

Title: A 2<sup>nd</sup> Chance  
Text: Exodus 34  
Theme: God is the God of  
Series: Exodus #53  
Prop Stmt God is the source, ground and author of forgiveness

Read Text: 34:1-12; 27-28

Exodus 34 is the account of the covenant-relationship being re-established between God and the children of Israel. Now, I recognize that many of you are sitting here in the middle of the Christmas season, with a gazillion other things competing for your time and concern. And what I just said may sound rather trivial, when in reality, most of the gazillion things that are on your concern list are in actuality trivial in comparison to this issue. Because, here is the essence of life boiled down to its raw basics: God is God and has been God forever and will be God forever. You are made by God for his pleasure and joy in order to love him, trust him, obey him, and delight in him. If you understand that and embrace that, then you will enjoy God as a merciful, compassionate, forgiving Sovereign. If you reject God, he will still be God, but you will be the recipient of his unstoppable judgment instead of his overwhelming mercy. When the children of Israel rebelled against God by creating a substitute god, they broke the covenant. They broke the terms of God's gracious relationship with them. They destroyed their very means of life and protection. They were on the verge of destruction. Moses ran to their rescue and pleaded their cause. Moses interceded for them and God agreed to give Israel a second chance. Chapter 34 is life! Chapter 34 is their 2<sup>nd</sup> chance at surviving and helps us face a critical issue that we have to deal with in terms of our relationship with God and our relationship with others. In fact, this issue is heightened by the fact that around the holidays, families get together, and many of you are faced with decisions of – am I going to invite this person, or am I going to accept the invitation of someone to an event? The issue of forgiveness and having or granting a 2<sup>nd</sup> chance is very fresh, because the wound is still raw and perhaps bleeding. Therefore, this text is particularly pertinent to you. There are two things that I want us to wrestle with this morning. 1) Why is God willing to give them (or anyone) a second chance? 2) How can and how does God give them (or anyone) a second chance?

### **1. Why is God willing to give them (or anyone) a second chance? (5-7)**

The answer is simple and overwhelming all at the same time. The reason why God is willing to give you a second chance is because this action on the part of God is actually a very, very important part of his glory.

Think of it like this. If you are a teacher, I presume that you enjoy helping your students learn, grasp and use new concepts. When the light bulb goes on in their brain, you are so pleased. Let's say that you are coaching a basketball team and you go over and over and over the play showing your team the options that it opens up when it is done correctly. Sometimes you have players who just don't see the whole picture right away. But, when they do, and they look for and run an option, and it works – they are excited, certainly,

but you are thrilled. How do you think a surgeon feels, when he or she is able to use all of that training and skill to save someone's life? Can you imagine how gratifying it would be to see that patient be able to go home to a family that is relieved and rejoicing? In each case, the teacher, the coach, and the surgeon are all using skills that they have acquired, and their joy is great. So, here is the connection now, please do not miss this. When God exercises compassion – he is not using a skill that he acquired that he now enjoys putting into practice. When God exercises grace, he is responding in a manner that is completely consistent with who he really is. Being gracious and compassionate is what God loves to do because it is who God is. I say that with such intensity because that is how God revealed himself here in verses 5-7. Now, in a second I am going to take you through those verses, but in order to appreciate these, we need to see something else.

How does God reveal himself to those who are challenging his authority? That is the issue going on in Isaiah 40. God is defending himself against idols. He does so in Isaiah 40 by revealing these aspects of himself:

Here is how BIG I am – v.12

Here is how SMART I am – v.14

Here is how INCOMPARABLE I am – v.18

Here is how AWESOME I am – v.22 & TERRIFYING – v.24

Here is how POWERFUL I am – v.26

Now, all of those things are true of God. All of those characteristics are part of his glory because they are part of what is his essence; that is his very being. But, when God reveals himself to those whom he loves and cherishes, (which is what is going on in Exodus 34) he does not focus on how powerful and deafening his strength is, but he speaks of another aspect of his being. So, the answer to why is God willing to give you (or anyone) a 2<sup>nd</sup> chance is because this is WHO God is. In fact, when you look at verse 5 you see that God repeats his name. “LORD LORD” That is his covenant name – Yahweh, which means the God who always is. By repeating it, in essence God is saying, that “The One who will forever be, what he has forever been, really is!” What follows is a description of God that is obviously so important that it is repeated all throughout the rest of the OT. David, Nehemiah, Joel and Jonah all refer to this list of attributes that help us understand who God really is. This verse basically functions like a creed for the children of Israel as they remind themselves of what God revealed about himself. And, this is what He is:

#### **A. He is Compassionate**

We have just seen an example of this (32.14). Compassion is a word of sympathy. It refers to looking beyond the fault of a person and seeing their true need. I am overwhelmed at times as I try to grasp how this Sovereign and Omnipotent God is truly drawn to and sympathetic to my weaknesses and is moved to help me. The admission of your weakness and the expression of your need resonate with the compassion of God and compels him to act on your behalf.

We recently set up our Christmas tree. I have a train that goes around it and a village. There is also a little ice-skating pond that plays annoying music while the skaters are moved around by the magnets that rotate underneath. We have had it for years and this year when I plugged it in, the music worked, but not the skaters. Now, quite honestly, I didn't really care, expect, one family member seemed very upset that this was not working and gave me that "you're kidding me, can't you fix that?" look. Well, for me, that changes everything. So, I took the thing apart, and to my eternal surprise, was actually able to fix it! The need, of someone I love, moved me to action. That is compassion. Your need puts God into motion. That is why you and I must acknowledge our needs.

### **B. He is Gracious (6)**

There once was an elderly lady who was going to a photographer to get her picture taken and took a friend along for support. After stopping at the salon in order for them to do what they could the ladies went to the appointment. As the photographer was getting her seated in her pose, she said, "Now be sure to do me justice." Her friend said, "My dear, what you need is not justice, but mercy."

This is a word related to mercy that has the idea of undeserved favor. Mercy and grace go together. God, who could exercise his justice and give us the just punishment for our sins that we deserve, instead poured out his justice that we deserved upon his Son, so that he could grant us forgiveness and do not deserve. God does not do that begrudgingly or reluctantly. That is what God loves to do!

### **C. He is Slow to Anger (6)**

This is one of the reasons why dads and moms with hair-trigger tempers are so offensive to God. If you are in a position of authority, you are a representative of God. God is slow to anger with those that are under his care. If God, who is perfectly righteous, chooses to be slow to anger, how much more should we? I like how one guy put it.

*"Slow to anger does not present the LORD as a frustrated deity who eventually loses patience and strikes out against those who have thwarted him. It rather acknowledges that the LORD is reluctant to act against his creation, even when it is in rebellion against him. He waits long to give the sinner opportunity to return in repentance. But he is not forgetful and will not condone sin. At a time of his choosing he will act decisively against it."*<sup>1</sup>

### **D. He is Abounding in Love (6)**

These next two actually go together, but I have separated them for explanation. God's Love (chesed) is tied to his covenant with his people. His love is not essentially an emotion, but a disposition. Does that make sense? God's love is not a feeling that comes and goes, not simply a sentiment that emotes towards those he feels affection for. His love

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<sup>1</sup> John L. Mackay, Exodus (Fearn, Ross-Shire, England: Mentor, 2001), p. 563. cited by Ryken, p. 1042.

is a commitment to pursue the best interest of that person. So, what is your best interest? It is your best interest to love the LORD your God with all of your heart, all of your mind, all of your strength all of the time! God loves you so much he is going to pursue that in you. He abounds in love for you. But as I mentioned, this goes hand in hand with his faithfulness.

#### **E. Abounding in Faithfulness (6)**

Faithfulness simply means true. The fact that God abounds in love and faithfulness means that God loves you with a true love. And God loves you with a true love that will never fail, or quit, or run out. This is so important for you to grasp. Some of you have been in a relationship in which someone told you, “I love you” and you believed them. You invested your heart and your dream into that person. But as time went on, it became apparent that the love they professed was not true. In reality their love for you was only a means to them loving themselves. And so they found someone else, or they found that loving you demanded more than they wanted to give. And you are left with the cards, the memories, the songs, the events, the promises, all of which at the moment meant so much but now hurt so deep. And you go over and over in your mind, did they really mean it when they said it? So, for you, it is so powerful to find out that God’s love abounds in faithfulness. It is true and since God cannot die, it will never quit. It will forever be true. But, seriously, how can God really love me, when there are so many other people in this world?

#### **F. Maintaining Love to thousands (7)**

If you have 100 hundred dollars to give to your kids and you have 10 kids, each kid gets 10 dollars. But, if you are a multi-multi trillionaire, then it does not matter if you have a billion kids, because there is plenty to go around. While that is true about the depth of God’s love, I believe that this phrase has to do with the endurance of God’s love. It is probably related to the phrase of his love enduring for a thousand generations. God did not love David more than he loves you. God’s love has no ending. There is plenty to go around.

#### **G. Forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin (7)**

Forgiving is from a Hebrew word that means “to lift.” That is what God does to our sin. He lifts it from off of us. The question, at least at this point in the story is, “so where does he put it?” That is answered in the NT. He lifts it off of us and puts it on Christ – who died because our sin condemned him. But in his death, the penalty for our sin was paid. There are 3 different words that are used here to define wrongdoing. Wickedness means to turn aside from what is right. Rebellion is a willful violation of a known standard. Sin is a general word that covers every kind of moral failure. The point is, there is no sin that is beyond the love of God. God is willing to forgive any sin. I will get to this in a moment, but I want plant the seed now – are you?

One last thought on this, before we go on. It is very common to hear people in our culture use the name of God in a flippant manner. I addressed this earlier when preaching on Exodus 20. 7. But I want to re-iterate the point of how offensive it is to God for someone to say, “God damn it!” That is not what he desires to do. That is not how he wants to be known. God reveals himself as being merciful, and we must embrace that.

## **2. How can and how does God give them (or anyone) a second chance?**

Yes, God is incredibly merciful. But that does not mean that God just ignores sin. We do not fully understand how incredibly merciful God is because we do not grasp how intensely pure his righteousness is. We do not realize the tension that exists between the mercy of God and the justice of God. While God loves to be mercy, he cannot deny his justice. Now, at this point in the story of the Bible, that tension has not yet been resolved. That will not happen until the cross. But what happens here, anticipates that event by showing us that while God loves to be merciful, forgiveness is a serious matter. God is re-establishing his covenant with his people. The foundation for that is seen in verse 1 when God commands Moses to bring with him two tablets of stone to replace the ones that were broken. So, how does God give people a second chance?

### **A. By Re-affirming the authority of his Word. (1)**

God gives a second chance to those who acknowledge the authority of his Word. Notice that while Moses makes the tablets, it is God who writes on them. The first set of tablets was apparently made by God. Moses had to bring his own this time. This time, the people of God understand that he really means what he says. God’s forgiveness is in a sense conditional. It is conditioned upon you placing yourself under his Word. When you say, God, I was wrong, you are right. I was going my own way and ignoring your counsel, but now I submit myself to your authority – his mercy comes running to your need. The floodgates that store his grace are opened up to soak you. But there is more here. We also see that he can give a second chance ...

### **B. Be Re-establishing the terms of his relationship. (10-27)**

Of course this is the natural result of reaffirming God’s Word. In verses 10-27, the terms of the covenant are reviewed. Forgiveness is granted by God assuming that the people have repented of their ways and are willing to live according to the terms that he establishes. Repentance does not mean that you are sorry for the consequences for your sin. Repentance does not mean that you admit that you made a mess of things. Repentance means that you recognize that your beliefs and actions were fundamentally wrong and sinful and that you have changed your thinking and are changing your behavior. Now, imbedded within the terms of the covenant are sacrifices. God establishes a system of sacrifices that are described in more detail in Leviticus that show us how serious our sin is by showing us how costly the payment for it is as well. All of these sacrifices ultimately point to Christ. That is the ultimate ground upon which God can give us a second chance.

### C. **By Reminding us of Christ.** (19, 20)

But the death of Christ is so full and so complete and the satisfaction of God's justice is so final that God's abounding mercy is ready to be poured upon those who repent.

### **3. How well do you reflect God?**

#### Appendix

What I find so interesting, is that the very words that God uses to demonstrate how gracious he is are twisted by people to say the opposite. The abuse of this text angers me because I have seen how some of you have been frightened and held in bondage by this false teaching. I am referring to the heresy of generational curses. There are those who teach that some, many or most of the problems in your life can be traced back to three or four generations where you may have had a family member who was part of a secret society, was involved in Satanism, or other cultic type activity. They teach that you could be suffering from a generational curse that has come upon your family because of the sins of those before you. This text is cited as evidence for that. Deut. 24.16 and Ezek. 18.4 are very clear about this. You will not be personally punished for the sins of another. You will not stand before God and give an account for your dad's sins. If you are in Christ, you are not cursed! What is so disturbing about this teaching is that it blatantly denies the power of the gospel, that is the power of the cross, and the power of Christ. Every curse, generational or otherwise is broken at the cross. There is NOW, no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus – Romans 8.1. Besides, keep in mind that Exodus 34 is a review and summary of the original covenant (Exodus 20-23). Those 126 verses are summarized in about 17 verses. Not everything is repeated. The second half of 34.7 is a partial repeat of Exodus 20.5-6. In 20.5 we read that God punishes “the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me.” That same phrase is repeated in Deuteronomy, when Moses is reviewing the law with the nation before his death and their advance into the Promised Land. Again, since in this culture several generations tended to live in the same place, the sins of one would have an effect upon the others. It is no secret that children learn behavior from their parents. Those who hate God set into a motion a pattern that children easily pick up. One of the consequences of hating God is that you create a culture where it is easy for the children to do the same. And, those children who, like their parents hate God, will face the consequences for it. So, the warning is strong. None of us lives to himself or dies to himself. What we do affects others for good or for bad. This is a warning to those who hate God that your sin will affect others. But, again, the main point that God is making here is showing that while he will not overlook sin, but will deal with it, He loves to be merciful.