

NOTES ON THE BOOK OF EXODUS

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Exodus 33-34

The Lord refuses to accompany Israel to the land of promise. **“I will not go up in the midst of thee; for thou art a stiff-necked people; lest I consume thee in the way.”** At the opening of this book, when the people were in the furnace of Egypt, the Lord could say, **“I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows.”** But now He has to say, **“I have seen this people, and, behold, it is a stiff-necked people.”** An afflicted people is an object of grace; but a stiff-necked people must be humbled. The cry of oppressed Israel had been answered by the exhibition of grace; but the song of idolatrous Israel must be answered by the voice of stern rebuke.

“Ye are a stiff-necked people: I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment and consume thee: therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee that I may know what to do unto thee,” It is only when we are really stripped of all nature’s ornaments that God can deal with us. A naked sinner can be clothed; but a sinner decked in ornaments must be stripped. This is always true. We must be stripped of all that pertains to self, ere we can be clothed with that which pertains to God.

“And the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by the mount Horeb.” There they stood beneath that memorable mount, their feasting and singing changed into bitter lamentations, their ornaments gone, the tables of testimony in fragments. Such was their condition, and Moses as once proceeds to act according to it. He could no longer own the people in their corporate character. The assembly had become entirely defiled, having set up an idol of their own making, in the place of God - a calf instead of the Lord.

“And Moses took the tabernacle and pitched it without the camp, afar off from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of the congregation.”

Thus the camp was disowned as the place of the divine presence. God was not - could not - be there. He had been displaced by a human invention. a new gathering point was, therefore, set up.

“And it came to pass that every one which sought the Lord went out unto the tabernacle of the congregation, which was without the camp.”

There is here a fine principle of truth, which the spiritual mind will readily apprehend. The place which Christ now occupies is **“without the camp,”** and we are called upon to **“go forth unto him.”** It demands much subjection to the word to be able, with accuracy, to know what **“the camp”** really is, and much spiritual power to be able to go forth from it; and still more to be able, while **“far off from it,”** to act towards those in it, in the combined power of holiness and grace - holiness, which separates from the defilement of the camp; grace, which enables us to act toward those who are involved therein.

“And the Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend. And he turned again into the camp: but his servant Joshua, the son of Nun, a young man, departed not out of the tabernacle.” Moses exhibits a higher degree of spiritual energy than his servant Joshua. It is much easier to assume a position of separation from the camp, than to act aright towards those within.

“And Moses said unto the Lord, See, thou sayest unto me, Bring up this people: and thou hast not let me know whom thou wilt send with me: yet thou hast said, I know thee by name, and thou hast also found grace in my sight.”

Moses entreats the accompanying presence of the Lord as a proof of their having found grace in His sight.

Were it a question of mere justice, He could only consume them by coming in their midst, because they were **“a stiff-necked people.”** But directly He speaks of grace, in connection with the mediator, the very stiff-neckedness of the people is made a plea for demanding His presence.

“If now I have found grace in thy sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray thee, go among us; for it is a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us for thine inheritance.” This is touchingly beautiful. a **“stiff-necked people”** demanded the boundless grace and exhaustless patience of God. None but He could bear with them.

“And He said, My presence shall go with thee, and I will give thee rest.”

Precious portion! Precious hope! The presence of God with us, all the desert through, and everlasting rest at the end! Grace to meet our present need, and glory as our future portion! Well may our satisfied hearts exclaim, **“It is enough, my precious Lord.”**

In Exodus 34 the second set of tables is given, not to be broken, like the first, but to be hidden in the ark, above which, as already noticed, the Lord was to take His place, as the Lord of all the earth, in moral government.

“And he hewed two tables of stone, like unto the first: and Moses rose up early in the morning and went up unto mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him, and took in his hand the two tables of stone. And the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with them there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord.”

“And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed the Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, and transgression, and sin, and that will by no means clear the guilty; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children’s children, unto the third, and to the fourth generation.”

This, be it remembered, is God, as seen in His moral government of the world, and not as He is seen in the Cross - not as He shines in the face of Jesus Christ - not as He is proclaimed in the Gospel of His grace.

The following is an exhibition of God in the Gospel:

“And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself, by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto Himself; NOT IMPUTING their trespasses unto them, and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation” (II Corinthians 5:18, 19).

“Not clearing” and “not imputing” present two totally different ideas of God.

“Visiting iniquities” and cancelling them are not the same thing. The former is God in government, the latter is God in the Gospel. In II Corinthians 3 the apostle contrasts the “ministration” recorded in Exodus 34 with “**the ministration**” of the Gospel.

My reader would do well to study that chapter with care. From it he will learn that any one who regards the view of God’s character given to Moses, on Mount Horeb, as unfolding the Gospel, must have a very defective apprehension, indeed, of what the Gospel is. Neither in creation, nor yet in moral government, do I, or can I, read the deep secrets of the Father’s bosom. Could the prodigal have found his place in the arms of the One revealed on Mount Sinai? Could John have leaned his head on the bosom of that One? Surely not. But God has revealed Himself in the face of Jesus Christ. He has told out, in divine harmony, all His attributes in the work of the Cross. There **“mercy and truth have met together, righteousness and peace have kissed each other.”**

Sin is perfectly put away, and the believing sinner perfectly justified **“BY THE BLOOD OF THE CROSS.”**

When we get a view of God, as thus unfolded, we have only, like Moses, to **“bow our head toward the earth and worship”** - suited attitude for a pardoned and accepted sinner in the presence of God!

~ end of chapter 33-34 ~

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