

EXODUS 33 – 35

MOSES GETS A MULLIGAN!

You don't have to be a golfer to enjoy the benefits of a Mulligan – the term is now widely used to describe any “do-over,” or second chance after initial failure. In the late 1920s, David Bernard Mulligan had a regular club foursome, which he often drove to the course in a 1920s vintage Briscoe, a touring car.

Once on the first tee, the story goes, his partners allowed him to hit a second ball after mishitting his drive. Mulligan complained that his hands were still numb after driving rough roads and a bumpy Queen Victoria Jubilee Bridge (now Victoria Bridge). Said Mulligan: “I was so provoked with myself that, on impulse, I stooped over and put down another ball. The other three looked at me with considerable puzzlement, and one of them asked, ‘What are you doing?’ ‘I’m taking a correction shot,’ I replied.”

His playing partner asked what he called that.

“Thinking fast, I told him that I called it a ‘Mulligan.’ They laughed and let me play a second ball. After the match, which Mulligan and Spindler won by one point, there was considerable discussion in the clubhouse about that free shot.

We have all needed a ‘Mulligan’ or a ‘do-over’ from time to time. And thanks to the fact that our God is a God of grace, we can get a ‘Mulligan’ when we turn to Him in repentance.

Today we will see how, through his appeal to God's grace in faith and an intimate knowledge of his God, Moses was able to intercede for Israel and acquire a mulligan.

As you may recall, we are on the heels of the golden calf fiasco. A total of 3,000 people are now dead at the hands of the priests due to God's command. I would imagine that all is somewhat quiet in the camp as the Israelites await Moses' descent the summit of Mt. Sinai once again. If anyone spoke at all, it was in a whisper. I imagine it is sort of like when you know you are in trouble with your mother, but you don't yet know how bad the punishment is going to be.

As we open our Bibles to chapter 33, we see that Moses is atop Mt. Sinai once again for another 40 days and nights.

1 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Depart and go up from here, you and the people whom you have brought out of the land of Egypt, to the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'To your descendants I will give it.' 2 And I will send My Angel before you, and I will drive out the Canaanite and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Hivite and the Jebusite. 3 Go up to a land flowing with milk and honey; for I will not go up in your midst, lest I consume you on the way, for you are a stiff-necked people."

4 And when the people heard this bad news, they mourned, and no one put on his ornaments. 5 For the Lord had said to Moses, "Say to the children of Israel, 'You are a stiff-necked people. I could come up into your midst in one moment and consume you. Now therefore, take off your ornaments, that I may know what to do to you.'" 6 So the children of Israel stripped themselves of their ornaments by Mount Horeb.

Moses Meets with the Lord

7 Moses took his tent and pitched it outside the camp, far from the camp, and called it the tabernacle of meeting. And it came to pass that everyone who sought the Lord went out to the tabernacle of meeting which was outside the camp. 8 So it was, whenever Moses went out to the tabernacle, that all the people rose, and each man stood at his tent door and watched Moses

until he had gone into the tabernacle. 9 And it came to pass, when Moses entered the tabernacle, that the pillar of cloud descended and stood at the door of the tabernacle, and the Lord talked with Moses. 10 All the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the tabernacle door, and all the people rose and worshiped, each man in his tent door. 11 So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend. And he would return to the camp, but his servant Joshua the son of Nun, a young man, did not depart from the tabernacle.

I would like for you to see that there is a contrast between Moses and Israel when it comes to their relationship with God. As we saw in an earlier chapter, the people were content to worship God from afar and let Moses be close to Him. This was a grave mistake. We can see now how that affects the lives of the people as compared to the life of Moses. The closer we are to God, the more intimate the relationship, the better prepared we are for life's troubles and the greater the chances are that we will respond to those troubles properly.

God told Moses that He would send an Angel to escort Israel into the Promised Land in His stead. This was quite a blow to Moses as it was to Israel once Moses relayed the message. Think of it as your favorite football team losing their star QB just prior to the Super Bowl. Israel had counted on the very presence of God, not an angel.

A separation of sorts occurred.

Isaiah 59:1,2

***1 Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened,
That it cannot save;
Nor His ear heavy,
That it cannot hear.***

***2 But your iniquities have separated you from your God;
And your sins have hidden His face from you,
So that He will not hear.***

Charles Spurgeon put it this way: *“God never permits His people to sin successfully.”*

God referred to the Israelites as a ‘stiff-necked people.’ This is an expression that compares them to an ox that won’t turn when its bridle is pulled one way or the other.

Israel, just like a stubborn mule, was bent on going her own way. We are often like that ourselves. And the result of that was this separation.

We see in verse 7 that Moses moved his tent outside of the camp. Compare this with the fact that it had once resided in the midst of the camp. This is what separated Israel from the surrounding nations. The Israelites were still not truly repentant; at least not as a whole.

Since the Tabernacle had not yet been built, Moses had used a special tent to commune with God. He now moved that tent as a demonstration of the separation that sin causes.

The Welsh Protestant minister, Dr. Martyn Lloyd-Jones put it this way: *“When the Holy Spirit of God begins to deal with any one of us, there will be this separation. It will not be paraded, it will not be the Pharisees' 'I am holier than thou' attitude. No, once a man begins to be burdened for the glory of God and the state of the Church, he immediately feels the call to consecration, he 'goes out' as it were.”*

Israel's sin had separated her **FROM** God, whereas Moses separated himself **TO** God.

Israel was still holding back.

The story is told of a Saxon warrior who wished to be baptized, that when he was immersed in the water, he held up his right hand. When he was told that all of his body had to be immersed, signifying death to his old self, he replied that he would keep that hand to himself for battle with his enemies. There are too many people who reserve some part of their life un-devoted when they make their consecration to God. (J.R. Miller)

Contrast this with Moses who wanted to go deeper in his relationship with God.

It is said of Faraday, the famous chemist, that he learned a lesson as young boy while delivering newspapers. Upon coming to a house that had a huge iron gate, he stuck his head and hands between the bars. He began to ask himself on which side of the gate he actually was. His head and hands were on one side while his torso and legs were on the other. Without warning the mechanized gate began to open and he couldn't get out in time. While he wasn't injured, he learned that all true work required head, heart and hands to be on the same side.

And that is what God wants from us; to follow him with everything instead of just a portion of our being.

Mt. 22:37,38

37 Jesus said to him, " 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. ' 38 This is the first and great commandment.

While I don't like trying to force Christianity into unnecessary formulas, the answer to most of our questions is usually the same; repent!

By God moving His presence outside the camp, He created a space between Him and His people. This space required some movement by Israel. They had to make a choice. They could either stand still or draw closer to God. But there is something else. Because they didn't know God like Moses did, they were hesitant to approach Him. And that is why what Moses did next was so important.

The Promise of God's Presence

12 Then Moses said to the Lord, "See, You say to me, 'Bring up this people. ' But You have not let me know whom You will send with me. Yet You have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found grace in My sight. ' 13 Now therefore, I pray, if I have found grace in Your sight, show me now Your way, that I may know You and that I may find grace in Your sight. And consider that this nation is Your people."

14 And He said, "My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest."

15 Then he said to Him, "If Your Presence does not go with us, do not bring us up from here. 16 For how then will it be known that Your people and I have found grace in Your sight, except You go with us? So we shall be separate, Your people and I, from all the people who are upon the face of the earth."

17 So the Lord said to Moses, "I will also do this thing that you have spoken; for you have found grace in My sight, and I know you by name."

18 And he said, "Please, show me Your glory."

19 Then He said, "I will make all My goodness pass before you, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before you. I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion." 20 But He said, "You cannot

see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live.” 21 And the Lord said, “Here is a place by Me, and you shall stand on the rock. 22 So it shall be, while My glory passes by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock, and will cover you with My hand while I pass by. 23 Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen.”

Chapter 34

Moses Makes New Tablets

1 And the Lord said to Moses, “Cut two tablets of stone like the first ones, and I will write on these tablets the words that were on the first tablets which you broke. 2 So be ready in the morning, and come up in the morning to Mount Sinai, and present yourself to Me there on the top of the mountain. 3 And no man shall come up with you, and let no man be seen throughout all the mountain; let neither flocks nor herds feed before that mountain.”

4 So he cut two tablets of stone like the first ones. Then Moses rose early in the morning and went up Mount Sinai, as the Lord had commanded him; and he took in his hand the two tablets of stone.

5 Now the Lord descended in the cloud and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. 6 And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, “The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, 7 keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation.”

8 So Moses made haste and bowed his head toward the earth, and worshiped. 9 Then he said, “If now I have found grace in Your sight, O Lord, let my Lord, I pray, go among us, even though we are a stiff-necked people; and pardon our iniquity and our sin, and take us as Your inheritance.

Moses is now interceding for Israel. He pleads for God to personally accompany Israel to the Promised Land.

Is it right for us to approach God like this? It most certainly is. The closer you are to someone the more intimate the conversations you have with them. Being close to someone, by necessity means that you bear more of your soul to him or her. You are able to ask more of someone you know well as opposed to someone you don't know that well.

Moses knew God well. And he knew God's character.

6 And the Lord passed before him and proclaimed, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abounding in goodness and truth, 7 keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, by no means clearing the guilty, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children and the children's children to the third and the fourth generation."

Moses appealed to God's grace. And it worked! This is why we see God re-stating the covenant. Through His grace, God allowed Israel back into the fold. Moses is a type of Jesus in this instance.

You see, we have an intercessor in Jesus, sitting at the right hand of the Father. He is forever pleading our case no matter how often we mess up or how many times the enemy accuses us.

In verses 10 – 28 we see God re-stating the covenant. Then in verse 29 we read how Moses came back down the mountain.

The Shining Face of Moses

29 Now it was so, when Moses came down from Mount Sinai (and the two tablets of the Testimony were in Moses' hand when he came down from the mountain), that Moses did not know that

the skin of his face shone while he talked with Him. 30 So when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone, and they were afraid to come near him. 31 Then Moses called to them, and Aaron and all the rulers of the congregation returned to him; and Moses talked with them.

There was something different about Moses. His face glowed from being in the presence of God. Everyone knew he had been with God. So Moses goes back over the covenant with the people.

This continues on into chapter 35. And it is there we see something awesome!

20 And all the congregation of the children of Israel departed from the presence of Moses. 21 Then everyone came whose heart was stirred, and everyone whose spirit was willing, and they brought the Lord's offering for the work of the tabernacle of meeting, for all its service, and for the holy garments. 22 They came, both men and women, as many as had a willing heart, and brought earrings and nose rings, rings and necklaces, all jewelry of gold, that is, every man who made an offering of gold to the Lord. 23

Those that were willing came forward and took part in the work of the Lord. They gave of their resources – their time, talents and treasuries. God gifted them so they could perform the necessary tasks.

And this is what it is all about. We have seen the people sin in a grotesque way. We then saw Moses intercede for them, appealing to God's mercy and grace. This was possible because of their close relationship. The result was that God forgave those that repented. They then humbled themselves, approached God and began to serve Him once again.

This is the cycle of our Christian lives. I pray we take advantage of this lesson. I pray that we appeal to God's grace because of the work Jesus did on our behalf. I pray that we intercede for others. And I pray that we respond to God's grace and forgiveness by serving Him in humility with all we have.

A man that worked in a plant nursery had before him the task of going through a large number of young saplings. There were many that were straight and healthy looking while there were a great many that had crooked trunks and various other blemishes. Normally he would throw the worst of them away and keep the best of them. Surely the best looking ones would continue to grow and not require much work trimming on his part. But instead, he decided to keep the crooked saplings, saying to himself that nurturing the feeble ones and making them something of which to be proud would give him greater satisfaction.

We, as Israel are all crooked saplings. But God in His grace and mercy hasn't thrown us away. He trims and prunes, waters, feeds and nurtures us so that one day we will be made straight.