

God's Sermon on His Name (Part 3)

Exodus 33:12-34:9

September 13, 2020

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Well once again wonderful singing this morning, singing to the Lord. Well I promised you back in the middle of the summer or at least I told you it was my intention to start Romans 14 today, we took a break from our study of Paul's letter to the Romans, and we were going to begin again today, but I started a series on Exodus 33 and 34 and I'm just not done with it yet. There's too much here, and so, that's coming, I promise it will come, but I want you to turn with me again this morning to Exodus chapter 34.

Since the Garden of Eden the greatest temptation that we as mankind have faced has been to question the goodness of God. That was at the heart of Satan's temptation of Eve, you remember in Genesis chapter 3 verse 5, he said to her, after he said has God really said this? And you're not going to surely die, he said, here's why God has told you not to eat of that tree. It's because in the day that you eat of it, God knows that you'll be like Him. In other words, God is intentionally holding back from you something that is good. That is in its heart an attack on the goodness of God. And that is still one of Satan's most effective weapons. Sadly there are many Christians who live their lives with this distorted view of the person of God. But God's self-revelation in Exodus 34 destroys all of our inadequate and idolatrous views of God and replaces them with a glimpse of the true and living God, of His holiness, of His greatness and of His amazing goodness.

This remarkable self-revelation that we're studying together comes in the aftermath of the golden calf incident. Just to remind you of the setting, it begins with an ominous backdrop, the sin of God's people and we looked at that in chapter 32 verse 1 through chapter 33 verse 11. The people sin by their idolatry, by their immorality - sin upon sin. And as Moses seeks God's forgiveness for his people, he makes in that context three audacious requests. In chapter 33 verse's 12 to 23 we studied the prayer of the mediator. The three requests Moses made were these. One, he asked God for the promise of His presence. Go with us. He asked God for the

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knowledge of His character. Let me know Your ways. And he asked God for a visible display of God's glory. Show me Your glory. God agreed that He would respond to Moses' request, that He would fulfill these three requests Moses made, but in verse 19 He made it clear that the only grounds on which He would do so was not the merit of Moses but rather His sovereign grace. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious.

That brings us to chapter 34 and we are considering God's gracious revelation, the explanation of God's name. This passage is what Martin Luther called God's sermon on God's name. In Exodus 19, you remember that the people of Israel at Sinai had made a covenant with God. In that covenant they had sworn allegiance to God and they had committed themselves to obedience to His laws. Two short months later, two months, the golden calf incident occurred and they disobeyed God's commands, several of the Ten Commandments they had heard God speak, they broke His covenant with them, in fact they shattered it, pictured by Moses shattering those tablets with the law written on them. This was the first time since they had made those promises just two short months before that they had sinned against God in such a serious way, how would God respond, how would God react, what is God like toward His people who sin against Him? Well Exodus 34 records God's renewal of His covenant with His people. And as God restores His people Israel to Himself, we learn what we as God's people need to know about our God when we sin against Him. This self-revelation demonstrates how the covenant keeping God responds to His people when they sin against Him, when they break their promises, when they break the covenant that they have made with Him.

You and I as New Testament believers are part of what the New Testament calls the new covenant. It's called that in the Old Testament as well. It's the new covenant that we've entered into and you and I just like them, often break our promises of allegiance. We disobey the laws of our good and gracious King, how does God respond? Well in Exodus 34 verse's 1 to 7; God teaches us several essential verities or trues about Himself.

Now the last time we studied this text together, we learned the first couple of those verities, let me remind you of them, first of all, we learned that God is holy. The first four verses of chapter 34 remind us that when we as God's people sin against Him, God doesn't forget His law. God doesn't compromise His character. Instead what does He urge Moses to do? Before you come to the mountain again for Me to renew the covenant, I want you to cut out two more stone tablets and I'm going to write My law on them again. So when we sin against God, we must not take our sin lightly, He doesn't, and He does not compromise His character or His holiness to deal with our sin.

Secondly we learned that God is great. In verse's 5 and the first part of verse 6, God reveals something of His greatness. He condescends; He comes down to be with Moses and in picturing that pictures His condescension to humanity period. But He also reveals His greatness in His name. He says I am Yahweh. I am the One who simply is. I depend on nothing and no one for my existence, but rather all things depend on Me. And I am not only Yahweh, the One who is, I am El, I am God, I am the mighty One, Almighty. So in response to the sin of the people God reveals Himself to be still holy and still great. None of that has changed.

But today we come to the heart of God's self-revelation and to what is the truth about God that is the greatest comfort to us when we sin against Him. Let's read the text together, Exodus chapter 34 and let me just read, I'll take a running start with verse 5, and then we'll look at verse's 6 and 7.

“The Lord descended in the cloud and stood there with Moses as he (probably the Lord) 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 gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations.”

And notice, Moses response, verse's 8 and 9, "Moses made haste to bow low toward the earth and worship." And then to pray in verse 9, to pray on the basis of what he's learned about God. "If now I have found favor in Your sight, O Lord, I pray, let the Lord go along in our midst, even though the people are so obstinate, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your own possession." So when we sin against God, God wants us to remember just like He wanted Moses and the children of Israel to remember that He is still holy, that He is still great. But He reminds us thirdly that He is also good. He is good. That's the message beginning in the middle of verse 6 and running to the first half of verse 7. He is good.

I remember several years ago how I was struck with how important the goodness of God is to God Himself. Have you ever thought about that? Look back at chapter 33 verses 18 and 19, Moses said, "I pray you God, show me (what?) Your glory." To which God responds in verse 19, "I Myself will make all My goodness pass before you." You see what God says? You want to see My glory, My glory is My goodness. He gave him a visible display of His goodness and He gives him here a proclamation of a declaration of His goodness. In this extraordinary text God explains His goodness to us and He does so by recounting His attributes, who He is, that's verse 6, and His actions, what He does that's verse 7.

So let's look first of all and consider the fact that God is good in His attributes. That is as in who He is. When God wants to explain His goodness to us, He starts with His attributes, what I'm like, He says let me tell you what I'm like. And He begins to unfold the goodness of His attributes by telling us notice verse 6, "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate." God says I am compassionate. It's a great word; the Hebrew word is a warm emotional word that actually comes from the Hebrew word for womb. It describes a deep love for the helpless that's rooted in the natural bond exactly like that that a mother feels for the child that came out of her womb. That's the emphasis of this word, that's the atmosphere of this word. In fact it's expressed just that way in Isaiah chapter 49 verse 15. Listen to God, I love this, "Can a woman forget her nursing child?" Now just stop and think about that a moment. Is it normal for a woman to forget a child that came out of her womb, her nursing infant, of course not? God says, "Can a woman

forget her nursing child and have no (and here's our word) compassion on the son of her womb?" And then God says it's not likely but even if these forget, I will not forget you. God says My compassion is more relentless than what a nursing mom feels for her child. This word pictures someone who is strong but who sees someone else who is weak and vulnerable and voluntarily enters into that persons struggle and comes to their aid. You see, God sees us believers, and He sees us as weak and vulnerable and His great heart is moved with our situation. He shares our struggles and His powerful arm acts on our behalf.

You remember Psalm 103 I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, it's really David's commentary on this self-revelation of God, he quotes it and then he explains it. Listen to how David explains God's compassion in Psalm 103 verse's 13 and 14. "Just as a father (an earthly father) has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him, for He Himself knows our frame; He is mindful that we are but dust." Christian, do you understand and believe that God genuinely cares about you, that He has compassion toward you like that, that a mother feels toward the child who came out of her womb? What God wanted Moses and wants us to understand is that that doesn't change because of our sin. Remember the context here, the people of Israel have sinned against God, sinned against His covenant, sinned against His law and God says to them, I am unchanged, I am still compassionate. Psalm 78 verse's 37 to 39 make this clear. It's talking about Israel and the psalmist writes,

"Their heart was not steadfast toward God, nor were they faithful in His covenant. But He being compassionate, forgave their iniquity and did not destroy them; and often He restrained His anger and did not arouse all His wrath. Thus He remembered that they were but flesh, a wind that passes and does not return."

Listen, Christian, God never excuses your sin. God never takes your sin lightly. But God does understand what you are experiencing and He does have compassion on you. And of course our Lord is able to do so in a special way, having experienced what it's like to be fully human. In Hebrews chapter 4 verse 15, the writer of Hebrews says, "We have a high priest who can sympathize with our weaknesses, because He was tempted in all things as we are, yet without

sin.” When you sin, don’t ever forget that while God doesn’t excuse your sin, while God doesn’t take your sin lightly He’s still holy, He’s still great, He has compassion.

There’s a second attribute of His goodness that’s here in this passage and it’s that He’s gracious. Verse 6 goes on to say, “I am compassionate and gracious.” Now the noun form of this, grace occurs more often in the Old Testament, but this adjective form translated here gracious occurs some fourteen times in the Old Testament. Eleven times it’s combined with the word compassionate. They come together, like a package. What does it mean that God is gracious? Well it means that He by nature is full of this quality. He is full of grace. So let me ask you this, what is grace? You ask the average Christian what is grace and he or she’s going to give you an answer something like this. Grace is God’s unmerited favor. That’s the most common response. Grace is God’s unmerited favor and that’s okay as far as it goes. The problem is it doesn’t go far enough. Because grace is that quality in God which causes Him to find joy and delight in doing good to those who deserve nothing but evil. You see when God says He’s gracious, He means that He is completely full of this inherent quality that finds joy in doing good to those and treating with favor those who not only don’t deserve it, but who deserve exactly the opposite. I like the way G S Bishop puts it, he says, “Grace is a provision for men who are so fallen that they cannot lift the axe of justice, so corrupt that they cannot change their own natures, so averse to God that they cannot turn to Him, so blind that they cannot see Him, so deaf that they cannot hear Him and so dead that He Himself must open their graves and lift them in resurrection.” That’s grace.

It’s like what our governor does when he pardons a death row inmate. If he steps in and intervenes and pardons a death row inmate, that’s grace because not only does that condemned criminal not deserve or merit that pardon, but in fact he or she deserves exactly the opposite, deserves to be justly punished for his or her crimes. What God is saying about Himself here, don’t miss this, is that it is His inherent nature to do for His people what we don’t deserve. Aren’t you glad? I mean think about how grace permeates everything in our lives, this quality of God. I mean sending His Son into the world to accomplish our salvation was the greatest

expression of God's grace. In Titus chapter 2 verse 11, Paul writes, "the grace of God has appeared bringing salvation." What's he talking about? He's talking about the appearance of Jesus Christ. He says grace is a person, grace has appeared.

The whole process of salvation from beginning to end is solely of God's grace. You understand that? God chose you in eternity past. You know why? Because you were such a wonderful person, NO it was His grace, it was that in God which finds delight in doing good to you when you deserved exactly the opposite. In time He saved you, He brought you under the gospel, you heard the gospel, He called you to Himself through that gospel, He declared you right with Him. He adopted you as His child. He gave you new spiritual life. All of that was grace. Ephesians 1:7 says, "In Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace." And of course Ephesians 2:8 and 9, "by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, so that no one may boast." You understand your salvation is entirely from this quality in God.

But if you are growing at all, if you are a believer you are growing and if you are growing at all in likeness to Jesus Christ, that's not because you're working so hard at it. Although you ought to work hard at it, we're commanded to do so. But the reason that's happening is grace. Listen to First Peter chapter 5 verse 10, "the God of all grace, who called you to His eternal glory in Christ, will Himself perfect you." The God of grace. We all serve. We serve the Lord in this church, we serve each other. Where does that come from? Well even our spiritual service is grace. What you do to serve others in this body is grace. Romans chapter 12 verse 6, "we have gifts that differ, according to the grace given to us." Paul talked about his own service in First Corinthians 15:10, "by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me did not prove vain; but I labored even more than all of them." Paul says I worked hard in ministry, and then he adds, "but not I, it was the grace of God with me." Paul says don't look at me and say, wow, look at Paul, look at his ministry. Look at what a wonderful guy he was. Look at how great his ministry, no he says it was all grace. It's all grace. Our eternal blessing will be entirely because

of grace. You see you're never going to get to a point, even when you are like Jesus Christ that you will deserve to be there.

Listen to First Peter 1:13, Peter writes, "fix your hope completely on the grace to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." When He's coming for you, He's bringing more grace. And then Ephesians chapter 2 verse 7 says, "in the ages to come God will show the surpassing riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." You know God's going to spend eternity showing you just how wonderful His grace really is. If you are here this morning and you are not a follower of Jesus Christ, if you know in your heart of hearts you've not repented, you don't obey Him, you don't follow Him. You are guilty before God because of your sins, you only have one thing to do and that is to cry out to the God of grace to show you what you don't deserve. Because you'll never earn your way there. You'll never get there on your own; you'll never earn or merit heaven. Your only hope is to throw yourself on the grace of God. God show me what I don't deserve, give me the forgiveness that I can never earn. Make me Yours.

If you're in Christ, when you sin remind yourself that you're real hope of forgiveness, you have a real hope of forgiveness, when you sin Christian, you have hope. Why? Because God is gracious. That's what David said in Psalm 51:1 you remember after his sin with Bathsheba, and his horrific murder of Uriah, her husband, how does he begin Psalm 51, "Be gracious to me, O God." Show me grace. Forgive me even though I don't deserve it. That's how we always come to God after we sin.

There's a third attribute here, not only is He compassionate and gracious, He is slow to anger, verse 6 says, "the Lord proclaimed, slow to anger." As I've shared with you before, I first encountered this expression when I was in seminary. I was translating Jonah in intermediate Hebrew and I just to be honest with you, my wife will tell you it wasn't uncommon for me to have one eye on my Hebrew and one eye on Monday night football. And it happened that way,

this particular night. I was translating Jonah chapter 4 and I was enjoying both, and you know I was enjoying Jonah and I was enjoying whoever was playing that night and I translated Jonah 4:2 and in Jonah 4:2 you remember Jonah quotes this self-revelation of God back to God, and he says God, I knew You were like this, I knew You were going to do this, that's why I didn't want to come to Nineveh. Well, I'm translating that passage and when I finished my translation, I look away from game and back to my translation and it didn't say 'God was slow to anger' what my translation said was, 'God has a long nose.' I thought uh oh, I looked at the wrong word in the lexicon; I better look it up again, because this can't be right. Well it turns out its exactly right. It's what the Hebrew says. God is long of nose, that is it takes Him a long time to get hot. God isn't quick to inflict punishment on those who deserve it, but He's extremely patient. God delays the execution of His justice to give time for people to repent.

If you're a follower of Jesus Christ, when you sin remind yourself that God says this is true about Him. Remind yourself that God is patient with you and your less than satisfactory behavior. He patiently gives you time to repent. Now don't take God's patience lightly, if you continue to refuse to repent and you're His child what's God going to do? Hebrews 12 makes it clear, He's going to discipline you, He's going to deal with you as a son or a daughter He loves. He's going to discipline you, chasten you. But God is by nature slow to anger. One commentator Bush puts it this way, "Who is not forced to acknowledge that he himself is a monument of this long-suffering? Have we not provoked Him to anger every day of our lives? Yet to the praise of His patience, here we still find ourselves; favored with the offers and opportunities of pardon. How different would our lot be had He dealt with us after our sins or rewarded us according to our iniquities?" Can you imagine what it would be like if God gave us what we deserved the moment we sin? Boom! I mean let's be honest; we're all tempted in that direction right? I mean there are times when I see the behavior of certain people on our planet and I think, 'boy, if I were God, I'd just turn it loose. Boom, you're done.' But that's not what God is like. He is patient.

Let me just say if you are here this morning and you do not believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ, please, listen to me, please do not misunderstand and misinterpret God's patience with you as indifference or tolerance of your sin. There's a real temptation to do this, I've talked to people who haven't believed and they think of themselves, you know I'm basically a good person, I don't really need the gospel and they look at their lives and they go, well, I mean look, God and I must be okay because look at all the good things He's showered upon me. I mean I have a great marriage, I have good kids, you know I have material prosperity in this life. I have good health. We're good. Please don't misunderstand. It's not because of that that God is being patient with you. Listen to Romans chapter 2 verses 4 through 6, Paul says, "Do you think lightly of the riches of God's kindness and tolerance and patience?" You just say, yeah well, you know we're good. He says, don't you know that the kindness of God is intended to lead you to repentance. Did you ever stop to think that all of that goodness that you enjoy in this life is actually God's patience and He is pleading with you through all of those good things to turn to Him? To turn from your sin and put your faith in the gospel of His Son? Paul goes on if you don't, "because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and the revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds." I plead with you, do not misunderstand, do not misinterpret God's patience with you as though God is winking at your sin and He's okay, He's not. His goodness, His patience is intended to lead you to repentance.

There's a fourth attribute that's revealed here and that is He is abounding in lovingkindness and truth. Now lovingkindness and truth are a figure of speech called a hendiadys. That may not be a word that you are familiar with, but you're familiar with the concept. A hendiadys is when two concepts or two ideas are put together to form one new concept. The most famous English example of a hendiadys is the expression sick and tired. When you say I'm sick and tired - you don't mean you're sick and you don't mean you are tired. You mean you are sick and tired. It's a different thing, right? That's a hendiadys, two words have their own meaning joined together to make this new thing, this new concept, that's the words lovingkindness and truth.

Now before we look at the individual words, let me just note for you that these words are often joined together. In fact seven times in the Old Testament these words appear together. But notice God says that whatever these qualities are, whatever this concept is, He is abounding in it. That means He's great in it. He has an abundance of it. God has more than enough of these qualities. It's impossible for Him to exhaust them. You won't be the one who exhausts these qualities in God.

Notice first of all He is abounding in lovingkindness. Now our New American Standard Bible is a fabulous translation from the original language. It's the best we can get in English, the closest to the original text. If you don't know Greek and Hebrew the New American Standard is the closest we can get in English to a literal translation to what's there. However, on this occasion I feel like this may be the most unfortunate translation in the entire New American Standard. The Hebrew word that's translated lovingkindness is the word, hesed. It occurs more than 250 times in the Old Testament. Sometimes it's used of the relationship between people, but most often it's used of the relationship that God has with His people. And it contains two completely equal ideas. You have to get both sides of this word.

First of all this word, hesed, speaks of a profound love that is found in the deepest of relationships. Secondly it refers to tenacity, a tenacious stubborn commitment to love the person in that relationship. Both of those concepts are there. So it has the idea of love, on the one hand and loyalty on the other. That's why some translations render it steadfast love. In fact if you're around Countryside any time at all, you'll notice that every time, except this morning when I was reading this passage before I explained it, I always read the word lovingkindness as steadfast love because that's what it means. It's God's hesed. It's His steadfast love. Other translations render it unfailing love. In the end, God's hesed is a long term unfailing loyalty by one member of a covenant relationship toward another. Davis writes, "In the context of Exodus 34, Israel had absolutely no claim on Yahweh's hesed because they had broken the covenant in the golden calf worship. If Israel receives hesed, it will only be because it flows from Yahweh's heart because

of who He is. He is rich in hesed. Hence hesed really passes over into grace.” It is His steadfast tenacious stubborn love.

God’s hesed is often described as it is here in chapter 34 as abounding, or great. But I think my favorite word picture of the greatness of God’s hesed occurs in Psalm 36 verse 5 where the psalmist writes, “Your steadfast love, O Lord, (Your hesed) extends to the heavens.” You want to know how great this quality in God? After the service is over I’ll give you this assignment, walk outside and look up as far as your eyes will let you see into the atmosphere of this earth, that’s how great God’s hesed is. It’s like an ocean in which we live. God’s hesed is also described as precious in Psalm 36:7. Good, in Psalm 69:16 and here’s an interesting one, in Psalm 63:3, God’s hesed, His steadfast love is said to be better than life. You believe that? Do you believe that God’s steadfast love to you is better than life itself? It is. Why? Because by God’s steadfast love we are preserved, Psalm 40 verse 11, “Your steadfast love will preserve me continually.” By God’s steadfast love we are comforted. Psalm 119:76, “may Your steadfast love comfort me, according to Your word to Your servant.” It is through God’s steadfast love that we find forgiveness. Psalm 51:1, “be gracious to me, O God, according to Your steadfast love; according to the greatness of Your compassion blot out my transgressions.” And here’s a favorite of mine, Psalm 86:5, “You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive.” Don’t you love that? You don’t just forgive, you don’t just sort of okay, I guess I’ll forgive you. God You are eager to forgive, You are ready to forgive and that’s because You are abounding, he goes on to say, in steadfast love to all who call upon you.

It’s through God’s steadfast love we receive compassion. Isaiah 54:8, “In an outburst of anger I hid My face from you for a moment, but with everlasting steadfast love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord God your Redeemer.” It’s through God’s steadfast love that we are heard by God. Psalm 119 verse 149, “Hear my voice according to Your hesed.” It’s by God’s hesed that we have hope and salvation. Psalm 130 verse 7, “O Israel, hope in the Lord, for with the Lord there is steadfast love and with Him is abundant redemption.” Listen, there is one unchanging reality in our ever changing world, it is God’s hesed, His steadfast love. Again and

again Scripture says that it is everlasting, it's forever, it always endures. I love the way David puts it in Psalm 23 verse 6 where he says, surely, certainly Your goodness and Your steadfast love will follow me, now that word follow doesn't mean like a mile behind me, it's a word that means that describes what a predator does when it chases down its prey. Here of course it's used in a positive sense. God surely Your steadfast love will hunt me down all the days of my life and then I will dwell in Your house forever.

In fact, God's steadfast love for us, are you ready for this? It really never had a beginning and it never has an end. Look at Psalm 103, again this is David's commentary on the self-revelation of God we're looking at, and in Psalm 103 verse 15, notice how he describes this truth in God. He says, "As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, and its place acknowledges it no longer." He's talking about spring wildflowers. If you lived in California you'd understand this, you know it rains and boom, up pops the grass and the flowers, they're beautiful and then comes the Santa Anna's and it's gone. We're bluebonnets, folks, that's what he's saying. We are like bluebonnets, we're here today and gone tomorrow, but verse 17, "the steadfast love of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting on those who fear Him." You see the word picture? God's love for us began in eternity past, it spans our brief lives here and it reaches into eternity future. In fact what he really says, when he says it's from everlasting to everlasting, he says think for a moment about this. Have you ever sat and tried to contemplate eternity? I mean just try to think your way back into eternity past and go as far as your mind will take you. And then turn around and take your mind and go as far as you can into eternity future and imagine how far out you can go. David says from vanishing point in the past to vanishing point in the future there is always God's steadfast love. It's set upon you.

In Exodus 34, go back there with me; God adds to this word grouping, not only steadfast love, but I am abounding in steadfast love and truth. In this context truth speaks of God's faithfulness to His promises. You see when you sin, God wants you Christian, to remind yourself that every promise that God has made to you will still ultimately be completely fulfilled. Nothing can

prevent you from receiving the eternal blessings that He has reserved for all of those who have trusted in His Son. Not even your sin. You put these two words together and we learn that God's love is unchanging and steadfast and God's promises are sure and certain and He abounds in this reality. More than enough, He's never going to run out and your sin is not going to exhaust it. He is good in His attributes, who He is.

But secondly I want you to notice that He is good in His actions, what He does. Notice verse 7, "who keeps steadfast love for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." Now did you notice in verse 7 there are two groups? Very important you understand these two groups. First of all there are thousands to whom God shows steadfast love and forgives their sin. And then the second group is the guilty whom He will not leave unpunished but visits their iniquity on the third and fourth generation. Now don't misunderstand, He's not saying that the first group are without guilt. They are also guilty, but God said I will forgive their iniquity transgression and sin. So who are these two groups and how does God respond to each of them and how in the world do you become a part of one of these two groups?

Well the context can help us; go back to Exodus chapter 20. Exodus chapter 20, this is just two months before and as God gives the Ten Commandments, as He speaks them aloud from Mount Sinai, in the Second Commandment, verse 4, He says, "you shall not make for yourself an idol" and then He says in verse 5, "don't worship that idol or serve that idol; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, (here it is) visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children, on the third and the fourth generations (but notice the addition) of those who hate Me, but showing steadfast love to thousands, (and again notice the addition) to those who love Me and keep My commandments." Now keep that in mind and turn over to Deuteronomy chapter 7. here is the recounting of the Law, forty years later as they're about to enter the land of promise, and Deuteronomy chapter 7 verse 9, Moses writes this, "Know therefore that the Lord your God, He is God, the faithful God, who keeps His covenant and His steadfast love to a thousandth

generation with those who love Him and keep His commandments;” There’s the first group, here’s the second group, verse 10, “but repays those who hate Him to their faces, to destroy them; He will not delay with him who hates Him, He will repay him to his face. Therefore, you shall keep the commandment and the statutes and the judgments which I am commanding you today, to do them.”

So, back in Exodus 34 there are these two groups then, let’s define them, now that we have that picture, let me give you a definition and I’m going to put it up on the screen so you can see it, I want you to read it with me, not out loud, but in your mind, in your heart. Group number one are those who love Me, God says. Who are those who love Him? Well you put those passages we just read together and this is where you land. They are the guilty who believe in Yahweh as their God, trust solely in His grace, repent of their sins and seek His forgiveness and having found forgiveness, love God and show their repentance in love by obeying His word. It’s what we just saw in those passages. The second group are those who hate Me. Who are those who hate God? Well nobody says, well very few people anyway would say I hate God, but who are they? Here God defines them. They are the guilty who remain unrepentant and demonstrate their hatred for God by continual disobedience and a refusal to turn from their sins and plead for His grace and forgiveness.

So my question for you this morning is which of those two groups are you in? Did you notice by the way, there’s no like third group? You can’t raise your hand and go look I don’t belong in either of those, is there a third choice? There’s no third choice. God doesn’t give you a third choice, that’s it. You, in the mind of God fit into one of those groups so the question is which? Because God acts very differently toward these two groups. Look again at Exodus 34, consider His actions towards those who love Him, verse 7. First of all, “He keeps steadfast love for thousands.” The word keeps is a verb of action, so not only does He have steadfast love, but He keeps it that is He does something about it. He acts on it. There’s a stream of benefits that flow out from His steadfast love that’s recorded even if you read Psalm 103. David talks about all the benefits that are ours because of this relationship we have with God. And He says He keeps

steadfast love for thousands. Now obviously on the one hand that means for lots of people, right? But it means more than that because in the parallel passage we just saw He says He keeps steadfast love to the thousandth what? Generation. Think about this for a moment you are still benefitting from God's steadfast love to Abraham. In Genesis 12 God said to Abraham, in you all the nations are going to be blessed, spiritually blessed through the One who will come from your line, Messiah. And here you are. You are as Galatians 3 says; you are a son or daughter of Abraham if you have believed as he believed in the gospel that was preached to him. God has shown His steadfast love to Abraham to the thousandth generation.

A second action toward those who love Him, verse 7, is that He forgives iniquity, transgression, and sin. The word forgives means He no longer holds our sin against us. He holds us guiltless as if we had not committed those sins. In fact look down at verse 9, the synonym is pardon, He pardons our sin. Or in the words of Psalm 103 verse 12, "as far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us." God takes our sin and the guilt that comes from that sin, the justice we deserve and He separates it from us as far as east is from the west, they never meet. And our guilt never meets with us again.

Notice the three words, iniquity, transgressions, and sin. Those are synonyms, but each of them has its own nuance describing sin in a particular way. Iniquity describes sin as intentionally turning away from God and His path, twisting your way off of His path is the idea and having guilt because of that. Transgression sees sin as rebellion, rebellion against your rightful King and His laws. And sin is the most general word; it's failing to meet the divine standard. Taken together these three words include every possible sin you have or ever will commit. Beloved, the point is there is no sin that God will not forgive if you are willing to repent. He'll pardon it. He'll take it and separate it from you as far as the east is from the west.

If you're not a Christian, do you understand? If you're here this morning and you know that you're not a Christian, perhaps you thought you were, you made some prayer or profession when

you were younger, but frankly your life is not marked by obedience to Jesus Christ, you don't love Jesus Christ, you're not following Him, you're not living in His way. If you're like that this morning do you understand that what we've studied this morning is how God will respond to you if you will turn to Him in repentance and faith in His Son? And if you doubt that, this afternoon I have an assignment for you, I want you to take your Bible this afternoon and I want you to read Luke 15, read the story Jesus tells about the prodigal son, because in that story, the father is God the Father and the prodigal who takes every good thing the Father has given him and squanders it in all kinds of loose living and finds himself in a desperate situation – that's you and that's me. And if you've wondered how God would respond if you ever really turned back to Him, read the story, because Jesus says if you'll really get up out of your pigpen of rebellion and you'll start heading back to the Father, He will run to meet you because He forgives iniquity, transgression and sin that's part of who He is.

Christian this is also how God responds to you when you sin and when you return to Him in repentance. And if you doubt that then you re-read Psalm 51 this afternoon. You read how these concepts permeate David's prayer as he seeks the forgiveness of God in light of his sin. This is who our God is. When you sin, don't misunderstand God is still holy and He will not compromise His holiness for you, He doesn't take you sin lightly and neither should you. He is still great, He is still worthy of your respect. He is not One to be trifled with, but thank God He is also good. He is compassionate and gracious, long of nose, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness and He will keep His steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love Him and He will forgive your iniquity transgression and sin. This is our God. Look again at Exodus 34, "The Lord passed by" verse 6, "in front of him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness; who keeps steadfast love for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin;" This is our God. Next week, Lord willing, we'll finish God's self-revelation here and we'll look at the great enigma of the Old Testament. Let's pray together.

Father, You are amazing and we are amazed. Lord we know only a little of what we really deserve from You. But we know this, we know we don't deserve anything good. And yet we thank You that in response to our sin, we who are Your people through Your Son Jesus Christ can expect You to respond just like this to us. Lord help us to remember when we sin You are still holy. Don't let us trivialize our sin, that You are still great, don't let us trivialize You. But Father thank You that You are also good, that we can come home. Lord help us to do so immediately when we sin, help us to run to You and find forgiveness, restoration, the path of righteousness. Father I pray for those who are here this morning who are not in Christ. Lord they've doubted Your goodness, perhaps questioned how You would welcome them, how You would receive them if they really came. I pray that You'd use this passage and the truths that we've discovered this morning to strip away that excuse, help them to see You as Jesus presented You, as a Father eagerly watching for the prodigal to come. And may they turn to You in faith and repentance even this morning, we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.