

Exodus 33:17-23 “When He Takes His Hand Away”

Introduction: God guided his people into Egypt under mutual goodwill. All was well until a new Pharaoh took the throne. The Israelites were soon mistreated and eventually cast into a state of slavery. It appeared as though God wasn't paying attention to them but, to the contrary, He had a plan to deliver His people out of their bondage and into a very good place. Through His power God demonstrated that He is sovereign, making a name for Himself “I Am”. In Exodus 33, Moses is leading them from Egypt toward the promised land but unfortunately, between deliverance and blessing commitments to their God have begun to shift.

Look out - Israel wandered, unsure of their future although they were just given a phenomenal escape with the promise of land and prosperity. They have turned their trust from God and now find themselves in a wilderness, not knowing which way to go. Today our world is in disarray and no one knows how long this challenge will last. Medical scholars, the government, and the church are among the voices trying to put pieces together, fill in the blanks - how? why? How long? Many wonder about God's participation or seemingly lack thereof, in the midst of our confusing circumstances. Pastor Henley reminded us that the Lord Jesus Christ sent the Holy Spirit to his believers to be the Spirit of Truth, enlightenment, and comfort. He is one who brings clarity, understanding, and peace. Look at **2 Pet. 1:19**. The believer possesses the Holy Spirit and the word of God but still doesn't have all of the answers, the omniscient God knows all. However, though we don't understand a contemporary issue, we are not walking aimlessly because God has given us some insight. Consider **1 Cor. 2:9-10**. The Unbeliever, absent of the Holy Spirit, doesn't have the ability, or means to fully understand the movements of God and can only depend on limited reasoning.

We know God is alive with mercy and compassion. How have you seen Him moving in the world over the last six months? How has He shown himself recently? Do you see similarities between behavior today and actions of Israelites while in the wilderness?

Look in – Israel suffered heavy burdens under a hard taskmaster. Bitterness set in and then showed itself when difficulty came. The people were promised land, houses, wells, and trees without their efforts (**Deut. 6:10-12**). However, no one knew wilderness would be included in the promise. They wanted to go straight to benefits, but for their own good, they traveled an indirect path. Has your path ever taken an unexpected turn? Have you found a solution that wasn't God's solution? The people complained about uncertainties and looked in the wrong direction for help. They needed a wilderness for their own good. The temporary trials would call their attention to the True and Living God and away from the idols.

Mt. Sinai was pivotal in the life and history of Israel. God brought Moses and the people there to receive the law, which would provide direction and guidance for a safe, healthy, peaceful, and long life. The people brought their gold and jewels that would be used for tabernacle and temple worship. God's preparation was used instead for erecting a golden calf. While Moses was receiving the commandments from God, the people were breaking them. The holy God might judge His people and end their journey in the wilderness but Moses steps up, interceding for their future. God doesn't change His mind, nor does Moses persuade the God of the universe. We see an omniscient God, withhold wrath because He had good things planned for His people. In verses 2-3, God responds righteously to an unrighteous situation, saying that He will allow an angel to go with the people to the promised land. Moses continues his intercession. Do you think the people would have taken God up on His offer and continued with an angel? Moses, answered God, if you don't go, then we don't want to go. We, Israel represent God to the world. According to Pastor Henley, “It's not worth the trip without God.” Moses found favor in God's sight and asks the ultimate question: “...I beseech thee, show me your Glory.” (verse 18). He desires a bigger view of God, he wants to go beyond their face-to-face relationship. Think about it, what would be your request of God that might bring you closer to Him?

Look up- God is in heaven and we wonder and pray about His participation or lack thereof. Some call it the ‘hiddenness’ of God. Similar to theodicy, considering how God relates to suffering. Can a good God allow tragedies to occur, IF he cares? We have catastrophes, pandemic, and other. Are we left to ourselves to solve them, to survive? Has God pulled His hand away. Is He apathetic, absent, or unable? Israel has turned away and

Moses is asking for a closer engagement. Moses asks to see glory but is given much more. God's glory is an essential aspect of His being. The manifestation of His substance can't be separated or compartmentalized. God says "I will make all my goodness pass before thee..." (vs. 19), every quality, in one demonstration. Did Moses realize what he was asking of God? Remember Gideon in **Jud. 6**. Moses is humbled and He would receive all that he could withstand as a human. God puts Moses in cleft, a safe place, preparing him for their encounter. Moses is to do nothing, but allow God to create the setting. God would cover Moses's face with His hand until He had passed, allowing him to see only His back. Waiting with **fear**, Moses knows that he spoke with a God who wanted to fellowship with him and reveal Himself to him. He met a strong and protective God, acting through mercy and compassion. Moses saw the spirit of God in a miraculous new way.

Look on- We're in the midst of catastrophe and a multitude of information is bombarding us. We can look at the history of God's people and be reminded that God delivered with a strong hand. The people were in a wilderness because of idolatry and they complained every step of the way (see **Psa. 78:41-42**). Had God pulled away His hand of preparation and guidance or did His hand of provisions and protection remain? Our 'whys' or 'how longs' suggests that God has pulled back His hand of protection. A self-centered or deistic attitude says that we must solve the situation. God has created and now sits back to watch. Thankfully, our trials allow us a new view of Him. He delivered and saved, and can do it again. God doesn't need to be replaced with other solutions. Israel wasn't responsive to God's word but received the promises because He didn't let them continue in their own way. As the pastor said, "God, in His sovereignty allows whatever and for whatever in the believer's life." This same God is still taking care of every living being. He hasn't withdrawn his hand, we are a beneficiary, in accordance with His nature. Will He be good tomorrow? As we anticipate re-openings, returns, re-gatherings, God will not withdraw. The scripture says "...if God be for us..." **Rom. 8:31**; "...nothing shall separate us..." **Rom. 8:35**; "...he'll never leave us..." **Heb. 13:15**. His hand is still there!

At the end of the day, and every day, God is not absent, He's available to you. God will not take His hand away when it comes to His people. He'll never leave you in the hand of the enemy. And God is still at work in the world. Pastor said that "if He were absent, we'd all be in trouble." Recall **2 Pet. 3:9**. Yes, with Moses, God pulled back his hand. God didn't forsake him, but to the contrary, blessed him. Moses didn't see the promise land but he saw a greater wonder, a glimpse of God's glory.

Are we waiting for God; no God is waiting for us. He's come for us and is waiting. He's given revelatory accounts of His visitation and effects, in points of history to show us that He's divine and available, God is God, all by Himself, good and pure. When God takes His hand away it's always for our good. Pastor Henley's urge to you: Go aside, Look back into scriptures, Psalms and others. Ask Holy Spirit to take you to places in your history. He will reveal to you in His word, where and how he has always been with you for our understanding and good. Can you see His purposes? "It will cause your eyes to twinkle and say, God I've never realized that like before."

Other scripture from message: Ps 139:10, Ps. 145:16

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