

The Name **Exodus 34:6-7**

We are starting a new sermon series this week. We will spend the next four weeks looking at just two verses out of Exodus 34. Our goal is to look deeply and think deeply about who God is.

At the beginning of September, I shared with you that for this year all of our sermons will revolve around a central theme: Faith in the real world. This was birthed out of John 17 when Jesus prays that his disciples wouldn't be taken out of the world but like Jesus, be sent into the world.

What does faith look like in our world today?

Maybe you saw in the news, Toby Mac's son passed away just over a week ago. Toby Mac is a popular Christian recording artist. His son was just 21 years old. In the aftermath of his death, Toby Mac gave issued a public statement that was picked up by news outlets all across America. His statement ended with this:

"My wife and I would want the world to know this...

We don't follow God because we have some sort of under the table deal with Him, like we'll follow you if you bless us. We follow God because we love Him. It's our honor.

He is the God of the hills and the valleys.

And He is beautiful above all things."

This is faith for the real world. And we want to consider as a church, what faith looks like in the hills and valleys.

We just wrapped up five weeks talking about lies we are likely to believe. We started here because our faith must be able to interact with the lies our world tells us every day.

Today we will begin to consider who our God is. There are many different beliefs about God and who he is. Here are what a few well known people have said.

Oprah Winfrey: "One of the biggest mistakes humans make is to believe there is only one way. Actually, there are many diverse paths leading to what you call God."

Friedrich Nietzsche: "God is dead, God remains dead. And we killed him. Yet his Shadow still remains."

Homer Simpson: "I'm gonna die! Jesus, Allah, Buddha – I love you all!"

Mahatma Gandhi: "All paths leading to God are equally good."

Richard Dawkins: "The God of the old Testament is arguably the most unpleasant character in all of fiction."

We are going to spend the next 4 weeks looking primarily at two verses in Exodus 34. This is where God describes himself. God tells us who he is. We are not so much concerned with what man's opinion is, but what God says. With each week, there will be a practical, corporate response to what we learn. You'll see what I mean later.

Before we read our passage: I want to lay some groundwork of why these next four weeks are important.

Why these two verses matter.

1. **Who God is has profound implications for who we are.**

The Christian author AW Tozer said, “What comes to our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. For this reason the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like”

What do you think of God? If you see him as untrustworthy – You will be filled with anxiety. If see him as an angry, judgmental tyrant – You’ll be a religious bigot who is always angry. If you see him as this warm, tingly, sentimental man in the clouds, but powerless to do anything – You’ll crave every self help book with cliché sayings.

Just think about the world: The Isis terrorists beheading the infidel is because of what he believes about God. The Hindu who lets the cows roam the streets – because of what he believes about God. The U.S. Army sniper praying to God before he takes the shot because of what he believes about God. The peace activist who protests a war because of what they believe about Jesus teaching on “loving your enemy”. The father who quits his well paying job to move his family to the other side of the world to be missionary to an unreached people group. He does this because of his understanding about God. The Grammy winning artist who accepts an award for their song about a “one night stand” and thanks God for the gift.

They are all acting in accordance to what they believe about God.

We are the same way: How you spend your money, prioritize your life reveals who you believe God to be. How you view sin and how you deal with sin demonstrates what you believe about God. The kind of relationships you have, your marriage, how you raise your children. Show us what you believe about God. Whether you share your faith, cook a meal for someone in need, forgive someone who hurt you or pray for your enemies are all dictated by your belief in God.

Therefore, we need a right understanding of who God is because it will influence who we become.

Scot McKnight is a New Testament professor and scholar and written a number of books. For years, he taught a class on Jesus, and he would start every semester with two surveys. The first was a set of questions about the student: what they like, dislike, believe, and so on. The second was the same set of questions, but this time about Jesus. He says that 90 percent of the time, the answers were exactly the same.

That’s telling, isn’t it? Here’s how you know if you’ve created God in your own image: he agrees with you on everything. He hates all the people you hate. He voted for the person you voted for. If you’re a Republican, so is he. If you’re a Democrat, she is too. If you’re passionate about ____, then God is passionate about ____. If you’re open and elastic about sexuality, so is he.

Theologian Gregory Beale said, “What people revere, they resemble, either for ruin or restoration.”

The second reason for this sermon series:

Our theology shapes our worship.

If we don't know who God is – then who are we worshipping? In fact, verse 8 of Exodus 34 says this. Read the whole thing with me.

Exodus 34

⁵The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD. ⁶The 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, ⁷keeping 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." ⁸And Moses quickly bowed his head toward the earth and worshiped.

Here is what we are going to do. :

- Each week we will think about the original language and meaning.
- Each week we will think about who God is and what it means for us.
- Each week we will have one corporate application of each statement.

TODAY: Merciful and Gracious

Next week: Slow to Anger

Week 3: Steadfast love

Week 4: by no means clears the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children and the children's children.

These two verses are a foundation for a theology of God. What we find here is different than most theology books are organized. In nearly every class I have taken or taught- we begin with the "omnis" ... God is omnipotent (all powerful). God is omniscient (all knowing). God is omnipresent (every where at once)

All this is true! **But when God describes himself he gives us a name** and then he describes his character.

Starting with the omni's is a little weird.

What if you were to ask me "who my wife is?" I could say, my wife is 34 years old, 5 foot 10 inches, long brown/blondish hair, blue eyes, has three kids... You would learn something about her, but you wouldn't really know her.

What if I said, she is passionate about people. She is a selfless, caring friend. Then you would get to know her character. This is exactly what God is doing in Exodus 34

Therefore, in studying this passage together, we will get a profound picture of who God is.

John Mark Comer in his book – calls this passage the "John 3:16" of the Old Testament. It was central to Jewish belief. It should still be central to us today.

Let's think for a moment about the immediate context of our two verses.

Go back to Exodus 33:18. Moses is talking with God and makes a request. "Moses said, "Please show me your glory."

Don't just give me a little bit of you. I don't just want you nearby. I want all of you.

This is a dangerous request as we see in God's response.

Exodus 33:19-23

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."

God has told Moses what will happen. When we get to verse five of Exodus 34, we see God descending on Moses. Imagine God's hand covering Moses. He can't see, but he does hear. He hears a name.

34:5-

⁵The LORD descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the LORD.

This is the immediate context – God is going to show Moses his glory.

God has a name – and it isn't "god". IN FACT – it isn't "The Lord".

We need to think about God's name for a second – it is repeated twice at the beginning of this statement about who God is.

The name first appears in Exodus 3 with the burning bush. Moses is called by God to go back to Egypt and lead the people out of slavery. Moses is a little hesitant and he says, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'the God of your fathers has sent me to you' and they ask me, 'what is his name?' what shall I say to them?" (vs. 13)

You need to notice the phrase, "what is his name." The Hebrew is (*Mah Shemo*) – But if you were an ancient Hebrew reader, your ears would perk up right here. It's different from the typical way you would have asked someone their name.

If you lived in a Hebrew refugee camp in 1500 BC, you would walk up to a stranger and ask, "Miy shimka?" which is more literally, "Who is your name?"

But that's not what Moses asks. He asks, "Mah shemo?"

Mah shemo? is more like, "What is the meaning of your name?" Or, "What is the significance of your name?" Or, "What makes you . . . you?" Moses isn't just asking for a label like Bryan or Chris or

Sarah. He's asking the Creator God, "Who are you? What are you like? Tell me about your character." And that's when the Creator speaks his name.

The answer in verse 14 is, "I am who I am" – is sending you.

It could be translated, "Whatever I am I will be." If I am compassionate – I will be compassionate. If I am slow to anger – I will always be slow to anger. If I am loving – I will always be loving.

There actually isn't a surprise twist with God.

Have you ever known someone really well. Thought they were a stand up, honest person. Only to discover they are actually wanted by the police? Maybe you have trusted someone with your secrets, they always kept them in the past, but this time they are telling everyone.

Not possible with God. What ever he is, he will be.

You can trust God to be who he says he is.

A student who graduated from our college group a few years ago was diagnosed with cancer just recently. She posted on facebook about it yesterday and said this: "As scary as it sounds, I'm a strong believer that God will use me and my story for something good."

If God has been good, he will continue to be good!

Before we move on. A quick word about why some translations say "Yahweh" and other "The Lord."

Why do so many translations use "The LORD" when Yahweh appears? After the writing of Ten Commandments – and one commandment in particular – "Do not take the Lord's name in vain" – YHWH – the teachers, the rabbis, the scribes wouldn't even say or write the name. Instead they substituted "Adonai" which is Hebrew for "lord" or "master. It is used throughout the OT a generic term for God.

The English translators didn't know what to do with the Hebrew word "Yahweh". It is literally translated "he is."

So, they opted for the Hebrew tradition – we will just say "THE LORD".

In my opinion – by using the words "The Lord" we are missing out on a key facet of our relationship with God. "The Lord" is a title, not a name.

That would be like me always referring to Charissa as "The Wife". It's her title... but I have a personal relationship with her, so I call her Charissa.

John Mark Comer said,

"I would argue that we need to get back to calling God by his name. I think the gradual shift from calling God "Yahweh" to using the title "the LORD" says something about the human condition. For all our talk about a "personal relationship with Jesus," there's a part of us that's scared of intimacy with God. We see the fire and smoke up the mountain, and we shrink back in fear."

The Character of God – Compassionate and Gracious.

My version says “merciful” – but I think its easier to understand as compassionate. It has the same Hebrew root word as “womb” It’s a word used to describe a mother’s love of her children. How she feels about them.

In the book of 1 Kings – Solomon is king and every day makes judgement over people’s arguments. Two ladies approach the king arguing over a baby – both are claiming to be mothers. Solomon declares: Cut the baby in half and give each woman part of the child. 1 kings 3:26 - ²⁶The woman whose son was alive was **deeply moved** out of love for her son and said to the king, “Please, my lord, give her the living baby! Don’t kill him!”

Deeply moved is the same word as compassionate.

My point: **Compassionate is a feeling Word.**

We have a God who feels for you. He hurts for you, he rejoices with you, he feels your pain. HE IS COMPASSIONATE. **He is a relational God – who responds to you.**

I am barely beginning to grasp this as a dad. The other night, Judah comes up to me – It was a long day at work. I’m sitting on the couch. He wants to wrestle on the ground. I say no. He says, okay... can we wrestle on the couch so you don’t have to get off it. I say no. Please Daddy... I really want to.

Next thing I know – I’m on the ground wrestling with him. I felt for him... He wanted his dad... so I responded.

God feels for you.

Contrast this with Gracious, which is An action word.

Grace is a word that goes beyond what is expected to grant kindness towards people – who are not worthy or deserving.

Grace is demonstrated on the cross.

Grace is the means by which you are eternally saved.

God feels our pain and acts on our behalf.

Let me give you two examples.

Jonah: God calls a guy named Jonah to go to the city of Nineveh and preach against it. Nineveh was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. Assyria was the dominant empire of the day and the archenemy of Israel. They’d been at war with the Hebrews on and off for centuries.

A few decades ago, archaeologists found a Ninevite library. Their writings are crazy.

Speaking of a city he just destroyed, King Shalmaneser II had this to say: **“A pyramid of heads I reared in front of his city. Their youths and their maidens I burnt up in the flames.”** So he made a giant pile of heads by the front gate and burned the women and children alive.

His son, Sennacherib, had this to say about a king he defeated: **“I flayed [him], his skin I spread upon the wall of the city.”**

One of Sennacherib’s descendants, King Ashurbanipal, was true to the family name. Writing about another king, and another war, he said, **“I pierced his chin with my keen hand dagger. Through his jaw . . . I passed a rope, put a dog chain upon him and made him occupy . . . a kennel.”**

No one would blame Jonah for not going to Nineveh. But the reason Jonah give is interesting.

Jonah 1:3

“³ But Jonah rose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.”

Jonah wasn’t running from the evil city... he was running from God – because Jonah actually believed in the character of God.

Jonah gets swallowed by the fish... then he goes and preaches a one point sermon: “Yahweh is going to kill you.”

The Ninevites repent!

Jonah 3:10

“When God saw what they did, how they turned from their evil way, God relented of the disaster that he had said he would do to them, and he did not do it.

You would expect Jonah to be excited... great revival from such a short sermon.

But he is depressed... wants to die: WHY? He quotes Exodus 34

Jonah 4:2-3

² And he prayed to the LORD and said, “O LORD, is not this what I said when I was yet in my country? That is why I made haste to flee to Tarshish; **for I knew that you are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love, and relenting from disaster.** ³ Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live.”

God feels our pain and acts on our behalf.

Here is what you and I learn about Yahweh: He can’t be trusted to withhold grace – even from the worst of people. He goes around blessing all kinds of people. He feels and he acts all the time.

Here is another example. It’s the story of the prodigal son.

Jesus makes up a story about a son who leaves his father. He demands all his inheritance before the father has died. He end up wasting all the money... makes a fool out of his dad. Totally disrespects and abandons him.

He eventually comes to his senses (a term meaning he is repentant)

When he is walking back home here is what Jesus says happens:

Luke 15: 21-23

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. ²¹ And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ ²² But the father said to his servants,^[d] ‘Bring quickly the best robe, and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand, and shoes on his feet. ²³ And bring the fattened calf and kill it, and let us eat and celebrate.”

God feels our pain and acts on our behalf.

How should we respond to all of this?

Repent

Notice this about both stories: For God to act, repentance was needed. Change didn't have to take place: just a recognition of wrong.

We believe in common grace. God is good to all. The rain falls on the righteous and the unrighteous. But the Bible is clear, for us to receive grace for sin, we must repent.

Maybe you need to repent?

Be compassionate and gracious.

If God is compassionate and gracious, we should be to.

So, I did something a little crazy. I called Chelderlin Middle School. We have for many years helped provide meals to about 20 families at thanksgiving. But this year I wanted to feel the need and act! So I called the school and said, “Grant Avenue would like to help with every family who needs help this thanks giving!

They have let us know there are about 70 families who need help. So, If you are willing, would you consider buying food for a family. There is a shopping list in the welcome center and we have a box for you. Fill the box and return it on November 24th.