

## Sermon 114, Nombre de Dios, Exodus 34:5-8

**Proposition:** God's glory is inseparable from His name, His visible revelation from His verbal revelation. This in turn places demands on us to listen to Him, fear Him, and obey Him.

- I. God Comes to the Mediator, v. 5a
- II. God Proclaims His Name to the Mediator, vv. 5b-7
  - A. Yahweh — He Who Is
  - B. Merciful
  - C. Gracious
  - D. Slow to Anger
  - E. Abounding in Steadfast Love
  - F. Abounding in Faithfulness
  - G. Keeping Steadfast Love for Thousands
  - H. Forgiving Iniquity, Transgression, and Sin
  - I. Will Not Acquit the Guilty
  - J. Visiting the Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children
- III. The Mediator Responds with Worship, v. 8

### Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, the name of God is beautiful and rich. Indeed, rather than preaching just one sermon on it, I would love to pause and preach a sermon on every one of the attributes that God lists as belonging to Himself in our text this evening. As valuable as that would be, though, we are going to hasten through these, what the Jews call the “thirteen attributes,” in just one sermon this evening. We are going to see that God's glory, which Moses asked to see, is inseparable from His name, and this demands that we listen to Him, fear Him, and obey Him.

#### **I. God Comes to the Mediator, v. 5a**

As we saw last time, God came to the Mediator. He descended in cloud right to the top of Sinai.

#### **II. God Proclaims His Name to the Mediator, vv. 5b-7**

As He stood there with Moses, He picked him up and put him in the cleft of the rock, hiding him with His hand while His glory passed by. Moses hid behind the rock, under the shadow of God's hand, while Yahweh passed by and showed Him His glory. He passed by, and proclaimed His name.

The text puts these two things in parallel. We can safely say that the uncreated glory of God shines forth most brightly in His name. When you know who He is, you see how glorious He is. You could meet Chuck Norris and never know that you are looking at an incredible display of raw manhood. You could presumably ride in the subway next to a world-class karate black belt and never know about the trophies he's won. But when the Mediator saw God, he also heard God's name.

### **A. Yahweh — He Who Is**

The first thing that God does is to proclaim His name, which He repeats twice — Yahweh, Yahweh, a God merciful and gracious. As we saw when we looked at Exodus 3, this name means “He who is.” It refers to God’s self-existence. He is the God who is dependent on no one and no thing. He is self-feeding, self-sustaining, self-existing. That is why He is the self-feeding fire, the one who burns in the bush but does not consume it. He does not need the bush. He does not need something outside Himself to sustain Himself. He is all and has all He needs within Himself. All else that is comes from Him, depends on Him, and returns to Him: Of Him, through Him, and to Him are all things.

This name alone would be sufficient to comfort and sustain Moses for the rest of his life, for the rest of eternity. But there is more, far more, filled in here that is not mentioned in the revelation at the burning bush.

### **B. Merciful**

Not only is Yahweh self-existent. He is also merciful! He is a God whose guts feel for His people.

Mercy is compassion on misery. The reason that God came down to deliver His people from Egypt was precisely because of this compassion. He saw their pain, and He cared about it, and it moved Him to come and save them.

As with all of these attributes, the climactic display of God’s mercy was at the cross. There He showed His compassion on our misery, not merely by rescuing us from it, but by undergoing it Himself. He saw our pain and took it away from us by taking it on Himself.

### **C. Gracious**

God is also gracious. The best definition of this verse is given back in Ex 22, where God says "If you ever take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, you are to return it to him before the sun sets, for that is his only covering; it is his cloak for his body. What else shall he sleep in? And it shall come about that when he cries out to Me, I will hear him, for I am gracious." (Exo 22:26-27).

He cares about the man trying to sleep on the ground with no cloak to cover himself. That is the depth of graciousness which our heavenly Father exemplifies.

### **D. Slow to Anger**

He is also “long of nostril,” an idiom meaning that it takes a long time to make His nostrils flare in anger. Do you know anyone who is quickly angered? Who will yell at you at the slightest provocation? One thinks of the characters in certain British TV shows who seem to spend the entire show running around yelling at people. God is not like that. He does get angry when He needs to. But He does not get angry lightly or easily.

### **E. Abounding in Steadfast Love**

He is full of unfailing, steadfast love. God is love. God’s love will not depart or change; it is an “ever-fixed mark,” as the Bard put it. Brothers and sisters, I spoke last week of the ring of Gyges and the pagan god who rapes, kills, and steals with impunity. Contrast that with our Father, of whom the apostle John declares “God is love.” Plus, this attribute and the next are the only ones

which are mentioned in an intensified way. Not only is He love, He is *abounding* in love. There is a great ocean of love, covenant faithfulness, loyalty to those to whom He has sworn, inside our God.

Brothers and sisters, if you had to build a god from the ground up, would you make one who is chock-full of steadfast love? You couldn't. I couldn't. The world's mythologies can't and don't. Only the Bible records such a God, who declares as His central attribute that He is love.

#### **F. Abounding in Faithfulness**

But He abounds in something else as well. He abounds in faithfulness (as some versions translate it) or, more basically, in truth. The Hebrew word *emeth* is probably known to you as the name of a certain righteous Calormene in *The Last Battle*. God is full of truth.

Again, the New Testament ups the ante slightly on this when Jesus announces that He is the truth. But already, in this revelation at Sinai, God proclaimed that He was full of truth, abounding in truth. He cannot lie. It is impossible for Him to say what He does not believe. He is the sum and substance of all truth. Brothers and sisters, this is your God! If you want truth, look no further.

#### **G. Keeping Steadfast Love for Thousands**

Once again, He declares His steadfast love. God guards love. He protects His love, stops it from cooling, doesn't let it dry up and go away. And His love is not just for His Son and His Spirit. It does not remain within a narrow circle of His favorites.

Most people think of themselves as loving — to the right individual. I love my spouse, I love my kid, I love my mom, and that about sums it up. Love my neighbor? Love the arrogant weirdo who ripped me off in a business deal? I think not!

But brothers and sisters, God is not like that. His steadfast love is not just something that He does in the confines of Heaven for His Son, Spirit, and Heavenly Court. No. His love spreads to thousands, or as we would say, to millions. He is a God whose love reaches from end to end, and orders all things sweetly.

In other words, love is an extremely prominent attribute in this list, for it is mentioned twice. By the way, the word “generations” should most likely not be added to this claim. God's love spreads to thousands. It does move down the generations, but it spreads out across the world. God loves Chinese and Armenians and Brazilians. He loves countless thousands.

#### **H. Forgiving Iniquity, Transgression, and Sin**

The way He shows that love is by forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin. Words from all three word-groups that denote wrong activity are used here, to make it clear that God forgives any kind of sin. He does not say “Well, technically that was rebellion, not just going outside the lines but actively attacking me, and therefore I won't forgive it.” No. He also forgives rebellion and every sin but blasphemy of the Holy Spirit.

Brothers and sisters, if you have sinned, you don't have to atone for yourself. You have to go to the God who cleans your sin and forgives it. Israel understood Him to be a forgiving God. The day before He had said “If I were to go with you for a moment, I would consume you.” But

after listening to Moses' mediation for the people, He relented and said He would go with Israel without consuming them.

### **I. Will Not Acquit the Guilty**

Yet that said, God also emphasizes the other side of His character. He will not leave the guilty unpunished. He will see that every transgression and disobedience receives a just recompense of reward. Again, this is clearest at the cross. God forgave iniquity, transgression, and sin — not by canceling the punishment due to them, but by taking it upon Himself.

God is perfectly just. But He is also perfectly loving. His love is mentioned twice, and His justice is mentioned twice, in this glorious proclamation of His name.

### **J. Visiting the Iniquity of the Fathers upon the Children**

Our Father visits the iniquity of the fathers upon the children — and indeed, that is where this proclamation ends. His love spreads to thousands, while His punishment of sin runs down even to the fourth generation. If you do something truly evil, it can harm your grandchildren, even your great-grandchildren.

God is not divided; these attributes are not at war with each other. Yet without the Mediator's work, the story clearly tells us that God's justice would have been poured out on Israel for their sin with the calf. Only because Moses stood in the gap and entreated for the people did God spare them.

### **III. The Mediator Responds with Worship, v. 8**

So when you hear the account of who your God is, what should you do? You should do what Moses did. He made haste to bow and worship. He did not worship slowly. He worshiped quickly. He hurled himself on his face, because that is the only proper response to a deity like this one.

The God who uses His power for good, whose character is so unutterably perfect, in whom mercy and truth meet together, righteousness and peace kiss each other, is a God whom we can worship and will worship for the rest of eternity. Thank God that He is like this!

Secondly, though, worship requires listening. To worship and bow down requires listening to His voice with a soft heart. If you will not listen to Him, but instead blow Him off and ignore Him, you are in trouble. You are a faithless child and a wicked son. To see the glory of God, to have God's glory pass before you in this proclamation of His name, and to ignore it and prefer your Nintendo or your PornHub, is an act of rebellion that will not go unpunished. He does not clear the guilty; He visits their iniquity on them. Because God proclaimed His name, you are on the hook to listen to His name.

Finally, because this is what God is like, you are called to be like Him. He made you in His image, after His likeness. That includes righteousness and holiness. Be imitators of God as dear children; be holy, for He is holy. That means that you need to be merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in love and truth, keeping love for thousands, forgiving all kinds of sin, but not letting the guilty go unpunished, visiting their iniquity on them and, if their children are wicked too, on their children down to the third and fourth generation.

Does that describe you, brothers and sisters? By the grace of the Holy Spirit conforming you to the image of the Son, it should. The name of God should also be the name that the Christian has in the church, in the home, and in the city. Everyone who knows you, who interacts with you in the tire shop or at city hall, should be able to say “That person is slow to anger and abounds in love and truth.”

What a testimony! That’s who our God is in Himself. That’s who He is for us in Jesus Christ. May we never get over it, but always hasten to throw ourselves to the ground in worship of this God who saves. Amen.