

Introduction:

- a. **The Sin of Israel: When What We See Overrules the Word of the LORD (Exodus 32)**
- b. **The Intercession of Moses and the Face of the LORD (Exodus 33)**

I've titled this sermon "a new covenant"
because of what God says in verse 10.

"I am making a covenant."

Wait, I thought that Exodus 19-24 was when God made a covenant with Israel.

That's right.

In Exodus 24 we heard about the Book of the Covenant (namely, Ex 20-23)
and we saw the Blood of the Covenant sprinkled on the book and on the people.

But then Israel broke that covenant –
symbolized in the breaking of the stone tablets that contained the words of the covenant!

So what does God mean here in Exodus 34 when he says, "I am making a covenant"?

Let me be clear:

in one sense there is only *one* Mosaic Covenant.

In all the rest of the scriptures,
there is only *one* Mosaic Covenant.

Just like there is only *one* Abrahamic Covenant –
even though God made a covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15,
and then many years later, in Genesis 17, God makes a covenant with Abraham!

And then God says that he will establish his covenant with Isaac.

Are these all separate covenants?

No, all of God's dealings with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,
are all gathered together in the rest of scripture
under the rubric of God's covenant (singular) with Abraham.

In the same way, there are at least *three* distinct covenant-makings with Israel in the days of Moses:
Exodus 19-24 is the original covenant-making.
Here in Exodus 32-34 the covenant is further developed.
And then in Deuteronomy 29-30, the covenant is further developed and applied
to the next generation.

And the reason for this second covenant-making is because the original covenant was broken.
Exodus 19-24 showed how to deal with individual sin,
but had no provision for how to deal with corporate sin –
when the whole nation rebelled in the sin of the golden calf.

Exodus 19-24 could almost be read as a very optimistic view of humanity!
If Israel will keep God's covenant,
then God will bless them and be their God!!

But that rosy optimism doesn't even last six weeks!
If God's covenant with Israel only contains what is in Exodus 19-24,
then Israel is going to die.
That's what we saw in Exodus 32:33,
when God said to Moses,
“Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book.”

But as we've seen over the last couple weeks,
if Israel's status as God's covenant people *depends* on their own performance,
then they will fail –
and if they fail,
then God's blessing will never come to the nations!

Indeed, when you continue reading the OT
you quickly discover that Israel *did* fail!
God finally brought judgment against them and sent them into exile!
But all of that story of Israel's rebellion and God's judgment
was in order to show us our need for Jesus!

Because the *only way* for God's blessing to come to the nations
is for God *himself* to guarantee the covenant.
In order for salvation to come to all the earth,
God must be a merciful and gracious God –
a God who pardons sin and takes his people for his inheritance.

So Exodus 32-34 becomes an essential part of God's covenant.
Without Exodus 32-34, the Mosaic Covenant ends in death.
With Exodus 32-34, the Mosaic Covenant is revealed to be a covenant of life and grace.

And that's why we are singing Psalm 86.
Psalm 86 reflects of Exodus 32-34
and applies it to Israel.
Psalm 86 is 'a Psalm of David' –
which may mean that David wrote it –
but which certainly means that we are sing it in the voice of David –
or, perhaps even better, in the voice of Jesus, David's greater son.

In Psalm 86, the Davidic King asks God to continue to be the God who revealed himself to Moses.
And because Jesus sings this song –
we who have been united to him as his inheritance may also sing this song with him.

Sing Psalm 86
Read 2 Corinthians 3:1-4:6

“The letter kills”

“the ministry of death carved in letters of stone”

“the ministry of condemnation”

You might think that Paul has a very negative view of the Mosaic Covenant!

He speaks of it as “the old covenant” (v14)

whereas we are ministers of a “new covenant.” (v6)

So why do I title this sermon “A New Covenant”?

Listen to Paul more carefully:

“ministers of a new covenant, not of the letter but of the Spirit”

Okay, what does that *mean*?

Not the letter but the Spirit.

Look again at verses 14-17:

“For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted,
because only through Christ is it taken away.

Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts.

But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed.

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.”

In other words, the *problem* is *not* the text of the Old Testament!

The *problem* is the veil that lies over their hearts!

When one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed,

so that you can read Moses as proclaiming the New Covenant!

Yes, the letter kills!

But it only kills apart from Jesus.

After all, the incarnation of the Son of God *is* the *grace* that suffuses the old covenant with life.

God’s promise to be present with his people comes to its fullness and fruition in Jesus –

and so any reading of the OT that does not find its heart and soul in Jesus
is a ministry of *death*.

Indeed, very clearly in Exodus 34, this covenant-making

is what gives *life* to a people who were under the sentence of *death*

because of their sin in making the golden calf.

1. Who Is the God Who Makes This Covenant? (v1-9)

a. Replacing the Broken Tablets (v1-4)

34 The LORD said to Moses, “Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. 2 Be ready by the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain. 3 No one shall come up with you, and let no one be seen throughout all the mountain. Let no flocks or herds graze opposite that mountain.” 4 So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone.

In verses 1-4, God instructs Moses to come up the mountain with new tablets
to replace the broken tablets.

Then in verses 5-6 we hear the revelation of God's *name*.

b. God's Name Is Revealed in His Character (v5-6)

⁵ *The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD.*

⁶ *The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness,*

I want you to think about this.

The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there.

(We can see the importance of God's *presence!*)

And he proclaimed the name of the LORD.

When God proclaims his *name* he is revealing his *character*.

When you hear the name "Yahweh" – the LORD –

you should think of his mercy and grace – his steadfast love and faithfulness.

You should think of the story of the Exodus –

and how God delivered his people –

and how he *forgave* his people – even after they had rejected him!

c. What Does "Visiting the Iniquity of the Fathers on the Children" Mean? (v7)

⁷ *keeping steadfast love for thousands, [a] forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children, to the third and the fourth generation."*

What is meant by "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children"?

The first thing to say is that *this verse* does not really explain what is meant!

We need to read the rest of the Bible to flesh out what is meant.

So, for instance, think back to the plagues of Egypt.

Egypt had sinned.

Pharaoh had enslaved the Israelites –

the Egyptians had joined in the oppression of Israel –

and thus Egypt fell under God's wrath and curse.

Who died in the tenth plague?

All the firstborn of Egypt.

That's a clear example of "visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children."

Pharaoh had ordered the death of all the baby boys of Israel,

so God judges Pharaoh according to Pharaoh's own standard.

But there are lots of similar examples in everyday life:

Think of the crack baby who is born to a drug addict.

What did the baby do to deserve this?!

Think of the children who die because big chemical companies cut corners on safety.

Think of how racial sins and resentments result in the suffering of children.

The sins of the parents are visited upon the children.

I think that it is safe to say that this is *obviously* true!

It's plainly true.
But how is it just?

It is just

because we are not isolated individuals –

we are linked together in families – in communities – societies.

God did not make us as solo individuals.

(After all, God himself is Triune – there is genuine communion in the Godhead).
God made us to be in fellowship with others (and with him!).

And so our actions have consequences for others – not just for ourselves.

But also, think about what would happen if we lived in a world
where you only (and always) paid for your own sins – and *never* anyone else's?!

It would mean that no one else could pay for *your* sin.

It is only because of our corporate solidarity as the human race – as children of Adam and Eve –
that it becomes possible for Jesus to pay the price for the *sin* of the human race!

But God says that this principle of punishing children for their parents' sin has limits:
“to the third and the fourth generation.”

What does this mean?

It means that if you want to stop the craziness, you can!

You can turn away from sin.

You can repent!

(Indeed, both Jeremiah and Ezekiel make this point when commenting on Exodus 34.
Yes, there are consequences for sin – and these often fall on the children.
But if you repent, you can break the pattern!)

And if you do, then rest assured that over time you can get away from the consequences of that sin.
But, you might say, we've seen many of these sins perpetuated over many, many generations!
Yes, that's true.

And the reason why is because generations keep repeating the same sin!

In order to get away from the *consequences* of sin
you have to repent!!

And that is the other side of it:

“keeping steadfast love for thousands” – which is rightly understood as
“to the thousandth generation.” (cf. Ex 20:5-5, Dt 7:9)
A thousand generations would be approximately 30,000 years.

And God said this a little more than 3,000 years ago.
So if you want to take this literally, we still have around 27,000 years
before God has fulfilled this promise!!

God continues to be faithful to his covenant –
he is faithful to his word and promise – abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

And he *does* forgive sin.

It may seem a little strange at first:

“forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty”

Okay, which is it?

Does he forgive or not?!

Yes, he does forgive.

But he only forgives those who repent!!

He will not *clear* the guilty.

But if you have repented, and if God has forgiven,
then *you are not guilty anymore!*

If you owe someone \$100 –

and they forgive your debt,
then what do you owe them?

Gratitude, certainly!!

But how much do you owe them?

Nothing!

The wages of sin is death.

So what do you owe God?

Death.

But God loved the world in this way:

that he gave his only-begotten Son,
that whosoever believes in him might not perish, but have everlasting life!

So if you have believed in God, what do you owe him?

Gratitude, certainly!!

But your debt has been paid.

Your guilt has been wiped out.

There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus!

And as evidence that this is what God meant in Exodus,

just look at Moses' response:

d. “Take Us for Your Inheritance” – Moses’ Plea for Pardon (v8-9)

⁸ And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. ⁹ And he said, “If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance.”

We saw last time how Moses had plead with God to *go with* Israel.

It's not enough for God to send his angel.

It's not enough for God to be with *Moses*.

We need a God who will be *present* with us.

In our midst.

And remember, here in the OT, “in our midst” is a very physical, spatial reference.

Please, God, let’s not do this “tent of meeting” outside the camp.

Please, let us build the Tabernacle – where you may dwell in the middle of the camp.

Please let the Lord go in the midst of us –

and notice the reason: “*for* it is a stiff-necked people” –

in other words, the reason why we need God’s presence

is *because* we are a stiff-necked people,

and without God with us, we are doomed to failure!

So please go in our midst, pardon our iniquity, and take us for your inheritance.

That last line is fascinating.

So far, the language of inheritance has focused on the land.

God promised Israel the *land* as *their* inheritance.

But now Moses asks God to take *Israel* as *his* inheritance.

After all, God had said back in Exodus 4 – Israel is my son, my firstborn –

so Moses is simply asking God to do what he had promised!

But this very language draws our attention back to the bigger purpose of what God is doing with Israel.

God’s response in verse 10 highlights the uniqueness of Israel:

2. The Covenant of the LORD Declared (v10-28)

a. God Will Do Awesome Things – and All the People Will See It (v10)

¹⁰ And he said, “Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.

Yes, God’s *purpose* is for the salvation of the nations.

But in order to *save* the nations, he must first show the nations what his salvation looks like.

God will do marvels for his people Israel – and all the people around them will see it.

There is a tendency for American Christians (and particularly white American Christians)

to think of themselves as the Israelites –

and other peoples as Gentiles.

Even when we talk about racial reconciliation we often position ourselves as the “jews” –

Jesus came to break down the barriers between us (whites) and them (non-whites).

We need to remember that pretty much all American Christians (both black and white) are Gentiles.

We are all *them* – those outsiders who have been grafted in.

And it’s only because of the work of that first-century Jew – named Jesus –

that we now can talk about “our fathers” in the wilderness.

And God warns his people *not* to make covenants with the nations around them.

The requirements of verses 11-26 are pretty much all restatements
of things found in the Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20-23).

b. Do Not Make Covenants with the Nations – *Because of Idolatry* (v11-16)

¹¹ “Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ¹² Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. ¹³ You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim ¹⁴ (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), ¹⁵ lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whor after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, ¹⁶ and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whor after their gods and make your sons whor after their gods.

Why not?

(Verses 11-16), Because every nation has their own deities –
and if you buy into their gods, you will also buy into their sinful practices.
Therefore the LORD tells his people to destroy the religious artifacts in the land –
the altars and pillars and Asherim.

And at the heart of this prohibition against making covenants with them
is the practice of intermarriage.

If you are living side by side in a small region
(and remember that the whole land of Israel is around the size of New Jersey,
Indiana is more than four times larger than Israel),
So if you are living side by side in this small region,
then you are likely going to marrying into each other's families.

If you intermarry with them, then they will draw you away to worship their gods.

When you go to visit your wife's family,
and they offer a sacrifice to Baal,
then what do you do?!

It is important to say that Scripture never forbids intermarriage for the reason of ethnicity.

Let me explain the context.

In the ancient world, if two tribes make a covenant,
they are effectively saying,
we will intermarry and become allies against foreign enemies.
But in the ancient world, every tribe has its own patron deity.
So in the villages of the Canaanites, you would worship Canaanite deities,
and in the villages of the Hittites, you would worship Hittite deities.

What God is saying is that you cannot have these sorts of relations.
Because you shall worship Yahweh *only*.

If a foreigner – *of any tribe* – should wish to convert to the worship of Yahweh *only*
then they are *very welcome!*
And they may intermarry with you.

As we see throughout the scriptures (Rahab and Ruth are two really obvious examples)
even women from prohibited tribes are welcome *if they worship Yahweh only.*

So the issue is *not* ethnicity or race.

The issue is religion!

It may be a challenge for a Presbyterian to marry a Baptist –

they will have a really frustrating time dealing with the question of infant baptism!

But at least you are worshiping the same God!

But for a Christian to marry a Muslim – or a Hindu – or an Atheist –

these are entirely different religions – with different gods.

And the result is that the unbeliever will seek to draw you and your children away from the living God.

So don't do it!

And since *worship* is at the heart of God's covenant,

verses 17-26 focus on various matters relating to worship.

c. The Centrality of Worship to the Covenant (v17-26)

¹⁷ “*You shall not make for yourself any gods of cast metal.*

Uh, like the golden calf!!

¹⁸ “*You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month Abib, for in the month Abib you came out from Egypt.*

In other words, remember the great act of redemption when I delivered you from Egypt!
And make it a regular part of your life by keeping the Passover Feast.

¹⁹ *All that open the womb are mine, all your male^b livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep. ²⁰ The firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before me empty-handed.*

And in verses 19-20, the LORD reminds them of the law of redemption (from Exodus 13).

As Israel was redeemed from Egypt through the death of the firstborn,
so throughout all their generations, they shall redeem the firstborn of man and animals.

Verse 21 then reminds Israel of the Sabbath:

²¹ “*Six days you shall work, but on the seventh day you shall rest. In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest.*

Even in the busy season – when you think that you need to just keep going, going, going...

Don't.

The God who made you rested on the Sabbath day –

therefore he created you to work for six days and rest on the seventh.

There have been plenty of times in my life where I have wondered

how will it all get done?

Don't worry!

In fact, that is one of the central benefits of the *gift* of the Sabbath!

Don't worry.
Just worship God and rest.
Step back from the chaos of the week and rest.

²² You shall observe the Feast of Weeks, the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end. ²³ Three times in the year shall all your males appear before the LORD God, the God of Israel. ²⁴ For I will cast out nations before you and enlarge your borders; no one shall covet your land, when you go up to appear before the LORD your God three times in the year. ²⁵ "You shall not offer the blood of my sacrifice with anything leavened, or let the sacrifice of the Feast of the Passover remain until the morning.

Verses 22-25 then lay out the three main feasts of Israel:

Passover (or the Feast of Unleavened Bread),
Firstfruits and Ingathering –
The Feast of Firstfruits is also known as the Feast of Weeks – or Pentecost
and Ingathering is also known as Booths (or Tabernacles).

At these feasts, all the men of Israel were to gather.

Why?
Because as they spread out there will be a tendency to forget each other.
Each tribe will go to its inheritance,
and it could be really easy for the people of Israel to divide and fragment.
We need to come together regularly in order to remember that we are brethren!

By the way, this is why we have tried to practice joint worship services with other churches.

If we just sit back in our own little Presbyterian corner,
we will forget about our brothers and sisters around the city –
and around the world!

So when we have joint services, I would encourage you to show up!

(We'll be having a Reformation Day service at the end of October –
I'll be preaching a sermon from Martin Luther...)

But the point of all of this is that God wants to meet with his people.

Because that is what *corporate worship* is all about:
the Triune God meeting with his people.
This is why having other gods is such a problem –
because it means that God's people are refusing to meet with their God!

In the same way, today, when someone who professes to be a Christian
refuses to gather for corporate worship
they are saying that they don't want to meet with their God.
Because God says that he wants to meet with his people *together* –
so those who try to be "lone ranger" Christians
are refusing to do what God himself requires.

And then v26 has two commands:

First,

²⁶ *The best of the firstfruits of your ground you shall bring to the house of the LORD your God. Give to God the first – and the best – of your time, your wealth, and your labor.*

And Second,
You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk."

This is the second time that we've seen this in Exodus (also in ch 23 – the Book of the Cov). As we saw in chapter 23, the reason for this is very simple:
you shall not mix life and death in the same pot.
A mother's milk is to give *life* to a young goat!
So it is simply *mixed up* to boil a young goat in its mother's milk!

And then God tells Moses:

d. “Write These Words” – the Importance of the Written Word (v27-28)

²⁷ *And the LORD said to Moses, “Write these words, for in accordance with these words I have made a covenant with you and with Israel.”* ²⁸ *So he was there with the LORD forty days and forty nights. He neither ate bread nor drank water. And he wrote on the tablets the words of the covenant, the Ten Commandments.* [\[L\]](#)

Throughout all of Christian history
the written word has played a key role in Christian worship.
And this goes all the way back to Exodus 24, when Moses read the Book of the Covenant
in the first worship service ever.
And here in Exodus 34, we have another instance of this,
as the LORD tells Moses to write these words.

One of the earliest descriptions of Christian worship after the NT
is from Justin Martyr in the mid second century.
He talks about how they would read from the memoirs of the apostles and prophets
as long as there was time!

And then the president – the pastor – would preach and exhort the congregation
to put these things into practice.

(That's pretty much how the first part of the liturgy has always worked!
From the Call to Worship through the Sermon,
the Word of God takes center stage –
together with a few congregational responses.)

The reading and the preaching of the scriptures has *always* been central to Christian worship
because it is *here* in the reading and preaching of the Word
that *God* speaks to his people.

Paul highlights this in 2 Corinthians 3
as he simply *assumes* that *Moses* would be read in the gatherings.

What was the point of Israel gathering together for worship?

They were to remember what God had done – and what God had promised to do.
The liturgy is supposed to remind us – to draw us back in to the story that defines who we are.

And then we watch as Moses comes back down the mountain...

3. The Glorious Result of the Covenant: the Shining Face of Moses (v29-35)

²⁹ When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God.^[d] ³⁰ Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. ³² Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. ³³ And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

Why did Moses veil his face?

We sometimes think that it was because his face was shining!!

But notice in verse 32 that Moses spoke to the people *without a veil*.

Only when he was finished speaking with the people did he put a veil over his face!

And keep reading in verse 34:

³⁴ Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, ³⁵ the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

So Moses would only put the veil on *after* speaking to the people.

Why?

Well, Paul explains this in 2 Corinthians 3:12-13 –

“Since we have such a hope [the greater glory of the new covenant]
we are very bold, not like Moses,
who would put a veil over his face
so that the Israelites might not gaze at the outcome
of what was being brought to an end.”

In other words,

Moses veils his face *because the glory is fading!*

He doesn't want the people to see that the glory is fading!

The glory of God in the face of Moses is a fading glory.

Because the covenant made at Sinai is a fading covenant!

It cannot last forever.

That's why it is called a “ministry of death”

a “ministry of condemnation.”

Oh, sure, in Moses' day it was glorious!

Because in Moses' day it is *so much better* than anything else!

For Israel it was the path of life and salvation!

But now that Jesus has come,
the Law of Moses is the path of death and condemnation!
Because if you try to follow the Law of Moses – *without Jesus* –
you will find yourself in exile, alone, abandoned –
with no glory, no hope, no future!

Because the whole *point* of the Law was Jesus!!

And Paul says that the veil of Moses is like the veil that covers the hearts of unbelieving Israel.
Because “only through Christ is it taken away.”
Only when you read the Law of Moses through Christ
can the veil be removed!

And what happens when the veil is removed??!

“And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord,
are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.
For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.”

We now see Jesus here in Exodus 34!

Because we now see that the only way for God to be *just* and to justify the ungodly
was for his own Son – our Lord Jesus – to come in the flesh
and bear in his own body the wrath and curse that was due to us for sin.

We now see that God’s *presence* with his people
was fulfilled when the Word became flesh and dwelt among us!
Jesus own body became the holy temple where God dwelt with humanity!
And therefore when Jesus sent his Holy Spirit to us,
he becomes the presence of the resurrected Savior with us!
And so we even begin to participate in that glory!

The glory on Moses’ face was a *fading* glory.
The glory that is revealed in Jesus – *and in you* – is an abiding and enduring glory!

But someone may say, “I don’t see much glory!”

Paul replies: “even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled only to those who are perishing.
In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers,
to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ,
who is the image of God.

For what we proclaim is not ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord,
with ourselves as your servants for Jesus’ sake.
For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’
has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God
in the face of Jesus Christ.”

We may not see much in the way of outward glory –
but the God who created all things
now also shines *in our hearts*
to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.