

Strengthening the Soul Your Faith

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Exodus 32 & 33

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I. Introduction to this Study

This week we continue our summer series Strengthening the Soul of Your Faith, thinking through the ways God reveals Himself to us.

II. Connecting with One Another

Have you ever felt the presence of God? If so, how would you describe it?

III. Study the Text

- a. At the outset of Exodus 32, Moses is atop Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments. But he's taking longer than expected!

Read Exodus 32.1-8.

Why do the people "make gods" to go before them? What does this say about their spiritual lives? What does it say about Aaron's leadership that he allowed - or even encouraged - such behavior!?

- b. Read Exodus 32.9-14.

How do you understand God's desire to let His "anger burn against them" that He might "destroy them"? Do you think Moses really changed God's mind!? Why - or why not?

Read Luke 18.1-8, what's known as the Parable of the Persistent Widow. How does this parable and Moses' interaction with God inform (or transform!) your understanding of prayer?

The phrase "make you into a great nation" first occurs in Scripture in the call of Abram, found in Genesis 12.1-3. What similarities or differences do you see between these two passages?

This passage in Exodus 32 may also remind us of Genesis 6.5-8, where God's heart is troubled by the wickedness of humanity. What similarities or differences do you see between Noah and Moses?

- c. Read Exodus 32.15-20.

Though Moses had convinced the LORD to relent from destroying His people, Moses is still angry. Why do you think this is? Is it right for him to be angry if God has relented?

Why do you think Moses grounds the golden calf into powder, mixes it in water, and makes the Israelites drink it!? What purpose does *that* serve!?

- d. Read Exodus 32.21-35.

How does Aaron respond to Moses' anger? Why? Turn to Genesis 3.1-13, commonly referred to as "the fall," paying special attention to verses 12-13. Is Aaron essentially doing the same thing as Adam and Eve? Why - or why not?

- e. Exodus 32.25-29 is a difficult passage to read. Why do you think Moses commanded the people who came to him to commit such an atrocity?
- f. In Exodus 32.31-32, Moses pleads with God to "please forgive their sin - but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written."

Ruth Haley Barton writes, "Alone in God's presence, [Moses] begged God to be merciful, and his identification with his people was total. When it seemed that all was lost, he was willing to sacrifice his own life if it would placate an angry God."

How does this foreshadow Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf?

- g. Read Exodus 33.1-11.

God restates to Moses His earlier promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, but asserts, "But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way."

Why do you think God says this? Why do the people respond the way they do?

- h. Read Exodus 33.12-17.

How do you understand Moses' questions in verse 16? Try putting them in your own words:

- i. In verse 15, Moses says, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here." Have you ever said something similar to God? How did you hear from God during that time?

If you're meeting with a group, share that time with others. If you're working through this study alone, spend some time reflecting on that season.

- j. Read Exodus 33.18-23.

Ruth Haley Barton writes, "Moses did have a point. How else would people know that they had found favor in God's sight if God's presence was not palpable among them? What was the point of continuing on if there was nothing to distinguish them from all the other nations that they passed through? But Moses needed more than just wordy assurances. He was desperate for a sign of God's

favor - some assurance that he was not alone - and so he asked God to show him his glory. Who wouldn't want to see God's glory, after all?

But God knew that what Moses really needed was the assurance of God's goodness. Moses was well acquainted with God's justice, his power and his righteousness, and he had seen more than enough of God's anger punishment. What he needed now was an experience of God's goodness, his graciousness and mercy. All of a sudden this was more important to him than any promised land he had ever dreamed of."

What do you think Ruth Haley Barton means by "what Moses really needed was the assurance of God's goodness"?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Have there times in your life that it seemed like God was taking too long to respond? What did you do during that difficult season? What can we learn from the Israelites when Moses was on the mountaintop?
- b. Are there ever times you're more angry about something that God is!? Is this usually anger directed toward someone else? Or yourself? How could the grace of God change these times of (unnecessary) anger?
- c. Think back through your journey of faith. How has God's goodness been revealed to you throughout your life?

V. Pray

- a. Lift up our Middle School students who are heading up the hill to Forest Home this week, asking God to give them assurance of His goodness!
- b. Pray for our ongoing dismissal process, that God's will would be done in our church and in Los Ranchos Presbytery,
- c. Pray for those you know (in our church family or outside of it) who need to be reassured of God's goodness - or accept it for the first time!