

**When God Passes By**  
**Exodus 33:12-23**  
**September 9, 2007**  
**FBC Waynesboro**

Wouldn't it be nice if our journey with Jesus was an ever upward movement toward heaven where each day we grew to be more and more like Him? What it would be like for every day with Jesus really to be sweeter than the day before so that every day is bathed in the beauty of sunlight, garnished with gentle breezes with no difficulties or dark nights of the soul, no problems or pains, no failures or falls—but every day we are climbing higher and higher as we reach for glory. Wouldn't it be nice if walking in the way of Jesus were like floating on a raft down a cool stream on late summer day? But it just isn't that way, is it? If it is for you then you are either the most to be praised or the most to be pitied. For most of us the journey is jagged. It is a few steps forward and a few steps backward. It is sometimes moving from side to side and then there are those times when we sense that we are going nowhere. The pilgrimage is paused.

I want you to look again this morning at the diagram on the outline. I want to remind you that whenever we are at a place of pause we can be sure of two realities: God knows where we are and is sovereign over our being where we are and we are responsible. Something is going on in us that needs attention so that God brings us to this place for the purpose of getting our attention. It is ultimately for His glory and the honor of His Name but it is also for our good. After the pause of Exodus 32, God moves His people forward and He does so by showing them and us seven internal essentials that are necessary for the forward movement in faith framed by three external realities. Whenever you and I are at a place of pause, we can look for the problem among these seven essentials in the context of these three realities. We looked at the first two last week: God desires that we as His people crave His presence and the extent to which we do is seen in our living lives of penitence. We will not harbor sin in our hearts. We will deal with our sin either as it is shown us by the Spirit of God or by the Spirit of God through a fellow brother or sister. Yes, God will use a family member to point out to you your sinfulness. And if my response is to become defensive and strike back then God has used that family member to show me just how much I really am controlled by Satan and just how much pride is really in me. You and I as brothers and sisters can know just how godly we are by

how we receive genuinely loving rebuke from a brother or sister, and that does include our spouses.

We move this morning to the next two realities in the diagram and focus on one of the external realities. God not only wants us to crave His presence as seen in a life of sincere repentance; God wants us to be passionate for Him as seen in the life of presenting ourselves before Him in worship at the place that is designated for worship. There is no greater measure of our passion for God than our presence with the people of God in the worship of God at the place of worship. Only one Scripture in the entire Bible would even hint that God does not care about the place of worship and we have made that Scripture suit our needs by misinterpreting and thus misapplying it. When Jesus was in conversation with the Samaritan woman about the place of worship, He never dismissed place as unimportant but simply shifted the focus from the place as if coming to a place makes one a worshipper of God to the power that drives worship. Those who worship God worship Him by the power of the Holy Spirit who is the author of the Truth of God which is the Word of God so that every person who has the Spirit who leads us to learn the Truth will be compelled by both to gather at the place for the purpose of worshipping God.

So Moses took a tent and he pitched it outside the camp at some distance and he called it the tent of meeting. Now, this is not the tabernacle. The plans had been given but the place had not yet been built. This is not the Temple. It comes later. This is a portable tent that Moses pitched outside the camp for himself and all who sought God to meet with God. Now I want us to notice three reasons for this tent of meeting. First, it existed for SERVICE. The Bible uses more than one word to describe what is involved in the worship of God. One word means to bow before God to give Him glory. One word means to lift up the voice and give Him praise. But one of the most important words for worship simply means an act of service by which we show our commitment to God. It is the word “leitourgos” from which we get “liturgy.” Liturgy is simply the action of coming to God with others so that together we can join hands and hearts in the worship of God. We call what we are doing right now the worship service or the service of worship; it is that action beyond all others by which we show our love for God and our desire to do His will.

Secondly, the tent of meeting is for SEPARATION. The phrase “some distance away” is not so much about geography as it is about

theology. First, it is removed from the camp because those in the camp had proven themselves unworthy of the presence of God. But second it is removed from the camp so that those who came to the tent would have to make a conscious decision and a concerted effort. God knew that not all those in the camp were His although all who were in the camp professed to be His. Thus, the tent of meeting. Those who professed to be His but were not would just as today find some good reason for not going out to the tent of meeting. This tent of meeting is about separation from the world but it is even more about separation of those who profess to belong to God and those who really do belong to God. Thirds, the tent of meeting is about SANCTIFICATION. Who can go to the tent of meeting? Anyone inquiring of the Lord. Anyone who wants to seek God in worship and hear God speak His Word to them. Those who are so passionate for God that they cannot live from week to week without feeding upon His Holy Word. They depend on that more than they do any other thing in their lives. They would rather do without physical food than to miss the meal that comes when we gather to give glory to God and feast upon the riches of His grace and goodness.

Moses was the spiritual leader of this people. He not only represented them to God and God to them, he represents for them here and for us that passion that is seen in the pursuit of God in worship. When he went to the place of worship the people stopped everything they were doing and stood at the door of their tents and they stayed there until he entered the tent. They were not standing to honor Moses; they were standing to honor God. They were standing at the door of their tents when he went into His tent because they knew that what was happening then was more important than anything else that happened at any other time. Moses was entering the tent to meet with God, to receive His Word and to bring that Word to the people. And this people of God was learning through their pain that hearing and heeding the Word of God was more important than any other reality in their lives. So they stood until he entered and Joshua stayed after he left. The people praying for the Word of God to come through the man of God to the people of God and Joshua pressing through in persistent prayer that the presence, power, and purpose of God would be plain to the people of God.

God does something very special for us in the verses that follow. He lets us listen in on one of the visits of Moses to the place of worship. The opening words in verse 12 are translated differently in different translations because the thrust of the original is something like, “look here” or “see now.” Moses reminds God of what He has told him, 12. Moses knows that

he cannot do what God has called him to do by himself. He must have a helper. And no human helper will do for what He is called to do. He is asking for that which Jesus promises, “and I will give you another counselor who will come to you, even the spirit of truth. . .”

What comes next shows us what always comes as result of the worship of God and it also declares what is in the heart of all who desire to worship God. Look closely. God had told Moses that He knew Him and that He had graced Him (the word for “favor” means to have received grace). God says to Moses, “I have a RELATIONSHIP with you and I have REDEEMED you.” He knew him before He redeemed him. Now Moses speaks in verse 13. He shows us the heart of every true believer of all who are drawn to the worship of God: Moses wants to receive three things from God: he wants REVELATION so that He can learn the Word and ways of God. He wants a RELATIONSHIP that is growing and developing as a result of what he is learning and he wants RESPONSIBILITY in serving God so that he can be used of God to glorify God by using what God is teaching him.

God responds to Moses by promising him what Moses most needs, 14. The word for rest does not mean cessation from work. It means the kind of peace that comes only from God when we are bringing pleasure to Him by learning His Word and seeking to live it in the world. Isn't one of our struggles that we want to please God but we also want to please ourselves and our families and our friends and our employer and etc.? What would it take for us to learn that desiring and doing that which pleases God is that which brings ultimate and lasting pleasure to the person who belongs to God? And it all begins with craving His presence which always produces a passion for the worship of God at the heart of which is hearing and heeding His Word. Thus, the dialogue between Moses and God in verses 15-17. God knows and Moses shows that He knows that what makes us distinctive as God's people is God's presence. Because God's people crave God's presence. It is what we want and desire. It is enough for us. Or is it?

The text does not end at verse 17. Moses wants more. Now there is a sense in which the desire for God leads every child of God to desire more and more of God. There is a true and right sense in which we who are seeking God can never be comfortable with where we are in relationship to God. But Moses asks for that which no man can receive and live. Oh, he is not asking to die; he is just asking that for which he cannot ask and receive.

We can all do that with God can't we? We learn what to ask from knowing the One from whom we are asking so that some of what we ask shows how little we know the One from whom we are asking. Moses asks for that which would kill him and God makes that plain. But God gives him something and in what God gives him we see what it is that God gives us, and it is enough.

God gives Moses something to see, something to hear and something to understand. Moses will see His goodness. He will hear His name and He will understand God's sovereignty. But Moses cannot see Him in all of His glory. Listen carefully to verse 21. The place right next to God is occupied by whom? Who sits at the right hand of God and is the solid foundation upon which the church is built? Paul says that we are hidden with Christ in God. And what God promises to Moses is that he will pass by him. Now this term is used one other place in Scripture; it is a technical term that points to the presence of God being enough. When God passes by it simply means that He is showing us Himself and for His people, that is all we need. Is it? Turn to Mark 6:45-52. That Jesus intended to "pass by" them means that He intended His presence on the sea in the midst of the storm to be enough for them. Just as in Mark 4 He intended His presence in the boat during the storm to be enough for them. And His rebuke of their little faith has nothing to do with their inability to believe that He could calm the storm but their little or no faith was that they could not believe in Him if He did not calm the storm. And here the text says that their hearts were hardened; they did not understand. Do we? Is your relationship with God based on what He can do with you or is it enough that He is with you? Do you crave His presence or is your relationship based on what He provides? Are you truly passionate about the worship of God in the presence of God with the people of God? And is your passion driven by a desire to know Him and His ways so that you can live for Him as you live out His way in your world? And please know that if you are not passionate to worship Him it is most likely because you do not crave His presence, and could it be dear friend that your failure to crave His presence is because you do not know Him?