

Constant Worship

Exodus 34:4-14; Psalm 32; Matthew 24:40-51



Constancy is not much valued in today's society. Sure, we claim its worth, but our actions belie other values. Our world is much more in tune with a philosophy of the moment. We are a society of instant coffee, fast food, instant messaging, and immediate gratification at the expense of long term investments. In the quest of the immediate, we leave constancy behind—a relic of an age gone by. How shall we be faithful servants in a world of immediate results? How can we be constant in our service to God amid the rapid rush of a hurried world? Are our lives consistent with our worship?

The Hebrews had trouble learning to be constant and dependable. They were forever backing away from their commitment to serve *Yahweh* with a whole heart. They were glad of their standing as the ransomed people. They were happy to be fed by God in the wilderness. They were pleased to have God give them victory against their enemies. They were not content to give up their freedoms and give allegiance to *Yahweh* alone.

Back in Egypt, they had cried out for relief from bondage to Pharaoh. At each turn in their release, they complained and grumbled against Moses' leadership and *Yahweh's* provision. Faith was not a given, for trusting God did not come easy for them. They had confidence in what they could see, but not in God's unseen provision. They celebrated the victories that God provided, but were consistent only in griping when things didn't go their way. They were not really interested in serving God, but thought to use God to serve themselves.

When Moses brought them news of God's commandments for them and God's calling them to be a special and holy nation, they responded well. When it meant they needed to live up to their words, consistency disintegrated. They consecrated themselves to receive the instructions of God through Moses and take upon themselves responsibility for God's covenant. They pledged themselves wholeheartedly to obey the commandments, serving *Yahweh* alone. When Moses returned up the mountain, however, they had Aaron cast an idol for them, forgetting Moses and the instructions of the God they had vowed to serve.

After the incident with the golden calf, Moses returned up the mountain, having broken the tablets of stone with God's commands on them. The people had ruptured the covenant, making the tablets worthless. That they had been "inscribed with the finger of God" made no difference, for they had not been obeyed. Moses dashed the tablets to pieces, symbolizing what the people had done in their defiance of the covenant with *Yahweh*. He returned then to entreat God to have mercy upon this people whose commitment was not to God, but to their own sense of comfort. There on the mountain, Moses will plead a difficult case of a people who are in need of God, but who refuse to take their responsibility to commit their lives to serve the One who is providing them a new life after Egyptian bondage.

Moses does not seem to expect God to accept these people back into a covenant relationship. He was certainly tired of their unfaithfulness. Why should God have any care for such a people who are consistent only in breaking their promises and griping about God's provision for their needs?

Indeed, there is little reason for us to expect God to accept this self-serving, irresponsible people. We should be surprised at the degree of mercy and love that God expresses on the mountain. Perhaps we are not surprised, but we ought to be. The forgiveness we find is not out of character for God, but it is out of character for us. Compassion, grace, faithfulness, and unfailing love are not the response we are accustomed to offer when we are offended. We hold them as esteemed and ideal values, but they are not our immediate response. We are happy to offer forgiveness on small issues of little importance, but when the stakes are high it is not so easy. We tuck our tails in self-protection and self-absorption.

Yahweh comes down to Moses, however, proclaiming first his identity as different from our own. "I AM *Yahweh* the compassionate!" This is a God whose grace and mercy flow naturally out of his very character. Mercy, compassion, grace, and love is the central nature of God. Forgiveness is not a stretch as it is for us. Mercy flows from God's identity. Compassion comes from within God. Grace and love pour forth out of the abundance of God's very nature. Forgiveness is not something God offers with a grudge, for it is divine nature to forgive and seek reconciliation.

On the other hand, sin is no trifling or laughing matter for God. Sin offends God's very nature and character, for love desires what is best for the other. It is not anger that drives God to deal with sin, but love, grace, mercy, compassion, and faithfulness. God's commands are not arbitrary impositions. They are instructions for living our lives as God knows best. They are in our interest, for they flow out of God's character of mercy, compassion, grace, and love.

When Moses heard God's character declaration, he bowed himself and worshipped. He understood his need and the need of the people to follow God and learn to live under God's instructions. He asked God to continue faithfulness beyond the unfaithfulness of the people.

Once again, God established a covenant with the people. The others had been broken by the consistent unfaithfulness of the people. In the same tone as before, God elects to proclaim before and through this people the identity and character of the Creator. *Yahweh* is different from the gods of the nations all around. Because this God is different, the worship he expects is different. The covenant that is established is different. The covenant and promise are byproduct of God's character, not our own.

There is no room in this covenant for the worship of any other god. There is no room in this covenant for anything that would alter the consistency of God's character and identity. There is room for grace, for God's character is grace. There is room for faithfulness, for God is faithful. There is room aplenty for mercy, for God is compassionate. There is room for love, for God's identity is of love.

In the face of God's consistent nature that Moses was discovering, he accepted God's words of grace and renewed covenant. He brought them back to the people to call them to consistent and constant worship of God.

What kind of constancy will our lives portray? Will they speak of constant service to God, or will they speak of our attachment to self? How shall we be found by the One we call Master? Will our lives portray God's character and identity, or will our claims of service be found inconsistent with the values in our choices and actions? The One calling us is consistently faithful. What kind of constancy will our worship proclaim?

—*Christopher B. Harbin*