

Moses' Second Forty Days

Ex. 32: 30-35, Ex. 33: 1-23, Ex. 34: 1-9, 27-35; Deut. 9: 25-29, Deut. 10: 1-5.

The "Forty Days" of Scripture.

Sixteen Addresses.

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CHAPTER 4 — MOSES' SECOND FORTY DAYS.

MERCY AND BLESSING; OR, GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY AND ITS WAYS.

Those of you who were present here, last Lord's Day evening, will remember that we followed Moses up to the mount, where he spent his first forty days receiving from God the ten commandments, the law, the claims of God upon man, written down on the tables of stone. And when Moses came down, you remember what was the condition of affairs below. All was ruin. Everything was hopeless.

The people who had put themselves upon the ground of responsibility before God, declared with the utmost folly possible, that they would do all that the Lord commanded them. The very first word of the law was, that they were not to make any graven image, and the first thing that meets the eye of Moses is a golden calf, and Israel dancing round about it, and saying, "These be thy gods, O Israel." The ruin was absolute. The breach was complete. The ordered relation between Israel and God was absolutely broken by this open act of sin. I can quite understand how deeply Moses was affected when he brake the tables of stone. What must God have done if he had carried them down? He must have brought in immediate judgment upon the lawbreakers. Moses met the difficulty in this way, so to speak, saying, If I do not carry them down, there will be an opportunity for God to bring out His resource, if there be any resource. God is holy, they are guilty, and if the law be bound on them He must judge them. So he brake the tables of stones, and God did not chide him for so doing.

Then he calls for any who are on the Lord's side to make it manifest. Levi responds, and three thousand men die. That is, the day the law was broken, modified judgment came in. The lesson is this, man cannot stand before God on the ground of a command. No, beloved friends, he must either be before God in the sense of His grace, and on the ground of His mercy, or else be condemned.

Next you see Moses turns to the people and charges their sin on them. In Exodus 32: 11-13 he had been zealous for the people before God. Here he is zealous for God before the people, and says, "Ye have sinned a great sin" (Ex. 32: 30). It is a great thing to know that you have sinned. I have sinned; so have you. Their sin was idolatry. It was breaking the known commandment of God. For that sin, Scripture tells us, they got all their future punishment. There was the root that brought forth such bitter fruit in Israel's history in days to come, because idolatry was in the heart. Now I do not say that your sin and my sin have been exactly the same; but you have sinned a great sin. What is it? That is not the point. I am not going to unfold what your sin is. But this I know, you are a sinner, and sin is a serious thing. Sin God will not pass over. He could not. If He did, He would not be God.

Cecil said once, that an unconverted man was half a beast, and half a devil. He resembles the beast in his lusts and passions, and he resembles the devil in his pride. It is a true statement. Take man as man, and you will find that is his history. Corruption and violence appear all through the scene. You may have a few exceptions. But, broadly speaking, man will follow his lusts and desires. He does not care for God. Then there is another thing, in which he resembles Satan. He finds the world a place in which he can get on, and when he gets up in it he is proud. The Word of God is perfectly plain, "All have sinned." And the man who has a deep sense before God of his sin, does not minimise it.

Now we think, that when sin comes out, then is the time for God to judge. Ah, that is man. But you see God is not like that. What comes out in this scene at Sinai is, that when everything was ruined and gone, and Israel's case absolutely hopeless, then it was that God retired into the blessedness of His own being, and the absolute goodness of His own nature. When grace had been abused, mercy came out, and God said I will be sovereign, I will do what I like, and I will bless them, spite of their sin.

Ah, dear friends, it is a wonderful thing to know God. You may ask, What do you mean by grace being abused? Well, what had it been but grace all the way till then? God drew near to Moses in the burning bush, and said to him, "I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters: for I know their sorrows: and I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey" (Ex. 3: 7 and 8). Was not that grace? Pure, sovereign, blessed grace. You know how He led them from the burning bush right up to the last act which we have seen in the previous chapter. The manna came down day by day to them, and pure water followed them.

If you want to get God's ways in grace with them traced out, go and read Psalm 105. It is the record of all that He did. How He brought them out and blessed them. It is the tale of the unfailing goodness of God. He brings them to Mount Sinai, and then He says, "Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself" (Ex. 19: 4). Then He proposes the law; and in self-confidence, without really knowing what the claims of law were, they boastfully say to God, Whatever You want we will do. What is the next thing? The first moment they are really on the ground of obedience they fail, and all is over. Thereon Moses charges their sin upon them, "Ye have sinned a great sin." Do you not hear the Holy Ghost saying to you, "You have sinned a great sin"? The greatest sin you have

committed is this, you have never believed the Lord Jesus Christ. If you are not a converted person you have never bowed to God's Son, and that is the greatest sin that any sinner can commit. And by-and-by, if you die in your sins, even though there may be ten thousand sins laid at your door, the damning sin of all will be this, you have heard of Jesus, and yet never believed in Him. That is the great sin of every unconverted person in this hall tonight. And, if you feel it, all the better for you.

Then Moses says, "And now I will go up unto the Lord; *peradventure* I shall make an atonement for your sin" (Ex. 32: 30). Mark the word "peradventure." He is not sure that he can effect what he sees necessary, the making atonement for their sin. And you say to me, Is that all the comfort you have for me? By no means, listen. There is a Man gone up to God with no "peradventure" on His lips. There is a Man at God's right hand who was once on the cross, and who once bare the sins of sinners, went down into death under the judgment of God, and died with a thief on either side. But mark, He has risen from the dead and gone up to God, a victor. He has gone up as the One who *has made* atonement — gone up as the One who, in death, has met all the claims of God, and having finished the work which God gave Him to do, has taken His on the very throne, the judgment of which He bore at Calvary. Blessed Victim, glorious Victor!

Do you know the legacy He has left to you? Do you know what a legacy is? It is a gift that comes to you from a person that is dead. And I rejoice to tell you tonight that you have been left a wondrous legacy. What is it? When that Saviour died on Calvary's tree, do you know His last words? "It is finished." There is His legacy to every anxious, labouring soul, a finished work. Moses must say, "Peradventure I shall make an atonement for your sin." Not so the Lord Jesus Christ, whom I preach to you tonight. He has gone up with no "perhaps" on His lips. Note what the Holy Ghost says of Him: Who "when he had by *himself purged* our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high" (Heb. 1: 3). It was when atonement was fully effected, when every claim of God had been met, when He had crushed Satan's power, and borne man's sins, that He annulled death, and, raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, that He went on high.

Resurrection is the evidence and witness of the satisfaction of God in that which Christ has accomplished, and if you see a living Christ at God's right hand, you will get peace in your soul. You will not get peace by only knowing that Jesus died. There is no dead Christ now. I take you to His grave. There is no buried Christ. Where is He? He is risen! "Why seek ye the living among the dead?" No, my friend, look up. I want you this evening to look up and see at God's right hand that blessed, adorable, holy Man, the Lord Jesus, God's only Son, who was once in death for us. Nothing is left for you or me to do, nothing except to appropriate and enjoy the benefit of the blessing that is connected with Him who died and rose. I was saying to you last Sunday evening that the law did not give life, power, or an object. What does the gospel do? It gives the believer in Jesus all three. It gives you life, eternal life, the gift of God, in Christ Jesus; it gives you power, because the moment you receive the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour, the Holy Ghost falls on you, and you have power. And what is the next thing? You get an object for your heart in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. I repeat that is what the gospel brings you.

Last week we noticed that when Moses came down from the mount, after the first "forty days," and broke the tables of stone, his face must have flashed with righteous anger. When he came down the second time, we read that "Moses wist not that the skin of his face shone while he talked with him. And when Aaron and all the children of Israel saw Moses, behold, the skin of his face shone: and they were afraid to come nigh him" (Ex. 34: 29, 30). Why was his face shining? He had got a sense of what mercy was. It was the result of his discovery of the revelation of God's own blessed absolute goodness, taking now the shape of mercy to a people who were hopelessly lost.

When Moses went up, he said to God. "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin." He felt it almost impossible. He does not say, You will do it, because he did not know the heart of God well enough to say that. So he only says, "Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin: and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written" (Ex. 32: 32). In this instance Moses is like Christ. He is prepared to lose everything if only the people might be blessed. He was not called upon to do it, but there is where his love and the love of Christ came in. Jesus absolutely gave Himself up to God, and He gave Himself for our sins. The discovery that He has loved you and given Himself for you will bring blessing to your soul immediately.

God replies to Moses here: "Whosoever hath sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book. Therefore now go, lead the people unto the place of which I have spoken unto thee: behold, mine Angel shall go before thee" (Ex. 32: 33, 34). When you come to the next chapter, God "spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Ex. 33: 11). And you now find a most beautiful point in the history of this blessed servant. He is in the company of God, and at length Moses gets very bold as, filled with the sense of what Israel's sin is on the one hand, and equally with the sense of the goodness of God on the other, he says, "I beseech thee, show me thy glory (Ex. 33: 18). The answer of the Lord is beautiful: I will make all my goodness pass before thee, and I will proclaim the name of the Lord before thee." If the glory of the Lord had then shone, Moses must have been withered up. Only in Him, who is God's Son, can that glory and majesty be revealed without man being overwhelmed. But He who Himself was God, left that glory, the glory which he had with the Father, came down here, became a man, and passed through this scene as the revealer of God. That perfect Man closed His life in death for the man who had no link with God. Then God "raised him up from the dead and gave him glory: that your faith and hope might be in God" (1 Peter 1: 21). Get into His presence and see the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

"I will make all *my goodness* pass before thee," is God's response to Moses' wish to see His glory, and then He lets out what I may call the secret thought of His heart, as He retires into the absoluteness of His being in goodness, in order to spare a guilty people. He, so to speak, says to Moses, The case is very bad, and if I let law have its way, I must cut the people off to a man. And then adds, "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy" (ver. 19). Had righteousness had its sway at the moment Israel must all have been cut off. But He says, Although they have abused my grace, and broken the law, there is one resource I have left — mercy. "I will show mercy," is divine prerogative, and divinely charming.

It is a wonderful thing when the soul has the sense of the mercy of God. In the words "I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy," He, so to speak, says, I will do what I like. I am absolute. Beloved friends, do not set your face against God. Do not oppose God. You leave God alone to exercise what I may call the prerogative of His love, and what will He do? "I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy," is His way of meeting the guiltiest sinner that ever trod the earth.

I will ask you to turn to Psalm 106 for a moment. How wonderfully there does the truth of the mercy of God come out. Psalm 105 gives the detail of what God had been for Israel in grace. And then the next Psalm opens with "Praise ye the Lord. O give thanks unto the Lord; for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever" (Ps. 106: 1). Then the whole of that Psalm is occupied with showing what obdurate rebels Israel were. But why do they say, "His mercy endureth for ever." Because it says further on, "And he remembered for them his covenant, and repented according to the multitude of his mercies" (Ps. 106: 45). It is mercy that God falls back on. And you will find in the next Psalm, "O give thanks unto the Lord, for he is good: for his mercy endureth for ever" (Ps. 107: 1). If you trace out Israel's history from first to last, the keynote of their song has ever been mercy, fruit most truly of the absolute, blessed goodness of God. When the nation had utterly ruined themselves because of their sin, then it was God retired into the infinite goodness of His own Being, and mercy rejoiced against judgment.

How beautiful is it to hear, "For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward them that fear him" (Ps. 103: 11). Do you want to know the measure of God's mercy? Try to measure the distance to heaven. You would have some difficulty to do that. You cannot measure it And then the Psalm goes a little further, "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children" (Ps. 103: 17). That is what God is in His own being. He delights in it.

Do you remember the lovely expressions regarding mercy in the Gospels where the Lord speaks. It is a lovely theme for a troubled soul to dwell upon, and for all our souls to dwell upon. "And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." It is not whole folk that need a doctor, but people who are sick. Then He says, "But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice." There is the keynote to all God's ways. Did you think God wanted something from you to put things right? "Go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance" (Matt. 9: 10-13). That again is what comes from God. Now go a little further. You find it comes out in the twelfth chapter, where He was blessing and healing on the Sabbath Day. "But if ye had known what this meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless" (ver. 7). Observe, they were condemning Him for blessing a man on the Sabbath Day. What is His answer? "But if ye had known what this meaneth, *I will have mercy*, and not sacrifice, ye would not have condemned the guiltless."

That God delights in mercy has perpetual testimony in His Word; and a lovely instance of it is found in the Book of Micah. There you get the character of God, and the attitude of God

towards a troubled people, beautifully expressed. Well may they exult in God's mercy and faithfulness, saying: "Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? He retaineth not his anger for ever, *because he delighteth in mercy*. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea. Thou wilt perform the truth to Jacob, and the mercy to Abraham, which thou hast sworn unto our fathers from the days of old" (Micah 7: 18-20). What a thrill of joy goes through the heart to find that a holy God so delights in mercy. And if you are here this evening a wretched, good-for-nothing, undone sinner, understand that the Lord delights to meet you, and He will gladly show you mercy, pardon all your sins, and give you the knowledge of His forgiveness.

Do not delay to taste His mercy. If you owed me a ten-pound note, and you came to me and said that you were hard up and could not pay it, I might say, "Oh well, it can be paid later on." "But I shall never have it," you reply. "Then I shall just have to score off your debt," is my remark, and you go away and say, "He did not do it with very good grace." Well, that would be like me. But when God forgives a man his debt, his sins, He delights in it. He is rejoiced to meet a man trembling in his sins. His very nature thrills with joy in giving you the sense of His love, and He, receives and blesses you on the ground of righteousness. God has immense joy in blessing a man like me, on the ground of what His own dear Son has effected. "I will show mercy on whom I will show mercy," reveals the depth of the goodness of God's heart.

Some people stumble at the sovereignty of God. They think His ways are arbitrary. I do not. Did not God say, "Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated"? (Rom. 9: 13) Yes, but God did not say it when the two lads were born. You find this statement in the last book of the Old Testament (Mal. 1: 2, 3). He said it long after they were gone off the scene. With all his crookedness Jacob was a believer, and God loves faith, and always blesses the believer. But Esau was a real man of the world. He would sell his birthright for a mess of pottage — a little bit of enjoyment in this world. And what about his posterity. Why, they were always fighting against God and God's people. Israel were His people, and their very sin gave Him an occasion to show what He was in goodness. This is the next thing we read in Romans 9, "For He saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion" (ver. 15). Do you not see, beloved friends, that God is sovereign? His sovereignty He retired into, in the scene before us, that He might exercise the most blessed attribute of His nature, mercy. Have you tasted it, man? He is rich in mercy. May you taste it this night, and go on your way and say, "I have tasted God's mercy." If God had dealt with Israel as they deserved, they would have been cut off to a man in their sin. Instead of that He had mercy on them. If God had dealt with you and me as we deserved, do you know what would have happened? I can speak for myself, and surely for you too. He would have cast us both headlong into hell for eternity. But He has saved me with an everlasting salvation, and I hope He has saved you. I have tasted His mercy. Have you? If not, may you taste it tonight. And mark, you need not be afraid of Him.

"I will make all my goodness pass before thee," said God to Moses. How has God made all His goodness pass before us? In the gift of His Son. Did you ever think God would give His Son for you? Did you ever think that His Son would come right down to Calvary's cross and go through sorrow, suffering, and death, in order to bring you to God on righteous ground? No. But He has done it. His goodness and His righteousness have been displayed in His Son. Remember

that the wages of sin is death. But I know that He died for my sins. You say, I do not know whether He died for mine. I wish you would be like the old woman in the workhouse whom a friend of mine went to see. He said to her, "Come, tell me, my friend, are you quite sure you are forgiven and saved?" She replied, "Yes." "How do you know that for certain?" continued her visitor. "Well, sir," she said, "I am no scholar, but it says in the Bible, Christ died for sinners, and I am quite sure I am a sinner, and therefore I am certain Christ died for me." That was a bit of heavenly logic. The syllogism was perfect. It had its major and minor premise, and its right conclusion. What was the major premise? "Christ died for sinners." And what the minor premise? "I'm a sinner." And what was the conclusion? "Christ died for me." Good. Well done, old lady in the workhouse. That is the way I got the assurance of salvation, and that is the way every soul has to get it.

What follows this revelation of God's mercy is intensely interesting, and I would commend the study of Exodus 34 to each of you. Again God calls Moses up into the mount, "And he was there with the Lord forty days and forty nights" (Ex. 34: 28). For the second time, at the end of the forty days, God gives him the tables of stone. And what do you think Moses was doing during that second forty days? I believe that he downright enjoyed God. He enjoyed the Lord's company those forty days and forty nights, for "the Lord descended in the cloud, and stood with him there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord. And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin" (Ex. 34: 5-7). He was in the enjoyment of His grace, as well as the deep sense of the mercy of the Lord. He had the sense that God would spare His people, guilty though they were. That was a wondrous forty days for Moses.

And when he came down, what was the effect? His face shone. And I tell you what will be the effect if you spend forty days with the Lord. Your face will shine. "The skin of his face shone" (Ex. 34: 30). It was like Stephen's in the Acts of the Apostles. There is always joy, peace, and blessing connected with the company of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Will you read at your leisure the third chapter of the Second Epistle to the Corinthians? where we get the Spirit's comments on those instructive forty days. There it says, "But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not steadfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: how shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?" (2 Cor. 3: 7, 8). That "ministration of death" is the inevitable consequence of law, as such, and is connected with the first man's trial. It is in contrast with the ministration of the Spirit, which is a ministry of life and righteousness. That is all connected with Christ gone on high. The effect is liberty, not bondage, hence it can be said, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. 3: 18). You can draw near to God now on the ground of the death and resurrection and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ, with the knowledge that the blood of Christ fits you to draw near to God. You can draw near with the happy sense there is nothing in the heart of God towards me but love, goodness, and grace, and your soul gets the sense, He meets my state, and loves to have me near Him.

We could not clear away one sin, but the blood of God's Son has cleared every sin away. And we are brought to God with the discovery of the deep amount of mercy that is in His bosom. Well may we exclaim with the apostle Paul: "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor? Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again? For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen" (Rom. 11: 33-36). He has acted for Himself, and worthy of Himself in connection with the death and resurrection of His own blessed Son, and He will by-and-by have His house filled with emancipated and profoundly happy souls, who can now call Him Father. He will have all His children there in the likeness of Christ, and He will have them there on the ground of sovereign mercy. Oh, my friend, if you have never turned to and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ till this night, may God give you to taste of His mercy now, for His name's sake.