

The Backside of God
Exodus 33-34

Introduction:

- A demonstration of fickleness “They have turned aside quickly.” (32:8)
- We are at the tipping point...between a covenant broken and one restored in a truly mysterious way. The God who cannot tolerate sin yet will not destroy sinners. There is tremendous tension in the story! This same tension is embodied in the cross of Christ. When Luther was asked about the “backside” of God in Exodus 33 he taught that in the crucifixion of our Lord God mercifully shows us mortals all we can bear: the hidden “backside” of God.
- The role of the mediator is established: “Therefore he said he would destroy them—had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him, to turn away his wrath from destroying them. (Ps 106:23)
- An example of grace “I will go with them.”

Exodus 32

When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered themselves together to Aaron and said to him, “Up, make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.” ² So Aaron said to them, “Take off the rings of gold that are in the ears of your wives, your sons, and your daughters, and bring them to me.” ³ So all the people took off the rings of gold that were in their ears and brought them to Aaron. ⁴ And he received the gold from their hand and fashioned it with a graving tool and made a golden calf. And they said, “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!” ⁵ When Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it. And Aaron made a proclamation and said, “Tomorrow shall be a feast to the LORD.” ⁶ And they rose up early the next day and offered burnt offerings and brought peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play.

⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down, for your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have corrupted themselves. ⁸ They have turned aside quickly out of the way that I commanded them. They have made for themselves a golden calf and have worshiped it and sacrificed to it and said, ‘These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt!’” ⁹ And the LORD said to Moses, “I have seen this people, and behold, it is a stiff-necked people. ¹⁰ Now therefore let me alone, that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them, in order that I may make a great nation of you.”

¹¹ But Moses implored the LORD his God and said, "O LORD, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? ¹² Why should the Egyptians say, 'With evil intent did he bring them out, to kill them in the mountains and to consume them from the face of the earth'? Turn from your burning anger and relent from this disaster against your people. ¹³ Remember Abraham, Isaac, and Israel, your servants, to whom you swore by your own self, and said to them, 'I will multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven, and all this land that I have promised I will give to your offspring, and they shall inherit it forever.'" ¹⁴ And the LORD relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people.

¹⁵ Then Moses turned and went down from the mountain with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand, tablets that were written on both sides; on the front and on the back they were written. ¹⁶ The tablets were the work of God, and the writing was the writing of God, engraved on the tablets. ¹⁷ When Joshua heard the noise of the people as they shouted, he said to Moses, "There is a noise of war in the camp." ¹⁸ But he said, "It is not the sound of shouting for victory, or the sound of the cry of defeat, but the sound of singing that I hear." ¹⁹ And as soon as he came near the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, Moses' anger burned hot, and he threw the tablets out of his hands and broke them at the foot of the mountain. ²⁰ He took the calf that they had made and burned it with fire and ground it to powder and scattered it on the water and made the people of Israel drink it.

²¹ And Moses said to Aaron, "What did this people do to you that you have brought such a great sin upon them?" ²² And Aaron said, "Let not the anger of my lord burn hot. You know the people, that they are set on evil. ²³ For they said to me, 'Make us gods who shall go before us. As for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.' ²⁴ So I said to them, 'Let any who have gold take it off.' So they gave it to me, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf."

²⁵ And when Moses saw that the people had broken loose (for Aaron had let them break loose, to the derision of their enemies), ²⁶ then Moses stood in the gate of the camp and said, "Who is on the LORD's side? Come to me." And all the sons of Levi gathered around him. ²⁷ And he said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Put your sword on your side each of you, and go to and fro from gate to gate throughout the camp, and each of you kill his brother and his companion and his neighbor.'" ²⁸ And the sons of Levi did according to the word of Moses. And that day about three thousand men of the people fell. ²⁹ And

Moses said, "Today you have been ordained for the service of the LORD, each one at the cost of his son and of his brother, so that he might bestow a blessing upon you this day."

³⁰ The next day Moses said to the people, "You have sinned a great sin. And now I will go up to the LORD; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin." ³¹ So Moses returned to the LORD and said, "Alas, this people has sinned a great sin. They have made for themselves gods of gold. ³² But now, if you will forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of your book that you have written." ³³ But the LORD said to Moses, "Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. ³⁴ But now go, lead the people to the place about which I have spoken to you; behold, my angel shall go before you. Nevertheless, in the day when I visit, I will visit their sin upon them."

³⁵ Then the LORD sent a plague on the people, because they made the calf, the one that Aaron made.

Notes:

Golden calf – egypt "young bull in its early strength" Egypt or Canaan? Symbol of strength and fertility. A bull market means a strong economy still today.

Moses is absent; presumed dead – 40 days, terrors of Yahweh

What are we to make of Aaron? Ex 24:14; Deut 9:20 Compliant or culpable?

- Perhaps stalling for more time...
- They said, "Make for us gods...these are your gods..."
- Notice they didn't ask for a new leader...for Moses.
- What was their sin? "A feast for Yahweh!"
 - Graven image
 - discontent with the invisible god
 - syncretism

God calls them "your people"? And he tempts Moses..."I will make of you a great nation..." How does Moses play along?

Moses thrusts God upon the horns of a dilemma. What is it? The Lord repented. (shuv)

Sound of singing....antiphonal singing

Burned the calf....made of wood overlaid with gold (Deut 9:21)

"Book of life" privilege of citizenship are listed (Ps 119:29; Dan 12:1; Phil 4:3; Rev 3:5)

- blot not erase because of the ink
- Romans 9:3 for a parallel

Exodus 33

The LORD said to Moses, "Depart; go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought up out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your offspring I will give it.' ² I will send an angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanites, the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ³ Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; but I will not go up among you, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people."

⁴ When the people heard this disastrous word, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. ⁵ For the LORD had said to Moses, "Say to the people of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people; if for a single moment I should go up among you, I would consume you. So now take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do with you.'"⁶ Therefore the people of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments, from Mount Horeb onward.

⁷ Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, far off from the camp, and he called it the tent of meeting. And everyone who sought the Lord would go out to the tent of meeting, which was outside the camp. ⁸ Whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people would rise up, and each would stand at his tent door, and watch Moses until he had gone into the tent. ⁹ When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses. ¹⁰ And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door. ¹¹ Thus the LORD used to speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. When Moses turned again into the camp, his assistant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, would not depart from the tent.

¹² Moses said to the LORD, "See, you say to me, 'Bring up this people,' but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' ¹³ Now therefore, if I have found favor in your sight, please show me now your ways, that I may know you in order to find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." ¹⁴ And he said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." ¹⁵ And he said to him, "If your presence will not go with me, do not bring us up from here. ¹⁶ For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people? Is it not in your going with us, so that we are distinct, I and your people, from every other people on the face of the earth?"

¹⁷ And the LORD said to Moses, "This very thing that you have spoken I will do, for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." ¹⁸ Moses said, "Please show me your glory." ¹⁹ And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you and will proclaim before you my name 'The LORD.' And I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy." ²⁰ But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for man shall not see me and live." ²¹ And the LORD said, "Behold, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock, ²² and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by. ²³ Then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back, but my face shall not be seen."

Notes:

- Like the decalogue so too here the narrative begins with a reminder of God's gracious activity on behalf of his people. God has kept his promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob! He has brought his people up out of Egypt to a land flowing with milk and honey.
- But then God says "I will send an angel." Moses hangs on this phrase!
- Why would God do that?
- Verses 7-11 as a parenthetical. This paragraph sets up the incredible interaction to come after it.
- "face to face" as an expression of true friendship. You don't phone it in!
- Moses will cash in on some good will....on behalf of Israel
- Show me your glory (kavod) Literally show me your weight.

Questions:

What is bothering Moses here? What exactly is his complaint?

Why does God do the thing that upsets Moses? What is the context here in this?

Why this bold move on Moses' part? It is just curiosity? Or proof? Perhaps Numbers 12:8 give some additional insight.

Why the backside? Is this an insult of a gift? Close but no cigar?



"Therefore, let us learn this rule and order, which God is wont to employ in governing His saints. For I, too have often attempted to prescribe to God definite methods He should use in the administration either of the church or of other matters. 'Ah, Lord' I have said, 'I would like this to be done in this order, with this result!' But God would do the very opposite of what I had sought. Then the thought would come to me: 'Nevertheless, my plan is not disadvantageous to the glory of God; but it will contribute very much toward the hallowing of Thy name, the gathering and increasing of Thy kingdom and the propagation of the knowledge of Thy Word. In short, it is a very fine plan and excellently thought out' But the Lord undoubtedly laughed at this wisdom and said, 'Come now, I know that you are a wise and learned man; but it has never been My custom for Peter, Dr. Martin, or anyone else to teach, direct, govern, and lead Me. I am not a passive God. No, I am an active God who is accustomed to do the leading, ruling, and directing.'" (Luther on Exodus 33)

Exodus 34

The LORD said to Moses, "Cut for yourself two tablets of stone like the first, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke. ² Be ready by the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself there to me on the top of the mountain. ³ No one shall come up with you, and let no one be seen throughout all the mountain. Let no flocks or herds graze opposite that mountain." ⁴ So Moses cut two tablets of stone like the first. And he rose early in the morning and went up on Mount Sinai, as the LORD had commanded him, and took in his hand two tablets of stone. ⁵ The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶ The LORD passed before him and proclaimed, "The LORD, the LORD, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, ⁷ 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 the fourth generation." ⁸ And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped. ⁹ And he said, "If now I have found favor in your sight, O Lord, please let the Lord go in the midst of us, for it is a stiff-necked people, and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for your inheritance."

Notes:

Three requests in verse 9

- Go with us...in the midst of us!
- Pardon
- Inheritance

Double Lord - Yahweh, Yahweh (alpha and omega)

- Merciful and gracious rachum...channun...maternal...kindness
- slow to anger...misinterpreted as tolerance
- abounding in covenant love and faithfulness..chesed
- Num 14:18; II Chron 30:9; Neh 9:17; Ps 86:15; 103:8; 111:4; 145:8; Joel 2:13;

Decalogue Redux (vs 10ff)

And he said, "Behold, I am making a covenant. Before all your people I will do marvels, such as have not been created in all the earth or in any nation. And all the people among whom you are shall see the work of the LORD, for it is an awesome thing that I will do with you.

¹¹ "Observe what I command you this day. Behold, I will drive out before you the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. ¹² Take care, lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land to which you go, lest it become a snare in your midst. ¹³ You shall tear down their altars and break their pillars and cut down their Asherim ¹⁴ (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God), ¹⁵ lest you make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and when they whore after their gods and sacrifice to their gods and you are invited, you eat of his sacrifice, ¹⁶ and you take of their daughters for your sons, and their daughters whore after their gods and make your sons whore after their gods.

¹⁷ "You shall not make for yourself any gods of cast metal.

¹⁸ "You shall keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Seven days you shall eat unleavened bread, as I commanded you, at the time appointed in the month Abib, for in the month Abib you came out from Egypt. ¹⁹ All that open the womb are mine, all your male livestock, the firstborn of cow and sheep. ²⁰ The firstborn of a donkey you shall redeem with a lamb, or if you will not redeem it you shall break its neck. All the firstborn of your sons you shall redeem. And none shall appear before me empty-handed.

I am making a covenant...not we. (Ex 34:10)

-This one opens with a forward looking gospel statement!

-Forward looking commandments too

-“whore after their gods” jealousy, fidelity

²⁹ When Moses came down from Mount Sinai, with the two tablets of the testimony in his hand as he came down from the mountain, Moses did not know that the skin of his face shone because he had been talking with God. ³⁰ Aaron and all the people of Israel saw Moses, and behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. ³¹ But Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the leaders of the congregation returned to him, and Moses talked with them. ³² Afterward all the people of Israel came near, and he commanded them all that the LORD had spoken with him in Mount Sinai. ³³ And when Moses had finished speaking with them, he put a veil over his face.

³⁴ Whenever Moses went in before the LORD to speak with him, he would remove the veil, until he came out. And when he came out and told the people of Israel what he was commanded, ³⁵ the people of Israel would see the face of Moses, that the skin of Moses' face was shining. And Moses would put the veil over his face again, until he went in to speak with him.

Veil over Moses (II Cor 3:7-18)

-Transfiguration pro tem

-I Jn 3:2