Exodus 34:1-35

Exodus 34:6,7

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, 7 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.”

We, Christian, want to get closer to God, see Him, and know Him more and more. Then why is it important for us to know who God is? The Bible says that knowing God means obtaining eternal life. In other words, the more we know who God is, the more we can experience the joy of eternal life, and eternal life is the key to overcome and solve all our current unbearable suffering and future anxiety. So, how do we know who God is? What is the best way to get to know someone? When we can ask someone about himself, he answers to our question, then it will be the best way to get to know him.

In today's passage, God speaks directly who he is, His name, and His character. Through today's words, we pray that we may know who God is so that the joy of eternal life can overflow among us.

1. The New Stone Tablets

To understand Exodus 34, we need to know the situation of Israel in the previous chapters. What was the situation in Israel before Exodus 34? While Moses went up to Mount Sinai to receive God's holy Ten Commandments and various laws, the Israelites made a golden calf and indulged in revelry, having very corrupt party in front of the idol. What did Moses do when he saw the sin of Israel? Look at Exodus 32:19.

When Moses approached the camp and saw the calf and the dancing, his anger burned and he threw the tablets out of his hands, breaking them to pieces at the foot of the mountain. (Exodus 32:19)

As soon as Moses saw this sinful Israel, he threw the sacred two stone tablets that God had written by his own finger and broke them.

God's anger was greater than Moses’ anger which broke the Ten Commandments tablets by throwing them. At that time there were many other powerful and able nations and peoples, but God led the Israelites who had lived in Egypt as slaves, saved them through ten plagues including the punishment which had killed all firstborn sons of Egypt. During the night God led them with a pillar of fire, and by daytime he led them with a pillar of cloud. Also God split the Red Sea and let Israel cross it like dry land. He saved Israel from Egypt to make them his chosen people and a holy people. He even wrote the holy laws on the two stone tablets with his finger. He loved Israel and chose them with hope and expectation. Even though he showed Himself with countless wonders and signs that had never been before or since, they complained, and later they betrayed God and made a golden calf and bowed to the idol. It would have been as if one woman seduced another man into her home and committed adultery, even though she had her own husband. This was a betrayal that no one could forgive or recover from. Instead of receiving gratitude and glory from them, God was betrayed, and their relationship was broken to the point of being beyond recovery. Just as the broken stone tablets cannot be made whole again, so the relationship between God and Israel would have become irrecoverable like the broken stone tablets. What did God do in this situation? What did God speak to Moses? God might say to Moses, "Oh Moses! Like the stone tablets that you threw and broken, our relationship cannot be restored forever. You have no hope and I do not want to recover! You are fired." Did God say this?

 Let’s read Exodus 34:1 again.

The Lord said to Moses, “Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones, and I will write on them the words that were on the first tablets, which you broke."

God said that he would write on the new stone tablets by his own finger as he did it before. "I will write on them the words again." How many times did we nail God's heart and break his love and expectations as if breaking the stone tablets? However, God is the One who remakes and restores the broken stone tablets dozen times and hundred times, and He does not give up on his love and expectation for us. What did Jesus answer Peter when Peter asked him how many times he should forgive his brother? Jesus didn’t say seven times, but seventy-seven times. When Jesus said seventy- seven times, he can forgive sinners and recover them in the same way---countless times.

Matthew 18:21-22

Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, “Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?” Jesus answered, “I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times.

"77" means unlimited number. God is the One who loves and hopes for us and covering our sins by infinite unconditional love. God restores something that cannot be restored. So, don't be discouraged, and don’t look at our own mistakes, failure, and fault, but only see how much God loves and hopes for us by his infinite love. There is nothing that cannot be restored in God's love and hope.

Then, did God just give Moses the Ten Commandments and the law and send him down? Or what else did he do to Moses and to Israel?

2. God proclaimed his name and revealed himself.

Look at chapter 34 verses 5 and 6.

What did God want to do, not only to give the law engraved on the stone tablets? God wanted to give Himself which is the true content of the law.

Exodus 34:5 says "The Lord descended in the cloud and stood with Moses there, and proclaimed the name of the Lord."

First, God proclaimed his name. Let's look at verse 6.

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,

What did I say at the beginning about the best way to get to know someone? If we want to know someone, we may ask Him what his name is. And he may directly answer the question by telling his name. Then we come to know who that person is. So, how did God introduce himself? First, God directly proclaimed his name and told them what his name is. Look at the first half of verse 6.

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,

"The LORD The LORD" in Hebrew is "Yahweh Yahweh ". God’s name was a very sacred and holy that the Israelites feared to call it. So, they used a different term when they called God.

Over time Jews started to call God in substitute form such as “Adonai,” or “El Shaddai”, and so on. Another common replacement is “Elohim,” which simply means “God the Almighty”

So, when was the name Yahweh used for the first time?

 It was when God appeared to Moses and called him. Moses asked God how to answer to Israelite when they asked what the name of God who sent him was. Then God answered his name first "I AM WHO I AM" which is Yahweh.

What is meaning of the name of Yahweh?

Yahweh means that God exists by himself.

Yahweh means he is self-existent, eternal, self-sufficient, self-directed, and unchanging, and he is the only God, who is dependent on nothing.

If so, what does it mean to us that God who exists by himself? Everything that exists in this world unconditionally depends on each other. There is nothing which lives without depending one another. Just as the earth needs the sun, and humans need the air and the sun, so also everything needs from each other. However, it is Yahweh God who does not depend on anything, but exists by himself. God lacks nothing to do with it.

 This week I saw from house to house unnecessary items dumped on the street. We call this day Bulk day. On bulk day when people put obsolete items on the street, the city will pick them up for disposal.

 So, this week when I drove through the streets, I saw some broken up and really useless things out there. However, there was something really captured my eyes which were really good stuffs with good shape that seemed to be usable. So, I wondered how people threw them away if they looked still useable and necessary to my eyes.

Even though people throw away which they don't need on the bulk day, God does not abandon us who sinned and rebelled against him. Instead, he lowed himself and appeared as a human being in this world. And He took the sins of hopeless and useless sinners, thought he did not need it at all, and gave his life on the cross to atone for our sins.

 Praise the God who really needed nothing, but sacrificed himself and died in order to meet all our needs for us. How could he do so?

 Because he loves us, He was able to do so.

Second, how did God introduce himself? Let’s look at verse 6 again.

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,

He introduced himself as the compassionate God. What is the meaning of the word "compassionate" here?

 When I searched it in google, the meaning of the word ‘compassion’ appears immediately.

Compassion literally means “to suffer together.” It is defined as the feeling that arises when you are confronted with another's suffering and feel motivated to relieve that suffering.

How wonderful it is if someone is with us, knows our pain, suffers together, and carries it on his back when we feel alone with pain which is really hard to express?

 God knows our pain, and He feels and bears it together with us.

 Is a golden calf a true god who feels and bears our pain together? It's just a mass of dead stones with no emotions or reactions. But who is God? He is the compassionate God who takes our pains and sorrows as we feel, experience, and endure. He heals and saves us. How comforting it is when someone is really suffering together and bearing all pain and burdens with us? There are people who are lonely and sad that no one knows their own worries and pain. But, don't be sad or feel lonely anymore. There is a person near us who knows our sorrow, anxiety, and worries, and carrying them together with us. He is the compassionate God.

These days when I struggled with material problems, I was so desperate. I was so lonely because no one could understand my problems and worries. I felt like I am a person who lives in a no-man island all by myself. I had to endure the pain and agony alone, and no one was with me these days. I thought how happy I would be if there was such a person who understood my worries and helped me. As I learned through the Scripture that He is the compassionate God, I was able to think and appreciate that I do not have to bear all my burdens alone and struggle. Because God already knew and felt my suffering together like his own, and prepared the way to solve it since I believed God who loved and cared me as my father, I give thanks and praise to Heavenly Father who knows my pain and takes part in and endures it to the end.

 Third, God is a gracious God. What is the meaning of the word gracious here? Of course, this word is an adjective of noun ‘grace’, so you just need to know the meaning of grace. Grace means getting something that we don't deserve to have. We deserve to be judged and punished as sinners and had to go to hell. However, because of the grace that Jesus shed his blood on our behalf, even if we do not deserve, we have forgiveness of sins and the kingdom of God without cost.

 We commit many sins over and over again, but when we think of a gracious God, we have strength to repent and return to God again. In other words, God's grace has amazing power to cover up all our sins, and it can give us the strength to fight against sins.

Yet, he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation."

God certainly does not tolerate sin. However, there is one condition. Even if we have committed a sin, if we sincerely repent of our sin and accept the blood of Jesus Christ and turn away from that sin in our heart, then God will forgive our sins and break the curse. However, if we do not repent of our sins, continue to commit those sins, and make the grace of Jesus' forgiveness of sins in vain, the sin reaches to the third generation and more.

 3. How can we not forget the compassionate and gracious God?

 When Israel enters the promised land, how can they not forget God? They had to read the Word and obey it. They must not bow down to idols and compromise with the world. They must not intermarry, but keep the Sabbath holy, celebrate festivals, eat holy food, and bring sincere offerings and sacrifices.

When Moses came back from Mt. Sinai, his face became radiant so much that all people of Israel were afraid. This teaches us that the more we know God and the closer we get to Him, the more we will be changed. We also will change others, too.

 The fact that all the people of Israel, who often had disobeyed and disrespected Moses, became afraid of him. If someone really wants to change his or her life, he or she must come closer to God, knowing Him, having an intimate relationship with Him, and they must decide to live according to His will. Then he or she can change not only himself or herself, but also people around them.

Through today's passage, we learned that God himself proclaims what his name is and who he is. God is Yahweh, which means that he exists by himself. He is the One who gave Himself for us. He is the compassionate God who feels our pain, and comforts us and solves troubles together with us. He is full of love who can cover all our sins by his abounding love. We pray that we can overcome our current difficulties by wonderful grace and power by knowing our God.