

FAITHLESSNESS AT THE MOUNTAIN

+ **SESSION IN A SENTENCE:**

God judges idol-worshippers for giving the worship due Him to something or someone else, but He also offers grace.

+ **BACKGROUND PASSAGE:**

Exodus 32–34

+ **SETTING:**

After the Israelites arrived at Mount Sinai and had prepared themselves, God spoke His Ten Commandments to them directly. This frightened the people, and they requested that Moses speak to them for God. So Moses climbed up Mount Sinai twice, entering the burning darkness of God's glorious presence. His second ascent lasted forty days and nights as the Lord gave him His law and the tablets containing the Ten Commandments for the people of Israel. But in Moses's absence, the Israelites grew restless and forgetful.

DAY 1

READ:

Exodus 32:1-14

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 32:4-6

NOTES



ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #22: GOD IS OMNIPRESENT

God's omnipresence refers to His presence in all time and all places simultaneously. Because God exists apart from and outside of time and space, He is not limited by their constraints (1 Kings 8:27; Acts 17:24). He is present with us wherever we are, and sees all that occurs; nothing escapes His attention (Pss. 33:14; 139:7-10; Isa. 57:15; Jer. 23:23-24; Matt. 18:20). God's omnipresence is a deterrent for sin and a source of great comfort and hope for believers.

When we hear God's commands to worship Him alone and not make, bow down to, or worship an idol, most people do not feel tempted to break this command by setting up a statue. Most likely you've never made an image or statue with the intention to worship it.

Idolatry, however, is much more subtle than revering a statue. Idols claim the loyalty of your heart that only God alone deserves. Idolatry can even masquerade as the worship of the Lord God, but these are attempts to constrain the omnipresent God to a single location for a selfish purpose. When Aaron made the statue of the golden calf for the people of Israel, they declared that the statue before them was their gods, the ones who had brought them out of the slavery and bondage of Egypt. In response, Aaron built an altar and declared that the next day would be a feast to the Lord. Mixing together the people's idolatry and the worship of the Lord, Aaron confused true and proper worship with false and destructive festivities.

God is the Creator and Lawgiver. He is the true focus and object of worship. Therefore, God alone has the right to say how He is to be worshiped. Worship must consist of prayer and praise, hearing and reading God's Word, professing faith and confessing sin, and celebrating the Lord's saving work through baptism and the Lord's Supper. Other forms of worship may be appealing to us and attractive to others, but if not directed to and for God, they run the danger of being worship of our preferences. Any worship that is primarily concerned about personal preference and style will begin to fashion God into our image, even if it is only done in the imagination and heart.

What are some ways the modern church needs to resist distorted worship?

DAY 2

READ:

Psalm 115

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Psalm 115:4-8

NOTES

People reflect things in their culture—sometimes consciously and other times unconsciously. Looking back to high school or college, we can see how we imitated our peer groups. Certain brands or fashions that were popular became the “must-have” item in order to fit in. Others associated with their athletic group and attempted to look the part. Still others got caught up in a crowd that led them to participate in behaviors that were harmful, and soon the effects of their poor choices began to show outwardly.

Over time, people begin to look like the things that they adore and pursue. Shaped by their quests, people are transformed, little by little, from one image to another. Because the heart is wired by God to worship, humans will find something to latch on to, either for good or for ill.

Idolatry has the same effect. What you worship you will mimic. The psalmist warned that those who make idols become like the idols they worship. Lifeless, senseless, motionless idols are not harmless. Over time, idol worship transforms a life to its detriment. For the Israelites, their worship of the golden calf (Ex. 32) caused them to become like a rebellious, ornery calf: stiff-necked, wild, and untamed. This distorted worship corrupted them inwardly and transformed them even further.

But the good news about the worship of God is that He will transform and conform you into His image and likeness—particularly as He has been revealed in Christ—remaking you and changing you from one degree of glory to another (2 Cor. 3:18). The next time you worship God, even right now, delight in Him, for He is forming you to look more like His Son!

What captures your time, energy, emotions, and money, and how might that be shaping your soul?

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

“Idolatry is worshipping anything that ought to be used, or using anything that is meant to be worshiped.”¹

—Augustine (354-430)

DAY 3

READ:

Exodus 32:11-35

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 32:11-14

NOTES

If you were to receive an invitation to an influential person's home for a conversation and discussion about something important, you probably would not hesitate to respond. You wouldn't forget or delay in getting back to that person. And if more than one invitation came, you might find yourself in awe that someone of such stature was inviting you to dialogue with him or her.

Every day, the Lord invites His people to come to Him in prayer. The Bible is full of the Lord's calls to come and fellowship with Him in prayer. Sometimes He calls us by way of our needs; other times we feel the burden to pray for the troubles that others are experiencing.

God has given us numerous examples in His Word to know how to approach Him in prayer. As Moses prayed for Israel, he prayed in light of God's character: God is all-powerful and able to save and rescue His people. Further, Moses prayed that as the Lord dealt with Israel, God's reputation among the nations would be seen as great and glorious and that He would not be blasphemed nor seen as wicked and evil. He appealed to the tender affections of the Lord's heart, crying out for the Lord to remember His people. And he prayed in light of God's covenantal promises that had been made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

God's invitation to pray is an invitation to look again at His character and trust in His faithfulness. As we look to the Lord, our eyes will see that the Lord is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. So we can pray that the Lord's mercy would triumph over judgment (Jas. 2:13).

How might a focus on God's character change the way you pray for your needs and the needs of those around you?

DAY 4

READ:

Exodus 33:1–34:14

FOCAL PASSAGE:

Exodus 34:5-7

NOTES

If you were to describe the glory of God in the Old Testament, images of power, might, strength, and authority most likely come to mind. Images of lightning and thunder or the vastness of the universe that God has created are depicted in artwork. These pictures are consistent with the Lord as Creator and Redeemer. God's glory is displayed in rescuing His people out of Egypt by the use of the plagues (Ex. 7:5) and defeating the armies of Pharaoh in the Red Sea (14:4). But when God revealed His glory to Moses, what He displayed was all of His goodness, lovingkindness, and mercy toward sinners.

When Moses asked God to show him His glory (33:18), the Lord responded by saying that all of His goodness would pass before Moses (33:19). This response is not our natural expectation of glory. Because of sin, we expect God to be thundering and judging. Even when we think that God is loving, there is a deep suspicion that God isn't truly loving of us. We know that there is an ugliness within us; the corruption of sin taints our thoughts, words, and actions.

In one of the most remarkable passages about God's character in all of the Old Testament, God does not attempt to "balance out" His attributes. He does not attempt to give equal time to how His goodness is displayed in both mercy and judgment. Since Genesis 3, humans have been suspicious of God, that somehow He is untrustworthy and withholding good things from us.

What God revealed about Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai is astounding. To a people who have been stiff-necked (34:9) and broken His covenant (32:1-6), God comes with abounding mercy. When we look at the glory of God, there is much more than power and might. There is His power to forgive sinners and restore covenant-breakers to a relationship with Him.

How does the mercy of God change your view of God's glory?

DAY 5

READ:

John 1:1-18

FOCAL PASSAGE:

John 1:14

NOTES

At the birth of a child, every parent has spent hours thinking about an appropriate name for the baby. Every name is chosen with thoughtfulness and intentionality: How will this name get shortened? Is it appropriate for a child and an adult?

God has revealed his name to us. He is “the LORD.” When the Lord revealed Himself to Moses at the burning bush, He told him that His name, *Yahweh*, meant that He would be who He would be (Ex. 3:14). His name would be understood by His mighty deeds of deliverance, by His power, and by His glory that revealed His self-sufficient nature. But this was not the only way that God would be known. After God had delivered Israel, brought them out into the wilderness to worship Him, given them His law, and watched His people break the covenant after promising to obey it, Moses pleaded with the Lord to show him His glory.

In an act of great mercy, the Lord again revealed His name to Moses. But this time, the Lord told Moses that He is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, abounding in love and truth, and forgiving. When Israel deserved wrath and punishment for sin, God responded to Moses’s prayer with His name. This description is one of the most repeated expressions of who God is throughout the Old Testament.

Yet God would again reveal Himself to us as full of mercy and grace. John tells us that the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen His glory. And what does this glory look like? He is full of grace and truth (John 1:14). These words echo God’s display of His name to Moses in Exodus 34, which would later be clearly seen at the cross. As Christ suffered and died, God’s name was fully revealed to us in His greatest redemptive work. Taking the punishment for sin and death, Christ died to give us freedom and life, mercifully and graciously exchanging our sin with His righteousness (2 Cor. 5:21).

What has the coming of Jesus taught you about the mercy and justice of God?

GROUP

NOTES

VOICES from THE CHURCH

"Sometimes we sense God more palpably in our lives than at other times. When His presence feels more distant, if not completely gone, we must resist the temptation to substitute the tangible things that we can touch and feel for the God we temporarily can't sense."²

-Kelly Minter

POINT 1: Idol-worshippers distort the worship of God (Ex. 32:1-6).

The Israelites' demand for "gods" in the absence of Moses involved them breaking the _____ and _____ Commandments.

? Does the quickness of the people's rebellion against God surprise you? Why or why not?

The people's distorted _____ led to distorted ways of _____ that were not obedient to the rest of God's commands.

? How does the true worship of God protect us from distorted lives?

POINT 2: Idol-worshippers deserve the judgment of God (Ex. 32:7-14).

ESSENTIAL DOCTRINE #22: GOD IS OMNIPRESENT

God's omnipresence refers to His presence in all _____ and all _____ simultaneously. Because God exists apart from and outside of time and space, He is not limited by their constraints (1 Kings 8:27; Acts 17:24). He is present with us wherever we are, and sees all that occurs; _____ escapes His attention (Pss. 33:14; 139:7-10; Isa. 57:15; Jer. 23:23-24; Matt. 18:20). God's omnipresence is a deterrent for _____ and a source of great comfort and hope for believers.

The reality of God's just judgment invites God's people to _____ for others so they may be _____ .



How have you seen prayers for God's glory and the salvation of sinners be answered?

POINT 3: Idol-worshippers depend on the grace of God (Ex. 34:1,4-9).

God was gracious to reaffirm His _____ with the Israelites and to re-establish the _____ with Israel that they broke.

The Lord's glory is wrapped up in His _____ , which is on display in His overflowing grace, love, and forgiveness. Apart from His grace, we could not withstand His holy _____ against sin.



How does God's self-revelation here compare with the life and ministry of Jesus Christ?

MY RESPONSE

Because Jesus has brought us to God as our mediator, we intercede for others who are in need of salvation, praying for their redemption as we point them to Jesus.

- **HEAD:** How has God's self-revelation in Exodus 34 challenged your understanding of who God is?
- **HEART:** What sins do you need to confess so that you can experience the Lord's abounding grace and mercy toward you?
- **HANDS:** Who will you pray for, asking our gracious, compassionate, forgiving Lord to save?

NOTES

VOICES from CHURCH HISTORY

"When he solemnly declared his nature by his name to the full, that we might know and fear him, he doth it by an enumeration of those properties which may convince us of his compassionateness and forbearance, and not till the close of all makes any mention of his severity, as that which he will not exercise towards any but such as by whom his compassion is despised."³

-John Owen (c. 1616-1683)