

Jesus Greater than Moses #12

Series: Epic Journey: From Where We Are to Where God Wants Us

Exodus 32-34

Intro: The book of Exodus started with Israel enslaved in Egypt; God raised up Moses and miraculously delivered his people from slavery; he got them across the Red Sea; he provided manna to feed them in the wilderness; he gave them the Ten Commandments and the other laws, and they built the Tabernacle, so God's presence would be with them as they journeyed to the Promised land.

Every week I've been saying that the story of the Israelites is our story, because right now, God is working in your life to lead you from where you are to the abundant life in Christ. And just like the Israelites needed help to get them to the Promised Land, so do we. Today, in this message, we will see that if we want to continue moving forward, we need help, we need an advocate.

The title of today's message comes from the heading of Hebrews, chapter 3: **Jesus Greater than Moses.**

Story: In the middle of the Great Depression, it was not unusual for New York City mayor, Fiorello LaGuardia, to ride with firefighters, raid with the police, or take field trips with orphans. On a bitterly cold night in January of 1935, the mayor turned up at a night court that served the poorest ward of the city.

LaGuardia dismissed the judge for the evening and took over the bench himself. Within a few minutes, a tattered old woman was brought before him, charged with stealing a loaf of bread. (8 cents/loaf) She told the mayor that her daughter's husband had left, her daughter was sick, and her two grandchildren were starving.

The shopkeeper, from whom the bread was stolen, refused to drop the charges. "It's a real bad neighborhood, your Honor, she's got to be punished to teach other people a lesson."

LaGuardia turned to the woman and said, "I've got to punish you. The law makes no exceptions. Ten dollars or ten days in jail." Even as he pronounced the sentence, the mayor was already reaching into his pocket.

He pulled out a bill and tossed it into his famous hat, saying, "Here is the ten dollar fine which I'm contributing; and furthermore I am going to fine everyone in this courtroom fifty cents for living in a town where a person has to steal bread so that her grandchildren can eat. Mr. Baliff, collect the fines and give them to the defendant."

The following day, New York City newspapers reported that \$47.50 was given to a bewildered woman who had stolen a loaf of bread to feed her starving grandchildren. Fifty cents of that amount was contributed by the grocery store owner himself, while some seventy petty criminals, people with traffic violations, and New York City policemen, each of whom had just paid fifty cents themselves, gave the mayor a standing ovation.

Have you ever been in a position where you needed professional help? Maybe in a courtroom, or some other situation, where somebody stepped up and went to bat for you? They pleaded your case. Amazing things happen when we have the right person on our side.

A few weeks ago, we saw how Moses went up onto Mount Sinai, and he received the Ten Commandments and the other laws from God, and he passed them on to the people. Do you remember how the people responded? "We'll do it! We're all in!"

After that, God called Moses back up onto the mountain, and he wound up staying up there for 40 days, getting instructions for building the Tabernacle (which we talked about last week). While he was up there, Moses assumed the people were patiently waiting for him at the bottom of the mountain.

Here's what really happened: Exodus 32, verse 1. ***When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."***

2Aaron answered them, **"Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me."** **3**So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron.

4He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, **"These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."**

5When Aaron saw this, he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, **"Tomorrow there will be a festival to the Lord."** **6**So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

7Then the Lord said to Moses, **"Go down, because your people, whom you brought up out of Egypt, have become corrupt. **8**They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them and have made themselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. They have bowed down to it and sacrificed to it and have said, 'These are your gods, Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt.'**

9"I have seen these people," the Lord said to Moses, **"and they are a stiff-necked people. **10**Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation."**

11But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. **"Lord,"** he said, **"why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? **12**Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people."**

Verse 14: **Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened. (NIV)**

Go to chapter 33, verses 1-3... **Then the Lord said to Moses, "Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants.' **2**I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites,**

Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. 3Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey. But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people, and I might destroy you on the way.

Go to verses 15-17: Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. 16How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?"17And the Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you, and I know you by name." (NIV)

Let's PRAY

We're going to talk about three things: Our Need for an Advocate, The Role of an Advocate, and Jesus, our Advocate. The need, the role, and Jesus.

I. Our Need for an Advocate.

The reason we need an advocate is simple: our sin will always clash with the holiness of God. Even if we are like the people of Israel when Moses read all the commandments to them, and they said, 'We totally agree! We'll do it!' Even if we have the best intentions, sooner or later, we'll fail. And when we do, that sin or disobedience will clash with God's holiness.

For the Israelites, that sin came out in an ugly way. While Moses was up on the mountain, the people started to get impatient. So, they went up to Aaron, the brother of Moses, whom Moses put in charge; and said, 'We don't know if Moses is ever coming back. And we need something to worship!'

And Aaron inexplicably said, 'great idea! Bring me all your gold jewelry.' And he melted it down and made it into the shape of a calf, which, by the way, were common symbols of gods in Egypt. So, these people are out of Egypt, but obviously Egypt is not out of them.

They made an idol and worshiped it and made sacrifices to it. God sees what they're doing, and God is upset. In Exodus 32:8 He says, ***'These people have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them.'***

Why would he say that? Well, do you remember what God said right before He gave the people the Ten Commandments? "I am the Lord, who brought you out of Egypt." And already, the people are saying, "This golden calf brought us out of Egypt!"

And then the first commandment says: "Don't have any other gods besides me." They made another god. The second commandment says: "Don't make any idols." They made an idol. They've already broken the preamble, commandment #1, and commandment #2.

And before we get judgmental, remember this is in the Bible so we can take a good look at ourselves. The reality is, given enough time, given enough stress, given enough peer pressure, and given enough opportunities, we may turn away from God.

We inevitably fall short of the way we're supposed to live. God is highly upset, and says to Moses, ***'Leave me alone, so my anger may burn against them that I may destroy them. And I'll start fresh with you.'***

The Israelites' sin has clashed with God's holiness, and the only one standing between God's wrath and their sin is Moses. They needed an advocate.

II. The Role of an Advocate.

Look what happens next in Exodus 32: ***"I have seen this people, and behold, they are an obstinate people. Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them, and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation"*** (Exod. 32:9-10).

Verse 11: "But Moses sought the favor of the Lord his God. "Lord," he said, "why should your anger burn against your people, whom you brought out of Egypt with great power and a mighty hand? 12Why should the Egyptians say, 'It was with evil intent that he brought them out, to kill them in the mountains and to wipe them off the face of the earth'? Turn from your fierce anger; relent and do not bring disaster on your people. (NIV)

These are some amazing verses. It reveals something of the inner workings of the divine mind. I am thinking of the Lord's statement: ***"Let Me alone."*** The implication is that if the Lord is left "alone" -- without an intercessor to appeal

to His mercy -- divine wrath will come. Conversely, the opposite is true: wrath can be restrained if there is an advocate or an intercessor.

If Moses does not withdraw from prayer, if he does not leave God alone, there is a mercy opportunity that is being made possible.

The goal of an intercessor is to remain in prayer; to "not let God alone." I believe that some measure of divine grace and forgiveness is reserved in God's heart and released through intercession. God's holiness demands that sin be punished, His mercy, however, triumphs over judgment.

The Lord declared, "**Let Me alone!**" Yet Moses refused. Instead, he reminds the Lord of His promises for Israel as well as the Lord's relationship with Israel's forefathers: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (Exod. 32:11-13).

He reminds the Lord of His purpose, repeats the Lord's promise, and he does not stop praying for Israel. Moses stayed close to God, prevailing in prayer.

The result of Moses' intercession is utterly amazing: "**So the Lord changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people**" (Exod. 32:14).

The bible says, "His mercies are new every morning."

The future of a society does not belong to sinners; it belongs to those who pray. Jesus told His disciples that whatever two of them agree on anything that they may ask" (Matt. 18:19), it will be granted by the heavenly Father.

What is Moses doing? He's being an advocate for the people of Israel. He's stepping up; he's interceding; he's pleading their case before God. And he's really pleading for two things.

1. **God's Pardon.**

Verse 14 says, "**Then the Lord relented and did not bring on his people the disaster he had threatened.**" (NIV)

God listened, and God agreed to forgive. The intercession worked! Now, if you're really thinking deeply about this, you might say, 'Well-wait a minute. Did God change his mind? Or did he know all along how this would turn out?'

That's a fair question! And all we can say from this passage is that through the actions of Moses, the people are pardoned. Now, there would still be some consequences. But God didn't give up on the people. He pardoned them.

It seems like all is well; everything is back to normal. But then you get to chapter 33, and God says, "Okay, go into the Promised Land; I'll send an angel with you; I'll give you success," and in verse 3 he says, ***"But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people."***

If you think about it, it's an interesting offer. God says you'll get success, you'll have prosperity, and peace... ***"I'll give you all the benefits, but you won't get me!"*** Can I tell you; a lot of people would love that deal! But not Moses.

Look how Moses responds... Exodus 33:15... ***"Then Moses said to him, "If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here."***

What is Moses doing? Once again, he's being an advocate. But this time, he's not pleading for God's pardon, He's pleading for...what?

2. God's Presence.

Moses is saying, "God if you don't go with us, don't send us. It's not worth going." Moses realized what we touched on last week; our spiritual life is meaningless, powerless, and empty, without the presence of God.

If you heard last week's message, you know the word for ***"presence"*** is the Hebrew word for ***"face."*** When you talk to your friend, you don't stare at their knees; you look in their face! Moses is talking about knowing God personally and experiencing His love.

In verse 17 God responds: ***"And the Lord said to Moses, "I will do the very thing you have asked, because I am pleased with you, and I know you by name."***

So once again, the advocacy of Moses is successful, and God says, "Yes, I'll go with you." And once again, did God change his mind? I don't know; all I know is that they were back on track with God, and that would not have happened

without Moses standing between God and the people as an advocate, a mediator, an intercessor. They had God's full pardon; they had God's personal presence; and NOW they were ready to move forward.

That happened over 3,000 years ago, so what does this have to do with us?

That brings us to the final point:

III. Jesus, Our Advocate.

All during this series, we've been saying that if we allow Exodus to point us to the example of Moses, it'll be helpful, but if we allow Exodus to point us beyond Moses, it will be transformational.

- We've seen that the true deliverer, who sets us free from our slavery, isn't Moses; it's Jesus.
- We've seen that the true Passover Lamb, who spares us from God's judgment, is Jesus.
- The true miracle-worker who makes a way through the sea when we face those Red Sea moments, is Jesus.
- The true manna from heaven, is Jesus, the Bread of Life.
- And the ultimate tabernacle, who brings us directly into the presence of God, is Jesus.

The list goes on! Over and over, as God moves his people from here to there, every aspect of that Old Testament story is like a shadow of something better that was coming, and that better something is Jesus.

Moses is worthy of our admiration, but only Jesus is worthy of our adoration...our worship. The subtitle of Hebrews, chapter three is: Jesus Greater than Moses. Verse 3 says, "***Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses.***"

Romans 8:34 (NIV) ***“Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.”***

The writer to the Hebrews says, ***“Therefore He is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them”*** (Hebrews 7:25, ESV). This verse (and others like it) tells us that although Christ’s work to secure our salvation was completed on the cross, as evidenced by His cry “It is finished!” His care for us, as His redeemed children will never be finished.

After Jesus ascended to heaven and was seated at the right hand of God the Father, He returned to the glory He had before His incarnation to carry on His role of King of kings and Lord of lords—His eternal role as the second Person of the triune God. Jesus is still very active on our behalf in heaven. He is the Advocate for Christians, meaning He is our great Defender. This is the intercessory role He currently fulfills for those who are His. Jesus is always pleading our case before the Father, like a defense lawyer on our behalf.

Jesus is interceding for us while Satan (whose name means “accuser”) is accusing us, pointing out our sins and frailties before God, just as he did with Job (Job 1:6-12). But the accusations fall upon deaf ears in heaven because Jesus’ work on the cross paid our sin debt in full; therefore, God always sees in His children the perfect righteousness of Jesus.

The devil is not authorized to define your identity. God has marked you by the Holy Spirit as His own. Listen to your identity according to 1 Peter 2:9-10, ***“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.”***

When Jesus died on the cross, His righteousness (perfect holiness) was imputed to us, while our sin was imputed to Him at His death. This is the great

exchange Paul talks about in 2 Corinthians 5:21. That took away forever our sinful state before God, so God can accept us as blameless before Him.

It is important to understand that Jesus is the only human mediator between God and man. No one else—not Mary, not any previous Christian saint, or religious leader—has the power to intercede for us before God’s throne. No angel has that position. Christ alone mediates and intercedes between God and man. **“For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus”** (1 Timothy 2:5).

1 John 2, verses 1 and 2: **1 My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. 2 He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.”**

An advocate is a person who comes to our aid or pleads our case to a judge. Advocates offer support, strength, and counsel and intercede for us when necessary. The Bible says that Jesus is an Advocate for those who’ve put their trust in Him: **“My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous”** (1 John 2:1, ESV).

In other verses, Jesus calls the Holy Spirit our Advocate (John 14:16, 26; 15:26; 16:7). The English word advocate has been translated from the Greek word *paraclete*, which means “helper, adviser, or counselor.”

Jesus stands as the Advocate between our repentant hearts and the law. If His blood has been applied to our lives through faith and confession of Him as Lord, He pleads our case with the Righteous Judge.

We may imagine a heavenly courtroom scene going something like this: the devil says to God the divine judge, "Look, Gerry Blood has done it again." And Jesus says, "It's true, Your Honor, and we throw ourselves on the mercy of the court!" Right? **No!**

Jesus doesn't say that, because He's my advocate He doesn't ask for mercy, He asks for justice. Because any sin that I committed was actually paid for when Jesus died on the cross. Paid in full!

And every time I sin, it's as if Jesus reminds God the father: "I know this one has sinned and violated our commands. He is guilty as charged. However, you have said that my sacrifice is sufficient payment for the debt he owes. My righteousness was applied to his account when he trusted in me for salvation and forgiveness. I have paid the price, so he can be pronounced 'Not guilty.' There is no debt left for him to pay."

Jesus is our Advocate when God first accepts us into His family as His children. And He remains our Advocate forever. First John 1:9 says that, when we confess our sin, He is faithful and just to forgive our sin and to cleanse us from it. Our Advocate steps before the Judge, and together they agree that, because we are "in Christ," no further punishment is necessary. Jesus has already made sufficient payment to redeem us.

Another aspect that makes Jesus a compassionate Advocate is the fact that He has been tempted, rejected, overlooked, misunderstood, and abused. He lived the life we live, yet He did so without sin.

God accepts His Son's advocacy on our behalf as part of their divine agreement, established before the world began (1 Peter 1:20; John 17:24; Revelation 13:8). Our position as "the righteousness of Christ" is secure because the One who purchased our position with His own blood is also our Advocate (Romans 4:25; 8:3; 1 Corinthians 1:30).

Do you know this advocate? He's there for you! The world, the flesh and the devil say, "Don't be so hard on yourself! You're really a good person. You're just doing what everyone else is doing."

But the gospel says, "There is a darkness in you, and it's called SIN, and it separates you from Father God, and it will ruin you! But the love of Christ can save you." Jesus is the advocate that you need.

Let me give you three implications of having Jesus as our advocate.

1. Because Jesus is my advocate, I can stop defending myself.

See, if I'm basing my self-image on my performance, how good of a person I am, how well I do my job and live my life...what happens when I get criticized? I'll get defensive. I'll start attacking that person because the very foundation for my self-image has been shaken.

But when I understand the gospel, and Jesus as my advocate, I realize I'm not perfect...I'm a work in progress, and my worth is based on what Jesus has done, not on what I do.

In fact, I would say that in some ways, Christian growth means becoming more aware of my sin, and more grateful for God's grace at the same time. So, when someone criticizes me, I can say, "You know, you might be right, but my worth is based on what Jesus has done."

2. Because Jesus is my advocate, I can stop being self-righteous.

You all know about 'cancel culture,' right? Cancel culture is when you think someone else is wrong, or they've done something bad, and instead of just disagreeing or disapproving of them, you cancel them. You silence them; you exclude them from your life; you want their reputation ruined.

So, what does having Jesus as your advocate have to do with that? Well, here's what I've realized: cancel culture is always rooted in self-righteousness. You see someone doing something wrong, and you think, "I would never do that! You are so wrong, and the reason I know that is I am so right!" That's self-righteousness. It's denial of my own sin. But in the gospel, I realize that I'm a deeply flawed person, and I constantly need my Advocate to intercede for me.

That's humbling! And it makes me slow to judge others. Wouldn't this world be a beautiful place if we had less self-righteousness and more humility?

3. Because Jesus is my advocate, I can stop being afraid.

Knowing that Jesus is on my side, that He will never leave me or forsake me brings tremendous confidence and boldness. In Acts chapter seven, there's the

story of the first Christian martyr. Stephen gets dragged in front of the religious leaders, and it says he looked up and as they were stoning him, he said, "**Lord, don't hold this sin against him.**"

He died without fear, and with love for his enemies. How was that possible. What was it that he saw when he looked up? It says he saw Jesus, standing at the right hand of the Father. Jesus, as his advocate.

Think about this: at the very moment when this human court was condemning Stephen, the only court that really mattered was commending him.

How tragic it is to live life without a real advocate. Everybody needs an intercessor from time to time. Moses was great, but Jesus is greater. Jesus Christ has never lost a single case. We can be assured that when we ask the Lord for His intercessory help that He is able to assure us of victory.

As God leads you from where you are to the Promised Land of spiritual maturity and Christlikeness, I know it's going to require courage. You're going to have to overcome fear, self-righteousness, and defensiveness. So, trust your advocate. If God is for you, because of Christ, who can be against you?

"If anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense - Jesus Christ the Righteous One." (1 John 2:1)