful experience that Moses gets, he asks for it because it's what he wanted.

[28 : 56] He needed to see the glory of God. He longed to see the glory of God. So let's finish with that because that's what you and I need also, isn't it?

That is the potential for you as a Christian, if you're a Christian, to know something of the glory of God. And of course, you and I see that now. Moses, in this slightly mysterious way, saw this experience of the glory of God.

And you and I look back to the finished work of Christ on the cross. This great humiliation, where he was simultaneously most glorified in his grace and in his wonderful finished work, so that you can have absolute confidence that when you approach him now, again as it says in Hebrews, as we approach the throne of grace, we approach confidently because of this finished work.

What glory, what a glorious Savior. So then our prayer becomes, wherever you go this year, wherever you do, Lord show me your glory, along to see your glory.

In the new office I'm going to, in my travels, in my new relationships, keep me within a clear sense of the glory of God.

[30 : 07] And that's the greatest thing we can ask for, to know his salvation which makes that possible, so that we can know him.

And you know, this is what God wants for us also. That's remarkable, isn't it? Because we don't go to God and say, Moses didn't come to God and say, please show me your glory and God said, no.

He wanted him, he expressed to him that he couldn't see his full glory, he couldn't deal with it. But God wanted Moses, God wanted his people to look for him.

And he still wants the same for you and I, so that he can reveal his glory, so that we can have a sense of his greatness and of his goodness, so that we can see the purpose of all things.

Because that's what we're for, after all. And so Jesus, I find myself back in this passage often these days, Jesus in John chapter 17 says these words, these wonderful words as he's praying, for his people, and we just finish with these words.

[31 : 20] And consider these are the words of Jesus as he prays for his people, for his church. This is what he wants for you. Father, I desire that they also whom you have given me, may be with me where I am to see my glory that you have given me because you loved me before the foundation of the world.

So Jesus' desire is that his people would be with him to see his glory. And that begins now as you call on his name, as he helps you by his Holy Spirit leading you, and as you look forward to glory, when you will one day see his face.

Let me pray. Lord, we just asked that you would give us a sense of your awesomeness. Thank you for all the different things that we may do in life, the gifts that you've given us, and the great benefit of friendship and people and places that we may go.

And we pray that by your Holy Spirit you would stir us up to long for you so that you would be there with us in all things that we would know you as Saviour and as Lord and as Comforter and as Counselor and as Guide.

Give us this we ask in Jesus. Amen.