

# Mind the Gap

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Praise the Lord. We're going to look at Exodus chapter 33, verses 1 through 23.

Don't worry, I won't read all of that, but we'll cover it. And just to refresh your memory, if you remember that this chapter comes after chapter 32, where the Israelites rebelled against God and worshipped the golden calf.

Verse 1, Then the Lord said to Moses, Leave this place and the people you brought out of Egypt, and go to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, I will give it to your descendants.

I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. 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.

When the people heard these distressing words, they began to mourn, and no one put on any ornaments. For the Lord had said to Moses, Tell the Israelites, You are a stiff-necked people.

[ 1 : 3 6 ] If I were to go with you, even for a moment, I might destroy you. Now take off your ornaments, and I will decide what to do with you.

So the Israelites stripped off their ornaments out Mount Horat. Now Moses used to take the tent and pitch it outside the camp, some distance away, calling it the tent of meeting.

Anyone inquiring of the Lord would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances of their tents, watching until he entered the tent.

And as Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the Lord spoke to Moses. Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, they all stood and worshipped, each at the entrance of his tent.

The Lord would speak to Moses face to face as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua, son of Nun, did not leave the tent.

[ 2 : 4 9 ] Verse 12, Moses said to the Lord, if you have found favor with me, no, I'm sorry, you are telling me to lead these people, but you have not let me know whom you will send with me.

You have said, I know you by name, and you have found favor with me. But if you are pleased with me, teach me your ways, so that I may know how to continue to find favor with you.

Remember, this nation is your people. Remember earlier, God said, Moses, take your people and go. God said, no, no, God, these are your people. Amen.

You may be seated. Amen. Amen. I want you to pay attention to verse 3. The Lord says, go into the land flowing with milk and honey, but I will not go with you because you are a stiff-necked people, and I might destroy you on the way.

If you've ever been to London, England, you know that they have an extensive subway system called the Underground. And evidently, there was no coordination between those who built the subway cars and those who built the station platforms.

[ 4 : 13 ] Now remember, the London Underground was opened in 1863. And if you know anything about England, there's no rhyme or reason to anything. England is like dots, and the rest of the world is like windows.

So as a result of this, there is as much as a 12-inch difference between the height of the station and the floor of the subway cars.

Some of you know what I'm talking about. And the people call this the gap. And it is easy to stumble on the gap and get hurt.

So therefore, at all the subway stations in London, speakers constantly blare out, mind the gap. Mind the gap.

You hear this all the time. Well, okay. That's what I want us to pray about this morning. This topic, mind the gap.

[ 5 : 19 ] The covenant presence of God has been a constant throughout the history of God's people. The basic statement of the covenant is this.

Simply, God saying, I will be your God, and you will be my people. That's it. That's the basic statement. The basic format of a covenant, it starts with the introduction, right?

Like in Exodus 20, I am the Lord your God, right? Then there's a, a, a statement of historical roots. Again, Exodus 20, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.

Then there are terms for God. And God has already stated his terms in this case, because he says he's going to be the Lord our God. Then there were terms for the people, for mankind.

And of course, the terms for mankind were the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. Then there's a statement of blessings and cursings. Blessings if you keep the covenant. Covenant cursings if you break the covenant. And finally, there's the conclusion.

[ 6 : 24 ] Now, there are two covenants in the Bible. One is the covenant of creation, all right, where we were to keep the terms through works. And the blessing was the continuation of eternal life.

The curse was eternal death, namely the lake of fire. The day you shall break, you break this covenant, you shall surely die, said God. Then there's the covenant of salvation.

Now, you wonder why Adam and woman did not go straight to the lake of fire. It's because the covenant of salvation was already in effect. So, there's the covenant of salvation.

Terms, if we keep the terms through faith, then God will save us. The promise of salvation.

The promise and the accomplishment of salvation. Faith in the accomplishment and promise of salvation. The blessing was the deliverance from the curse of the broken covenant of creation, namely, eternal life.

[ 7 : 27 ] The curse is the continuation of being condemned already. It's not that God will condemn us for not keeping the covenant. God does not condemn us for rejecting the salvation.

You know why? Because we're condemned already unless we accept the terms. Subdivisions of the covenant of salvation.

There's the old covenant of salvation which deals with the accomplishment of salvation. There's the new covenant of salvation which deals with the application of salvation which has already been accomplished in Christ.

Subdivisions of the old covenant. You got the covenant with Adam and his children, with Noah and his children, with Abraham and his children, with Moses and his people, and with David and his people. The context of our passage today comes in the time right after God made a covenant with Moses and his people.

We often think that the golden calf incident ended when the children of Israel were hit by a plague. And you remember that? Aaron claimed that God made the calf.

[ 8 : 32 ] Remember this? Aaron said, well, Moses, what did you do? What did you do? He said, well, I just took all this gold and I threw it in the fire and this calf just popped out. Look at the wonderful things that God did.

But an even more dreadful consequence of Israel's rebellion happened in this chapter. And that's what I want to focus on.

The covenant God made with the children of Israel was broken when Moses broke the tablets. Remember he came down and saw all that craziness going on? He broke the tablets and that was the end of the covenant.

And God threatened to destroy them. But Moses pled with God to spare them. And in verse 14 of the last chapter, God relented and did not carry out this threat.

But God was still angry at the Israelites. They were not only on bad terms with God, they were on no terms with God. Now that the covenant was broken, there was no more covenant to keep.

[ 9 : 45 ] There were no more blessings of salvation to offer because there was no covenant. Nothing. Never before had the people of God been void of God's covenant presence.

But this time, they were void of God's covenant presence. All that was left was the empty gap in the covenant. And that's why we have to mind the gap today.

There was no escape from the curse that God was about to bring down on them, namely the lake of fire. The best they can do was to postpone the inevitable application of the curse.

Now we all know that we must hate sin. Is that right? We must hate sin. And sometimes we need to be motivated to do so by being reminded of the consequences of sin.

Sometimes that's not enough. And when that happens, we need to mind the gap and remember the blessing of God's special presence.

[ 10 : 50 ] You know it's scary to be without God's special presence. Amen. Amen. This covenant gap, in this gap, the Israelites were given a new name.

You know what the name was? A stubborn people. They had been complacent, but their complacency was left unchecked until it became stubbornness.

Because of this covenant gap, God told Moses, take your stubborn people and get out of here. That's scary to hear from God.

Since God knew them better than anybody else, they were speechless as they faced God's wrath. God would have brought them into a special bond with himself, but they were too stubborn for that.

God would have straightened out their sick and sinful natures, but they were too obstinate to desire God's solution to their problem. God would have been their loving Lord, shield, and defender, but they wanted no part of God's reign over them as they turned to worship the golden calf.

[ 12 : 11 ] Mount Sinai was to be the place where the worship of God would be set up, but now they were being expelled and the worship was replaced by mourning. Okay, God would keep his promise to give them the land of Canaan, but now they would get there without God's special presence.

They would not be led by God's special presence angel. Now they would get there, being led by just an ordinary run-of-the-mill angel.

This special presence angel actually carried the name of God. And if you want to think about it, this angel that would have led them was a, what the scholars call a Christophany, an Old Testament appearance of Christ.

But now God said, I'll just give you an ordinary angel. Who wants an ordinary angel? God spoke to them as if he did not know what curse to apply to them.

Listen to what God says, take your jewelry off and I will decide what to do with you. That's uncertainty. you don't know what God's going to do. That's scary.

[ 13 : 48 ] In other words, God was saying, repent. Maybe my wrath may be replaced by my compassion or maybe not. Maybe my mercy is stronger than my judgment or maybe not.

The Israelites were so shaken by the loss of God's special presence that they forgot that when God calls us to repent, God's intention is to give us mercy.

Think about that. God calls you to repent, he's already ready to give you mercy. If God dealt with us according to our sins, then it's justice knows exactly what to do.

Straight to the lake of fire. sin. Without repentance, we are dead, and God takes no pleasure in the death of sinners. But with repentance, God's mercy knows exactly what to do with us, to deliver us.

The covenant gap sobered them up, and it threw them into deep mourning. They did not mourn this way in the previous chapter when 3,000 were killed by the sword of the Levites.

[ 15 : 10 ] They probably thought that this would release them from their guilt, but it did not. They didn't mourn this way in the last chapter when a plague came upon them. They probably thought this was the full consequences of their sin, but it was not.

The lack of God's special presence is what caused them to mourn. They would rather risk the danger of God's anger than to be deprived of God's presence.

Of all the consequences of sin, the withdrawal of God's special presence is by far the one to be dreaded the most.

God promised that they would still conquer the land of Canaan, but without God's special presence, the land of Canaan would be a meaningless, empty possession.

We often forget that Emmanuel, God with us, is the greatest blessing we have. Everything else is nothing in comparison. If you don't believe me, check with Obed-Edom.

[ 16 : 25 ] Remember Obed-Edom? They were bringing the ark back to Jerusalem, them, and they should have carried it, but they had it rolling on a cart, and the cart broke down, and the thing almost fell, some guys tried to ride it, and they were incinerated immediately.

That happened right in front of Obed-Edom's house. So they had to keep it there for a while. So he let it stay in a room, and guess what?

Obed-Edom had all kind of blessings and prosperity. It just increased. I mean, this guy became very, very, very rich because of the presence of the covenant.

So what do you think when they took the ark of the covenant away and brought it to Jerusalem? What did Obed-Edom do? He left all that wealth, all that prosperity behind, and followed the ark because he valued the presence of God more than all the blessings that God could give him.

In our daily struggles in life, we often take God's special presence for granted. You know what the cure for that is? Mind the gap. Why?

[ 17 : 45 ] Because if God gives us everything we want, but withdraw us as special presence from us, we would go insane with guilt, with grief. God's love.

The Israelites stripped themselves of all their jewelry because of their shame and guilt, because without God they did not want anything else, because they hated now what they used to value, because with it they provoked God's anger.

Isn't that funny? we may be tempted to sin with something we just can't give up. I just can't get this up. And then we fall for the temptation and guess what?

We want to unload it all. What we couldn't give up before, now we want to give up. Why can't we turn that around? resisting temptation is always help when we mine the gap.

Why? Because God gives us, if God gives us everything we want, but withdraws his special presence from us, then we would go insane with grief.

[ 19 : 05 ] Though they stripped off their valuable possessions, it was not enough to keep God's presence with them. The tent of meeting was now outside the camp. And God was no longer present inside the camp.

Remember, the tent used to be inside, now it's outside, at some distance, the Bible tells us. They were unworthy of God's presence, special presence.

And without God's initiative, God would never return to them. You know, we may complain sometimes about God's commandments, but we must remember that God's commandments are a blessing of God's special presence.

Think about it that way. And if you find yourself forgetting this, then my advice to you is to mind the gap.

Why? Because if God gives us everything we want, but withdraws this special presence from us, we would go insane with grief. Though the Israelites were without God's special presence, they were not without God's grace.

[ 20 : 22 ] Praise God. After all, God had not destroyed them yet. That's grace right there. the tent of meeting may have been far outside the camp, yet the people were still invited to come and inquire of God.

You know, when God plans to give us mercy, what does he do? He draws us out to prayer. Now that they were without the covenant, they were now without their stubbornness.

Isn't that amazing? They were stubborn as long as they had the covenant, but God said, I'll take it away, now all of a sudden they're being nice. They were sober and humble as they worshipped God as he appeared to Moses.

Now they wanted to show God their appreciation for not destroying them. Now they wanted to demonstrate that they would do anything that Moses promised that they would do. Now they longed for the blessing of God's law.

The question we have to ask ourselves this morning is, why can't we stay sober and humble like this when things are going well with God?

[ 21 : 49 ] God's special presence for granted and not for grace? Moses was the most shaken by this experience.

He knew the implications of the covenant gap better than anybody else. God had warned Moses that he might destroy the Israelites if he stayed with them.

still Moses preferred God's anger to his absence. Kind of reminds me of David.

Remember God told David he was going to really punish him for something he did. And he said I'll give you three choices. And two of the choices were going to be carried out by people and one would be carried out by God himself.

And you know God can really whoop somebody when he wants to, right? And what did David say? He said let God do it because he's merciful.

[ 22 : 53 ] That's amazing. And look at Moses' dialogue with God. In the previous chapter Moses appealed to God based on his covenant promises to Israel. But in this chapter there was no covenant to appeal to.

And God had no obligation to keep any terms. If it had not been for Moses the story of the Israelites would have ended there. But Moses himself had not yet broken the covenant.

It was not him who bowed down to that golden calf. Therefore all of God's covenant promises were still in effect for him. And Moses related to God.

by special grace. The Bible says he talked to God as one friend would speak to another. And by this special grace Moses was the only mediator between God and mankind.

Because God had turned the children of Israel over to Moses, Moses could have led them as their king. And Moses would have been successful because God promised him success.

[ 24 : 19 ] But this was unacceptable to Moses. Moses laid his special grace on the line with God for the sake of the children of Israel.

And in essence as he spoke to God he says, how can I please you if you reject your people you told me to lead? How can I serve you if you reject your people you told me to lead?

In essence Moses was saying, if you reject them you might as well reject me. Now that's leadership. Well, Moses didn't know this at the time.

I'm sure he had an inkling of this. But in the future another Moses would arise. And this Moses would never break the covenant because he would never sin.

And we all know who this is. This would be Jesus. And all the covenant promises would have their yes and amen in him.

[ 25 : 24 ] Why? The Bible says because he is full of grace and truth. Yet, in a sense, Jesus daily lays all this on the line for us as our advocate to the Father.

In essence he says, how can you be pleased with me as your only begotten son if you reject those who are in me? Ooh, that's deep. If you reject them, you might as well reject me.

Have you ever thought about that? that's kind of deep. Where would we be if Jesus kept his grace to himself?

My goodness, we'd be in terrible shape. And God finally agrees to be with the children of Israel as Moses requested.

that is very, very profound. Verse 14, the Lord replied, my presence will go with you and I will give you rest.

[ 26 : 44 ] Okay, Moses, cool your jets, everything is all right. Right? But Moses is so caught up in all of this with the gravity of it all.

In verse 15 he says, then Moses said to him, if your presence does not go with us, do not send us away from here. 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 nations on the earth? Moses was so shaken by the prospect of leading the people without God's special presence that he did not realize what God had just said.

What did God say? He said, my presence will go with you and I will give you rest. He continued to plead with God for his special presence.

He continued to appeal to God on the basis of his glory. Moses was still trying to persuade God to do something that he had already agreed to do. I remember when I got saved, the night I got saved, you know, all of a sudden this peace came over me.

[ 27 : 57 ] I thought, hmm, was that it? Well, just in case, oh God, please, oh, I can't. I said, I realized that, okay, all right. The thing that really convinced me that I was saved, I couldn't understand the Bible, like, you know, back in those days, the King James was about it, right?

And I couldn't understand King, I never understood that kind of language. Matter of fact, I hated Shakespeare when I was in school. So I picked up the King James Bible and read the book of Revelation and it was so clear to me, I said, oh, this is deep, you know, so that's how I knew.

All right, praise the Lord. So, wow, then God repeated the promise to be with the Israelites for Moses' sake.

Verse 17, and the Lord said to Moses, I will do the very thing you have asked me because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.

Moses was relieved, but he was still shook up and so he asked God for an audio visual aid. Because his faith was shaken and weak.

[ 29 : 20 ] God understands that about us. That's why he gives us baptism in the Lord's dinner, you know. Every now and then we need audio visual aids to remind us of how faithful God is. Verse 18, then Moses said, now show me your glory.

And the Lord said, I will cause my goodness to pass in front of you. and I will proclaim my name Yahweh in your presence. I will have mercy on whom I have mercy and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.

But he said, you cannot see my face for no one can see me and live. Then the Lord said, there's a place near me where you can stand on a rock.

When my glory passes by, I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed. And then I will remove my hand and you will see my back but my face you cannot see.

Think about it. Before we're glorified, if we see God face to face, we'd be incinerated. The whole character nature and nature of God is revealed in the proclamation of his name.

[ 30 : 45 ] See, the name of God is not just a label. The name of God is God. In this situation, the name of God included his mercy, his grace, and his compassion.

And this time, Moses got the message. But Moses wanted to see more than God's presence. Moses wanted to see God's glory.

And what did God say? No! But I will show you my goodness. You got it? Isn't that great when God says no?

Think about that. If God said yes, Moses would have been incinerated on the spot. Moses wanted to see God's majesty.

But God showed Moses his mercy. God shielded Moses in the cleft of the rock. Well, you might ask the question, how can an ordinary rock shield Moses from the face of God?

[ 31 : 48 ] I mean, nothing can stand up to the face of God. How in the world can this ordinary rock do that? Well, how can this happen unless there's something special about this rock?

Because we see that God partially shielded Moses with his hand. But what about the rest of the shielding from the rock? What was this rock?

And maybe the question should be, who was this rock? He was none other than the rock of ages cleft for us.

God was present in ways that Moses didn't know. And God is present with us today in ways we don't know. And yet, ways we often take for granted.

those of you who have children, you know, our children think that everybody has food, clothing, and shelter. That's nothing. Right?

[ 33 : 01 ] Have you ever heard that? Oh, I want that toy. If you don't give it to them, you don't give me anything. Wait, wait, wait, what about all this other stuff? That's how God sustains us with his grace. And as Moses was in the rock, so are the people of God in Christ.

well, let's put all this together. God had said, I will have mercy on whom I have mercy. God also said, I will have compassion on whom I have compassion.

God never said, I will show anger on whom I will show anger. Why? Because God's anger against sinners is always justified and righteous.

Because we all deserve it. But on the other hand, God's mercy and compassion are always undeserved. You can take off all the ornaments you want.

That's not going to earn God's favor. What a relief it must have been from Moses when God told him, quote, chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were written on the first ones that you broke.

[ 34 : 13 ] And Moses goes to start chiseling out the tablets. And it says he took them up to God on Mount Sinai and God wrote the law on there, the Ten Commandments, and he carried them back in his hand.

God once again reminds Moses of who he really is and he reminds us today. Then the Lord came down in a cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name Yahweh.

As he passed in front of Moses proclaiming Yahweh, Yahweh. But that's not all to God's name. Listen to the rest of God's name. The compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands and forgiving wickedness, rebellion, and sin.

yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished. God once said this very same thing in another chapter and he went on and said he punishes the children and the children's children for the sin of their fathers all the way down to the third and fourth generations and then he says of those who hate me.

Got it? Those who follow in the tradition of hating God, the curses pile up for four generations of those who follow in that hateful tradition.

[ 35 : 48 ] But then what does he say on the other side? He said, but I will show my loving kindness to thousands of generations who love me. If you follow the tradition of loving God, the blessings pile up for thousands of generations.

Notice how God makes that an indefinite number. What's stronger here? Is it his wrath or is it his grace? Moses bowed to the ground at once and worshipped.

Oh Lord, if I have found favor in your eyes, he said, then let the Lord go with us, although this is a stiff necked people, forgiving our wickedness and sin and take us as your inheritance.

in the previous chapter, Moses appeals to God on the basis of his covenant promises. In this chapter, Moses appeals to God based on the very name of God.

Remember, God said, forgiving weakness and sin, and then Moses says, okay, then, according to your name. Isn't that a great thing? And we think about praying in the name of Jesus as a tag that we put on the end of our prayers as a magic formula.

[ 36 : 59 ] No, no, no, no, no, no, that's not it. That's not it. What a joy it must have been for Moses when God said, quote, in verse 10, I think, I am making a covenant with you before your people, and I will do wonders never before done in any other nation in the world, and the people you live among will see how awesome is the work that I, the Lord, will do for you.

This was actually the second covenant with Moses and his people. At that time, and since that time, there has never been a covenant gap, nor will there ever be.

The covenant gap was a scary, horrible thing to be in. Not because we have been so faithful to God, but because Jesus has been so faithful to us.



The covenant was renewed, and the covenant will never, ever be suspended. Today, we have access to God's saving grace in the Old Testament through his covenant promises and through his covenant name.

Today, we also have access to God's saving grace through in the new covenant, through his only begotten son. never forget the awesome blessing it is to be God's people and to have God present with us in a special way, to have Jesus as our advocate, who was greater than Moses.

[ 38 : 45 ] How many times have you grown weary in serving God? The next time you feel this way, mind the gap, God's special presence.

How many times have you been felt burdened by God's commandments? The next time you feel this way, mind the gap and remember the blessing of God's special promises.

Don't let Christ's faithfulness be a crutch for complacency. When you find yourself slipping into complacency, what should you do?

Mind the gap and remember the blessing of God's special promises. presence. But if you've been complacent for a while and find yourself slipping into stubbornness like Israel, mind the gap and remember the blessing of God's special presence.

Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for the fact that you showed us this terrible, frightening incident in your word. We thank you for the warning it gives us, not to take you for granted, but to take you for grace.

[ 40 : 10 ] We pray that you will keep us mindful of the special privilege we have of being your children. Not just your people, but your children.

We ask that you will be with us for the next few weeks and keep us mindful of the tremendous honor and blessing it is to be yours.

In Jesus' name, amen. Amen.