

Glorious and Merciful

Exodus 33:12–34:9

The passage we'll be looking at has been described by theologian Richard Bauckham as “one of the most important of all scripture”! It's set in the context of betrayal: Israel has witnessed God and yet has turned away from Him, and now God says He will take His presence from them and may even destroy them (Exodus 33:1-11).

We view this event with hindsight – we will probably read it and think “Well, of course God will not *really* leave them; He will be merciful!”... but Moses did not know that at the time. From his viewpoint, as he approaches God, it could go either way. Israel *has* broken the covenant they agreed to with God, and Moses does not know what will happen next.

Read the passage

Wow. In the face of such betrayal by a whole nation, God shows mercy. As we dig in to this passage, let's look at two characteristics of God that it shows us: God is **glorious** and God is **merciful**.

1. God is GLORIOUS

There's a well-known saying that familiarity breeds contempt; we can easily become casual about things we are used to or feel comfortable with, and to take such things for granted.

It can be a result of many causes; technology distracting us, lockdowns taking away the chance to worship together and be in God's creation (think how casual we might have become about attending church while we were forced to watch it from home?) and the result of a cumulative effect – it can creep up over time without us really realising that that's where we were heading.

This God that we worship is so glorious that Moses needs to hide in a rock while God passed by; had Moses been left out on the hilltop, he would not have survived...

Our challenge as a church now is to eagerly pursue reverence for God, and re-awaken our awe at His might and majesty as we enter into a new season. Psalm 111:10 says “*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise.*” Our souls are made to worship in reverence to this glory!

2. God is MERCIFUL

That God is so glorious makes His mercy all the more astonishing!

Exodus 34: 6 & 7 *"The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation."*

How relieved would Moses have been to hear God declare these things about Himself?! He will show mercy to Israel, although Israel's sin was like someone committing adultery on their wedding night. He is abounding in steadfast love.

This God is the same God throughout the Old Testament and all through the New Testament. He is unchanging, and nobody is too far from Him to receive His forgiveness and mercy!

His mercy is relational; the glorious God wants to *know* people and *be known* by people. Love, compassion, grace, being slow to anger – all relational terms, expressed through relationship.

He is also a God of justice; the sins of parents that get reflected in the sins of children, as this passage mentions, will be punished. But His mercy lasts much longer, it goes much further – He can break sin-full cycles and set anyone free.

We rebel all the time – we taste the goodness of God and then manage to mess up somehow. But His mercies are new every morning.

How? How can we know this glory and this mercy and not need to make atonement sacrifices or be hidden in the cleft of a rock like Moses? Because of Jesus. Both the glory of God and the mercy of God are made know-able through the person of Jesus. John 1:14 *The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the one and only Son, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.*

It's mind-boggling that this glorious King of Kings, Creator of all things, Author of the Universe gives up his throne to become human, so that we can be forgiven and have a relationship with Him, as a result of His mercy for us ... and in doing so, He is glorified.

He's not glorious OR merciful, He is glorious AND merciful. And in giving our lives to Him, we get to experience both in full measure as we walk with Him.

Questions for Small Groups

- a) Have a think about your personal 'reverence level', and ask the Holy Spirit to shine light on anything that might need changed. Bring it to God and receive His mercy.**
- b) Are there practical things you could start/leave behind to help you re-discover your reverence? This is a time to encourage one another!**
- c) Spend time worshipping God for who He is – for His glorious, merciful Self.**