

Exodus in Biblical Perspective
The Heart and Purpose of the Gospel
Exodus 33
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January 3, 2010 – Evening Sermon

Our text for this study is in Exodus 33. Before we look at the text I would like to ask you to consider a couple of things. Why have I come to this text? Why have I inserted it here on this Sunday night? First of all, this is one of my favorite passages of Scripture. It has so been used of the Lord to reorient me and to keep me focused in the direction of my life because in it I believe the heart of the Gospel is declared. That's one of the reasons I wanted to go through this tonight. I want to ask you to become almost an evangelist of this sermon, not that it's going to be that great of a sermon but just the basic content of it is so crucial for us to be sharing with each other as we go into this year of celebration. Many people ask me as the second pastor at Briarwood, what is your evaluation of what God has used to bless this congregation over the 50 years it has existed with a great anticipation of the future until Christ comes? There would be many things I could say. There is the boldness and humility of the leadership of this church that I have had the privilege to watch and benefit from. This church has a great commitment to the Word of God and intercessory prayer. I could go on and on and by no means am I going to continue because I could not exhaust the list there is and I would probably leave something out that later on I wished I hadn't left out.

There is one thing I want to make very clear. With all of our fallibles and all of our foibles this church has been committed to being centered upon Christ and driven and empowered by the Gospel of grace in Jesus Christ. It is a Christ-centered and Gospel-driven congregation. That has been a 50 year legacy that we want to build on as we move forward. But we live in a society today, including the marginalization of Biblical Christianity where there are a lot of temptations and while we want to explore everything that is appropriately innovative in reaching the post modern age, realizing that methods ultimately effect your message, the one thing that we cannot do is move away from the Gospel ministry as defined in the Word of God. We can't have another Gospel. The threat of another Gospel being preached in the early church was so overwhelmingly distasteful to the Apostle Paul that he was willing to confront the Apostle Peter, as Peter was starting to fall prey to those who would introduce a works gospel instead of a Gospel of grace. It is the Gospel that is so crucial. It is the Gospel blessing of the deliverance from our sins, the Gospel responsibilities of repenting of our sin and walking for Christ and before Christ. There are the Gospel imperatives of preaching the Gospel and living the Gospel to this world but if you get the Gospel wrong then you are not blessing the Lord.

One may say, "Harry we get a lot of people coming to the church. Look at the numbers." While I want the churches of Jesus Christ to be full, I want them to be full in churches that are preaching the Gospel. The Apostle Paul said to the religious people of his age and his day, "You transverse all of creation to make one convert but after you have done it you have made him a child of hell, twice the child of hell that he was and that you are." We want people to be conformed to the image of Christ but you can't be conformed to the image of Christ until you are transformed by the Gospel of Christ. And

you can't be transformed by the Gospel until you are informed by the Gospel. You have to be informed with Biblical truth of what the Gospel is, be transformed by the Gospel, and conformed with the Gospel of Christ. So do we, are we and will we maintain our grip on the Gospel to believe it, preach it and share it to the world?

I'm not speaking right now of the subtlety of liberalism in Christianity, which by the way is no Christianity at all. Liberalism is an anathema to Christianity. It's not just some mistaken notions. It is anathema. It is antipathetic to Christianity. I am speaking of what is in the realm of the professing evangelical church today, not the nominal church and its flight and descent into liberalism but within the evangelical church.

There is this redefining of the gospel that's using Gospel terms. It talks about the cross. It talks about believing in Jesus. It talks about committing to Jesus. It says you can't live without Him and all of those things but it defines the Gospel as something the Gospel is not. The gospel is transformed into a therapy session where the whole purpose of the gospel is that Jesus died on the cross so that I could maintain my self esteem. So there's this therapy gospel that's out there. Then of course the one that's running rampant today is a prosperity gospel where Jesus died on the cross so that you and I could be healthy, wealthy and wise in the eyes of the world. Jesus died on the cross so that by faith I can name it and claim it. By faith whatever I desire I ought to be able to believe it and receive it. The whole point of Jesus' death on the cross is that a life defined by this world is good and can now be yours. Then there is the whole notion that Jesus died on the cross to give us direct access to whatever miracle we want at whatever time we want.

Let me be very clear here. I believe that prosperity from the Lord can be a blessing and I also think it can be a curse. I believe adversity from the Lord can be His discipline and it can also be His painful gift of blessing. I believe the Lord does have a route in which our self, not esteem, but our self respect can be put in place and the route is not self exaltation and self significance. The route is self denial. I also believe that God does the miraculous and I have seen it time and time again. I have seen it on many occasions from His normal Providence to His special Providence to His miraculous. So I know that God can and does these things but the purpose of the Gospel is not to give me a miracle. It's not the purpose of the Gospel to give me more money. It's not the purpose of the Gospel for me to feel better about myself.

There is a direct purpose of the Gospel and that is that I have Christ and Christ has me. I am delivered from my sins to my Savior. At any point in time that I began to disembark from the sufficiency of Jesus Christ, who alone satisfies the soul, or that I take at any point in time even the blessings of the Gospel and put them in place of the Savior Himself, I am departing from the Gospel. I cannot take the blessings of the Lord and create idols in place of the Lord. While I'm grateful for salvation, I want to ask the Lord to allow me to believe, preach and know a Gospel, my greater joy is and my soul is satisfied with my Savior, I want to rejoice in the Lord. I want to delight in His presence, I want His presence to be my chief desire and the goal of my heart because that's the purpose of the Gospel.

This Gospel of Jesus Christ, this glorious message that we are delivered from our sins to our Savior is a glorious Gospel that declares in His presence is joy evermore. Thankfully church history and the Bible are full of Gospel delivered heroes of the faith that with all of their weaknesses, frailties and faults, who have been saved by grace,

whom God uses to keep us on track and one such glorious trophy of grace that reminds us of this is Moses. Now let's look in Exodus 33 our text for this study.

Exodus 33:1-6 says, *1 The Lord said to Moses, "Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have 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.' 2 I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. 3 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." 4 When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. 5 For the Lord had said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you.'" 6 Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.*

Today's gospel has been subtly infiltrated by the exaltation of consumerism, by the exaltation of the rescued themselves instead of the Rescuer, Jesus Christ. Today's gospel has become something of miracle entitlements, personal prosperity, self esteem, all of those things but what is the purpose and heart of the Gospel of Jesus Christ? Here we see in the book of Exodus that God has fulfilled His Word. Over 400 years prior to this He has said to Abraham in a covenant promise, "I'm going to make you a people, I'm going to make you a nation, I'm going to give you a land but first I'm going to put you among a people who are not My people and I'm going to use those people to refine you. I'm going to keep you there under bondage until the sins of the Amorites in the land that I'm going to give you has come to fullness and when that sin has come to fullness (430 years later) I will take you out. I will deliver you. You will be My people and I will give you My land and this will be a beautiful land. It will be your land. What makes it beautiful is not that it's any prettier than Egypt, not that it's any prettier than Mesopotamia, but I will be with you in that land. That's what will make it beautiful." The Lord has fulfilled His promises.

Some 400 years later, He has raised up Moses and had taken them out with a strong right hand with the plagues that fell upon Egypt, with miracles that delivered them even through places like the Red Sea. Then as the Lord brought them from Exodus 1 through Exodus 19 He has delivered them until He gets to the point of Exodus 20 where Moses ascends upon the mountain to receive the Law of God that had to be given so that we might see our need of a Savior and that we might know the glory of a Savior. As the Law of God is being given with all of its intricacies – the consecration of the priest, the ceremonies, and all of those things, from Exodus 20 to Exodus 31, as it is being given the people begin to play the harlot. The very gold that He had secured for them from the people of Egypt that had been plundered, willing throwing the gold into the carts and wagons upon the people of Israel as they were leaving, they took that gold that they were now wearing and with much of it they began to construct a golden calf. They had began to abandon the truth of the glory and majesty of the One true and Living God. As that idolatry began to occur God sent Moses down from the mountain and he confronted them in Exodus 31 and 32.

In Exodus 33 we now get the verdict. God said, "Tell the people Moses, I will deliver My promises. I have taken them out and I with My strong right hand will give

them the land. I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. I will drive them all out. I'm going to take them up to a land and give them victory after victory over all of their enemies. I'm going to give them that land flowing with milk and honey. They will be sustained and prosperity will go their way and they will be a people like no other people, victorious over all. Their supremacy over all the nations will be secured. Their prosperity will be assured. Their military victories will be profound but there's only one thing. I'm going to continue the trip for them but I just cancelled My reservation. I'm not going. You're going and they're going but I am not going. So here it is, today's gospel. Good news. There is prosperity, victory, supremacy, significance, it's all yours. In fact, I'll tell you what, I'll throw in an angel. An angel will go with you but not Me. I'll have the miraculous. It will be amazing what this small nomadic tribe will be given. You'll have miracles but you won't have Me."

Now what is going to be the verdict of Moses and the people? Exodus 33:7-11 says, *7 Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch 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. 8 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. 9 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. 10 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. 11 Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to 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.*

Here they have moved out from Mount Sinai and have moved away. God's hand of discipline is among them and something has happened very significantly here. This statement of God "I'm not going to go with you" we have already gotten a few preliminary signals about this. In Exodus 33:1, 2 notice how He doesn't call them "My people." Up until now He would call them and say things like "Let My people go." Now He calls them "the people." Up until now He has given them "My angel", a Christophany, a pre-incarnate ministry of Christ, the second Person of the Trinity who spoke from the burning bush. Now there is not "The angel of the Lord", now it's "I'll give you an angel." It's no longer "My people", now it's no longer "The angel of the Lord's presence" but now it's an angel. Now it's "the people."

Also notice that now the Tent of Meeting is not where it's supposed to be which was in the midst of the people. Now it's outside. God is still there. He is disciplining them but not longer is He in their midst. He is away, outside. The people now have to go through the intercession of Moses. So they have Moses the professional. They are still very reverent about this. When Moses rises up to go everyone stands at their door. Everyone is reverent and respectful about it. Religion is good. So respectfully they see Moses go out to meet with God and to come back and tell them what God would or would not say to them. Moses has an assistant who is Joshua, son of Nun. The people, of course, would wait until Moses would come back. That's the arrangement of what is going on here. There are some real signals that God's hand of discipline that has already

been seen, where the indicators are there and now comes not simply “I’m outside the camp” but “I’m not going with you.” The trip will still be secured.

I’d like to stop here and ask you a question. If I possible could, what if I promised you life of ease, affluence, influence, the applause and acclaim of others, even with a life of religion as a vital part but you don’t have the Lord, would you strike the bargain? What if I offered you the Lord and a life of adversity, perhaps martyrdom, perhaps the loss of all things, would the Lord be enough for you? It’s amazing the deal that has been offered here. What is Moses going to do with this deal? Is he going to close the deal? This almost sounds like 21st century evangelical Christianity. I mean, we have God in a box nearby just in case we need Him. He’s out there in the Tent of Meeting. Nearby in case we need Him, but not too close to make us uncomfortable, in fact, His presence among us could destroy us. He’s nearby but not too close and by the way, we have hired our professional to go talk to Him and he even has an assistant pastor and he can go meet with the Lord and give us a message every once in a while. Also, look at all these things we are going to get with this – prosperity, victory, significance, acclaim and all of these things.

What will be Moses verdict? Moses you’re going to be the greatest military leader in the world. You’re going to bring the people prosperity. You’re getting an angel, and I say this reverently, you’ll get God in a box nearby not too close so nothing is uncomfortable. You get victories over all your enemies. So what will Moses say about this?

Exodus 33:12-16 says, *12 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.’ 13 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.” 14 And he said, “My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.” 15 And he said to him, “If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. 16 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?”*

God says, “Moses I’m going to give you the trip. You’re going to be able to go. You have victory, prosperity, significance, you have everything and I’ll even throw in an angel. And I will go before you to make sure that you are secure. I’ll go before you but I won’t go with you.” Moses says, “If You do not go up with us then let us perish in the wilderness. How do the people of this world know that we are Your people? Is it because we are stronger, richer or smarter? The way the people know that we are Your people is our God is with us.” Then the people also respond and they heard this as a disastrous word. They say, “We don’t want life no matter how prosperous or victorious, without our God.” They stripped their ornaments away, which is a signal/ sign in that culture of repentance. What was left of the gold that hadn’t been melted into the calf that they were still wearing, they now stripped it away. They removed it. Following Moses they called upon the Lord not to abandon them but to hold them and to keep them. They follow suit with Moses into repentance.

So here is the heart of the Gospel. It is the presence of God is more important than any success in life even life itself. “Harry what if I promised you a virgining church

and a growing membership and all the resources that you want and that every program will work and you'll be pastor of the whatever but you don't have Me, what would you do?" Oh that God would give me the grace, wisdom, soul and heart that would say, "Lord, even in the name of religion and even in the name of Christianity, I don't want a Christ-less life and ministry. If You don't go with us then don't lead us up from here." That's the heart of the Gospel. God has delivered us from our sins that we are His and He is ours. That's why the Apostle Paul said, "I don't know whether to stay or leave. I think I need to stay because God will use me in your life" (Philippians 1 and 3) "but it would be far better to depart and be with Him."

Hey, what if I could offer you heaven without Jesus, would you take that? When Jesus is getting ready to leave earth He says, "I go to prepare a place for you so that where I am there you may be also." (John 14:3) "I shall come again and take you to Myself." Philip said to Him, "Lord just show us the Father. We want to see the Lord." Jesus said to Philip, "Have I been with you so long that you do not know that when you see Me you've seen the Father?" (John 14:8, 9) The presence of God in Christ is the glorious gift to us and that is the heart and purpose of the Gospel. There are many blessings. I am freed from the penalty of sin, praise the Lord. Hell is banished. There is victory over death. I have heaven to go to and the joy of the Lord. Even the rewards the Lord has to give I'll give back to Him in worship in that day. Oh the joy of being with the people of God for eternity in a new heavens and new earth with no more pain, and no more sorrow. Praise God for blessing upon blessing upon blessing but the heart of the Gospel is He has delivered us from sin and its consequences to Himself that we are His and He is ours.

There are a couple of things in here that I would be really remiss if I didn't mention them. Not only is there this purpose and priority of the Gospel but look at the blessing of leadership. What astounds me in this text is here is this people that not long before when Moses was away with the Lord, they had taken the providential gifts of God and fashioned it into a golden calf committing spiritual adultery and had abandoned the Lord who had taken them out of Egypt with a strong hand where God had brought judgment upon the Egyptians, He brought them through the Red Sea and fed them in the wilderness with all of those blessings upon blessings upon blessings, and these people had gone into that spiritual adultery so rapidly. Now, look at the deal that is being offered to them to be a mighty nation, a military victorious nation, a nation that will have milk and honey, economic prosperity, miraculous intervention, an angel thrown in, and God nearby but not too close, and God going before you but not in the midst. You will be somebody and yet they said no to this deal.

The text says that they heard this not as a good deal but as a disastrous word. What happened to them? I know its God's grace but I also think it was the blessing of good leadership. Moses had set the pace. Moses saw it as a disastrous word and not personal promotion. Dear pastors, elders and deacons and most of all myself, we must set the pace that Christ is our life if we want to see that Life embraced with passion for those who we shepherd, for those whom the Lord has yet to add to this flock, for those whom He has placed here. It is the fullness and majesty of Christ that must cease us and that's the blessing of leadership. If that is our heart it even unfolds to a people who moments before had worshipped a golden calf and now want only the Lord.

Here is another thing I want to point out and I want to call this one “show me the money.” It’s interesting how the people come out and plunder the Egyptians yet the Egyptians throw things into their carts, coming out with all this money, now notice as soon as they get away from the Lord what do they begin to do with the money? They use it for personal idolatry and they played the harlot even to, using the King James language, lasciviousness while Moses is up on the mountain meeting with God. That’s what they did with their money. Now, the Lord’s hand of discipline is there. Now, the gold that’s left becomes meaningless and they loosen their grip upon it. They strip themselves of the ornaments. We don’t want the riches of this world. We want You! The question that I have as pastor for my own life and yours is never ‘how much money do you have?’ but ‘does your money have you?’ or ‘does the Lord have you?’

Another thought that comes from the text is the power of intercessory prayer. I’d like to finish by reading the last verses in this chapter. Exodus 33:17-23 says, *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.” 18 Moses said, “Please show me your glory.” 19 And he said, “I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name ‘The Lord.’ And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. 20 But,” he said, “you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live.” 21 And the Lord said, “Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, 22 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 have passed by. 23 Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen.”*

Here Moses intercedes in prayer. What is the power of intercessory prayer? It is the humbling of bringing before God our needs and the boldness of bringing back to God His Word. I just love to read that. I am so far short of the prayers of Moses and the Apostle Paul. I am so far short but I love the way Moses just says to God at times, “God, You can’t do that” and it’s not because God has got a better idea. It’s because Moses says to God “You can’t do that, these aren’t the people and they aren’t my people but they are Your people. I didn’t deliver them, You delivered them. How shall the world know that they are Your people? It is not by their supremacy but by Your presence.”

Moses brings back the Word of God and that’s why at Briarwood we have to teach the Word of God. You can’t even pray without knowing the Word of God. We don’t know how to deal with the issues of life without knowing the Word of God. You can’t be conformed until you’re transformed. You can’t be transformed until you’re informed which is by the renewing of our mind. With that mind renewed He begins this bold intercessory prayer and the Lord hears and responds to that intercessory prayer. He responds to the truth of His Word and the needs of His people. O Lord, we need You and not success. We need You.

So He takes His hand and puts him in the cleft of the rock and covers it. If you read you’re Bible most of the time the ‘hand of the Lord’ is that He is protecting His people from the onslaughts of the world. Here the hand of the Lord was protecting the people from Himself. I’ve often wondered did Moses want to peek? Moses if you look you’ll die. When I was in my 20s we had this total eclipse of the sun and people said if you look at it you’ll go blind. I want to confess something. I looked. Moses, if you look at My glory you can’t live. I’m just thankful God put His hand there because I know Moses would have peeked. God put His hand there. That hand of God over the cleft of

the rock has come to fullness in Jesus Christ. You're in Christ and the hand of the Lord is upon you. The presence of the Lord is with you and this same Savior said to you, "Good news!" He didn't say, "Come to Me and you'll be rich. Come to Me and you can get your miracle everyday." He said, "Come to Me and I am with you always even to the end of the age then I'll come for you." Then it will be our hearts fulfillment where we shall behold Him. We shall behold Him! Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, thank You for the Gospel of Jesus Christ that the presence of my Savior does not wait upon my ritual or my obedience but the presence of my Savior has been secured by Him and I am secure in Him. O God, give me great joy in Your Word, in prayer and in worship where I may enjoy those special seasons of the felt presence of the Lord. God, I thank You for bringing these Your people from death unto life so that they may have not only heard the Gospel but believed the Gospel that the presence of the Lord is better, is greater than any success in life. It is greater than life itself that the presence of the Lord is life. Christ is our life. I thank You in Jesus' name and may we see Jesus, O Lord, be thou our vision. In Jesus' Name, Amen.