

EXODUS 33:12-23

YOU SHALL SEE MY BACK

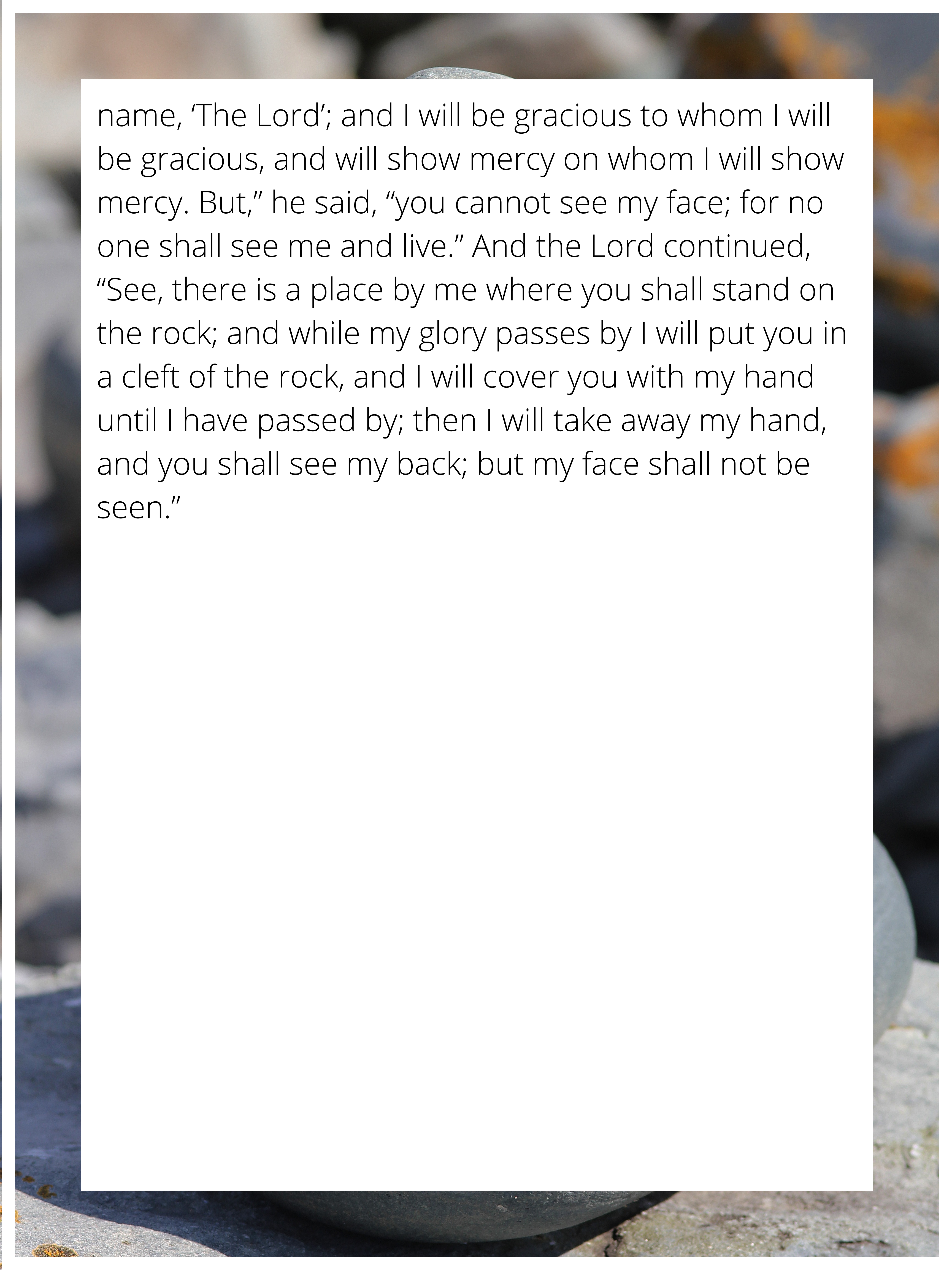
REV. IN KEE KIM

Scripture Passage

Exodus 33:12-23

Moses said to the Lord, "See, you have said to me, 'Bring up this people'; but you have not let me know whom you will send with me. Yet you have said, 'I know you by name, and you have also found favor in my sight.' Now if I have found favor in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favor in your sight. Consider too that this nation is your people." He said, "My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest." And he said to him, "If your presence will not go, do not carry us up from here. For how shall it be known that I have found favor in your sight, I and your people, unless you go with us? In this way, we shall be distinct, I and your people, from every people on the face of the earth."

The Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing that you have asked; for you have found favor in my sight, and I know you by name." Moses said, "Show me your glory, I pray." And he said, "I will make all my goodness pass before you, and will proclaim before you the



name, 'The Lord'; and I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and will show mercy on whom I will show mercy. But," he said, "you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live." And the Lord continued, "See, there is a place by me where you shall stand on the rock; and while my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen."

Sermon

You Shall See My Back

We all need to see God's glory. We need to feel that God is with us. We need God's touch. We need this more than ever before. We need to know concretely that God is with us and he leads us.

Uncertain Times

We are living in uncertain times. Now we know that life is precarious. We have experienced it. We cannot predict what the future holds. So many unimaginable things are happening in our life. Who would ever have imagined that the restaurants, gyms, and stores will be closed? What's gonna happen to our lifestyle, the education of our children, our school, our church, our hospitals, our family, and our business? Overall, what's gonna happen to humanity in the future? In my entire career, I never had to have the Easter service through zoom like we did this year. What will be our Christmas like?

We are living in a time when we need God's presence and God's guidance and protection.

A Visible Sign

When we look at today's Scripture, Moses felt the same. He needed God. He was so disillusioned by his people. He felt betrayed by his people. This story came right after the incident of the golden calf. Moses went up to the mountain to receive the 10 commandments. He didn't come down for a long time and so people were anxious and forced Aaron to make a golden calf because they needed a visible sign that their life was somehow protected.

"When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mountain, the people gathered around Aaron and said to him, 'Come, make gods for us, who shall go before us; as for this Moses, the man who brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we do not know what has become of him.'" (Exodus 32:1)

They did that because they were anxious. They could not see anything hopeful for them. Their leader was not present and visible. They could not see God and feel the presence of God. All they could see was a barren wilderness. They didn't know how long this journey would take. They didn't know where to go. The road

map wasn't there; The road wasn't there. They were basically lost. They could not see their future in the wilderness. So, they needed something visible.

Something concrete. Something they could see with their eyes. That's why they made a golden calf. At least they could see that with their eyes. They psyched themselves up, saying that it was their god now and it would lead them out of this miserable wilderness. We human beings only know how to deal with something tangible. Especially when we are disempowered and anxious, we want something concrete that we can hold onto.

We see that Moses wanted that too. ***"Now if I have found favour in your sight, show me your ways, so that I may know you and find favour in your sight."*** (Exodus 33:13)

He asked God, ***"For how shall it be known that I have found favour in your sight..."*** (Exodus 33:16) and ***"Show me your glory, I pray."*** (Exodus 33:18)

When he said, "show me your glory," he meant to show him something tangible, something he could show people that God was with them. All this time, they were

together. They together experienced wonderful works of God and they shared their life and destiny together. But when life was difficult, they abandoned Moses and replaced God with a golden calf.

Wanting Something Concrete

Yes, life in the wilderness was hard. For everyone. For Moses too. They should have encouraged each other and supported one another but they didn't. They complained and rejected Moses and abandoned God in the end. But when that happened, Moses lost all his appetite for his people. He lost the appetite for life. He lost all his energy. He was just tired.

That's why God said to Moses.

"He said, 'My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.'" (Exodus 33:14)

"I will give you rest." How comforting that was to Moses who was tired. But Moses wanted more. He wanted to see something concrete. He said, show me your glory.

And God said, ***"You cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live." (Exodus 33:20)***

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God let him know the reality that he could not see his face. I found that quite interesting.

Seeking God's Face

We often say, we should seek God's face. We see that expression in the Old Testament.

"Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always." (1 Chronicles 16:11)

"Look to the LORD and his strength; seek his face always." (Psalm 105:4)

We seek God's face but we cannot see God's face. God showed that reality to Moses. But instead, he said this, and it was quite comforting.

"While my glory passes by I will put you in a cleft of the rock, and I will cover you with my hand until I have passed by; then I will take away my hand, and you shall see my back; but my face shall not be seen." (Exodus 33:22, 23)

This is all an image, a metaphor. God is the Spirit and God doesn't have a human body like we do. God is not

locked up in a limited physical body. What God said to Moses was an image but a beautiful image. I can see caring hands of God that hide Moses from any harm. The glory of God was too much for Moses to handle. Too much to see it face to face. So God would hide him in a cleft of the rock and cover him with God's hand. And once the glory of God passed by, God would take away his hand and Moses would see God's back. How beautiful!

Seeing God's Back

We cannot see God's face but we can see God's back. What was God trying to say? While God works among us, we don't see him. But once God passes by, we can see his back. How true that is! Our hindsight is 20/20.

As we look back, we can clearly see how God helped us, protected us, and led us. When we went through storms of life, God hid us in a cleft of the rock and covered us with his hand. When God passed by in our life, we didn't see him but once all our trials were gone, then we could see God's back.

Seeking God's Presence

Let us seek God's face. Seeking God's face means to

seek God's presence. Because we cannot go through all this trouble all by ourselves, we ask God's presence. That is our prayer.

Let us not run away like Jonah.

"But Jonah set out to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord." (Jonah 1:3)

He ran away from God's face but ultimately God's grace brought him back. Let us not run away; let us seek God's face.

But remember, we may not be able to see God when he was working among us. Don't get discouraged because of that. Even though we are not able to see God, God is right here with us, working for us. After everything is over, and when God passes us by, we will be able to see God from the back. What we need is faith. Faith is the conviction of things not seen.

If they had faith, the Israelites in the wilderness would not have created a visible idol and worship it. With faith, we will be able to handle our own wilderness where nothing is visible; not our future, not our certainty, not

even our God. But those who believe in God, they will survive. Let us not be like fools who live their lives, only depending on what they can see.

Jesus said to Thomas, ***"Have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe."*** (John 20:29)

Reading God's word is like seeing God's back. Jesus passed us by but through his word, we can see his back. We can see the trace of God's presence. If we understand his word, we will be able to see the trace of God's presence. And that will give us faith. And through faith, we will be able to overcome our challenges.

God told Moses, ***"I will be with you. My presence will go with you. I know your name. And I will give you rest."***