

A God of Second Chances

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[0 : 0 0] Well, one thing that I think most of us, almost every one of us I'm sure, have experienced sometime in our life is what it's like to have a strained relationship with someone.

Whether you're young, whether you're old, we've all had that strained relationship. Whether it's been a brother or a sister, a friend at school, at work, a colleague, maybe even your spouse.

And, you know, there's something that's said or something, some issue between you and it strains the relationship. Something has happened, someone's been hurt and there's been a breakdown of communication.

Have you experienced that? I'm sure you have. And it's not nice to have strained relationship because, you know, at essence we are relational beings.

God has made us for relationship. And so when we have those strained relationships, it just sours the rest of life. But I want you to think back to the last time you had a strained relationship with someone.

[0 : 5 9] Think back in your mind right now to the last time you had a strained or broken relationship with someone. What did you do? Did you seek to fix that?

Or did you leave it alone? Because those are really the two options. Did you take steps to resolve that strained relationship? Or did you decide rather to just not have anything to do with that person and just avoid them from now on?

Well, have you ever considered that God also had that choice with you? Multiple times in your life. Every time you sinned against your Creator.

Every time you decided to live your own way rather than His in the world that He's made. Every time you've ignored Him. You've done things to upset your relationship with God.

And every time you've done things to strain your relationship with your Creator. Every time He could have said, fine. I'll have nothing more to do with you then.

[2 : 1 1] He could have. Every time. But the fact that you're still breathing means that He didn't. You know, the simple fact that we're still here, even though we're sinners and by nature rebels against God, proves to us that God does not yet want to end His relationship with us, but He wants to fix it.

He wants to fix it. You know, while we often rightly talk from this pulpit about making sure that your relationship with God is right, that you're in right relationship with God, this morning what we're going to discover is that God actually desires right relationship with you.

He desires it. He wants to be in right relationship with you. And that is the truth about God that is revealed clearly in His dealings with the nation of Israel, His people that He called out of Egypt that we've been reading about in Exodus.

And especially where we are in the story, if you've been with us, you'll know that we're in a very sad part of the story of Exodus. Israel, God's chosen people that He has miraculously rescued and called to Himself, have tragically broken their relationship with Him.

At the incident of the golden calf, where they've rejected God's covenant and they've turned to idols. And they've put God behind them and that relationship has been broken.

[3 : 48] And it's at this point in the story that God had every right to leave them and have nothing more to do with them. In fact, part of Him wanted to do that. We remember back to Exodus 32, what He said to Moses when the people committed this heinous sin against their God and Creator and Redeemer and rejected Him and decided to worship idols instead.

He said to Moses, I have seen this people that they are indeed a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger can burn against them and I can destroy them.

See, part of God really wanted to do that and He had every right to. But it's here, in the chapter we have in front of us this morning, that we discover there was another part of God that desired deeply to restore relationship with Israel, with His people.

And while God is a just God and He must judge and He wants to do justice, there is also a very important part of God that wants to restore and wants to forgive.

And you might be here this morning and you've come to church or you're listening to this recording and you know that your relationship with God is not right. It's not what it should be.

[5 : 10] And maybe it never has been. And that's why you need to be here. It's no mistake that you're listening to this this morning. Because you need to learn this truth which is so foundational for life.

And that is the truth we learn in this chapter, that not only is God able to restore your relationship with Him, but He really, really wants to.

And the reason is, as we turn to Exodus 34, we discover that it is God's glory to restore what is broken.

He loves doing that. He loves restoring what is broken. In fact, that is His glory. Now what do I mean by that? Well, look at Exodus 34.

Remember actually Exodus 33 last week. Remember what happened in the last chapter. Moses asks to see God's glory. Remember that? It's a little bit presumptuous of him.

[6 : 11] And God actually is really impressed with him and chuffed that He actually wants to behold God's glory. But He does qualify to it, say, Moses, Moses, you don't know what you're asking.

If you saw my glory, you'd die. But I will show you my glory. And that's where we left off in Exodus 33. God saying, okay, okay, I'm going to show you my glory.

And it's in this chapter, Exodus 34, that we see what happened. And what we discover is that Moses did, in fact, behold the glory of God, but not through what he saw.

That's what he was expecting. He was expecting to see God's glory. But God was like, no, you can't do that. Hide in a rock, but you will still experience my glory. And the way he experienced God's glory in this chapter was not through what he saw, but through what he heard about God, when God decided, for the first time in the whole Bible story, to tell a human being who he really is.

You see, Israel didn't actually know that much about God at this point. They knew that He was powerful. He knew that He saved them. He knew that He made a covenant with their forefathers.

[7 : 34] But they didn't know about His character too much. They had some clues. But they didn't quite know, was this God a demanding God?

Was He capricious? Was He ruthless? They knew He was scary. So what was He like? Well, it's here, in Exodus 34, that He finally reveals what He's like.

He reveals His character, and that is His glory. That is how Moses experiences His glory, by hearing about God's true character.

And as we read these words that He told Moses, from verse 6 to 7, of Exodus 34, where God reveals what He's really like to Moses, it turns out that just as well for sinful Israel, at the heart of God's character, is His desire to forgive sinners.

Let's read from verse 6. The Lord passed in front of Him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord is a compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, and abounding in faithful love and truth, maintaining faithful love to a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, rebellion, and sin.

[9 : 07] You see, God is showing Moses that at His heart, He is not a capricious, ruthless, demanding God, but He is a kind God. The true God is kind.

He wants to forgive sinners. That is God's glory. That is what He is really like, at His heart. And this verse, that reveals the character of God, this is one of the most important verses in the Bible.

Highlight it. Star it. Put a bookmark in your Bible. This is one of the most important verses in the Bible. It is quoted countless times from here on out. Not just in the Old Testament, but in the New.

And especially when people are facing the reality of their sin. You read in the Psalms, like Psalm 103 we read earlier, and other Psalms where Israel have fallen, but they go back to this truth.

They go back to what God told Moses here. Don't worry, God wants to forgive us. Joel, the prophet Joel, after the exile, and after Israel, again, again, sinned, and broke relationship with God.

[10 : 17] Joel recites this verse and says, there is chance for repentance, because this is who God is. Remember what He told Moses. Throughout the Old Testament, you see this. This was the foundation of Israel's relationship with God.

Them knowing this about God. Even the prophet Jonah. Remember the prophet Jonah? The reluctant prophet? He was a prophet. Much later, after this, hundreds of years later, God sends Jonah, and He says to him that he must go and take God's word to the Ninevites, which were the enemies of Israel.

Jonah really didn't like the Ninevites, and so he started to complain to God, that he knew that God wants to forgive them, and he didn't want God to forgive them. I'll read to you from Jonah, chapter 4.

Jonah was greatly displeased, and became furious. He prayed to the Lord, Please, Lord, isn't this what I thought? While I was still in my own country, that's why I fled towards Tarshish in the first place.

I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger, abounding in faithful love, and relents from sending disaster. How did he know that? Because God told Moses.

[11 : 29] How did they all know that? Throughout the history of Israel, that this God was willing to forgive them, because God here, in Exodus 34, revealed His character to Moses.

This is who I really am. And this is who God really is. You want to know who God is, the true God of the universe, the only one true God.

He could have been anything, actually. We don't get to choose. And that's idolatry, by the way, when we think we can choose what God is like. We don't get to choose what God is like. We are created beings, and we take what we get.

And God could have been cold and merciless. We didn't get to choose the God who made us. But it's here that we discover that the God who made us really is not cold, not merciless.

He's kind. He's compassionate. Let's see what He says about Himself. Firstly, He says, I'm compassionate. I'm compassionate. What does that mean?

[12 : 37] Well, the essence of that word is that He feels. He feels for sinners. The Hebrew word for that word, compassionate, is related to the word for bowels.

It's to feel in the depths. He feels. God feels. Just that is amazing. God has emotion. God feels. And He doesn't just feel. He feels for sinners.

It's like how you feel when you see a little bird with a broken wing. You know, you see it, and go, shame. You feel for it. You want to nurture it.

That's how God feels when He looks at broken sinners. He's compassionate. That's what He's revealing about Himself. He's telling us what He feels when He looks at you, a sinner. He's compassionate.

Sylvia and I had to chase a bird around the new hall this week. There was this cute little bird, and it had come in, and it was lost, and it couldn't find its way out.

[13 : 40] And we both felt so sorry for this thing, and we gently tried to chase it around. Eventually, it got into Dylan's office, and then we managed to grab it, and it was distressed. I could just, when I grabbed it, I could feel this little heart beating, and then it was so nice for us to be able to take it out and release it into the air.

And that's compassion, and that's how God feels about lost sinners who don't know the way they're going and don't know where to go. God is compassionate. He wants to grab them, and He wants to release them into life.

That is what He's telling us about Himself. He didn't have to be like that, but He is. He is gracious. That's the next thing He says about Himself. He's gracious.

You know what that means? It means He gives people what they don't deserve. He gives people mercy when they actually deserve judgment. I recently heard a story about a woman who took her friend with her when she went to a photographer to have a picture taken.

She was, well, let's put it this way, she was past her prime, apparently. But the beauty parlor had done its best for her. She took a seat in the studio and fixed her pose.

[14 : 55] While the photographer was adjusting his lights in preparation for taking the shot, she said to him, now be sure to do me justice. Her friend, who had accompanied her, said with a twinkle in her eye, my dear, what you need is not justice, but mercy.

mercy. And that's the same with us. What we need is not justice, but mercy.

We think we're okay. You know, we doll ourselves up, we do some good works, and we think we're decent people, but God looks at us and He knows, He sees us for who we truly are, and He knows that we're far more ugly in our sin than we think.

But then, as Psalm 103, verse 10 says, we heard earlier, He doesn't treat us according to what our sins deserve. Because He's gracious. The true God of the universe is gracious.

And the reason is, because of what else He says here in Exodus 34, He's abounding in faithful love. It might just be love in your translation, but it's not the same word in Hebrew for just normal love.

[16 : 11] A better translation is faithful love or covenant love. The Hebrew word here is chesed. You may have come across it before. If you remember our sermon series, we looked at this word, and we'll link it to the bottom of this recording, that sermon, so you can dive into this amazing word, chesed, covenant love.

It means not just loving people, but setting your love. God set His love. He decided to take this covenant people and bind His love to them, to set His love on them despite whatever they're going to do in future.

It's not going to change. That's faithful love, covenant love, chesed. It's this consistent, unchanging love irrespective of the future failure of the people God chooses to set His love on.

It's like a parent's love to a child. That doesn't change no matter how many times that child messes up, right? Now, even parents are fallen and sinful and they don't do that perfectly, but God does.

He's set His love and He has decided to love His covenant people and that's not going to change. And He didn't have to do that. He didn't have to be like that, but that's what God is like.

[17 : 27] He's a God of chesed. He's a God of this unconditional love like we've never experienced anywhere else. And that is why we read in verse 7 here, God forgives iniquity, rebellion, and sin.

Which one of those have you done? Iniquity, rebellion, or sin? Well, it doesn't matter because He forgives all of us, right? There's no type of sin, there's no extent of sin that is beyond God's ability to forgive.

And we see this in the lives of really, really broken, sinful people who have done terrible things and yet still experience God's forgiveness. John Newton is one of them.

You know the story of John Newton? He's the guy who wrote the original Amazing Grace that we sang earlier which became probably the most famous Christian hymn of all time.

It was written by John Newton. But John Newton was a nasty guy before he became a Christian. He was a slave trader. He was a captain of slave ships who used to sail the African coast looking to capture people from their homes and villages and sell them as slaves.

[18 : 52] And he had seen in his life and been party to terrible things that human beings can do to other humans. People made in God's image but abused and treated like trash.

If anybody had reached the limits of God's forgiveness it was this guy. In fact God's anger against him came down in the form of a terrifying storm at sea which swept the crew overboard and was about to sink the ship and end his life and he was at the helm and in desperation for the first time in his life he looked up and he prayed Lord have mercy on us.

And despite the greatness of God's rightful anger at this man's sin God's desire to forgive him was even greater. And after 11 hours of steering the storm subsided and John Newton arrived at port a changed man.

He became a Christian and from that day forward he worked to abolish the slave trade that he had profited from and then wrote this amazing grace hymn amazing grace how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me.

He meant those words. You see nothing that John Newton could do nothing that you can do is beyond God's desire to forgive you.

[20 : 20] And he wants to. He really wants to forgive you and restore relationship with you because it's in his nature to do that.

It's in his being it's his character to fix what is broken that is his glory it is part of who he is. And you need to know that about this God. But there's another thing you need to know about this God that we read on in verse 7.

Because there is another part of God that is equally true and that is his justice. Look at from verse 7 the second half but he will not leave the guilty unpunished bringing the father's iniquity on the children and grandchildren to the third and fourth generation.

That's just a Hebrew way of saying that his justice is consistently continuing throughout history. it doesn't stop.

And so while God desires to forgive what we also learn is he will never not punish your sin because that is equally who he is.

[21 : 39] He is a just God a perfect judge and perfect justice is as integral a part of his character as mercy is and that is both the glory and the contradiction of God's character.

You know Moses wanted to see God's glory God was like okay here it is. God's glory is that he is a God who is both perfectly gracious and also perfectly just.

That is who the true God of the universe is. And we don't get to choose. We don't get to choose his mercy and neglect his justice. We don't get to choose his justice and neglect his mercy.

He has revealed himself to us. He has revealed who he is and this is who he is. This strangely contradictory truth about God is that he is perfectly gracious and perfectly just.

And there is nothing quite like that in any man-made religion no matter how hard you look because it seems a contradiction doesn't it? How can both be true?

[22 : 48] both are beautiful. Justice is beautiful. We all actually want justice in an unjust world. And a God of perfect justice is beautiful but we also know we are sinners and a God of perfect mercy and grace is beautiful but one without the other is not beautiful.

God is both. God is but we can't find that in any other religion because you can't make this up. And it's because that's who God is and who he reveals himself to be here.

It's because he is a God of both perfect justice and perfect grace that the only way that you can know him this God the true God is through his son Jesus Christ.

See God God expresses these two attributes of his character by before the creation of the world knowing and planning that his son was going to come down and show us how God could be both these things at the same time.

See Jesus came to show us the glory of God. That's what the Bible says. That's what the Bible says. When Jesus came to this world he showed us like nothing else the glory of who God really is.

[24 : 15] In the beginning of the Gospel of John he says we have now seen his glory. The word became flesh and we have seen the glory of God. The beginning of the book of Hebrews says that Jesus is the exact radiance of God's glory.

If you want to see God's glory like Moses wanted to see you look at Jesus. But how did we see God's glory in Jesus? Think about that. Was it in what he looked like?

No, not really. He looked just like an ordinary person. That's not where we saw the glory of God. Was it in how he dealt with people? Well, partly.

But the main way Jesus showed us God's glory, who God really is, was by dying for sins on a cross.

And so revealing there the way God planned before creation, that God would uphold both aspects of his character at the same time. That God can justly punish your sin, which he must do as a just God, but can also forgive you and restore relationship with you, which he deeply wants to do as your creator.

[25 : 28] And it is only on the cross, nowhere else, that we see God doing both of those things at the same time. That's why Paul, the apostle, writes in Romans 3, verse 26, God presented him, Jesus, his son, to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, these are beautiful words, so that he would be righteous and declare righteous, the one who has faith in Jesus.

He could do both. Another translation, he is both just and the justifier of those who have faith in Jesus.

It's there on the cross that we could see the glory of God like nowhere else. That is why the central act of Christian worship is not singing, great as that is, it's the Lord's Supper.

Because it's when we partake in the Lord's Supper that we see again the glory of God like nowhere else. Because the glory of God, the glory of God, where we see the glory of God is not in angels worshipping him in heaven, which is great.

It's not in the beauty of creation so much as we see the glory of God on a bloody wooden cross. Where we see more than anywhere else that God is just and God is gracious.

[26 : 58] gracious. We see the character of God laid bare on the cross. Do you see that when you look at the cross? Because if you see God's glory on the cross, if you trust in Christ on the cross for you, then God's forgiveness is always available to you.

This God, this character and his desire to forgive is always available to you. His chesed, his covenant love is set upon you if you see God's glory on the cross and you trust in Christ, no matter how many times you mess up.

His character doesn't change. He is still as ready to forgive you the thousandth time you sin as he was the first. Whenever you come to him through Christ, he is ready to forgive you again and again and again and again.

I must admit I struggled for many years as a Christian to understand this. I would keep coming to God with the same sins, confessing the same sins and I would keep messing up and I would keep stumbling no matter how many times I prayed, forgive me, help me to turn, I repent of these sins and then I would come back to them.

There would be this thought in my mind, whenever I would pray those sins that I know I've prayed confession for before. There would be this thought in the back of my mind, you know, when's God going to have enough of this?

[28 : 33] When's he going to get fed up with me coming back with the same sin over and over again? When would his patience run out? And what we discover here is that it never does.

It never runs out. Because every time you come to him in Christ, he is still this God, the Lord, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in faithful love and truth.

Every time you come to God through Jesus Christ, he is this God for you. And this won't change.

His character won't change. And you need to know this. These verses which become the foundation for Israel's ongoing relationship with God need to be the foundation for your ongoing relationship with God in your life.

And that's why they are some of the greatest verses you'll read in the Bible. Before I finish though, I want you to look at how this chapter ends.

[29 : 50] We read that. End of Exodus 34 with a shining face. What's going on here? It's worth spending just a few minutes in closing looking at this.

You see, Moses has gone up the mountain to kind of negotiate and see if he can prevent God from destroying the Israelites.

And then God shows Moses who he really is. And he goes on and he says, actually, Moses says, will you forgive the people?

Will you forgive the people? And then God exposes who he is and he says, of course I will forgive them. I want to and I'm going to make a covenant with them and I'm going to do amazing things through them.

Anyway, so Moses now at the end of the chapter he comes down the mountain to share the good news with Israel that this God is a God who wants to forgive them. And when he did, what he didn't realize is that his face was shining, glowing.

[30 : 53] We don't know exactly how, but his face was shining and the Israelites were freaked out. They backed off. They didn't know what was going on. They didn't know what to expect. I mean, last time, I mean, to be fair, last time Moses came down the mountain, there was the golden calf, there was like killing and disease and judgment.

So, you know, you can understand they were a bit trepidatious. But now Moses is coming with this good news of who God really is. And let's see what happens. From verse 29, as Moses descended from Mount Sinai with the two tablets of testimony in his hands.

By the way, that's just a beautiful detail. The tablets of the testimony where the covenant was written. Remember, Moses had broken them to display the breaking of the covenant because the tablets represented Israel's relationship with God.

When they were broken, the relationship was broken. But at this chapter, the beginning of 34, God says, write them again, make them again, I'm going to make them again and you can take them down. In other words, he's saying these tablets represent the restored, fixed relationship.

Right? Anyway, let's carry on reading. two tablets of testimony came down, he descended the mountain, he did not realize that the skin of his face shone as a result of his speaking with the Lord.

[32 : 16] When Aaron and all the Israelites saw Moses, the skin of his face shone, but they were afraid to come near him. But Moses called out to them.

So Aaron and all the leaders of the community returned to him or drew close to him and Moses spoke to them. This is a very touching moment because Moses is representing God really here.

And they're scared. They see just a little bit of God through Moses. They're wanting to run the other way, but Moses calls out to them and says, it's okay. It's okay. And they draw close.

So why is his face shining? Well, because in bringing this truth about God's character that he learned at the top of the mountain down to the Israelites, he is not just bringing words, he is bringing God's glory into their world because this is God's glory, his character, right?

And so by revealing to them who God is, he is actually a conduit of God's glory. As a messenger of God's character, Moses is a conduit of God's glory represented here in this shining face.

[33 : 33] well, that is who Jesus is to us. Jesus is the one who brings God's glory from heaven into our world. 2 Corinthians 4 verse 6 puts it like this, for God who said, let light shine out of darkness has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of God's glory in the face of Jesus Christ.

When we look at Jesus, we see God's glory, we get to understand who the God of the universe really is. God came down to show you who God is and that although you are a sinner and God must judge your sin, he wants to forgive you much more than he wants to judge you.

But that is only possible if you, like the Israelites, draw close to the one who is bringing you God's glory, Jesus Christ, who is the only one who makes it possible for a just God to be compassionate to you.

You need to draw close to Christ so that you can be one of those who God forgives and is compassionate to. You need to listen to him.

You need to do what the Israelites needed to do here and focus on this one who brings you God's glory. Pay attention to him. Don't put him in the side of your life. Follow him centrally. Because he is the only one who can bring you to a God who is just and compassionate.

[35 : 16] And if you have done that, if you have followed Christ, if you have drawn close to him, if he is central in your life, and you trusted in him, well then the New Testament goes on further to say, now this is amazing, it's that it's by us beholding God's glory in Christ that our faces begin to shine too.

true. Not literally unless you wear a really good moisturizer, but figuratively, but in a very real way. Listen to what Paul says, reflecting on Moses' shining face, in 2 Corinthians 3 verse 18.

He says, we all, with unveiled faces, are looking as in a mirror at the glory of the Lord, and are being transformed into the same image, from glory to glory.

See what he's saying there? That we, having seen the glory of God in Christ, now get to be the ones who show God's glory to the rest of the world, as we share with the people out there, who God really is.

And that no matter who they are, and what they've done, the God who made them, and must judge their sin, is also the God who wants to restore them and forgive them, and he has made a way to do both through Jesus.

[36 : 41] And we get to tell them that. We get to tell them that. We get to go out into the world that is lost and dark, and we get to tell them who the true God really is, and that he wants to restore them to himself.

Evangelism is not a duty, it is a privilege. That is how our faces shine in the world, when we tell people about Jesus and how God has shown himself as a God of true justice, but deep mercy and compassion in Jesus.

And we don't just get to tell them that we get to show it, because do you see what that verse is? We are being transformed as we behold the glory of God, and we more and more are absorbed in Christ, and absorbed in his word, and get to see God more and more.

We get transformed by that. And so, we don't only get to tell people out there who God is, we get to show them as we reflect God's forgiving character to others.

Because as we get to know who God is, and behold that glory, we slowly but surely get transformed into his image through his spirit in us.

[38 : 02] The question therefore that I leave you with is, is that truth of who God really is, that is in you, if you're a Christian, is that going to remain veiled, or not?

Is it going to remain veiled in your life? Will you keep it to yourself? Or will it shine out for others to hear and behold the glory of God through you?

Let's pray. God, we are overwhelmed when we think of how you have revealed your very heart to us, and that it is a heart of compassion.

Lord, we praise you. We can do nothing more, but just praise you and glorify you for revealing who you really are to us through Jesus Christ, and we pray help us to be people who shine the glory that you've shown us to the world that we are going into this week, in Jesus' name.