

Exodus 33: The Presence of God

Leader Guide



PLEASE NOTE! – Presently, Summit Church is studying Exodus 19-34 during corporate worship and in small groups. While the small groups will study these texts in order, the sermon may not correspond to the precise chapter week by week. However, the themes that pervade both sermon and small group will overlap considerably. On Sundays and throughout the week, the goal is to grow in our understanding and respond rightly as a church to the Holy God who appeared to the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Also, please note a new section- a prayer guide based on the themes of this text.

Context: One of the most fascinating and revealing parts of Exodus 32-34 is the ongoing conversation between Moses and God about the future of Israel. Throughout the conversation, we see Moses interceding for Israel and God showing mercy and compassion. In 32:11-14, God says that He will destroy Israel and make a great nation out of Moses' offspring (instead of Abraham's). Moses rejects God's offer to become a great nation and does so appealing to the promises and the honor of God. In 33:1-3 and 12-17, God says that He will be faithful to the promise to Abraham and give the Israelites land, prosperity, and success, but He will not send His Presence with Israel. However, Moses begs for God's Presence and says that he would rather stay in the desert *with* God's Presence than go to the Promised Land *without* it.

The rest of the conversation takes place in 33:18-20, 34:4-7 in which God reveals His Glory to Moses. When Moses comes out of the Presence of God in chapter 34, his face is shining radiantly. In Exodus 40, God fills the Tabernacle, which has been meticulously constructed according to His standards. God then dwells with His people as they go up from Mount Sinai and into the Promised Land. Having experienced the Presence of God in His life, Moses wanted nothing more for himself or his people.

Biblical Survey of the Presence of God:

- Garden of Eden: humankind dwells with God in perfect harmony until sin disrupts the intimacy.
- Exodus: God's Presence leads the Israelites in the wilderness and fills the Tabernacle (Exodus 40).
- 1 Kings: Now settled in the Promised Land, God's Presence fills Solomon's grand Temple (1 Kings 7-9).
- Exile: As the Israelites are carried out of the Promised Land, the Temple is destroyed. The symbol for Israel's distinctiveness lies in ruins and the Israelites have no physical place to worship in His Presence.
- Ezra, Nehemiah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi: the Temple is rebuilt at God's request, but this building has very little of the grandeur of Solomon's temple and there is no clear indication that God's Presence fills it.
- Gospels: Jesus predicts that the 2nd Temple will be destroyed (Matt 24, Mark 13, fulfilled in AD 70) and that His body is the true temple (John 2:17). When Christ is crucified, the Temple veil is torn in two.
- Acts: The Holy Spirit is poured out on believers (Acts 2) and Paul preaches that God does not dwell in a temple made by human hands.
- Epistles: Ephesians 2:19-22 and 1 Peter 2:4-9 describe the church as the dwelling place of God.
- Revelation: God dwells with humankind in full glory and harmony in the New Heavens and New Earth.

Theme: Moses passed an important test that God orchestrates in this conversation- Moses chooses God's Presence over everything else in the world including God's blessings! Success, victory in battle, having an angel reside with Israel, wealth, prosperity, land, and personally becoming a great nation- these are things that would have been most important to a man in the Ancient Near East. Rather, Moses rejects all of them in favor of the Presence of God. In chapter 33, we see Moses beg for the Presence of God, the people mourn over losing it, Moses and Joshua continually going into it, and Moses coming away from it a changed man. Thus, in this chapter, we see how important the Presence of God became to this people who experienced it in a tangible way.

Aim: To be the type of people that seek, keep, and cultivate the Presence of God. To make sure that our relationship with God is less about asking for God's blessings and more about resting in God's Presence.

Prayer: Use the points below for a time of prayerful reflection on the Presence of God:

- take a moment of silence to prepare your hearts to be in the Presence of God
- ask God to remove anything in your life that is not compatible with His Presence
- thank Him for His glory and dwell on the excellent features of His personality
- declare to Him that His Presence is the greatest blessing He could give to us
- reflect on the power and wisdom at work in you as a result of the Holy Spirit's Presence in you

Study Questions:

What were some key points that were helpful for you from the sermon and text this week?

[33:1-23]

What do Moses and the people do that communicates the value they now place on the Presence of God?

Vs. 4-6 the people mourned at the potential loss of God's Presence, vs. 11 Joshua wouldn't leave the tent, vs. 12-17 Moses pleads for it.

Why/How did God's Presence become important to them?

The Israelites had seen God's wonders throughout the Exodus story. They began to know Him as Redeemer and Promise Keeper. He fed them in the desert, cared for them, and led them. They had violated the Covenant and knew that they had messed up the potential life they had with Him. Moses, who at the beginning of book had been reluctant to do God's will, had many experiences with God's Presence and now trusts God implicitly. Furthermore, he is bold enough to speak to God in an effort to save them from God's wrath. He had learned about God's character and could not imagine life without Him.

What does the New Testament say about the Presence of God? Refer to John 1:1-14, John 2:19, Acts 17:24, 1 Corinthians 6:19, Ephesians 2:19-22, 1 Peter 2:4-8, and/or Revelation 21 where helpful.

John 1:1 Jesus "tabernacled" among us. John 2:19 Jesus refers to Himself as the Temple. Acts 17:24 Paul affirms a Jewish adage that God does not dwell temples made by man (based on 1 Kings 8, but repeated in Jewish texts after the Exile and during the Inter-testament period). 1 Cor. 6:19 says that individual believers are the temple of the Holy Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22 and 1 Peter 2:4-8 says that the church is God's dwelling place. Revelation 21 says that God's Presence will finally and fully dwell with humans in the New Heavens and New Earth.

What things can make it difficult for you to rest in the Presence of God?

Sin has clearly proven to be a block to experiencing the Presence of God. That happened for Adam and Eve in Genesis 3 and for the Israelites in Exodus 32. Perhaps simple busy-ness, or even good things like family get in the way of taking time with God.

In the first "Presence" sermon, JD said, "some of you are in pain and praying for God to fix the situation. **But what if one of God's purposes in your pain was to allow you a chance to know more of Him?** And what if you spend so much time bitter and angry at Him and everyone else that you think has wronged you that you miss out on what was supposed to be some of God's sweetest work in your life?" He then gave the analogy of the broken pots that were worth more because they were fixed with gold. Have you seen this to be true in your own life? If so, describe how God worked through such a situation.

Share some stories about times when you've had particularly memorable "quiet times" in the Presence of God. Definitely make time for this question. This could be a great time of sharing. Answers probably will include: quiet times, nature, reading the Bible, prayer, corporate worship, concerts, etc.