**Exodus Chapter 33**

Go to your room! Those are the words dreaded by adolescents fortunate enough to have a room. The separation viewed by a child as punishment often has as its true purpose a cooling off time for the parent. In many instances it is the other parent who acts as an advocate for the child, tempering the anger caused by bad behavior. In chapter 33 we see God in His anger separating Himself from the Israelites. The chapter begins with God telling Moses to leave Mt. Sanai and lead the Israelites on to Canaan. Initially it seemed that the incident of the calf had been forgotten as God said that He would send an angel before them and that He would drive out the inhabitants of the land. In verse 3 He informed them that He would not go with them which caused the people to mourn what the KJV refers to as evil tidings. It is ironic that they despaired that God would not accompany after they had abandoned Him to seek another god to lead them. There did seem to be some measure of repentance on their part although they may have also feared losing their preeminence among the nations. They were assured of obtaining their inheritance in Canaan but they realized it would be incomplete without God’s presence in their lives. Bob Deffinbaugh wrote *“The grace of God is seen even in God’s threat to remove Himself from their midst. God’s stated purpose for keeping a distance between Himself and the Israelites as they travel on toward the promised land was that their sinfulness would require Him to destroy them. Thus, to be in their midst was to greatly endanger the Israelites, while to be distant from them was to assure their safety, unless there was some means provided to deal with Israel’s sins, and thus to appease God’s righteous anger.”* God commanded them to take off their ornaments which was probably jewelry they obtained when they left Egypt. The ornaments were representative of false gods and Deffinbaugh speculates that they may have had name of false gods engraved on them.

Verses 7 through 11 are about a tent of meeting (tabernacle in KJV) that Moses erected outside the camp. This was not the tabernacle that God had instructed Moses to build, instead it was probably something temporary that he used before the tabernacle was built. Moses would meet with God at the tent and the people watched from their tents no doubt hoping to see some sign that they had been forgiven. Verse 10 says that when they the pillar of cloud indicating God’s presence they worshipped from their own tents.

Verses 12-23 describe the discourse between God and Moses regarding His instructions to lead the Israelites to Canaan. Moses began by asking God to teach him His ways so that he could lead the people and he reminded God that the Israelites were His people. God replied that His Presence would go with **Moses.** Moses responded that if God’s Presence did not go with the **Israelites,** he asked that they remain at Mt. Sanai. God agreed to Moses’ request because He was pleased with Moses. Finally, Moses asked God to show him His glory meaning he wanted to see God face to face. God did not allow Moses to see his face but placed him in the cleft of a rock so that when God passed, Moses could see his back and thus get a glimpse of God. While the Israelites were terrified of God and did not even want Him to speak to them, Moses sought a closer relationship. The rock is symbolic of Jesus. Matthew Henry wrote: *“It is in the clefts of this rock that we are secured from the wrath of God, which otherwise would consume us; God himself will protect those that are thus hid. And it is only through Christ that we have the knowledge of the Glory of God.  None can see his glory to their comfort but those who stand upon this rock and take shelter in it.”*

As I studied this chapter, I was reminded of an illustration shared by Gary Youell, our former pastor. A man’s wife lamented that they did not sit close to one another in the car as they once did. He replied “I haven’t moved”. When we find ourselves in the position of having drifted away from God, it is because we have moved, not Him. This chapter is unique in that God did move away from the Israelites if only briefly. It was Moses who restored the relationship, again typifying Jesus. Also from Henry’s commentary: *“Thus our Lord Jesus, in his intercession, presents himself to the Father, as one in whom he is always well pleased, and so obtains mercy for us with whom he is justly displeased; and we are accepted in the beloved.”*