

The Faithful Church

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[0 : 00] Moses goes up the mountain to speak to the Lord and get the Lord's commandments from the Lord. Then the people turn aside from God and reject him.

And what do they do? They say, well, where is Moses? He's missing. And so they build a golden calf out of calf, out of gold. And they say, this is the calf.

This is the God that has rescued us out of Egypt. And they start bowing down to it. And while we might not turn to golden calves today in Glasgow, but in many ways we are tempted to turn away from God, aren't we?

So Glasgow is very attractive in many ways. There's the bright lights of a good job. There's lots of fun things and fun places to go in Glasgow. We might want to be a little bit richer.

Maybe we've got daydreams that we engage in, fantasies. Or maybe we just enjoy a little bit of gossiping on the side. And the problem here is not simply the people's then's idolatry and our idolatry today, but it's how God responds to this idolatry and unfaithfulness.

[1 : 15] So I'm just going to read a verse that comes immediately after this golden calf incident. And we didn't read it this evening because we didn't have time. But I'll just read it for us. So it's in chapter 32, verse 10.

You can glance at it. You see, as people and as Christians, that's our great problem.

That God's anger will burn at our idolatry and our unfaithfulness. So how on earth are we going to be the faithful church that God wants us to be when by nature we are always unfaithful?

Well, the answer is not that we should try harder, but that we need a mediator, someone who will act and speak on our behalf. So in this passage we have a picture of Moses as the mediator we need if we're ever going to be the faithful people that God desires.

So if you're taking notes there, our first point is coming up there. That's Moses as a mediator. And why is he a mediator? Well, the first way that we see Moses being a mediator is that he seeks God's glory.

[2 : 43] So I'll just read to you what Moses says to God in those verses following what God said in chapter 32. So verse 11 of 32 he says, But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God.

He said, Lord, he said, Why should your anger burn against your people whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say it was with evil intent he brought them out to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth?

What's Moses saying? Lord, are you going to bring them out and destroy the people? Just so that the Egyptians can say, Well, what kind of God is that? He brought them out just to destroy them.

What a foolish God that will be. You'll turn God into a laughingstock. And then we look at the end of our reading today, what Moses says right at the end of our reading, the last verse.

He says, I'll just read it first. Then Moses said, Now show me your glory. Moses wants to see and know God's glory more than anything else in life.

[3 : 55] Nothing else matters. It's the be all and the end all of his existence. Now the second way that we see Moses being the mediator that we need is that he offers atonement.

So let's look at what Moses says at the start of our reading this evening. So we'll turn there just to verses 30 and 32 of chapter 32.

And I'll read it for us. The next day Moses said to the people, You have committed a great sin, but now I will go up to the Lord. Perhaps I can make atonement for your sin.

So Moses went back to the Lord and said, Oh, what a great sin these people have committed. They have made themselves gods of gold, but now please forgive their sin.

But if not, then blot me out of the book you have written. So atonement, it's a bit of an old-fashioned word, isn't it?

[4 : 56] But to understand what he means by it, let's look at what Moses asks for. And the first thing that we see there in the first half of verse 32 is that he asks God for the forgiveness of sins, for rejecting God and doing all those bad things.

And so if we are going to be a faithful church, if we're going to be faithful to God, we are going to need to be wiped clean of our sins.

Then look at what Moses goes on to say in the second half of verse 32. So he says, But if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.

So what is he saying? He's saying that if God is not prepared to forgive their sins, then let the punishment that is going to go on the people for their sins, for their rejection of God, fall on Moses. Moses is asking that God's anger would burn on him and that he would be destroyed and not them for their sins.

[6 : 04] And Moses is asking that he be blotted out of God's book instead of them. He is offering to be as a substitute standing in their place.

Well, it's not the greatest illustration, but I'm going to give it a punt anyway. So 2003, two Royal Marines, they're in Afghanistan. There's Matt Bispham and Tom Curry. The section that then, eight men in the section, comes under fire.

There's the contact point, 200 meters in the distance. The chap in charge of the section says, Right, Curry, Bispham, sort it out. Curry, Bispham, stand up, start charging to this section, to this firing point, under fire.

They know that one of them is most probably going to be taken out. But the other one has a fairly good chance of surviving.

Well, Matt Bispham made it to the section. Tom Curry was shot and died. Tom Curry acted, in a certain sense, as a substitute for Matt Bispham.

[7 : 16] And Matt Bispham went on to get awarded the MC for that action. And another way, perhaps a better way, is you go out to Afghanistan, and you go...

One of the great things about going out to Afghanistan, if you've ever been... I was chatting to him. A mate who went over there. He says, You get back. You go to Bastion. Bastion's this great base that they had there. The best thing about going to Bastion is you go to the American PX there.

And there they've got lobsters, and they've got steaks, and you as a Brit, you've got your can of beans that the Brits give you. And you wander over to the American PX, and you have these great lobsters, and these lobsters and steaks and whatnot, and you sit there, and you're watching the rugby after your tour, coming back, waiting to go back to England, to old Blatty.

And this friend's telling me about... He's sitting there watching the rugby, and he's chatting to a Christian friend. He says to his Christian friend, Well, what did you make of your tour in Afghanistan? What was going on?

And his Christian friend looks at him and says to him, Well, the lads I were with, I'd been with them for two years before that, and they were all wretches. They all knew that.

[8 : 23] They did all sorts of terrible things. But I knew that I was a Christian. And I knew that if I died, I'd be safe with God, but that they wouldn't be safe with God.

And so he says that he prayed that if someone were to die, that it would be him and not them. See, offered up, he prayed that he might be a substitute for those people, that they might know God and be atoned.

So Moses prays to God as an offering to stand as a substitute and die in the place for the sins of the people. But look at how God responds in verse 33 and verse 34.

The Lord replied to Moses, Whoever has sinned against me, I will blot out of my book. Now go, lead the people, go to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you.

However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin. And so what does God do? He affirms his good justice.

[9 : 38] He says that every sin will be punished. All wrongdoing will be punished. Every murder, every rape, every child molestation, every crime, every faithful thought, every loose word, every careless trade-in will be punished.

But then he goes on and makes no mention of Moses' offer of substitution, but simply says, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin.

Well, the third way that we see Moses acting as a mediator in this passage is that he brings God's presence. You see, because of their rejection of God and their worship of God, God says that he

will reject them and that he will not dwell with the people.

But at the same time, God has said that he will honor his promises. He will always be faithful. That he will give them the land that he has promised to their forefather, Abraham.

And isn't that what he says in the beginning of chapter 33? So 33.1, Then the Lord said to Moses, Leave this place, you and the people you have brought up out of Egypt. Go up to the land I promised on earth to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, I will give it to you and your descendants.

[11 : 09] Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you because you are stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.

You see, God says you can go up, you can go up, you can have your fill of the land, you can have all the blessings of God, all the sweeties of religion, all the prosperity, all the gifts that you ever wanted.

but you can't have me. I will not go with you because you are sinful and I am a holy God.

Go up, have the land, have it all, have everything you want, do it your own way, live life your own way, have all the sex, all the pornography, all the idols, all the money, all the adventures you want, live your daydreams and your fantasies, have all the success and self-praise and adulation you want, have it.

But I won't go with you because you are a stiff-necked people and I may destroy you. I won't dwell with you.

[12 : 17] I will not be party to or condone any sin. So how would you respond to God's offer? Now let's notice how Moses responds in verses 15 and 16 of chapter 33.

Then Moses said to him, If your presence does not go with us, do not send us up. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us?

What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?

And what's he saying? What's Moses saying? No. If you don't come with us, Lord, don't send us.

If you are not with us, then what is the point? You see, Moses is passionate for God and he is passionate for God's people. And he says, if God will not dwell with his people, then what is the point?

What is the point of anything if God is not at the center of it? And at this point, perhaps Moses is better than a lot of us.

[13 : 31] I'll say, certainly better than myself. You see, how many of us have not thought, well, I wish I could simply live my life my own way and still get to heaven without having to worry about what God thinks.

Or maybe you have thought, I would become a Christian, but I'd have to give up this and that and the other thing, and I don't really want to. I simply love my sin too much.

But what is the thing that Moses knows? Moses knows that the promises are pointless without the Lord. See, at the heart of the promises and at the heart of the blessings of religion and church is the true and greatest blessing, God himself.

Knowing God is God's greatest gift. And so Moses says, no, the promises are pointless without having and knowing God.

And so when we struggle in the Christian life or we don't want to become a Christian, it's not because our sins and our struggles are too big, but it's because that we love God too little.

[14 : 46] So what's heaven going to be like? Answer, it's going to be the place where God dwells and we dwell with him. That's what heaven will be like.

It's like that scene from the movie Elf. Santa's coming. Santa's coming. That's what it's going to be like, but only bigger and better. So what is it going to look like for us to be a faithful church?

Not that we keep to a bunch of rules and look respectable and self-righteous, but that we know and love God. And we know that we are loved by God and that God is our son and our radiance and our everything.

And so God relents and he promises to go up with the people. And the wonder of it all is that despite all their sin, all their shame, all their apostasy, the Lord goes on to bless the people even more in the rest of the book of Exodus.

And so although the people in this passage are unfaithful, they are made faithful given all the blessings of being in relationship with God, of loving and being loved by God through Moses as their mediator, they needed and as we need, who sought God's glory, who offered himself as an atonement for them and who brought them God's presence.

[16:08] But you see, Moses was only a picture of Jesus, the true and better Moses. You see, the night before Jesus died, Jesus prayed for his disciples and he prayed for us saying, I'll just read it for us.

It's from John chapter 17 verse 22 to 24. It should come up on the screen. I have given them the glory that you gave me that they may be as one as we are one.

I in them and you in me so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

Father, I want those who you have given me to be with me where I am and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you have loved me before the creation of the world.

See, it's not just that Jesus is passionate for and shows us God's glory but that he gives us God's glory in the fullest sense possible.

[17:21] Moses wanted to see God's glory but Jesus gives us God's glory as ours. And it's not just that Jesus barter and cajoles God if that were possible to allow us into his presence but Jesus makes us children of God so that we can experience the perfect eternal love that God the Father has for God the Son and that the Son has for God the Father.

Never to be cut off from God's presence. Always dwelling with him perfectly, faithfully as God's people, as his faithful church.

And Jesus did this through dying on the cross for our sins. You see, even though Jesus was perfectly innocent, he was crucified for our sins.

And as he hung there dying, God's anger burned on him for our sins that our names might not be blotted out of the book God has written.

You see, God never accepted Moses' offer of atonement, of acting as a substitute for the people because God knew the true and greater substitute was coming.

[18:46] God knew that when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin. And as Jesus hung on that cross, as our substitute, our atonement, God's time for punishing sin had come as he punished our sins in Jesus.

So what about you? God's time so you see, as Robert Wag Dodge saw the danger of the inferno raging up the hill, he bent down and he lit a fire.

And he watched it blaze up the hill away from him, ahead of him. It scorched the earth and its path. He turned around and he waved to his companions, come over here, come here. One of them stopped and paused and said, looked at the fire and looked at it scorching the earth and said, well, to hell with that.

I'm out of here. And he continued running up the hill. And as the fire burned ahead of Dodge, of Wag, leaving scorched earth before him, empty of any feel for fire, obliterated with nothing in there, Dodge wet his bandana, wrapped it around his mouth and went and laid down in that patch of scorched, burnt air.

[20:18] The forest fire approached and raged all about him as he lay there. As the inferno came sweeping past him, the gusts of superheated hot air lifted him up almost from his prone position and then dissipated past him.

Dodge stood up, blackened, but virtually unscathed. Within 45 seconds of running past him, all of those who had not heeded Dodge's calls had perished in the blaze.

13 in total. You see, Jesus endured the burning of the Father's anger at sin that we might lie safely and secure in the scorched earth of the Son's sacrifice and love.

So what about you? What's it going to look like to be a faithful church? It's going to mean saying sorry and trusting in Jesus.

Day by day. Many of us do this day by day over the years. But maybe you haven't done that before. Maybe you haven't said sorry and trusted Jesus for the first time.

[21:32] Well, there's a prayer behind us. It should be on the screen. I'll just read it through for us. And if you'd like to say it, then when I read it through, you can say it quietly in your hearts.

So let's pray. Father, I'm sorry that I've turned away from you. Forgive me. I'm sorry that I've fallen short of your glory, that I've not loved you with my whole heart or loved other people as I should have.

Thank you that Jesus died for me as an atonement. Thank you that his sacrifice means that I am forgiven and redeemed to dwell in your presence forever.

Please come into my life by your spirit so that from now on I can live for you with Jesus as my Lord.
Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[22 : 41] Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.