

## I. Read

## II. Can I trust you? Can you trust me? Can we trust God? The Bible? The Church?

A. Can you trust your parents? Your spouse? Your teachers? Your employer? Can I trust my senses? My feelings? What does it mean to trust? What does it look like?

B. There is a lot being said and written about trust these days – mostly because it’s “breaking down.”

C. Trust in institutions of all types is at historic lows. We do not trust the government, the media, big business, Higher Ed, the press. Science.

D. I’m not interested in pushing you into any doom loop. Many things are going well. I do not want to be confused with Chicken Little.

1. As compared with twenty-five years ago, life expectancy and literacy rates are up. Infant mortality rates and extreme poverty are down. The water we drink is cleaner, the air we breathe is purer, the cost of energy is lower and our agricultural output is higher. It’s no longer fair to say we live like the kings and queens of the past because we live much better than they ever did.

2. Many things are going well. But a number of things are not, and among the warning signs is the collapse of trust. Who can we trust? Can we trust: the system? The election results? The courts? The FBI? The police? Each other?

3. I have two good friends going through difficult moments right now. One is struggling in a PhD program. He has faced set back after set back after set back. His advisor told him to trust the process. Another has made a long string of bad decisions to the extent that several of us have gathered around him and said, “you can no longer trust yourself. Something is wrong with your thinking.”

4. Trust. It’s a big topic. Who should I trust? Can I trust God? And what would that even look like?

## III. We are in Exodus 34.

A. Last week we turned back to the text. After starting our study last August, we marched ahead about a chapter week until we got to chapter 32 – the golden calf – and we did a mini-series on idols. Last week we started back with the text. It was Exodus 33. Today it’s Exodus 34, which has three sections.

B. The first part focuses on God’s character.

1. At the end of chapter 33, Moses asked to see God's glory. In chapter 34 we read about God placing him in a crevasse, covering his view as he moves past and then allowing Moses to see His back - or the afterglow of where he had been.

C. In the second section we read about the covenant being restored and reconstituted.

1. A covenant is like a contract, with a few key differences, most that emerge from the fact that it's a deal made with people you trust and like. My standard joke is that a good lawyer would often keep you from signing the covenant of marriage because you take on a lot of risk and give away your rights. "For richer or poorer. In sickness and health. I am going to honor you above myself."

2. Covenants are a big deal in the Bible. One of the ways we might understand our relationship with God is that it is defined via six different covenants made between God and key people: Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David and then Jesus.

3. And we sometimes refer to the first two-thirds of the Bible as the Old Covenant and the last third is the New Covenant.

4. I share all of this because the Jews worship of the Golden Calf violated the covenant. Moses asked God to resign it and God agrees. And goes on to make big promises about giving them the land. He has already shown them many amazing things: parted the Red Sea, mana from heaven, water from a rock. He says, you will see more.

D. Then in the third section of the chapter some of the commandments are restated.

1. The Ten Commandments are first given in Exodus 20. In the chapters immediately after that we get some case law explaining how some of them are to be applied in hard situations. Here some of them are repeated again. It seems a bit random until you realize that the theme is trust.

2. God is saying, You need to trust me enough to put away all other gods. You need to trust me enough to do what I tell you to do. To worship where I command you to worship, to give me what is first from your flocks and best from your harvest, and (hardest of all, perhaps) to rest?"

a) I was struck – convicted - by what verse 21 says: "In plowing time and in harvest you shall rest." We understand resting when there's not enough to do and we need a little break, but God goes out of his way to say, "When you're plowing—in the busiest time of the year, when there's this small window to get the seed in the ground—and in the next busiest time of the year—when you're harvesting, and you have to get it up before the rains or hail come—do you trust me enough to rest?" This is a representative sample of commands, sufficient to apply the Ten Commandments to the specifics of life.

IV. So, as noted, the topic here is trust.

A. They failed in chapter 32. They are going to try again. God has things to say about what that would look like. I want to focus on one thing. We are being given an opportunity here. We are listening in on someone else's meeting with HR. They've have been sent back for some special training. There is a chance here to learn from their situation, so we don't have to go back to HR for our own meeting.

B. You have your trust issues. I don't know what they are. Honestly, you might not either. But it is clear that trust is a big deal.

C. Society doesn't work without trust. Lots of people write about it. Not just the social scientists, but marketplace people.

1. Steve Covey said

2. And then his son wrote a book called Moving at the Speed of Trust.

3.

D. The question in front of us is, what does it mean to trust God? What does that look like.

E. We have been following the Jews as God has rescued them from Egypt and provided for them at every turn only to have them go rogue. They have failed to trust. When Moses spent too long on the mountain with God, they turned to an idol.

F. How do we learn not to do that? How do we learn to trust God as we should?

G. We are going to drill down on verses 6-7 – which are two of the most important verses in the whole Bible. We looked at them a few weeks ago on Mother's Day.

**V. Then the Lord – this is his covenant name - came down in the cloud – this is a standard theophany for God - and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, 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; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the parents to the third and fourth generation.”**

A. On Mother's Day, I noted:

1. That we get no description of God. Moses asked to see, what is emphasized here is what he hears.

2. And what he hears are the attributes of God. It's as if God said, what you really need from this revelation is to understand who I am. It's not about what you see, it's about my character and attributes.

3. And then he lists seven. And I drilled down on the statement that God is "compassionate and gracious" – which points to God having the qualities of a Mom.

B. If you were here, you may remember that I said:

1. God is repeatedly revealed as Father. We see that over and over. At other places He is portrayed as a judge, a shepherd, a king – there are a lot of anthropomorphic images of God to help us understand him.

2. But here in Exodus 34, God is compared to a Mother. "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God.

3. In Hebrew, "compassionate and gracious" is *habum vay-banun*. There is a bit of a word play here. These two words sound alike, and they are side by side to help explain each other.

4. And *habum* – "compassionate" - is from a root word meaning "female womb." The idea behind it is the feeling a mother has toward her infant child.

C. And then I said:

1. I want to encourage you ladies to realize the God-ordained role you have been given to nurture life – physical and spiritual.

2. And that means you need to attend to your own spiritual growth.

3. And then I told a story about my relationship with my Dad.

VI. I want to come back to this passage because it is so important – something we know because it is repeated over and over.

A. We find it cited in Numbers 14 and Deut 5 and 7, and Psalms 86, 103, 111 and 145 and Nehemiah and 2 Chronicles and Isaiah and Jeremiah and Hosea and Joel and other books.

B. In Jonah it is this passage that Jonah uses to justify not going to the Ninevites. When God is extending mercy to them – which Jonah didn't want him to do. He said, "I knew you'd do this." And then he quotes Exodus 34:6-7. He says, I knew you would be "compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness."

VII. We need to understand God – and this aspect of who he is is game-changing.

A. Whatever you have going on in your life—and I know some of you are hurting. This seems like a season in which a lot of things are going really well. But a lot of people are really hurting.

B. And so, you need care. But more than that, you need to know God: to know who he is, and what he's like. And this is foundational stuff. Understanding God without understanding this would be like:

1. trying to understand the United States without understanding the Constitution.

2. Or trying to understand the Star Wars franchise without knowing that Darth Vader is actually Luke's father. Or trying to understand economics without understanding the law of supply and demand.

3. There are some things you just have to know, or the rest of the story doesn't make a lot of sense.

VIII. What we get are five attributes of God. In order to “see” him, he gives qualities

A. First, God is gracious. He doesn't treat us as we deserve, but has pity upon us. He doesn't do to us all that would be in his right to do.

B. Second, God is merciful. He's tender, kind, and gentle, never harsh, petty, or cruel.

C. Third, He is slow to anger. “long of nose.” The idiom is the opposite of “hotheaded” (or has a short fuse)

D. Fourth, God abounds in steadfast, covenant love. People often ask the question: “Does God love everyone?” Others answer, “God loves everyone. We're all God's children.” But that's not the way in which the Bible talks. There's a sense in which God loves everyone. We're all made in his image, and he cares for people. But in this special, covenant loyalty, God has a special kind of affection for his people.

E. In the second half of verse 7, we learn that he will not clear the guilty.

1. If we're honest, we'd like to stop halfway through this verse. We think, “I love this verse. This is so good! Love, mercy...oh, that's beautiful!” Then he ruins it: “Can we just forget about the second half of verse 7? It was a lovely description of God and then...he doesn't clear the guilty.” It hardly makes sense to us. We think, “Well, which is it, God? Are you the God of mercy, or the God of judgment?” It sounds like it's all “Mercy, mercy, mercy,” and then, “I never let anything get away from my judgment!” Which is it?!

F. It is both and it has to be. Many of us have a one-dimensional, cartoonish god.

1. The villains in cartoons are usually one-dimensional. All bad. When they show up the music switches into a minor key. They have a very sinister laugh. And the good guys are all good.
2. Well, we don't have a one-dimensional god. Many people have a god who's either always walking around with cookies or a clipboard. The clipboard god is the god is always looking over your shoulder, always noticing, always saying, "Uh-huh. Yep. Okay. Sorry, you're not looking good today." Some of us understand God as being like Santa Claus, always keeping a list to find out who's naughty or nice.
3. That's not the God here. Mercy doesn't even make sense apart from justice. So, how are we to understand verses 6-7? How do we solve this seeming tug-of-war?
  - a) Some view God as part mercy and part judgment, pulling against each other. Maybe, Jesus sort of tipped the scales for all time, so that the mercy part can win and the judgment part can go away. Clearly the God of the Bible is one who has mercy on sinners, but clearly he punishes the guilty. How does this work? Is it that mercy is sometimes stronger, and judgment is sometimes stronger? Maybe he's just schizophrenic.
4. How does this work? If you want verse 6, you have to take verse 7. You can't make sense of what it is to be merciful and gracious unless he takes sin seriously. Somehow, in all of this, verses 6-7 are giving us the fullest revelation of God's character contained in the book of Exodus, so how do we make sense of it?
5. Well, mercy having a tug of war with judgment is not the right way to look at it. There must be something of even more ultimate concern to the Lord. If you make these the poles in some bipolar God, then you don't have God as he truly is. There must be something even more ultimate, which expresses itself properly both in mercy and in judgment. What is that? It is God's holy righteous name.

#### G. A Jealous God

1. It's not incidental to this passage (and our understanding of it) that verse 14 says that the name of the Lord is "Jealous".
2. God refuses to be replaced by any rival. He's a jealous God. That doesn't mean he's insecure or petty, as we might be.

3. It means that he knows his own worth, that the honor of his name is above all things, and that what is best for his people is that his name be honored. If his name is Jealous, what does jealousy produce? Two things: love—"I love you so much that I want you like no one else"—and anger when that love is torn apart—when that vow is broken, and when you forsake your covenant. So it is with God. His jealousy for his own name leads to mercy and judgment. They aren't warring things. All the time, in every way, God is working for the honor and vindication of his name. He's a jealous God.

4. If you think, "I don't know if I want a jealous God," listen: I'd rather have a jealous spouse than one who is chill and understanding. Meaning, if you commit adultery with someone, what's the measure of your spouse's love? Do you want him or her to say, "What happened? Aww. You know what? We decided a long time ago that we were going to have an open relationship. I hope there was something meaningful for you there, and I hope we can still have something meaningful together." Would you feel loved in that? That kind of indifference and openness to betrayal would be much worse than a spouse who loves with a fierce, passionate, unrelenting love, and would say in such a situation, "How dare you! I gave everything to you. I love you from the very depths of my heart."

5. So it is with God: his name is Jealous. Mercy and judgment don't exist as two warring factions in God, like he's got a good angel and a devil on his shoulders. No, they express what it means for God to be the only God—a God of fierce and forgiving covenant love. God is for us because he is for himself, and that's a good thing.

6. We know these two things can coexist because we see them both in the golden calf episode. He will by no means clear the guilty. He doesn't wink at sin. We've already seen three thousand people die because of it. Sin always has consequences. He by no means just shrugs his shoulders and says, "Eh, golden calf? No big deal." Yet he has shown himself to be merciful, gracious, and forgiving, because he's going with them. He has restored the covenant.

7. We see all throughout the Bible that God does not clear the guilty or shrug his shoulders at sin. There are covenant curses. Moses won't get to the Promised Land. There are sacrifices to atone for sin. Eventually, Israel will be exiled to Babylon. He is a God of justice and a God of mercy.

8. It's the very same problem that Paul labored to solve in Romans 3. How can God justify the ungodly? How can he show mercy to sinners? How can he forgive rebellious, wicked people and yet still be just? How can verse 6 and verse 7 of Exodus 34 both be true? Do you know Paul's answer? "Because Christ died on the cross, that God might be just and the justifier of the ungodly." God has not cleared the guilty, winked at any of your sins, or shrugged his shoulders at any of our rebellion. It all has to be paid for. In the cross, justice and mercy meet; and in the cross, God's character is fully revealed.

9. What we see may even have been something of a mystery to the Israelites: "God is gracious, loving, and forgiving, and yet he doesn't clear the guilty. How does that work?" In the cross, we see how it works. Everything that's revealed about God as Sinai is even more clearly revealed in his Son.

10.