

Text: Exodus 33:1-11

Title: "Rise up from this"

Time: 5/19/2024 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: The last running back to win the Heisman Trophy for the best college football player of the year was Alabama's Derrick Henry, who won the award in 2015. In that award-winning year, Henry had 395 carries, 11 pass receptions, and scored 28 touchdowns.

Some simple math gives us a statistic that Henry's stat sheet that year did not bother including. If we take the carries, add the receptions, and subtract the touchdowns, we find that in 2015 Henry was tackled to the ground or pushed out of bounds 378 times, after which he had to pick himself up off the ground and try again. In other words, 93% of the time Henry tried to make progress with the football, that progress involved getting stopped and rising up from there.

The Bible tells us that spiritual progress in the life of a believer can be much like this. We are saved by grace through the finished work of Christ, but now our goal is Christlikeness. That goal will be reached (Phil. 1:6), but in this life our progress toward that goal often includes getting tackled to the ground in some sin, or getting pushed out of bounds in some failure, and having to get back up again for another try.

Prov. 24:16, "For a just man falleth seven times, and riseth up again." Seven is the number of completion, so the proverb states the truth that it is righteous to fall and rise again as often as it takes to complete our journey to Christlikeness.

In the previous chapter of Exodus, Israel fell hard. They had sinned a great sin, making and worshipping a calf of gold in godless music, dancing, and idolatry. As we think of the very

low spiritual low-points in Israel's history, this episode is remembered as one of the lowest.

Now, however, we find out what the Lord wants Israel to do about the fact that they had sinned a great sin. He commands them explicitly, "Rise up from this" (v. 1). Literally, the phrase is not "Go up from here," but "Go up from this." The Lord is not telling them to ascend more mountainous terrain. In fact, they were not allowed to go up Mount Sinai where they were. Their departure from Sinai would have not been a geographical ascent, so that is not what the Lord is saying. What He is saying is what Prov. 24:16 says. He is saying, "Rise up from this, this great sin that you have committed."

The passage tells them how they could do so, and so it tells us how we will need to do so as well when we stumble, fall, or get tackled by the enemy. It may seem at times that there is no going on from the sin we have sinned. This passage assures us that this is never the case in the grace of God. We too can rise up from this. Notice with me how in three ways.

I. Rise up from sin believing God keeps His promise (vv. 1-3a).

Illustration: This past March Derrick Henry signed a free-agent deal with the Baltimore Ravens. At the press conference announcing the deal, he wore a purple suit, matching the color of the Ravens' uniform. When asked about his suit, however, Henry explained that it was the suit he wore at his grandmother's funeral, who had raised him from childhood and had died his freshman year of college. In 2018 as he graduated from college, Henry published an open letter to his grandmother in which he told her the following:

"I guess I just want you to know that I love you and I miss you, and I'm doing all the right things. I'm keeping God first, like you always told me to. I'm working hard every day. I'm being respectful to my elders. I'm doing my lessons, Grandma

– I promise I am. And when I walk across that stage in Tuscaloosa today and get my degree, I know I won't be walking alone. You'll be right there with me, the same way you are every day, inside my heart. I can feel your spirit. I can hear you singing. You did a good job raising me, Grandma." The guidance of his grandmother was critical to Derrick Henry's success.

Application: Just like the Lord gave Derrick his grandmother, the Lord gives Israel an Angel to lead them as they rise up again from their great sin (v. 2). This is the Angel of 32:34, and in sending this Angel to lead His people, the Lord kept a promise He made back in chapter 23:20-23.

Verse 21 of that passage tells us significantly that this Angel bears God's name. When it comes to things, names are merely tools of categorization. We name an animal "dog," but that name is a label for many individual animals in a certain category. But when it comes to persons, a person's name is an individualized identifier. I personify my dog when I give her a personal name, "Dixie." There is only one animal whom I would name *Dixie*, but many animals whom I would call a dog. In so doing, I am treating Dixie like a person.

Because the Lord is a Person, His name is a personalized identifier. This is why we must capitalize Angel when it comes to this Angel, who bears the Lord's name. He is divine. Isa. 42:8, "I am the Lord: that is my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images." In other words, in order for Yahweh's name to be on this Angel, this Angel had to be in some sense not another. He was both with God, and He was God (John 1:1). He is the preincarnate Son of God, the One who was named Jesus, *Yahweh saves*, because He would save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21).

This is the promised Angel who is there for God's people when they need to rise up again from their great sin. Jesus

Christ saves His people from their sins: “My little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous” (1 John 2:1).

God had promised to bring them out of Egypt, and He had kept that promise. God had promised to lead them with His Angel, and He would keep that promise. And God promised to bring them safely into the promised land of blessing, and He would keep that promise too.

We too have God’s promises when we need to rise up from our sin. We must believe that God keeps His promise. 1 John 1:9 is the precious promise of victory to every believer dealing with his sin, who is willing to confess and forsake that sin: “If we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sin, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” Believe that promise, rise up from your great sin, and gain new ground in your progress toward Christlikeness.

II. Rise up from sin more humble than before (vv. 3b-6).

Illustration: King David wrote a song in memory of his predecessors, King Saul and his son Jonathan, after hearing of their tragic death on the battlefield. He memorialized Saul, in part, with these words to the women of Israel: “Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet, with luxurious things, who decked your garments with gold ornaments” (2 Sam. 1:24).

Application: The garments of the Israelites in our passage were similarly bedecked. God had allowed them to plunder the Egyptians in the Exodus event. (Exod. 12:35, “And the children of Israel did according to the word of Moses; and they borrowed of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment.”) And now in our passage, the text tells us that these same children of Israel felt the need to divest themselves

(literally *rescue* themselves) from their gold ornaments (v. 6). The Lord tells them this is a good idea (v. 5).

Why the change? Why did the Lord want them to have their gold ornaments in chapter 12 and then want them gone in chapter 33? The answer is simply that, in spite of the blessing of their freedom from Egypt, Israel had become a stiff-necked people. Israel could not be trusted with gold ornaments anymore. The golden calf was the evidence the Lord cited for this shortcoming of a stiff neck. As Israel rises up from their great sin, the Lord wants them to remember what their neck is like, to remember just how naturally and easily idolatry and disobedience came for them (Exod. 32:9).

Illustration: One commentator insightfully compared their neck to that of a horse, which stiffens its neck against the pulling of the reins to direct the horse one way or the other.

For this reason, the Lord refuses to fully bless them with His presence in their midst (v. 3b). Ironically, this withdrawal is for their protection because that presence would consume them in an instant in view of His holiness (v. 5).

As believers, we need to believe the Lord when He tells us that we have a naturally stiff neck. This is an important part of the true confession of sin as described by 1 John 1:9. 1 John 1:8, "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." 1 John 1:10, "If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

It is when we recognize how stiff our neck can be that we learn to take certain precautions to avoid temptation as best we can. We learn not to trust our heart, which the Bible says is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (Jer. 17:9). We learn not to lean on our own understanding, instead acknowledging Him in all our ways (Prov. 3:5-6). Paul warns: "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he

fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). A fall can make it easier to obey that verse. To the degree we recognize the stiffness of our neck is the degree to which we may expect the fullness of the blessing of the Lord's presence and power in our lives. We must rise up from our sin with greater humility about our weakness.

III. Rise up from sin attending the tent of meeting (vv. 7-11).

Illustration: I have great admiration for those who build their own homes. My grandfather built a home, but unfortunately, he did not pass that skill, know-how, and work ethic on to me. I remember one house in particular that was built on the road I take to go to the grocery store. I can remember seeing first a camping trailer on the property, where I think the builder's family lived while he built his home.

Application: That seems to be the picture we are reading about in our passage. We know from our study of Exodus that the construction of the tabernacle and its furniture occupies around a dozen chapters in this book. We also learned that its construction begins in chapter 35. So, the tent of meeting that Moses pitches in this 33rd chapter is not that tabernacle. It is a temporary place for the Lord to meet with His people while the tabernacle is being built, and yet it proves to be a necessary place to help God's people rise up from their sin.

In our day, the local church meeting does for us what this tent of Moses did for him and his people in their day (Matt. 18:20, 1 Tim. 3:15). Their example teaches us about what it means to meet with the Lord together in corporate worship. Our passage teaches us three things about this.

1. What belongs to the meeting time and place is sacred; it does not belong to our camp (v. 7). The text emphasizes the distance between this tent of meeting and Israel's camp.

Paul seems to use the same idea when he warns the Corinthian church about the sacredness of the Lord's Table. He says we have houses to eat and drink in – that's our camp – so do not let the church's celebration of the Lord's Table degenerate into a boisterous festival of feasting. Do that at home, but the church meeting is set apart for worship. It is sacred.

2. When we go to the meeting, others see us go (vv. 8, 10). We should never underestimate the importance of a testimony that is faithful to the meeting of God's people. There is awe and fear in those who see Moses go to meet the Lord.

When God was working mightily in the local church at Jerusalem, we read this about that church: "And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them. And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women" (Acts 5:12-14).

When others see us go to the meeting, God may call one of them to be our successors there when we are gone (v. 11, Joshua). Joshua would become one of the two faithful spies who would survive the wilderness wanderings of Israel, and in Moses's place he would lead God's people into the Promise Land. These early days of following Moses to the meeting tent must have made a big impression on young Joshua. Our young need examples like this as well.

3. When we go to the meeting, the Lord speaks to us as He meets with us (vv. 9, 11). Hearing, believing, and obeying God's Word is at the center of meeting with God.

Conclusion: And so our passage teaches us that we as God's people can rise up from our sin, even great sins like the sin of chapter 32. Rise up, believing God keeps His promises; rise

up, more humble about our weakness; and rise up, attending the meeting of God's congregation, where we can encourage each other to battle sin together.

We have been singing Psalm 51 together, which David wrote when he rose up from his great sin. I will close this morning with his description of what happens in the life of a believer once he has risen up from his great sin.

When we rise up from this:

v. 6, "in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom";

v. 7, "I shall be clean . . . I shall be whiter than snow";

v. 8, "the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice";

v. 13, "then will I teach transgressors thy ways, and sinners shall be converted unto thee";

v. 14, "my tongue shall sing aloud of thy righteousness";

v. 15, "my mouth shall shew forth thy praise";

v. 19, "then shalt thou be pleased."

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching