

# Restoring the Relationship

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 24 March 2019

Preacher: Ali Sewell

[ 0 : 0 0 ]     So one of the things I like to do each week, I tend to read a little bit about the passage that we're going to be looking at the following Sunday from a few different places. This week, the very first sentence I read about chapters 33 and 34 was this.

I would say, of all the passages in Exodus, these chapters are by far the most difficult. So that was an encouraging start for my week. It's an encouraging start for our time together. Perhaps as we read that, there's some bits which are a bit tricky, some bits which we're kind of trying to get our head around.

But what I'd like us to do this morning, and what we've been trying to do all the way through Exodus, is to look at the big picture. So it's to see, you know, what's the main point in these chapters?

How does it kind of move on? How does it progress this incredible narrative of the book of Exodus that actually we're coming towards the end of? How does it deepen our understanding of the God who is the main character of this whole book?

And I think actually when we do that, when we approach these chapters in that way, things become a lot simpler because really what we have here is quite straightforward. There is a problem.

[ 1 : 0 9 ]     There is a solution. And then we're given the result of that solution. That's quite a kind of a common pattern that things go through, isn't it? This week we had a problem at home.

Our shower drain was blocked. The solution involved me kind of blindly poking around with a screwdriver and an old chopstick that I found somewhere. And slightly miraculously, the result was it started working again, and we're no longer flooding the bathroom.

Well, the situation here is perhaps slightly more significant, it's fair to say, slightly more grave. And yet it follows that same pattern. A problem, a solution, and then the result of that.

So let's dig in and have a look at those together. So first of all, what's the problem? What problem are we faced with here in chapter 33 and 34?

Well, to get to grips with this, we need to do a bit of a recap from last week, chapter 32, as these are all tied together. And you might remember if you were here that Chris took us through chapter 32, and it was this episode with the golden calf, where Moses is away from the people for a little bit, and the people decide to reject God.

[ 2 : 1 9 ]     Reject the God who'd rescued them, reject the God who'd brought them out of Egypt, the God who'd promised and delivered so much time and time again. They reject that God, and instead, they make their own God.

They make this idol, this calf, made out of gold. After promising their loyalty to God, saying, whatever you say, we will do, well, at the very first opportunity, they turn their backs on him.

And Chris mentioned that vivid language of kind of honeymoon unfaithfulness, that break in the relationship that we see here right at the offset.

And chapter 33 and 34 are following straight on from that momentous event, and really looking into the consequences of that. And it begins, you'll see at the start of chapter 33, what God says to Moses, basically, go, take the people, go to the land I promised you.

I'll drive out all these people before you. It will be your land. And so despite what has happened, despite Exodus chapter 32, well, God is still going to give them all that he'd said he would.

[ 3 : 29 ] Despite what has happened, it seems like, well, actually, perhaps everything's fine. And so what's the problem? Well, this bombshell lands in verse 3. Go to a land flowing with milk and honey, God says, but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people.

What's the problem? Well, the problem is that God is no longer going to be with his people in the land. The problem is that there is no longer going to be this great relationship between God and the people, which was the whole point of this great rescue out of Egypt, the whole point of bringing the people into this land.

The week before last, we were away as a family at Creef Hydro for Julie's mom's 60th birthday. It's a great place. There's kind of tons of stuff to do for all different ages, all the family.

It sounds a bit like a kind of an advert. It's a great bit. You know, the girls really enjoyed being there. But Monday just gone, as I was taking Emily to nursery, her teacher said to her, what was the best thing about your time away?

And Emily looked at her and she said, well, Granny was there. You know, it was being with Granny that was better than the pool, better than the kids' club, better than all the other stuff. I preferred the pool, but you know, that's her prerogative.

[ 4 : 51 ] That was what was special about the place. And that's the same as the promised land. You know, God has promised to give these people this land as their home. This land is their ultimate destination.

And it's kind of described throughout the Bible almost as a kind of a paradise. You see that in verse 3, it's this land flowing with milk and honey, this place of abundance. And yet the best thing about this land is that God was going to be there.

The people and God would once again be living together. It's a kind of a return to that perfection at the beginning in Genesis 1 and 2 in the Garden of Eden. And yet now here's God saying, actually, he won't be there.

And it's important we see this isn't this kind of God's in a bit of a huff, well, you've done this, so I'm not going. The point is, the problem really is that he can't be there. That the perfect holy God can't be among rebellious, sinful people.

Or what? They'll be consumed, it says. They'll be destroyed. It'll be like kind of dropping a white hot coal into the middle of kind of dry and dusty straw.

[ 6 : 01 ] And so it's a disaster. It's this problem that threatens to render the whole of Exodus so far, everything we've seen over the last two and a half months, meaningless. And so there's the problem.

How can a holy God be among sinful, rebellious people? And one of the things that Chris did such a great job, I thought, last week at, was showing us that the Israelites' rebellion with this golden calf in chapter 32, well, that might look to us very different, might look kind of weird, while we might think, how stupid are those people?

Well, actually, we saw that it's something that is very much part of our own lives. That each one of us, we turn away from God. We make idols not out of golden calves, but out of money, out of what people think about us, out of our desire to be in control of things, these are where we put our trust.

And just the same as the Israelites, we turn away from God. And so our problem is the same as this problem. How can a holy God be among sinful, rebellious people? And we're going to look at the solution that this passage gives to that in just a moment.

But first of all, I just want us, I suppose, to think about that problem, feel the challenge of that problem a little bit. And really, I think the challenge for a lot of us is this, does that problem actually bother us?

[ 7 : 22 ] So I think it's fair to say that the Israelites in the book of Exodus, they don't always come out that positively. They're not always great role models. But here, their reaction is spot on. Look at verse 4.

They're devastated. They mourn. It's a terrible, disastrous word that they're told. You know, they realize the seriousness of the situation. Even though they've been told, you can still have the stuff, you can still have the land, but without God, they're not interested.

I think that's a real kind of challenge. Would that be our response? Do we want the stuff that God gives? Or actually, do we want God himself? Is God a means to an end?

Or is God in a relationship with him the ultimate goal? We just sang earlier that great song. It finishes, There my heart has found its treasure. Christ is mine forevermore.

Can we really say, by the way that we act, that that is what we treasure above everything else? It's not stuff, not even stuff God gives us, but that Christ is ours. That relationship.

[ 8 : 27 ] For all of us here, whether Christianity is something perhaps we're thinking about, or whether it's been your life for a long time, we want people to kind of remember that the very heart of it is Christ.

So, you know, for an example, I'll tell you a secret. I quite enjoy being part of this church. We've got good friends here. There are people who I know would and who have been very supportive and encouraging to us, who would help us out.

There is kind of community. I enjoy eating before and after the service. All of these kind of good things that come from God. And yet it's this constant reminder for us that actually the main thing has to be God being with his church.

If all of that stuff was stripped away, would we still say, yeah, this is an encouraging place to be because God meets with his people? And that's something we can't lose sight of here, whatever stage of that journey we're in.

Are we in kind of to Christianity, into church for what it offers us? What can God do for me? Or do we actually, above everything else, want to know God, want to be close to God, want to enjoy relationship with God?

[ 9 : 37 ] Is that our treasure? Is that our number one priority? And yet the problem is, as we've seen, how can a holy God have a relationship with unholy, imperfect people like these Israelites, also like us?

Well, as I said, the good news is, as we move on, this passage gives us a solution to that, a solution to that problem. And it's a twofold solution. And so let's move on and look at that solution now.

And the first part of the solution is this. It's Moses' special role as a mediator. And we've spoken about this, I think, before, but here it's emphasized, perhaps even more clearly, those verses you see about the tent of meeting in verses 7 to 11.

What are they all about? Well, really they're showing us that God meets with Moses outside of the camp. And then there's this gap to where the people are. God is outside of the camp speaking to Moses in this tent.

Moses bridges that gap, coming into the camp to speak to the people. He's bridging that gap. He's that mediator. We see it even more as Moses' reasons, almost kind of argues with God on behalf of the people.

[ 10 : 47 ] Have a look at verse 14. God says to Moses, my presence will go with you and I will give you rest. What doesn't really stand out here in the English is that the you here is singular.

We were speaking with some guys before the service about the lack of y'all or yours in the English language which can get us in trouble. But here the you is singular. God is saying his presence will go with Moses and Moses alone.

What's Moses' response? He says that's not enough. He intercedes for the people. Verse 13, consider too that this nation is your people. Verse 16, how shall it be known I found favor in your sight, I and your people?

Is it not you going with us so that we are distinct, I and your people from every other people on the face of the earth? Moses is saying, you know, this doesn't work if it's only me.

It's the fact that this God is going to be with his people which sets us apart, which makes this whole thing worthwhile. So Moses argues on behalf of the people. He's this mediator.

[ 11 : 54 ] And we see there that God accepts that. Verse 17, the Lord said to Moses, this very thing you have spoken I will do for you have found favor in my sight and I know you by name.

The favor that Moses has with God, this special status that he enjoys that we've seen throughout the book of Exodus. He's not just an average person. This special relationship that Moses has with God, he uses so that all the people can be with God.

He uses so that God can be with all of his people. So that's the first part of the solution, Moses, the mediator. And yet the second part of the solution, the way this huge problem can be overcome is actually God's character itself.

And so if we're not careful we can end up reading this passage a little bit with kind of Moses as the good guy and God as this kind of meanie and Moses has to kind of twist God's arm to force him to be nice.

Well that is not the case here. That is not what we're supposed to understand. Imagine perhaps if you will you kind of scratch your neighbor's car or you kind of knock off their wing mirror as you're pulling into your driveway and it's a bit of a disaster.

[ 13 : 06 ] It's a car they love. It's completely your fault. You know they're going to be cross. What might you do to kind of smooth over things? Well you might send around someone I suppose to apologize in your place.

If you have a member of your family who's particularly smiley or kind of gets on with them particularly well is slightly cuter than you are you can kind of tell them to toddle around and try and sort out the problem that way they'd be acting kind of as a mediator and yet that's only going to make any difference whatsoever if there is something in your neighbor which is kind.

Something about them which is forgiving. Something about them that has kind of generosity in their character. If they're intent on revenge or on making you pay or on punishing you then there's nothing that mediator can do.

Well the point here of course is that Moses can't twist God's arm. Moses can only act can only have this kind of two way discussion with God because of the kind of God that God is.

Because of God's character and that's what's highlighted next is a kind of back and forward at the end of chapter 33 and into 34 but it's really all kind of building towards and summed up in verse 6 and 7 of chapter 34.

[ 14 : 21 ] This incredible revelation of who God is. The Lord passed before Moses and proclaimed the Lord the Lord a God merciful and gracious slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness.

Keeping steadfast love for thousands 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 fourth generation.

God reveals himself reveals his character as one who is merciful as one who's gracious as one who's slow to anger as one who shows love as one who forgives and yet still maintains and upholds justice will not just forget about sin but it's because of this character it's because of this grace which remember we said a couple of weeks ago is receiving this love that we don't deserve it's because of his mercy which I suppose is kind of the opposite of that it's not getting the punishment that we do deserve it's because of his forgiving nature that there is a solution to this problem.

God won't leave his people he'll go not just with Moses but with all the people his people even though as we read they are stiff necked people kind of a great description of these kind of rebellious people who constantly want to go their own way because of God's gracious character because of Moses the mediator there is a way that he will go with his people and that is the result isn't it verse 10 of chapter 34 we see the kind of the covenant that's the relationship between God and his people is renewed in fact we didn't read all the way through chapter 34 if we did you might have remembered or you might have recognized a lot of parallels to chapter 20 that we looked at a couple of weeks ago before the golden cup and the kind of the pattern is this in chapter 20 that as the ten commandments are given that relationship is established chapter 32 that relationship is broken and yet we're supposed to see the parallels to chapter 20 in chapter 34 as that relationship is restored once again the problem has been dealt with there's this solution which wasn't to pretend that sin doesn't matter but it was that problem that gap was overcome by God's gracious character and the provision of

Moses this mediator let's kind of bring this back to us today we might think that's great isn't it I'm glad that that worked out for the Israelites but what about us I'm glad all this time looking through the book of Exodus hasn't been a waste of time with a sad ending but actually what does this mean for us well we said this is our problem too how can a holy God be with sinful people well what's our solution I hope kind of by now we're kind of getting used to the solution which is that actually the same solution for the Israelites is the solution for us remember the picture of Exodus is a picture of the gospel how's God able to dwell with kind of sinful people like us well it's not by sweeping the wrong stuff under the carpet but he's able to offer us that solution because of that same character which is unchanging throughout the Bible his gracious merciful forgiving character that he is abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness he's able to have a solution to that problem through the ultimate mediator not Moses but Jesus

[17:59] Christ and we see the parallel so clearly don't we just as Moses used that favour he had with God to make a way for God to be with his people well Jesus all the more uses that perfect relationship that he has with God being God himself not for his own benefit but again to make a way for God to be with his people how does he do that I wonder if you notice perhaps the kind of tension we might say in God's description of himself that we just read in chapter 34 we read again verse 7 he forgives iniquity and transgression and sin but he will by no means clear the guilty so we have this picture he's forgiving and yet still he is just and that he will punish sin with the punishment it deserves he's loving and merciful and yet he takes sin seriously and this tension of forgiveness and sin runs kind of throughout the Old

Testament the part of the Bible written before Jesus it's at the heart of that problem that we began with how can a holy God be with sinful people and it says Jesus arrives that this tension is resolved it says Jesus comes that we see actually God does punish sin we see wickedness does get dealt with judgment does fall and yet incredibly it falls on Jesus the only perfect person ever the only human ever who didn't deserve this punishment and yet on the cross he takes the consequences of our sin of our rebellion he pays the price he takes the punishment and because of that this forgiveness is possible it's not that sin has been forgotten or kind of brushed into the carpet it's that sin has been dealt with once and for all by Jesus and the result of that for us is the same again as the result for the

Israelites a covenant relationship with God based on these covenant promises that he's made that show us his gracious character these promises he's made that he has kept at the greatest possible cost through Jesus the perfect mediator of a new and of a better covenant there is a solution that because of Jesus God can be with us we can have that great relationship in fact an even closer relationship with God because of the greater kind of mediatorial work of Jesus than the Israelites could ever enjoy and I just want to finish this morning by thinking about one thing in particular one of the things that I love about Exodus one of the things that's been so great to go through the book of Exodus is that it gives us this kind of huge sort of bird's eye view I suppose of the gospel this huge picture of God acting out his salvation on a kind of a grand scheme and we see that picture of how God rescues his people how he rescues through a lamb who dies in their place how God leads his people how God is able to dwell with his people because of this mediator who connects them we see all of those truths which were true for the

Israelites in Exodus and are equally true for us today Exodus gives us the big picture about what Jesus has achieved and it's so important that we have that but I know for me there's often a temptation to leave these big truths up here slightly without actually taking them into my own personal life and so I want to finish by landing these in our day to day lives and seeing what difference does this actually make and I think for me the key thing is this it's when we think this week of Jesus God himself that the perfect mediator taking the cost of our sin when we think about all that God has done to overcome this incredible problem of how a holy God could be with people like us when we think of that great price that he has paid does that not help us treasure that relationship all the more is it not remembering that is it not remembering these big kind of mile high truths that move us just from wanting kind of the stuff that God can give us to actually wanting that day to day relationship with

God himself with the God who has gone to incredible lengths to make this relationship possible and if that is the case well in some ways the number one thing that we could do this week is an incredibly kind of average day to day standard church advice nitty gritty kind of thing which is to dust off our Bibles and to read them you know to hear from God as he speaks to us through his word if you're here this morning and you don't own a Bible you're welcome to take one of these blue ones home with you and kind of dig into that to see what God says if we actually treasure this relationship with God above everything else will we not set time aside in prayer to speak to God to tell God what is on our mind to tell him what we're going through to bring him in to our day to day lives these chapters the book of Exodus shows us this great relationship but like all relationships it's a relationship which is developed which grows little by little in the small things day by day those decisions that we make to spend time with one another

[ 23 : 42 ] I know that carving out that time to read the Bible to pray is really difficult there are hundreds of things that kind of press in on our lives and take priority over that and yet if we when we think about what Jesus has done we recognise that relationship is the greatest prize we could ever have how much more will we then kind of commit and prioritise strengthening and deepening and learning to enjoy more and more that relationship and that was what the people knew that the promised land was all about it was about being with God that is what as a church we want to be all about a place where people can meet with the God who created all things and it's something that God wants us to enjoy in each of our lives day by day not as a once a week thing but as a way of life where we're able to listen to God as he speaks to us through his word where we're able to speak to God as we come to him in prayer where we're able to enjoy this great relationship because God himself has dealt with the problem he is able to be with people like us because of his grace because of his mercy because of that mediator

Jesus Christ