

"Oh That They Had Such a Heart"

I'm sure most of us are familiar with the Star Trek TV shows and movies. The franchise actually has had several different TV series now besides the original series that aired back in the late 60s. The most recent series was aired in the first half of our decade and it was called "Enterprise." And that series was actually set as a prequel to the original series. And so everything that was amazing and taken for granted in the original series, things like transporters and universal translators are all in their infancy in this prequel series. You get to see how and why these amazing things came into existence in the prequel series. In other words, it gave us the origin for many of the things that the rest of the franchise shows and movies take for granted.

Well, this passage for today is kind of like that for us in regards to the idea of having a mediator. In the New Testament we see the idea that Christ is the new better mediator between God and man. The whole idea of Christ being a mediator, and even the need for a mediator, is taken for granted. Well, in the Old Covenant we see a lot of mediators coming before God and his people. Every prophet essentially served in that role. But here in this passage we see a bit of the origin of this role. That's what we'll be considering today. We'll be thinking about why and how a mediator came to be between God and his people. And we'll think about how that relates to us with Christ being the mediator of a new better covenant.

So let's begin first by looking at the people's request in this passage. They call for Moses to be their mediator. This request starts in verse 23. The people send representatives to Moses, the heads of tribes and elders. Interestingly, this request to Moses for him to be a mediator involves mediators. In other words, the people start out by making this request to Moses through the heads and elders.

The request is listed specifically in verse 27. "You go near and hear all that the LORD our God may say, and tell us all that the LORD our God says to you, and we will hear and do it." That's basically what a mediator does. They are the go-between two people. They speak to each party individually and facilitate the forming of a relationship. Nowadays, mediators are often neutral third parties who help negotiate between two parties of equal standing. Back then, in Biblical times, however, that wasn't always the case. That's especially true when a covenant was being formed in the ancient Near East between a more powerful and less powerful nation. For example, often a powerful king would send his emissary to a vassal nation with the terms of the covenant, and the people would have to work with that emissary whether they liked him or not. That typically was not a setting for negotiation either. The mediator was certainly not unbiased in that case either. But he still functioned as a mediator, in the sense that he was the middle man between the two parties.

And so that is what the people are asking Moses to do for them. They are asking him to be there go-between. Moses would *mediate* God's revelation to them. God wouldn't give them *immediate* revelation anymore. It wouldn't come directly straight to them. God would speak directly to Moses, instead of them. Moses would then convey God's words to them, and they would then obey.

Or at least that's what they are promising to do here. They're committing themselves to follow God's words, but they want to receive those words through Moses as their mediator.

And so that is what's established here. The idea of a mediator between God and man, in terms of divine revelation. This is different than in the past. In the past God spoke very directly to his people. Think of the patriarchs, how God revealed himself so personally to them. Of course, think even back to the Garden of Eden, before the fall, when Adam and Eve walked with God in the garden, and spoke so directly with him. There wasn't this formal idea yet of a mediator. But here the people of God request a mediator.

And yet, God says this is a good request. Verse 28. God says, "They are right in all that they have spoken." When I read this, I'm almost a bit surprised. You know, reading through the Torah, you get the idea that Israel is always coming to Moses with bad ideas and complaints. Then we see God become angry with the people, and often he brings judgment on the people. But there are times like this where God actually affirms their desire. God says that there is something good about their desire for a mediator. And so God grants this request. This actually is something God would have to grant anyways, since he's the greater party in this covenant. He's the one who gets to specify the terms of their relationship. And yet God says that Moses would be a fitting vessel to serve as mediator in this covenant relationship between him and the people of Israel.

But I'd like to ask then a question. "Why?" Why did the people think they needed a mediator? And why did God agree with that? What's the reasoning and logic to need a mediator? Well, we see the people's motivation in the first few verses here. It boils down to fear. They are afraid of God. Verses 23-25 brings us into their perspective. They had seen and heard God in a very direct way at Mount Sinai. They saw the mountain burning with fire. They heard the voice of God coming from the midst of the darkness. It terrified them. Notice the tension they describe here. It's a bit interesting. In verse 24 they say, "We have seen this day that God speaks with man; yet he still lives." But then in the very next verse they ask, "Now therefore, why should we die?" They go on to say that they are afraid that this great fire and God's voice will consume them if they hear anything more from God. And so on the one hand they acknowledge that they have heard God and lived. But on the other hand, they think that if they hear him anymore then that won't be the case. And so they are genuinely afraid. They are afraid as humans to continue to come before the holy, almighty God.

And so it's really their fear here that is motivating them. And God even affirms their reasoning here. And so I'd like us to think about this fear and how that relates to the need for a mediator. Let me start by saying that there are really two kinds of fear to think about here. First, there's the fear of terrible consequences. That's more negative sort of fear. Second, there's the fear that respects the person and power of someone, in this case God. That's a more positive sort of fear. Both I think are in view here by the people of Israel, and so let's think through these two kinds of fear and how they relate to us.

Let's think first about this more negative fear. The fear of terrible consequences. When your actions result in an imminent danger or threat before you, you get afraid. Think about your childhood. If you did something that your parents had told you not to do, and it resulted in breaking something expensive of theirs, and you knew your parents were just

about to return home, you'd probably be afraid. You'd fear the consequences of your actions. You'd probably fear the parental discipline that you'd be getting. Or another example. If you are hiking out in the woods and see a cute looking grizzly bear cub. If you go and pick it up, only to look up and see the face of the roaring mother, well you should be afraid. Certain actions have consequences, ones that result in bad, sometimes, terrible things to us.

Well, apply this to the holy God and sinful man. If our sins haven't been forgiven, they have a terrible consequence associated with them. Death. Damnation. God's wrath. That's what Romans 6:23 says that our sins deserve. Our sins alienate us from the all holy God. The result is that we are his enemies; we've lost fellowship; we are outlaws to his kingdom and rule. Apart from God's grace, for sinful man to experience God, to come before him, was a dangerous thing. The people here thought they should have been consumed. They were afraid they would yet. They recognized that their sinfulness is a danger in coming before God. If you always kill a spider when you see it, then a spider should run away if it comes into your presence. If God is going to judge sinners in righteous wrath, and you are an unforgiven sinner, then you should be afraid, terrified, to go into God's presence.

The Israelites had in fact already experienced God's grace by the fact that they hadn't died when they experienced God at Mount Sinai. Sinful man coming before an all-holy God that cannot tolerate sin is a scary thing. It *should* result in God judging us. It's only his grace that restrains him. Of course, contrast this with Adam and Eve before the fall. We don't see their relationship characterized with this sort of fear before the fall. It wasn't until after their sin that they hid themselves from God in the garden.

And so Israel rightly here fears in this sense. They are afraid of God consuming them. Jesus says this is a right sort of fear for sinners to have. He says in Luke 12:5, "Fear him who, after he has killed, has authority to cast into hell." But thankfully there is good news when thinking about this sort of fear; fear of punishment. 1 John 4:18, "There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment, and whoever fears has not been perfected in love." As Christians, we no longer should have this fear of punishment. We have received forgiveness and grace through Jesus Christ. We've been reconciled with God. We are no longer his enemies. That sort of fear of punishment has been resolved for us. The Old Testament sacrifices pointed to this. They gave a measure of atonement in the old covenant so that people could approach God in the temple. But they looked forward to the atonement that would come in Jesus. Now, we as Christians can approach God without fear of judgment or wrath. This is not something everyone has. We only have it if we have found forgiveness through faith in Christ.

But I did mention that there is another sort of fear; a more positive one. There's the fear that respects the person and power of God. This is a sort of reverential awe. This is a good healthy fear that was surely part of what Israel was having in this passage. And it's certainly something we should continue to have as Christians. Think of the illustration of a loaded gun. We should have a healthy fear of a gun. It's not a toy. You don't fool around with it, you don't point it at people; even if the safety's on. It's a very powerful thing, and so you have a bit of healthy fear and respect for it. Well, God is the almighty creator of the heavens and earth. With one word he can do away with Satan and all that is against him. He alone

deserves all glory and praise. His power and position and person should instill in us a healthy fear in terms of reverence and respect.

But as Christians we are also encouraged about this fear as well. Hebrews 4:16 "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace." We're told in the New Testament that because of Christ we can draw near to God with confidence. That's a bit of tension, isn't it? Which is it? Do we have a healthy fear of God when we approach him, or do we have confidence when we approach him. Well, I think Scripture says we should have both. Think of the gun example again. I hope a police officer exercises both fear and confidence with that firearm. I hope that he has a healthy fear and respect of what that gun can do. He's not going to fool around with it. But when the time comes to use it, he's going to confidently use it I hope with great skill and precision. If a policeman can have both fear and confidence toward his firearm, certainly we can find a way to have both toward our relationship with God as Christians.

But turning back to the Israelites here. They seem to place a lot of confidence in Moses, don't they? I mean think about what they are doing here. They send Moses off as the mediator, but that's just after what they said in verse 26. They ask, "Who is there of all flesh who has heard the voice of the living God speaking from the midst of the fire and lived?" They are surprised they survived it, they don't want to take the risk anymore, and so they send Moses instead. If I was Moses, I might be like, "Well, thanks; what about me?" They don't seem to be terribly concerned about Moses' well being.

But of course, they had already recognized how God had already been using him as their spokesman, so I think that probably explains their lack of concern for Moses. And of course, all things considered, Moses did a pretty good job as mediator. And yet a better, ultimate, mediator would eventually come in Jesus Christ. Moses was like Christ as a mediator, but of course he fell short in comparison. Just compare the two.

Hebrews chapter 3 helps make the comparison for us when it points out that Moses was faithful to God, but as a servant. Jesus on the other hand was faithful in his service as God's own son. This of course introduces us to the fact that Jesus was unique in his role as a mediator. Jesus was both God and man. He was the eternal Son of God who took on flesh as he was born into this world. This makes him the perfect mediator and vastly superior than Moses in this role.

As God, Jesus could perfectly represent God. He perfectly spoke God's words to the people from his own authority. Remember the gospels tell us the surprise everyone had when they heard Jesus teach. He taught with authority unlike the religious leaders. Well that's because as God's own son, he came with divine authority that was inherent to himself. The prophets and Moses only had authority insofar as they brought God's word correctly. Jesus had authority even in himself as the Son of God.

And yet Jesus was also fully man. As such, he perfectly represents us. He's literally one of us. Hebrews 4:15 says that he can sympathize with our weaknesses because he himself has gone through all the temptations that are common to man, and yet he's without sin. And so as Christians, we have a human being that goes before God with all authority, on our behalf. And as he comes to deliver God's word to us, he understands the struggles we'll have to live out God's word.

And of course, one final comparison between Moses and Jesus is that Moses fell short of what the people asked him to do in verse 27. Moses was being commissioned to tell them *everything* God was instructing. But later Moses would not treat God as holy before the people. That's when he sinned by striking the rock instead of speaking to it, as how God had instructed Moses. Moses failed as mediator to properly honor God and God's Word in that situation. He was not a perfect mediator. Christ, on the other hand, never sinned, never got God's Word wrong. He is the perfect mediator between God and man; the one who is both God and man.

And so I want us to see that this passage shows the need that Moses filled here; it shows us that God's people needed a mediator between them and God. And yet though Moses served faithfully, there were limits to what he could provide as a mediator. We've already been talking about how Christ ultimately solved those needs. But let me tie them all together for you.

The people called out for a mediator here because of their fear. Jesus as mediator addressed this in a way that Moses could not. We've said that sin separated us from God, and that this was a real reason to fear God's presence. Jesus solved this by bringing salvation through the cross. He paid the penalty for our sins on the cross. Now he offers us his perfect love, this love that drives out the fear of punishment. Because in Christ, through faith in him, we are no longer under any condemnation. We can now come before God in confidence. Yes, we still should have a reverential fear and awe of God for who he is. But we can confidently come now before this God. We have been restored in our access to God. Like Adam and Eve before the fall, we need not hide from God's presence.

Instead, we now can have real fellowship and friendship with the God that we rightly revere. And not only does Jesus restore that fellowship that we had lost through sin; but he *heightens* our fellowship with God. Just think about how Jesus is described in the Bible. In John 1:14, he's described as pitching a tent on earth, and that through him we behold his glory, the glory of the only-begotten son of God. That's making an analogy to the Old Testament tabernacle which was a tent where God's presence dwelt, protected away in the Holy of Holies. But with Jesus, God's holy presence has come in the flesh; in Jesus. That's why Jesus said in John 14:9, if you have seen him, then you have seen God. Jesus as the mediator who is both God and man, is the revelation of God to man. He brings God's presence to us. Isn't that even our hope in heaven? Yes, it is! We look forward in heaven to seeing Jesus face to face. To seeing our God face to face. 1 John 3:2 says that we look forward to his return when we will "see him as he is." Jesus is the revelation of God to man. That's a part of his work as the perfect mediator

1 Timothy 2:5, "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus." Hebrews 9:15, "Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant, so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance." These are just so simply put. But they are right on. Jesus is our mediator, and he's the mediator of a new covenant. He brings us all these wonderful new covenant blessings. Things they only had in shadow and promise in the old covenant. Now, they come clearly to light in the new. Forgiveness and grace from God. Wonderful fellowship and access to God. Peace and perfect love that casts out fear of condemnation. Real confidence to come before God through our mediator, Jesus Christ, who is both God and Man.

Saints of God, I'd like to leave us with two applications for us today. The first is very simple: a simple gospel call of faith. If there is any here today who has not found salvation and access to God, realize that this comes only through the mediator Jesus Christ. Turn to him in faith today. Trust your life to him.

But the second application is to Christians concerning our everyday living. You might sit through a message like this and think this sounds wonderful to know, but that it's only something applicable for becoming a Christian. But I'd disagree. This is also a message to find ourselves growing as Christians through Christ as our mediator. You see, don't miss verse 29. "Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" Though God had agreed with Israel's suggestion for a mediator, he did disagree with one thing they said. You see, back in verse 27, the people made a promise. They said that they'd obey everything God tells them through Moses. But God knows that won't be the case. But look at God's heart here. God sees a good thing in their attitude here. They've recognized their sins before the all-holy God. They've made a commitment to live for him. And so God is seen here as longing for the people to have hearts like this all the time. But God knows they won't. So what does God do? Well, the answer comes in the end of the book. Deuteronomy 30:6. Turn there if you have your Bible's open. This chapter describes how the people will fall away in sin, but God would restore them. And when he does, look what he promises in verse 30:6. "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live." Saints, this is the promise of the New Covenant right here in Deuteronomy. God would change their hearts. God will change our hearts. You don't need to go to the New Testament to find the gospel. You don't need to go to the New Testament to find a gracious and loving God. That same God is right here in Deuteronomy. He's in chapter 30, and he's here in our chapter for today. We see his love coming forth for his people. He wants his people to have hearts that always live their life for him. But he knows they can't without his intervention. Thus the new covenant, and thus a new mediator.

When Jesus ascended up into heaven, he sent out his disciples to make more disciples. To teach them and train them in godliness. And Jesus promised that he'd be with them as they did this. Well, this continues today. Jesus, our mediator is up in heaven sitting at the right hand of God. He intercedes for us. And he is with us. We have a human, who is also divine, before God in heaven, on our behalf. And it's in all this, that's he's bringing out heart change in our life. From heaven on high he works in our lives by his Word and Spirit. He's in heaven bringing God's Word to us. He's in heaven sending his Spirit into our lives in order to circumcise our hearts. His Spirit and Word work real heart change in us; that we'd know God's will and to live our lives for him. He's making us people that can confess what the Israelites confessed in chapter 5:27, that we will do all what God says. God's answered his own desire in verse 29, by sending Jesus. He's making us people that always have the sort of heart that he desires. Yes, this is a gradual process for us. But it is Christ as mediator of the new covenant working the benefits of the new covenant in our life. Christ on high in heaven continues to be our go-between, bringing God and God's will to us.

Well, this being the case, certainly the application for us is that we should engage our mediator. We should learn God's Word from our Mediator. We should look to our Mediator to bring growth. This all boils down to having

an active prayer life and active time of Bible study. Praying in the name of Christ, and heeding the words of Christ. Become disciplined in this. That's what a disciple of Christ looks like. Let's pray now to this end, having confidence that our Lord hears us.

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