

God's Sermon on His Name (Part 2)

Exodus 33:12 - 34:9

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Exodus 33 and 34. It's a fascinating verse in Psalm 50, as God talks about those who worshipped Him in an external way but whose heart was not engaged. Psalm 50:21 says this, "You thought [this is God speaking, now, to the people of Israel] that I was just like you." *You thought that I was just like you.* The Hebrew, from that expression, can actually be translated, *you thought that the I AM was one like yourself. You thought that the I AM (God's personal name) was one just like yourself.* That's really the essence of idolatry - to think of God as less than He is and to think of Him really as not much more than a glorified human being. Your view of God, as we're seeing in this great text, is absolutely foundational to your spiritual existence. In fact, the most important thing about you is what comes to your mind when you think of God. As believers, most of our failures in practical Christian living can be traced to inadequate or defective thoughts about God. I remember the first time, as a new Christian, I encountered this idea in a book by AW Tozer. This is what he wrote, "The most important fact about any man is not what he at any given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like. And then listen to this, "We tend, by a secret law of the soul, to move toward our mental image of God."

So, the question this morning is: what do you conceive God to be like? What comes to your mind when we talk about God? My hope and prayer this morning is that we will allow what God says about Himself, in this passage, to correct our misconceptions. God's self-revelation in Exodus 34 absolutely destroys our inadequate, idolatrous views of him and replaces them with a glimpse of His holiness, His greatness, and His goodness. You see, you were made for God, not for some idolatrous parody of the true God, but for God as He actually is. And your heart will be eternally restless until it finds its rest in Him.

Moses asked God, in this passage, to allow him to really know Him. He prayed - *God let me know your ways. Let me know Your predictable patterns of behavior.* We weren't there to hear what God said. Wouldn't it have been amazing to have experienced that? And yet, in an incredible expression of divine grace, God commanded Moses to write it down in a book so that

all future generations of believers might read it and meditate on it and think about it, so that you might enjoy the reality of what God said to Moses that day.

This remarkable self-revelation, as we noted last week, comes in the aftermath of the golden calf incident. And so, I pointed out that the ominous backdrop for this revelation is the sin of God's people. We looked at Exodus 32:1 through chapter 33:11. As Moses then goes on to seek God's forgiveness for his people, Moses makes three audacious requests of God. And we looked at the prayer of God's mediator in chapter 33:12-23. The three requests that Moses makes of God there, first of all, for the promise of God's presence - "Go with us", Moses says. Then for the knowledge of God's character - "Let me know Your ways". And then for a display, a visible display, of the glory of God - "Show me Your glory". Those are truly audacious requests. On what grounds could Moses make that request of God and expect God to answer? And the answer is only one ground, and that is the grace of God, the sovereign grace of God, because in chapter 33, as we discovered in verse 19, God says, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious". It's grace and grace alone, and its grace as God determines to bestow it.

Now today, we come to the heart of this passage and it contains, thirdly, God's gracious revelation; God's gracious revelation: the explanation of God's name. This is found in Exodus 34:1-7. Just to remind you of the context in which these verses appear, the people of Israel were at Mount Sinai. They had made a covenant with God, something less than two months before this. Less than two months before this time, they had sworn allegiance to God. They had sworn obedience to God's laws. In fact, go back and look at it with me. Look at Exodus 19. This is really the constitution of the nation, if you will, as God lays out his expectations, the people affirm it, a covenant is struck. Exodus 19:4 God says to Moses, "You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and *how* I carried [bore] you on eagles' wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests [that is, you're going to be a nation of those who represent Me to the nations of the world] and a holy nation." He says to Moses these are the words you shall speak to the sons of Israel. "So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the LORD had commanded him. Now notice verse 8: "Then all the people answered

together [as it were in with one voice] and said, 'All that the LORD has spoken [what?] we will do!' And Moses brought back the words of the people to the LORD. Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also trust in you forever.' Then Moses told the words of the people to the LORD.”

You go over to chapter 20:1, “Then God spoke all these words, saying...” And what you have, beginning in verse two and running down through verse 17, is you have God audibly, with his own voice, speaking in the hearing of all of the nation of Israel. And in that moment, He gave to them the Ten Commandments as an outline of His law that He had given them as a covenant in which they had agreed to keep. Can you imagine? Oh some 2 million Israelites gathered at the foot of Mount Sinai. You see a visible representation of the presence of God on the top of the mountain and then you hear the voice of God Himself, outlining what His expectations are in the Ten Commandments. Less than two months later, less than two months after that experience, in chapter 32, they broke at least four of the Ten Commandments. I'm not going to numerate them here. At least four, perhaps a fifth, depending on how you interpret what happens in chapter 32, they broke those commandments. In the incident of the golden calf, they shattered their covenant with God and that the shattering of that covenant that made with God was symbolized when Moses took those two tablets inscribed with the outline of God's expectations and laws and shattered them in the presence of the people. This was the first time since they had made those promises and entered into this covenant with God, that they had sinned against God in such a serious way. They had broken their covenant with God. The question was: how would God react? This was absolutely crucial for them to know, and let's be honest, it's crucial for us to know as well. Not all of them were believers. Some were, but some were not. But as New Testament believers in Jesus Christ, we have been made new. But we still have the flesh and we still sin. So how should we expect God to respond toward us? What is God like toward His people who sin against Him?

Well, Exodus 34 records God's renewal of the covenant with His people. And as God restores His people to Himself, in this passage, we learn what we as God's people need to know about our God when we sin against Him. Let's read it together. Exodus 34 and I'll read the first 7 verses.

“Now the Lord said to Moses, 'Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you smashed. So be ready by morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to Me on the top of the mountain. And no one is to come up with you, nor let anyone be seen anywhere on the mountain; even the flocks and the herds are not to graze in front of that mountain.' So, he cut out two stone tablets like the former ones, and Moses got up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and he took the two stone tablets in his hand. And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he called upon the name of the Lord. Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in faithfulness and truth; who keeps faithfulness for thousands, who forgives wrongdoing, violation of His Law, and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, inflicting the punishment of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.’”

In the Old Testament, that text that we have just read together becomes absolutely foundational. In fact, the rest of the Old Testament either quotes this passage directly or clearly alludes to this self-revelation more than 13 times. Let me show you just one important example. Keep your finger here in Exodus 34 but turn over to Psalm 103, a favorite Psalm of many of us. David, here, references this self-revelation. Psalm 103 and look at verse 6: “The Lord performs righteous deeds and judgments for all who are oppressed.” Now, notice verse 7, and you're going to recognize the wording: “He made known His ways to Moses, His deeds to the sons of Israel.” And then in verse 8, David actually quotes from the passage we just read in Exodus 34: “The LORD is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in mercy.” And then beginning in verse nine and running down through verse 18 at least, you have what amounts to David's own commentary on God self-revelation. Here's what it looks like when God is this way toward his own. So, this is just one example of how this passage, that we just read from Exodus 34, literally permeates the message of the Old Testament.

Now, let's go back to the passage itself in Exodus 34. Because here in the verses we've just read together, God teaches us several essential verities about Himself. When you and I sin, when we have done as the children of Israel did, when we have broken His law, when we've shattered the

covenant that we've made, and we want to come and seek the forgiveness of God and the restoration to Him, these are the truths about God that we must always keep in mind, just as they were.

First of all, we learn, here, that God is holy. God is holy. That is really the message of the first 4 verses. Because in the first 4 verses, God's holiness is revealed to us in two ways. First of all, holy God cannot bend His law for sinful man without compromising His character. Look at verse one. "Now the LORD said to Moses, 'Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you smashed.'" Now don't miss the big point here. Clearly, this was primarily wonderful news, both to Moses and the children of Israel, because it means that God intends to forgive His people, to renew His covenant with them, in spite of their sin in the golden calf incident. But there is difficult news here as well and a reminder of the seriousness of sin. You remember that in the first case, the first set of tablets, God Himself had cut out those stone tablets and then it written on them with His finger; that is, He had inscribed them with His word, with His power. But now, Moses must prepare the second set. Don't misunderstand. That wasn't because Moses had sinned in some way in shattering the first set. Rather, there's no indication in the text of that at all. Rather, it is a reminder that by their sin, the Israelites had broken the law of God. And now, if the covenant is going to be renewed, the law needs to be re-inscribed. It needs to be rewritten. What's the point? The point, here, is that God is always ready and willing to forgive His people, but He will never do so by ignoring or downplaying His moral law. This is so important to understand when it comes to sin. If you're here this morning and you're not a follower of Jesus Christ - you've never repented of your sin, you'd never put your faith in Jesus Christ - you need to understand something. I don't know how it is you think about your own sin. That is, I don't know how you think about those times when either your thoughts or your words or your actions are contrary to your conscience, your conscience begins to scream at you, and say, "That was wrong! I shouldn't have done that", or how you respond basically to what you know of the Bible, what you know of God's law? Perhaps, you're tempted to think it's not really that serious. Listen, you need to understand God's view is that when you sin, and every time you sin, just like with the children of Israel, you have shattered God's law. You have shattered it. And believer, let me talk to you for a moment. When you sin, you have also shattered God's law, but

there's a difference. Because you have trusted in Jesus Christ, God sees that breach of His law as having been fully atoned for, fully paid for, even as we sang together this morning, “by the death of Jesus Christ” who, as Peter says, “*bore our sins in his own body on the tree*”. And God also sees you as in Christ. We looked at that in detail in Romans 5. Because you have believed in Christ, God has made him your legal representative. He stands in your place and you get all the benefit of His action. You get the credit for what He does. And because He is your legal representative, and since He perfectly obeyed God's law, God sees you, even though you have shattered God's law, He sees you as having kept His law perfectly in Jesus Christ your representative. But you need to understand, Holy God cannot bend His law for sinful man without compromising His character.

There's a second way we see God's holiness in these verses. It's in verses two and three and it's this: sinful man cannot approach Holy God without a mediator. Simple man cannot approach Holy God without a mediator. Look at the 1st part of verse 2: “So be ready by morning [God says], and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to Me on the top of the mountain.” Now notice verse 3: “And no one [man] is to come up with you, nor let anyone be seen anywhere on the mountain [not one other soul]; even the flocks in the herds may not graze in front of that mountain.” Now, if you're familiar with the Book of Exodus, you know this isn't the first time God has said this. In fact, He gave exactly these same instructions when He first made his covenant with Israel back in Exodus 19. So, what is the point here? Don't miss how important this is! None of the people of Israel, not one of them, not you, if you had been there that day, not me, not a single person from the nation of Israel could approach God; could approach God's presence. Only one person, the mediator, that God Himself had appointed, Moses alone. One commentator, Stewart, puts it this way, “God's holiness is a threat to the unholy. So, nothing and no one He does not specifically declare acceptable, may safely approach Him.” Here, God reminds us that sinful man cannot approach Him, as holy God, without a divinely appointed mediator.

Now, when we come to verse four, we simply see Moses telling us that he did exactly what God had commanded him in the first three verses. Notice verse 4: “So he cut out two stone tablets

like the former ones, and Moses got up early in the morning and went up to Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and he took the two stone tablets in his hand.”

Now, stepping back from these first four verses, I want you to understand that, in this first part of God's self-revelation as we see God respond to the sin of His people, we learn something absolutely crucial that God does not, in fact God cannot, compromise His own holiness. The entire scene, there at Sinai, was structured. It was ordered to impress upon them and upon us the awe inspiring sense of the holiness of Yahweh. Maybe you're a follower of Jesus Christ but perhaps, as you deal with sin day after day in your own life, you have begun to presume on God's forgiveness. Maybe you've begun to think pretty lightly about your sin, like God doesn't take it anymore seriously than you do. Listen, that is deadly wrong! God graciously forgives our sins but it *always* offends His holiness. It is deadly serious! And if you doubt that, just think about this, there are only two ways that sin can ultimately be dealt with. Only two ways. One of those ways is by the Son of God suffering and dying for our sins on the cross under the wrath of the Father in order to purchase our forgiveness. The only other way sin can be dealt with, is by the unbelieving, unrepentant sinner suffering for his own sins in eternal hell, Jesus taught. That's it. Find yourself a place to sit somewhere quietly and think about the reality when you think about your own sin - that the only way your sin problem could be resolved is one of those two ways. Either the Son of God suffering in your place under the Father's wrath or you enduring that wrath forever in eternal hell. Those are the only two solutions to sin. Maybe, you're here this morning, and you have not put your faith in Jesus Christ. You've not repented of your sins. You've not believed in Jesus. Maybe you're tempted to think - and a lot of people think this. I understand, this is really common. I've talked to a lot of people who think like this. Maybe you think you're basically a good person. You believe there's a God. You believe that good and evil exists. You believe there's life after death. You believe you're one day going to stand before God. You believe there's a heaven and you want into that heaven. But you've convinced yourself that you're basically a good person, and when you stand at the judgment, your good deeds are going to outweigh your bad deeds, and you're convinced that on the basis of that, God is going to let you into His heaven. Now, let me say this firmly but as graciously as I can. Please listen. When you think that way, when you say that, you're really saying God isn't that holy after all. And He's going to compromise his own character for you. Friend let me tell

you, that is not going to happen. God never grades on a curve. He demands perfection. It's not enough to obey some of His commandments. If you want to earn your way into heaven, if you want to earn your way into His favor, then you've got to obey them all. Galatians 3:10 Paul says, "For all who are of works of the Law [that is, as many of those who think that by their own works and obeying God's Law, in doing good, those people, they] are under a curse [God's curse]; for it is written: 'Cursed is everyone who does not abide by all the things written in the book of the Law, to do them.'" If you don't keep every single command, then you are under a curse. You are damned! James 2:10 says, "For whoever keeps the whole Law, yet stumbles in one point, has become guilty of all." Getting to heaven by your own merit, by your own efforts, will simply never happen.

So, back to our text. What's the point here? The only way that you can approach holy God is through the only mediator that He has appointed. 1 Timothy 2:5 says, "For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus." He's the one person who can represent you to God. He's the one person who can bring you to God. He claimed that Himself. You remember in John 14:6, "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; [and listen to this] no one comes to the Father except through Me.'" If you're here this morning and you have this idea that you're going to get yourself to heaven, Jesus says no one comes to the Father except through Me. You need to believe the gospel that you've heard sung, that I've already shared this morning - the truth that God the Son, the eternal Son of God, took upon Himself humanity. He became fully like you except for sin. He lived in this world 2000 years ago. He walked in a place you can visit today. He interacted with people, real people. And He lived a life of perfect obedience to God. He obeyed God's law perfectly. And then, He offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin - not for His own, because He didn't have any, but for those who would believe in Him. And on the cross, He bore every single sin of every single person who would ever believe in Him, satisfying the justice of God so that God could bring forgiveness to that person. If you're willing to put your trust in the work of Jesus Christ, then you can be made right with God. He will be the mediator to bring you to God. God then raised Him from the dead in order to show that He'd accepted His sacrifice. And now, He sits in heaven. One day He will return for His own. It's that Jesus who is your only hope of approaching holy God

without being incinerated and getting what you and I, what we all deserve. So, don't ever forget when it comes to sin, God is still holy.

Secondly, we learned that God is great. God is great. In these verses, we get several glimpses of God's greatness. First of all, we learned that God is so great that He must condescend to interact with mankind. Now, we use that word, condescend, in a very negative, pejorative sense - you know that person is condescending. That's not how the word is used here. It's a good theological, biblical word. In fact, if you look it up in the Oxford English Dictionary, you'll find that to condescend, is to graciously disregard your own superiority. In God's case, He graciously disregards the vastness of His superiority over us, in order to interact with us. This is part of the greatness of God. You see it in verse 5. It says, "And the Lord descended in the cloud." He descended. He had to come down. He had to come down from heaven. He had come down from the top of the mountain in order to interact with man. And He descended in the cloud. Now, you know that in the cloud, here, describes God's presence manifested in the cloud of His glory, or as it's in the original, the *shekinah*. What was this? It was a visible representation of the presence of God. It was a blazing, brilliant display of God's visible presence, shrouded in a cloud, in order to protect those who saw it. So, by day it was a cloud. By night, it looked like a pillar of fire as the cloud allowed some of the blazing light within to come shining through. It was a visible display of God's presence. The Lord descended in the cloud. So, in order to interact with us, God is so great that He must descend, and He must condescend to make Himself known, even shielding Himself, so that we are not destroyed. Verse five goes on to say, "And the Lord descended in the cloud and stood there with him as he..."

By the way, you'll notice in our translation that pronoun, he, is lower case implying this refers to Moses. But it's likely not. It probably should be capitalized. Most translations and most commentators agree that all the verbs in these verses are being done by God. So, let me read it that way. The Lord descended in the cloud, and the Lord stood there with Moses as the Lord called upon the name of the Lord. Then the Lord passed by in front of him. Now, that expression, *the Lord passed by in front of him*, that describes God's answer to Moses' request that we looked at last week in chapter 33:18, to show him His glory. This is all we're told of what Moses saw. The Lord passed by in front of him as we learned in chapter 33:20-23. Moses

would not have survived a direct view of the glory and splendor of God. And so, God, you remember, shielded Moses in a cleft in the rock, perhaps, the same cave in which Elijah sheltered years later. And then, as the visible display of God's glory, this blazing light cloud passes, God removes the shield that allows Moses to see what God calls His back, meaning, as some have called it, “the afterglow of God's glory”.

But verse six continues, “Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed...” This is the Lord proclaiming. Those two words “and proclaim”, introduce us to God's sermon on His own name. It consists of what the Jews refer to as the 13 attributes of God, although they disagree and argue about exactly how those 13 are enumerated here. Some are clear and obvious, others not so much. Regardless, what we see in verses six and seven is God and His predictable patterns. We discover His ways. Remember, Moses has said “show me your ways”. Well, here we discover God's ways.

And we discover His ways through several channels of revelation. First of all, we discover His ways through what He calls Himself, that is, His names. Verse 6: “The LORD, the LORD God”. A second channel of revelation is what He says about Himself. We call them His attributes. Verse six goes on to say, “compassionate and merciful [gracious], slow to anger, and abounding in faithfulness [steadfast love] and truth.” And a third channel of revelation is what He does, His acts. Notice verse 7. We're no longer talking about who He is and His attributes, we're talking about what He does. There are verbs here: “who [He] keeps faithfulness [steadfast love] for thousands, who [He] forgives wrongdoing [iniquity], violation of His Law [transgression], and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, inflicting [visiting] the punishment [iniquity] of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.” So, God proclaimed His name to Moses. He explained the implications of His name or character, His attributes. Luther described these verses as God's sermon on the name of the Lord.

Now, before we look at it specifically, I don't want you to miss one really important key lesson here. And that is, that our knowledge of God is totally dependent on His revelation. 1 Corinthians 2:11 says, “For who among people [men] knows the thoughts of a person [man]

except the spirit of the person [man] that is in him? So also, the thoughts of God no one knows, except the Spirit of God.” And he goes on to say and the Spirit of God has made the thoughts of God known in His Word. So, it's only because God has chosen to reveal Himself that we know anything about Him.

God's revelation comes to us in a limited way through the creation. We learn certain things through the creation, Romans 1 says. In Romans 2, we learn certain things about God through our consciences. Acts 13 says that we learn, 14 rather, says that we learn certain things about God from His providence, His order and structure of the world. But primarily, we learn about God through His Word. And, while all Scripture is God's self-revelation, what makes this passage unique is that, in it, God reveals His response with His people - those with whom He has entered into a covenant, sin against Him, and sin against His law.

So, we've seen some of God's greatness - that He must condescend to interact with man but, in the first name the Lord recites to Moses, it also underscores God's greatness. He is the Lord. Notice verse 6: “Then the Lord passed by in front of him and proclaimed, 'The Lord'“. Now, in our English translations, in the Old Testament, when you see the word, Lord, not capital L lowercase O, lowercase R, lowercase D, but when you see the word, LORD, in our Old Testament and it's in all capitals, the translators are telling us that, in that place, what really appears in the Hebrew text, is God's personal name. Theologians call it the sacred tetragrammaton. Don't be scared by that expression. It just means the sacred four letters or the holy 4 letters. There are four Hebrew letters, specifically four consonants, that make up the name of God, YHWH. YHWH. Now, Hebrew was originally written without vowels. And so, we can't be exactly sure how God pronounced His name when He said it to Moses, here in Exodus 34. But linguists and Hebrew scholars, as they've reconstructed the evolution of the language through time, have made their best guess. And their best guess is that it is something like *Yahweh*. *Yahweh*. So, you supply two vowels and “a” and an “e” - *Yahweh*. By the way, when *Yahweh* was anglicized into our language, it became *Jehovah* - same word, different vowels were added, and the same Hebrew letters were anglicized then it became *Jehovah* but it's really *Yahweh*.

Now, you may not know this, but this is actually, by far, the most common name for God in the Old Testament. It occurs over 6000 times. It's a form of the Hebrew verb, to be. In Exodus 3:14, when God first announced this name to Moses in sort of a special way as He was going to bring His people out of Egypt, He used the first person. Yahweh, or LORD in all caps in our Bibles, is the third person form of the verb, to be. So, God calls Himself, I AM, but when we refer to Him, we refer to Him as Yahweh, which means He is.

But what exactly is the significance of this name? Well, this name points out the greatness of God. It also points out some of the goodness of God - we'll talk about that the next time together. But it points to the greatness of God in three primary realities, in this name Yahweh. First of all, it points to God's self-existence. "I am the one who is". God is simply the one who is! What does that mean? It means that He depends on nothing and no one for His existence. To say it positively, God is responsible for all existence including His own. He is the Creator and Sustainer of all things, as Paul says in Acts 17, "He gives to all people life and breath and all things." He doesn't need anything from anybody else. Instead, He gives. So, it's God's self-existence. It also speaks of God's eternity. He simply is, that is, He always was, He is today, and always will be. In Genesis 21:33, Abraham called upon the name of Yahweh, the everlasting God. Yahweh, the everlasting God. Psalm 90:2, "Before the mountains were born or You gave birth to the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, You are God." God's name speaks of His eternity, but it also speaks of His immutability. He is, that is, He's always the same. He always will be what He always has been. God is unchangeable in His being and character. He's not in the process of becoming something different than He eternally is. Hebrews 13:8, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and forever." God is the same in every generation and through all the ages. That's why in Exodus 3, when He revealed this name to Moses, He then said, "you shall say to the sons of Israel Yahweh the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob has sent me to you this is my name forever and this is my memorial name to all generations." He's saying, *Listen, tell them I'm the one who eternally is. I'm unchangeable. I'm the same God that was Abraham's God, and Isaac's God, and Jacob's God, and I'm the same God today.*

There's a third glimpse of God's greatness in this text. It is that He is the Lord God. He is the Lord God. You'll notice, He repeats the word, LORD (Yahweh), and then he adds, "God". The Hebrew word for God is *El*. It's related to Elohim. It occurs 217 times in the Old Testament for the true God. It comes from a Hebrew word which means to be strong. So, when we say He is "Yahweh God", we're saying He is Yahweh the Almighty. He is the all-powerful one. He has the power to do whatever He chooses to do. Think about this, God's actions are only limited by His character and His will, but never by a limitation of power. He is almighty. Now, why should that aspect of God's greatness be encouraging to us here in this context? As one author puts it, "His mercies are not the mercies of a frail, feeble creature like ourselves, but a God of infinite resources. He is almighty. So, there is the greatness of God. Now, why does this passage go to the holiness of God and then the greatness of God before we get to the goodness of God? I think Matthew Henry has it right when he writes this, "That the terror of His greatness may not make us afraid, we are told how good He is. But that we may not presume upon His goodness, we are told how great He is."

So, what are the lessons we learn in the context here? Christian, listen, when you sin against God, like they did, when you sin against God and you come seeking forgiveness, and you come seeking to be restored, you must never forget that God is holy. He hasn't changed His standard. He hasn't forgotten His law. He's not taking your sin lightly and you better not take it lightly either. And you must remember that God is great. He is self-existent. He needs nothing from you. You need everything from Him including forgiveness, and restoration, and mercy. He is eternal, but His greatness also means that He is immutable. He never changes and that includes His promises to you. I love the way it's put in Malachi 3:6. Listen to this: "For I, the Lord [Yahweh], do not change; therefore you, the sons of Jacob, have not come to an end [are not consumed]." I, Yahweh, do not change therefore you, O sons of Jacob, are not consumed. You know what God was saying to the Jewish people? He was saying, *Listen, because my name is Yahweh, I am the immutable one. I'm the one who always is what I always have been. Because of that, I remember. I remember the promises I made to Abraham, and to Isaac, and to Jacob. And so, you survive as a people, because I'm the same.*

Same is true for us folks. When you sin against God, as a believer, your hope is found in the

reality of who God is, that He is eternally the same, the same God who declared His name to Moses in Exodus 34, who said I am a gracious, compassionate God who forgives iniquity transgression and sin. Folks, that is our hope, the fact that He never changes. But that's who He is. He was then, he is now, and always will be. Next time we study this text together, we'll examine the heart of God's self-revelation, what you've been waiting for, His goodness.

Let's pray together.

Our Father, I pray for those who were here this morning who are not in Christ, Lord, who somehow have convinced themselves that You are not as holy as You are, that You grade on a curve, that You're going to accept them, that they'll be the exception. Oh, God, I pray that You would be kind to them, even through what we studied this morning. And help them to see You as You are - One who cannot compromise Your standards without compromising Your character. Help them to see, oh God, that they will not be the first exception. And may they see their only hope is found in the mediator you've appointed, our Lord Jesus Christ. And may they run to Him for the forgiveness that He has authority to give even as we read from Mark 2 earlier. Father, I pray that today would be the day of their salvation. I pray for the rest of us. O God help us when we sin to think about this passage, to remind ourselves that this is who you are. And, Lord, don't let us jump ahead to Your goodness, but let us start, even as You did, by reminding ourselves of Your holiness, of Your greatness, which only makes us appreciate, even more, the goodness of your grace, compassion, and mercy. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen!