



DOES GOD CHANGE HIS MIND? Exodus 32:7-14

Father, I pray for grace this morning to represent your name well. And God, we pray that as we open your Word, you would grip us with the magnitude of your name and the awesomeness of your moment. And Father, we pray that what we do over the next few minutes as we study your Word, clearly and truly reflects you and your name, and your glory and your power and your holiness. God, we want to know you. We want to know your name, and we want to bring great glory to your name. So, we pray that you would help us to do that with the way we listen to your Word, with the way I preach your Word, and the way we respond to your Word. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.

Well, good morning. If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, I'm going to invite you to open with me to Exodus 32. And I encourage you to pull out the notes that were in your Worship Guide. Exodus 32. It's been a...it's been a difficult weekend. Over the last few weekends, I've been traveling to different places and have not been home the entire weekend. And I was home this entire weekend, which meant Heather had scheduled picture day on Friday.

This whole idea is, at least in some part, just ludicrous. The idea that you can get a three month old and a less than two-year old dressed up in nice clothes that will remain completely clean until you get to the picture location, and then once you get there, that you can get them to smile at exactly the same time. Never mind the fact that the three month old wants to throw up all over his mom at one point or anything like that. I know that taking pictures of our children is important, but I'm not convinced it's that important. And I'm guessing there are a few other dads in the room that might give an "Amen" to that. But don't say it out loud, for the sake of your marriage. Just leave that to yourself.

But, that's how the weekend started. And then, we're coming this morning to a...I'll just be honest, a difficult text of Scripture. It's one of those times where I'm studying the text during the week, and I'm thinking, "I have bitten off more than I can chew." This passage is theologically thick. It is theologically baffling in many ways. You see the top of your notes, "Does God Change His Mind?" If that doesn't give you an instant headache this morning, then I don't know what does.

I want to read you...this is...this idea of God changing His mind is the doctrine of the immutability of God. Does God change or not? And I want you to listen to what one scholar I was reading through this week talks about when he talks about immutability. Listen to this. He writes,

"Neither immutability nor omniscience are comprised by allowing God to change His knowledge of indexical propositions. What I have said so far covers indexicals about the present or past. But what about future tensed indexicals? Right now, they cannot be known to be true, so it is no deficiency for anyone, including God, to fail to know them as true. In the future, when they are true, a God within time will know they are true. Does this mean He

will learn something he did not know? It is hard to speak of the scenario I am sketching as a case of learning, especially if we think that learning something presupposes some intellectual deficiency before one learned it. The fact that in the future, God will know the truth of indexicals that are currently false does not mean His knowledge is deficient until the future."

That will bless your heart right there. What I want us to do this morning is something a little different. I want us to step together into theology class, "Theology 101", and I want us to look at this doctrine of God. Does He change or not? Does God change His mind? And what we're going to do...go ahead and get your fingers ready; Table of Contents ready...we're going to be all over Scripture.

What we're going to do is we're going to look at Exodus 32 and then look at the whole of Scripture. What does Scripture, and what does the Bible teach about this question, "Does God change His mind?"? And the result is not just so that we can walk away from here with more biblical knowledge than we had when we came in here. The result...the goal is that, as a result of the next few minutes, we would walk away, I hope and I pray, with a deeper glimpse of the majesty of God, the supremacy of God in Christ. And we will see its application for our lives. The ramifications of these truths that we're going to see in Scripture are astounding.

Four Truths ...

And so, we're going to look at four truths, and then three applications that flow from that, all based out of Exodus 32. Now, we've spent the last few weeks on sin in the camp, and we kind of started that journey in sin in the camp here in Exodus 32. And we looked, if you remember, at the beginning of this chapter, where God's people, the people of Israel, have been brought out of slavery in Egypt. Moses is meeting with God on a mountain, and the people of God are down at the foot of the mountain, and they get impatient at the beginning of this chapter, that they construct an idol, a golden calf, and they start bowing down and worshipping this golden calf.

And Moses is meeting with God on the mountain. And God knows what's going on down here, and so He speaks to Moses in verse 7. Listen to what He says. The Bible says,

Then the LORD said to Moses, "Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt have become corrupt. They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them, and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'

"I have seen these people," the LORD said to Moses, "and they are stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."

But Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God. "O LORD," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. Remember your servants Abraham,

Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self: 'I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and I will give your descendants all the land, this land I promised them. And it will be their inheritance forever.' Then the LORD relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. (Ex. 32:7-14)

Okay, you have the picture here. God's people sinned, built an idol, a golden calf, and they're worshipping the golden calf. God says to Moses, "Go down there. I'm about to destroy them because of their sin." Moses prays, and God, in verse 14, the text says, "Relented and did not bring on His people the disaster He had threatened." Some translations say in verse 14, "The Lord repented; God repented." Other translations, in the New American Standard, says, "The Lord..." Literally, it says, "The Lord changed His mind." God said He would destroy them, then He decided not to.

So did God change His mind? What's going on here? And the key word there in verse 14 is that word "relented" or "repented" or "changed His mind." This is a word that's used in numerous other places throughout Scripture to talk about how men change their minds. In fact, that's one common interpretation of this passage. People say this passage, this verse, is an anthropomorphism, which...follow with me here...an anthropomorphism is basically when we take words that describe human activities, and we apply them to God.

Like, when Scripture talks about how God stretches out His mighty hand over the earth, obviously, God does not literally stretch out a mighty hand over the earth. God is Spirit, and He doesn't have a hand that stretches out just like we would. But we take human terms to ascribe them to the activity of God. And some people say, "Well, that's exactly what's going on here."

Other people say...and you know what's really interesting? You look at this word, the word "relented" or "repented", "changed His mind", and some of the other places it's used in Old Testament, it talks about how God never changes His mind. It's the same word; it says God doesn't do this. We're not going to turn to these right now. We'll turn to one of them in a minute, but you might write them down. Numbers 23:19 says this: "*God is not a man that he should lie, nor a son of man that he should change his mind*" (Num. 23:19). Same word there. Same thing in 1 Samuel 15:29. Listen to what 1 Samuel 15:29 says. It says, "*He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind*" (1 Sam. 15:29). God doesn't change His mind is what Numbers 23 says and 1 Samuel 15 says.

Exodus 32:14 says God relented; God changed His mind. So how do we square all of this together? Did God change His mind or not? Does God change His mind or not? In order to answer that question, I want us to take a broad stroke of Scripture, and I want you to see four foundational truths that we see all over Scripture. And we're going to turn to a variety of different places. Just kind of have your hands ready and be ready to underline some different places and put a little note out that talks about the unchanging nature of God.

God's perfections are unchanging.

So let's dive in; go ahead and jump in. Truth number one: God's perfections are unchanging. God's perfections are unchanging. In other words, God's perfections never change. And I'm going to explain that to you a little bit while you turn to the right. Go with me to Hebrews 1. Hebrews 1, way in the back of the New Testament. Go with me to Hebrews 1. When I say God's perfections are unchanging, I'm talking about God's attributes. Who God is...God in His being...who God is does not change; who God is never changes. Unchanging. His perfections: His love, His mercy, His justice, His wrath, His perfections, His attributes, His

omnipotence, His omniscience, the fact that He has all power, the fact that He knows all things...these things do not change. His perfections are unchanging.

Look with me at Hebrews 1:10. Listen to what it says there about God. It says, Hebrews 1:10, *"He also says, 'In the beginning, O Lord, you laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands. They will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment. You will roll the up like a robe; like a garment they will be changed. But..."* Here's the contrast, *"...they will be changed. But you remain the same, and your years will never end."* Underline that. *"You remain the same, and your years will never end"* (Heb. 1:10-12). God remains the same forever. He is unchanging. Underline that, put a little note out on the side. God's perfections are unchanging. God remains the same forever. And then, he's quoting from Psalm 102:25-27. You can find the same words back there. That's how Hebrews starts.

Go to the end of the book of Hebrews. Go to Hebrews 13. The perfections of God that are unchanging are applied to Christ at the end of Hebrews. Listen to Hebrews 13, underline verse 8. Listen to what Hebrews tells us there. It says, *"Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever"* (Heb. 13:8). Christ is unchangeable. He is unchanging in who He is. Christ never changes.

Same thing in Malachi 3:6. We won't turn there, but in Malachi 3:6, God says, *"I, the LORD, do not change."* In fact, keep going. Turn one more page over to the right, you'll come to James 1. Look at James 1:17. Listen to what James says. He says in verse 17, *"Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights who does not..."* What? *"...who does not change like shifting shadows"* (Jas. 1:17). Underline that. God's unchanging perfections. God, in who He is, His essence, His being, He does not change. His perfections are unchanging. That's truth number one.

God's purposes are unchanging.

Truth number two: God's purposes are unchanging; God's purposes are unchanging. Go with me to the middle of the Bible: Psalms 33. I'm going to show you two places that talk about the purposes of God unchanging. And there are numerous places throughout Scripture. I just want to highlight a couple of them, show you in Scripture where the Bible teaches that God's purposes never change; that what God purposes to do, He purposes to do forever. What God purposes to do happens.

God's purposes always achieve their desired end. Always. They are unchanging. Listen to Psalms 33:10-11. Again, there's a contrast here. A lot of these passages contrast the ways of man or the ways of the world and the ways of God. Listen to what it says. Verse 10, *"The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples."* Listen to verse 11. *"But..."* Contrast, *"But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations"* (Ps. 33:10-11). The plans of the Lord are firm how long? Forever. They don't change. The purposes of His heart through all generations.

Same thing: Go to the right, and you'll come to Isaiah. Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, you go to Isaiah. Go with me to Isaiah 46. I will show you one other place where it talks about God's purposes being unchanging. This is a passage that's going to show us God always does what He wants, and He always achieves what He wants. His purposes are unchanging.

Look at Isaiah 46:9. Listen to what He says: *"Remember the former things, those of long ago; I am God, and there is no other; I am God and there is none like me"* (Is. 46:9). Listen to verse 10. *"I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to*

come. I say, 'My purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.' From the east, I summon a bird of prey; from a far off land, a man to fulfill my purpose. What I have said, that will I bring about; what I have planned, that I will do" (Is. 46:10-11). What God plans, He does. What God purposes, He does. His purposes are completely unchanging. Mark it down: When God purposes something, it's going to happen.

God's promises are unchanging.

So, number one, His perfections are unchanging. Truth number two, His purposes are unchanging. And truth number three, God's promises are unchanging; His promises are unchanging. I'll make it easy on you. Just stay here in Isaiah. Go back to the left a few chapters to Isaiah 40. Go to Isaiah 40:8. The unchanging promises of God, Isaiah 40:8. Again, there's a contrast being developed here. In fact, we'll start up in verse 6, midway through verse 6, just so you can see the contrast. Listen to what it says. Isaiah 40:6. "*All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the LORD blows on them. Surely the people are grass.—Underline this.—The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever*" (Is. 40:6-8). The Word of God stands forever. Grass withers, flowers fall...this is similar to what Jesus says over in Matthew 24:35, "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will—what—never pass away*" (Mt. 24:35). Jesus is saying, "My words will never pass away. What I have promised will never pass away. It will always happen."

Go back to the left. I want to show you a verse that I quoted just a little while ago. Numbers 23. Numbers 23, this is the last place we'll turn for a little bit. Numbers 23. While you're finding Numbers 23, you might write down Psalm 89:34-37. It's another place where God says His promises, especially regarding His covenant, will always stand firm, are always unchanging. It's what He says here in Numbers 23:19. God is talking about the way He works among His people, and the way He keeps His promises to them.

Listen to what He says in verse 19. The Bible says, "*God is not a man, that he should lie, nor a son of man, that he should change his mind. Does he speak and then not act? Does he promise and not fulfill?*" (Num. 23:19). Obviously, those are rhetorical questions that are giving us a picture. Of course, God does not promise and then not fulfill. He always fulfills. He never changes His mind. It's what He says over there in that part of Psalms. He says, "I will never violate my covenant. My promises I will keep." All throughout Scripture, we see God's people leaning on His promises and saying, "We know you are faithful to your promises, O God."

So, here's the deal. Three truths kind of giving us a foundation here. God's perfection is unchanging: Who He is never changes. His purpose is unchanging: What He says He's going to do, He does. He does whatever He pleases. And third, His promises are unchanging: When He gives His Word to His people, He is faithful, and His Word will stand forever.

Now, you take these three truths, and you bring them into our understanding of Exodus 32, and we start to ask the question, "Well, does this mean that Exodus 32 is contradicting what all these other truths are teaching in the Bible? Is the Bible contradicting itself? Do we throw it out the window at this point?" Well, hold on there. This is what is so cool about Exodus 32. This passage that causes so much debate on whether or not God changes or not, is actually dripping with the unchangeability of God. All of these truths, these three truths that we have seen, are saturated in Exodus 32, specifically Moses' prayer in Exodus 32.

Look at it with me. Look at verse 11. Back in Exodus 32:11, it says, "*Moses sought the favor of the LORD his God.*" And listen to what he says; listen to how he starts his prayer. "*O LORD, he said, why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought up*

out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand?" (Ex. 32:11). Do you hear what Moses is doing there? He's appealing to the unchanging perfections of God's character. This is the very first truth we saw Moses appealing to. He starts off, with "LORD," this word that described His covenant relationship with His people, His mercy toward His people. He said, "O Lord, aren't you going to be merciful to your people?" And he calls on Him with His great power and His mighty hand; he is appealing to God's perfect mercy, perfect love, perfect power, and unchanging might. He is appealing to the perfections of God that never change in the very start of his prayer.

And then he goes, and look at the next verse. "*Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people*" (Ex. 32:12). What's he appealing to there? The unchanging purposes of God. Moses is saying, "God you purposed to bring this people out of slavery in Egypt, to show your glory. This is exactly what you said in Exodus 14:4. You said you're going to gain glory for yourself, you're going to deliver them out to show the Egyptians your great glory." He said, "God, you cannot let them be destroyed here in the middle of the desert. Your purpose is to make a great name for yourself through them, and your purpose has not changed."

Moses is appealing to the unchanging purpose of God in delivering His people out of Egypt. And not just His perfections and His purposes, but His promises. Listen to what he says next, Exodus 32:13. This is the climax of the prayer, and he says, "*Remember your servants Abraham, Isaac and Israel, to whom you swore by your own self...*" (Ex. 32:13). By the way, this is one of those anthropomorphisms. This idea of "remember your servants", this is not the Bible teaching that God needed Moses to remind Him who Abraham was. It's not God sitting up there in heaven thinking, "Oh yeah, Abraham, Isaac and Israel. I forgot all about those guys and what I said to them." That's not what's going on here. It's not, "Oh thanks, Moses. Appreciate you."

That's not the picture. But this is a radical picture of prayer. It is Moses bringing before God His unchanging promises that He has given to His people. "Remember what you said to them, and you cannot go back on your promises." This is a bold picture and prayer. "You cannot break your covenant, God. You cannot break the promises that you made."

So, he calls on these unchanging characteristics of God: His perfections, His purposes and His promises. What's astounding in Exodus 32 is this discussion about whether or not God is changing or not; this picture that leads so many to say, "Well, God is changing in all these ways" is actually soaked with unchanging characteristics of God.

Now, that gets us through verse 13, but then we come to verse 14, and that's where it gets kind of tough. "The Lord relented," "the Lord repented", and "the Lord changed His mind," some of your translations say. He did not bring on His people the disaster He had threatened? So what are we to make of this?

God's plan is unfolding.

Well, we've seen three truths that we know are true in Scripture. God's perfections, His purposes and His promises are unchanging. Here's the fourth truth. The fourth truth is this: The plan of God is unfolding. The key word there being "unfolding". Now, I want you to follow with me here. Please don't take a break here and misunderstand what I am saying. I am not intending to contrast the plan of God from the perfections or purposes or promises of God that we just talked about, that the plan of God changes. That's not what I'm saying. In fact, I believe Scripture teaches the opposite. I believe Scripture teaches that, just like

we talked about with the purposes of God and the plans of the Lord, they stand firm forever. They don't change. God always does what He pleases.

There are popular theologies that are running rampant today in our culture that talk about how God doesn't know the future. God doesn't know what's happening tomorrow. God's will is kind of out of control, and it's yet to be determined what's going to happen tomorrow, and God doesn't have the power to know or to determine what's going to happen tomorrow. God is sitting back and doesn't really know what He's doing.

Ladies and gentlemen, the reality is God knows exactly what He is doing. He knows exactly what He is doing. Remember, this is the whole secret. God's got this whole thing rigged, okay? I'm not saying that His plan is just up for grabs. What I am saying is that Exodus 32 is giving us a picture of the plan of God unfolding step by step.

I want to highlight three steps in particular that show how God's plan unfolds from Exodus 32:7 to Exodus 32:14 that I think will help us to understand what I think this passage is trying to teach us. The plan of God is unfolding. First step is this: God judges men. This is where verses 7, 8, 9, 10...God judges men in their sin. Remember, this is the part of the unchanging perfections of God. He is perfectly holy. He is perfectly just. His holiness never changes. His justice never changes. And His wrath never changes. His wrath is dead set against sin. We've talked about this the last few weeks.

God, in His perfect character, is dead set against sin, and He is set to judge sin. No question. That's what we see in verses 7, 8, 9 and 10. God says, "They're stiff-necked." And He said, "Leave me alone that my anger might burn against them and I might destroy them." That word "destroy" that's used right there is the picture in the language of the Old Testament of ultimate destruction. It is once and for all destruction; death. Now, God judges men, and sinful men before a perfectly holy God stand under His judgment, stand condemned to die, to be destroyed. That's the picture that Exodus 32:7-10 is giving us.

But then, what happens in the next part of the plan of God...which again, God is not surprised by anything that's happening here. God was not surprised when the people of God sinned in the beginning of Exodus 32. He wasn't surprised when Moses prayed. This is all a part of His unchanging purposes and plans. But it's unfolding before our eyes. God judges sin; second part of this unfolding plan is God provides a mediator; God provides a mediator.

Now, stick with me; follow with me here because this is where we're getting to the rich truth of what God wants to teach us in Exodus 32. So hang with me. I want you to feel the tension of Exodus 32. On one hand, you have a holy and just God who is dead set against sin. On the other hand, you have a sinfully disobedient people deserving of His wrath, yet, a people that this God has promised to bless, promised to be faithful to.

So, you've got this tension between a holy and just God and a people who are deserving of His wrath, but He's made promises to bless. So, the question of Exodus 32, and the question that dominates this text is, "How can God, a holy and just God, bless a people who are sinfully disobedient?" And this is where God provides a mediator. He provides Moses to pray on behalf of the people.

Now, you're thinking "What do you mean God provided Moses?" This is exactly what God had set up all throughout the book of Exodus to this point. Moses was the mediator set up by God. A mediator is someone who is the go-between between two parties. This is what God had set up. Moses was the one whom God gave the law to, and Moses then passed the law down to the people. And when the people disobeyed, it was Moses who would go before

God. Moses stood before the people on behalf of God, and Moses stood before God on behalf of the people. He was the mediator in this picture. And God had provided him there for a reason, because the reality is God in His holiness would most assuredly demonstrate His wrath on sin amidst a disobedient people unless a mediator stood in the way and interceded on their behalf.

And this is...this is exactly what God does at a variety of places throughout Scripture. Remember Jonah? Remember the story of Jonah? God tells Jonah, "Go to the people of Nineveh; go to the people of Nineveh and preach to them. Tell them, 'In forty days, your city and your people are going to be obliterated because of your sin.'" And Jonah goes to Nineveh. He takes a little detour through the digestive system of a fish, and then he finally gets there. Once he gets there, he preaches to them. "Forty days, and you are going to be obliterated because of your sin." The people of Nineveh hear that, and they say, "You know, we'd rather not be obliterated. And so we are going to repent of our sin." They turn to God.

Now is God surprised by this? Absolutely not. God said, "They are under my judgment, and they are going to be destroyed in their sin." That was a concrete reality. At the same time, He sent Jonah to go and preach to them so that they would repent. He sent a mediator, a preacher on their behalf so that they would repent and turn to God and be spared. This is the picture that we have here.

God judges men and, at the same time, He's sending a mediator. This is exactly what He does in verse 7. "*The LORD said to Moses, 'Go down, [Moses], because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt'*" (Ex. 32:7). If God was going to destroy His people right there on the spot, then He wouldn't have sent Moses down. He could have done that right there. Instead, what He is doing is He's sending Moses, He's providing Moses to pray. In His sovereign plan, God provides a mediator so that the God who judges men, when He provides a mediator, that mediator prays on behalf of the people.

And the third part of the unfolding plan of God is that God displays His mercy; God displays His mercy. Moses prays, and God relents. God relents, and He doesn't show His judgment. He doesn't destroy them. This is exactly what Psalm 106:23 says, "*God said he would destroy them - had not Moses, his chosen one, stood in the breach before him to keep his wrath from destroying them*" (Ps. 106:23).

Ladies and gentlemen, please do not miss this picture. A God of just wrath against sin appoints a man of compassionate mercy to stand in the gap on behalf of sinners. You see the picture? A God of just wrath appoints a man of compassionate mercy to stand in the gap on behalf of disobedient sinners. Ladies and gentlemen, this is not just the unfolding plan of God in Exodus 32. It is the gospel. It is the unfolding plan of God in all of Scripture, and it is not out of control. It is not God going back and forth, trying to find out what He's going to do. It is the unfolding plan of God in Scripture.

God judges men. Every single one of us in this room, in our sin, stands before God destined for destruction, destined for death. That is not a hypothetical possibility for you or me; it is a concrete reality for you and me. We've talked about this the last few weeks. Sin demands...one sin demands the swift and just wrath of God; that is a concrete reality. We stand condemned in our sin. But praise be to God, He provides a mediator who stands in the gap on our behalf. The New Testament tells us one greater than Moses comes along to mediate the covenant, one who is perfect. He stands in the gap on our behalf, and hallelujah, what a Savior, God displays His mercy because of Christ's mediation.

This is the gospel. It is the unfolding plan of God, and God has not lost control or is not

deciding one thing one minute and the next thing the next. In this whole picture, when Jesus is taken captive and brought to trial, and He's mocked and beaten and scourged and spit upon, God is not the throne in heaven saying, "Oh no, what is going on? I didn't know this was going to happen. How can I get control of this picture? What am I going to do?"

"It was the Lord's will," Isaiah says, "to crush Him." It was God's will to do that. It was His purpose. It was His sovereign plan to crush Him so that you and I might be saved from our sins; so that you and I would not have to experience the concrete reality of God's judgment on sin, and instead, we would come out under His mercy. And all of this is rooted in God's...grounded in God's unchanging perfections, unchanging purposes and unchanging promises. These truths come together to give us the picture we have in Exodus 32. The perfections, purposes and promises of God are completely unchanging.

Three Applications ...

Praise God!

At the same time, when we read this, the plan of God is unfolding to show us this picture for a reason that leads us to the three applications. We've got this picture. We've got this baffling picture in Exodus 32 for three reasons, I think. Number one, so that we would praise God! Praise God! Praise God! Praise God! This is the whole reason Exodus 32 is written. It's written, even for those original readers, it was written so that the people of Israel would never, ever, ever look back on this story...they would never look back at what happened in Exodus 32 and pat themselves on the back and think, "We really did a good job coming out of Egypt, didn't we?" They would never look back and say, "God blessed us because we were so good before Him, because we deserved it." They would always look back and say, "Were it not for the mercy of God, we would have died on that day instantly." They would give God great praise.

Now, I've got reasons there in your notes to praise God based on Exodus 32. Some of you are sitting there thinking, "Okay, the question was, 'Does God change His mind?' and David's pulling a fast preacher trick where he's going to give us a bunch of other words, and he's never going to answer the question, and we're going to walk away from here just as confused as we were when we came in, but we'll listen to him for awhile." That's not what I'm trying to do here, okay? I want to show you, "Does God change His mind? Does God change?"

Here's the answer. This is why we praise God. Number one, we praise God because He does not change in His reign over us; He does not change in His reign over us. This is exactly what we've been talking about. All of these things, these perfections, purposes, promises of God, they do not change; in His reign over us, He does not change. And this is a very good thing. It is good that His perfections, purposes and promises do not change.

Think about it with me. This is where in "Theology 101," we realize how radically important a solid biblical theology is for our lives on a day by day basis. If God in His perfections changes, if God in His being, His attributes, changes, then any change that were to take place in God would either be for the better or for the worse.

Now, obviously, it goes without saying that we don't want God to change for the worse. We don't want God to become evil. We don't want God to take one step toward the worse. At the same time, we don't want God to become better. We don't want God to become better, because the moment He becomes better, then we come to the realization that He was not

perfect in the first place, and His love was not perfect; it could have been better. His mercy was not perfect; it could have been better. His majesty and His beauty and His power were not perfect; they could have been better. And who's to say that now they're the best? Who's to say that now He has all power if He can change for the better?

And we need Him to have all power, because that affects all this other stuff. If He gives us His promises, but He doesn't have power to come through on those, then what does it matter that we have His promises? It is vitally important that God's perfections never change. Not just His perfections, but His purposes: What He has planned out and purposed to do. Think about...well, just for example, this picture that we celebrate every time we take the Lord's Supper. The picture we talk about a lot, the picture we hold to when life is not going the way we planned; we hold to the fact that there is coming a day when God is going to send His Son back for us, He's going to return. He's going to establish reign over a new heaven, a new earth, and the old things will be gone. The new things will have come. There will be no more mourning or tears or sadness or pain, no more cancer, no more sickness and no more death. And God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. We hold onto that hope.

If God's purposes change, then our hope is in vain. We don't know He's coming back, then. We don't know there's coming a day where He's going to wipe every tear from our eyes. You see how huge this is? And it's huge that His promises never change; His promises are unchanging. If His promises change, then how can we celebrate today that God has told us we will have eternal life in heaven when we trust in Christ? How do you celebrate that when that promise may or may not be good?

It's a good thing, a very good thing that our faith, our knowledge, our worship, our everything is grounded in a God who is radically unchanging when it comes to His perfections, His purposes and His promises. That is a good thing. So, He does not change in those things. That's the straight up answer. He does not change in those things.

However, Exodus 32 is obviously showing some kind of change here; something changed as it relates to God. So, we praise God, number one, because He does not change in His reign over us, but number two, we praise God because He does change...okay, follow with me here...He does change in His relationship to us; He does change in His relationship to us.

Here's what I mean by that. There was a day, years ago, that I, David Platt, in the depth of my sin, stood before God under His wrath, deserving death and destruction, the picture we've got in here in Exodus 32. But praise be to God that, on one particular day, He opened my eyes, and He opened my heart to the victory of Christ on a cross, and its ramifications for my life. And He brought me under the cross of Christ as I trusted in Christ. He said, "I pour out my wrath on Him instead of you." And on that day, I was changed to come under His mercy, and God now relates to me radically different than He did before that day.

Do you have that story? If so, then praise God! He changes His relationship to you. Praise God that you did not sit under His wrath anymore; you are under His mercy. He does not have wrath for you; He has mercy for you; mercy for you. Even when He disciplines you, it is out of mercy and love, grace. We need no longer fear His wrath.

And if you have not experienced that change, if you are here this morning within the sound of my voice...students, boys, girls, men, women...if you do not know that you have come out from under the wrath of God through the victory of Christ on the cross, come under the mercy of God, then I urge you to plead with God now, right now in this moment, in your heart right now, plead with God to bring you out from under His wrath to under His mercy.

Plead with God to forgive you of sin. Plead with God, based on the finished work of your mediator, Christ Jesus on a cross. Plead with God to show you His mercy, and He does. He does based on His unchangeable perfections, purposes and promises. He does. Praise God, He doesn't change in His reign over us, but He does change in His relationship to us.

Pray to God!

Second application: We praise God, and second, we pray to God; we pray to God. This is such an important passage, Exodus 32, teaching us to pray. So many needed correctives here for our views of prayer in contemporary Christianity. We have these ideas in contemporary Christianity when we think about prayer that prayer is intended to control God, or prayer is intended to persuade God to do something that He wouldn't normally do unless we prayed. Our prayer is intended to change God's mind; that's how most people usually look at this. Does prayer change God's mind?

And it just shows the radically man-centered view of Christianity that we have adopted to think that God needs our advice to know how best to govern this world, that God needs us to tell Him what to do. It's not what Exodus 32 is teaching at all. God is not an impotent God in a holding pattern above the universe just waiting for somebody to finally utter the right prayer so He can get to do the work He wants to do. That is not a picture of biblical prayer.

Instead, the picture is of a God whose perfections, and purposes, and promises are unchanging. But the beauty of it is, and you've got it there in your notes...the beauty of it is and what Exodus 32 is teaching us, is that God, by His grace, involves us in His plan. Now, follow with me here. He involves us in His plan. As soon as I say...as soon as we see in Scripture that God's purposes are unchanging, and God does what He pleases, and God is in control of all things, automatically people start to think, "Well, doesn't that make prayer meaningless? If God is going to do what He pleases, and He's in control of all things, then what does it matter whether or not I pray?"

Here's the beauty of it. Don't miss it. What Scripture is teaching us here is, yes, God is in control of all things, but at the same time, our prayers are meaningful. Why? How are they meaningful? Because prayer is the God-ordained means by which He accomplishes His plan. Prayer is the God-ordained means by which He accomplishes His plan. So, God involves us in His sovereign plan through, what? Through prayer. It's what's in your notes. He involves us in His plans, and second, He uses us to accomplish His purposes. This is the beauty. Don't miss it in Exodus 32; this is the beauty. God's purposes will be accomplished, and they will be accomplished through a praying people. This is where God in His grace and His mercy includes us, involves us, uses us to accomplish what He is doing in the world.

All throughout Scripture, you see prayer, the means by which men are calling down fire from heaven, people are raising the dead, seeing the lame walk and the blind see. Men are leading people from everlasting suffering to everlasting satisfaction. Men are seeing incredible things happen as they pray, men are involved in...literally, men and women involved in altering the course of human history through prayer.

This is an astounding truth that God, in His sovereign purposes, would use us to accomplish those purposes. And this is why God has to help us to see this. Brook Hills, please see this. This is why we're fasting and praying. Why we're going to continue to fast and pray every Tuesday, or another day during the week where it might be easier for you. Fast and pray. Fast and pray. Why? Because God has purposes that He is accomplishing in Birmingham, and we want Him to use us to accomplish them.

So, we're going to fall on our faces. When He says, "Who will intercede for Birmingham," we're going to rise up. We're going to say, "We will; we will. We're a church that's going to intercede for this city," and God has purposes that He is accomplishing all over the world. God has purposes He is accomplishing in South Africa, like you saw in that video. He has purposes He's accomplishing all across the nations, and we are saying as a church, "We're not going to sit back in a monotonous routine of religious activity Sunday after Sunday in our seats. We are going to get on our faces, and we are going to pray, 'God, use us to accomplish what you are doing around the world. Use us as a part of the means by which you will alter the course of human history for your glory.'"

Pray to God, because He involves us in His plan, and He uses you and me to accomplish His purposes. God, make us a praying people. Help us to realize the gravity of prayer. Moses was praying and God was relenting. It's not that Moses was persuading God to do something He didn't want to do. It wasn't Moses altering God; it was God accomplishing His sovereign, glorious purposes through the prayers of this man, and He wants to do it in your life and my life every day. How can we not get on our knees in our prayer closet and experience this? How can we watch TV more than we pray like this? It makes no sense. God, help us to see the gravity of prayer.

Proclaim God!

We praise God, we pray to God, and third application, we proclaim God; we proclaim God. Let this soak in. We talked about the plan of God as unfolding, right? The plan of God is unfolding. God is still holy, because He hasn't changed. He's still just. He is still dead set against sin; He is just as dead set against sin today as He was in Exodus 32, which means God is judging men today. As we've seen, God has provided a mediator greater than Moses in Christ, who has paid the price for sin, stood in the gap for sinners. And God is displaying mercy in His salvation. The plan of God...if this is true, if God today is judging men, and He has sent His Son, Jesus, to die on behalf of men's sin, and He is displaying mercy and salvation for those who will trust in Jesus, then we have no greater responsibility than to proclaim this message to every person on this planet.

If this is true, everybody has got to hear this. This is the gospel. It's the good news. It's the best news. Everybody has got to hear this if this is true. We proclaim God because, listen, in your notes, the unsaved have a mediator in heaven. This is why we go to South Africa to tell people, this is what we go downtown to tell people, this is why we go to our workplaces and our neighborhoods to tell people, "You are under sin, but praise God, you've got a mediator in heaven who is standing before a holy God on your behalf and, when you trust in Him, you can be delivered from all your sins and brought under the mercy of God."

If we have that truth, then how can we sit back in a self-centered, self-consumed Christianity that exists in me sitting in a black seat every single week in this room and not going out to Birmingham and running to the nations with this gospel? We proclaim God. We tell people who have never heard the name of Jesus...a billion of them who have never heard the name of Jesus. We tell people, hundreds of millions in our country and other countries alike who are headed to a Christless eternity, we tell them, "You have a mediator in heaven." We do not stay silent; we do not stay silent, church, but we run to the nations with this gospel.

It's a complete contradiction not to, if this is true. The unsaved have a mediator in heaven, and the saved have a mission on earth. God help us; do you see this? Put yourself with me. Put yourself in Moses' shoes. Follow with me; don't put up your notes and stuff. I know we got the last blank. Just follow with me here. Put yourself in Moses' shoes. God says, "These people are under my destruction, and they are destined to be destroyed. They are under my

wrath because of their sin." And Moses felt the weight of that. He felt the weight of that. And God says, "Now leave me alone so my anger may burn against them and may destroy them, and I will make you into a great nation." And Moses had two options. The sovereign plan of God, two options: He can live at that moment for himself. He can live to soak in a whole new picture of blessing for himself, or he can stand in the gap on behalf of a people who are headed for destruction.

In the sovereign plan and purpose of God, he stepped up and did the latter. Here we sit, March 2, 2008, and the reality is there are over a billion people who have never heard the name of Jesus, and they find themselves at this moment under the wrath of God with no knowledge of that mediator. There are people that we will all rub shoulders with this week that, right now, are under the wrath of God in their sin. And they've not come to know Jesus as the great mediator.

And we have two options. We can sit back and enjoy the pleasures of Christianity all for ourselves and go on week after week after week enjoying a self-consumed faith. Or we can rise up, get on our knees and begin to pray; begin to pray hard on behalf of people in Birmingham, begin to pray hard on behalf of people in all nations, begin to pray hard on behalf of the church. And then go running to let them know there is a mediator who will save them from their sins.

God, may it be in your sovereign plan and purpose to raise The Church at Brook Hills up from any sort of slumber, and God, use us to accomplish your great, glorious, and global purpose. God, do it and do it through Christ in us. We were not saved to make and earn and save and spend money. We were saved to spend ourselves for the sake of others and the gospel of Jesus Christ. This gospel is worth taking to everyone we know with everything we've got.

God, we pray. We pray in light of this picture in Exodus 32, knowing that your perfections and promises and purposes are completely and totally unchanging. God, we pray and give thanks and praise to Jesus who stood in the gap on our behalf. And we pray, Lord, we pray, God: Jar us that we might take this gospel to people in Birmingham and people in all nations with radical abandonment. God, use us to accomplish your purposes, your plans, and to show and display your perfections before a lost and dying world. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.

What I want to invite you to do: I'm going to ask these guys to begin to lead us. This is thick. I know that these truths are thick. Does God change His mind? What I want to invite you to do over these next few moments is to take these notes and take your Bibles, and I'm going to ask these guys to sing a hymn over us that I think exemplifies the picture of Christ that is foreshadowed in Exodus 32. Hold them, and I just want to invite you to meditate on these truths. I want to invite you not to begin to immediately go into that gear of, "Where are we going to eat?" and "What are we going to do after this?"

Let these mammoth truths soak into your heart. How is this application going to look? Praise God. Pray to God. Proclaim God. How does that look in your lives? I just want you to let that soak in for a couple of minutes. And if you are here this morning, and you've never run to the mercy of God and ask God to forgive you of your sins through Christ, I want to urge you...children, students, men, women...I want to urge you during these moments of reflection and prayer, I urge you to run to Him. And in your heart, express your pleading for Him to forgive of your sins and to pour out His mercy on you. And He will because He is faithful to His Word. And He will, because He is loving and He's merciful. He will, because He

is unchanging in all of these ways. You reflect on these truths, this Word, and then we'll close our time together.

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