

Series: "Holy Moses" (Part 2)
"Intercessor"

I'm preaching 4 messages based on the life of Moses. Last week we saw how God *called* Moses for the task of leading the Hebrews out of slavery in Egypt. I said that *each of us has a calling from God*, something important to do to bless others, and glorify God. Today let's look at Moses' role as *intercessor*. The word "intercessor" means a "go-between". Moses must go between God (who is holy) and the people (who most of the time are ungrateful and rebellious).

The story of how God leads the Hebrews out of Egypt through Moses is a thrilling story. But it isn't long before the people begin to complain and sink into doubt. They're just starting to leave Egypt when they look back and see Pharaoh and his army chasing them. They panic, and think they're going to die. Then once they cross the Red Sea and move on into the wilderness, they complain about not having water to drink, then not having food to eat. They turn against Moses, and moan how they wish they could go back to Egypt, once again into slavery (where they were miserable, but life was predictable). Each time, Moses goes to God on their behalf, and God provides their needs.

But Exodus, chapters 32-34 give us perhaps the greatest examples of Moses as an *intercessor* (one who goes between the sinful people and a holy God). Moses is up on Mt. Sinai receiving the Ten Commandments and the laws of God. He's up there a long time - 40 days. As the days turn to weeks, the Israelites camping at the foot of the mountain become bored, impatient, and cynical. They get tired of waiting. Exodus 32:1 says, "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.'" They persuade Aaron, Moses' brother, to melt down their gold jewelry, and he carves out an idol in the shape of a calf (replicating the pagan gods that were worshiped in Egypt). Then the people worship that idol, and say *that idol is the one who brought them out of Egypt!*

The next day, Aaron proclaims a religious festival and offers sacrifices. The people eat and drink and have an orgy similar to the Canaanite fertility rituals! *Moses is up on the mountain receiving the commandments, while the people below are already breaking them!*

God, of course, sees what's going on, and has this to say: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Go down at once! Your people, whom you brought up out of the land of Egypt, have acted perversely; they have been quick to turn aside from the way that I commanded them'" (Exodus 32:7-8a). God tells Moses what He thinks of the whole deal: "The Lord said to Moses, 'I have seen this people, how stiff-necked they are. Now let me alone, so that my wrath may burn hot against them and I may consume them; and of you I will make a great nation'" (Exodus 32:9-10).

Don't miss what God is saying here! I'm going to consume these people; I'm going to get rid of them! *And I'll make a great nation from you! Not Abraham* – as God promised in the covenant with Abraham. "I'm done with them! I'll pass on my blessing to the world *through you!*" Think of the satisfaction that could have given Moses! *He* will be the spiritual father of God's people – replacing Abraham! But Moses turns that golden opportunity aside and begs God to

have mercy on His people. “But Moses implored the Lord his God, and said, ‘O Lord, why does your wrath burn hot against your people, whom you brought out of the land of Egypt with great power and with a mighty hand? Why should the Egyptians say, ‘It was with evil intent that he brought them out to kill them in the mountains, and to consume them from the face of the earth?’ Turn from you fierce wrath; change your mind and do not bring disaster on your people. (Exodus 32:11-12). God relents and backs off: “And the Lord changed his mind about the disaster that he planned to bring on his people” (Exodus 32:14).

Moses comes down from the mountain, and he’s livid. He smashes the tablets on which are written the Ten Commandments. But as furious as he is, he still has an incredible love for these rebellious people.

The next morning (after perhaps a night of tossing and turning and thinking), he tells the people what he’s going to do: “On the next day Moses said to the people, ‘You have sinned a great sin. But now I will go up to the Lord; perhaps I can make atonement for your sin’” (Exodus 32:30). He goes back up the mountain to talk with God. The Bible tells us what Moses said to the Lord. The Hebrew text here is choppy, broken – the desperate cry of a heartbroken leader: “So Moses returned to the Lord and said, ‘Alas, this people has sinned a great sin; they have made for themselves gods of gold. But now, if you will only forgive their sin – but if not, blot me out of the book that you have written’” (Exodus 32:31-32). He offers to give up *his own life and relationship with God* if God will only spare the people! Someone has called this “Moses’ finest hour.”

What was the outcome of all of this? If we follow the account through Exodus, we see that God *does not* abandon them as His people – even though He does punish them. It’s only the *next generation* of Israelites permitted to go into the promised land. This *was* Moses’ finest hour! We see the power of intercession on the part of a God-fearing man!

We can hardly read about Moses interceding for the people without thinking of someone else who did that in an even more dramatic way. Who is it who comes between sinful humanity and a holy God? *It is Jesus!* 1 Timothy 2:5 says, “There is one God, and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.” Jesus, though without sin, offered up His life for the sin and disobedience of us all. Moses was willing to be cut off from God and from the community of faith if it would mean God would forgive the peoples’ sin. Jesus, for a while, was even willing to be cut off from God the Father, as He bore our sins to intercede for us. Remember His words from the cross: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” Moses was a “type” – a preview or foreshadowing – of that Christ!

The Israelites were stubborn and rebellious. I’d like to think people today are different, and not like the Hebrews who grumbled at God and worshiped a golden calf. But are we better? You know what goes on today. For some, it’s wild parties, hedonistic pleasures. I was coming out of a grocery store one day, and overheard this old guy say this to someone: “As long as the women are warm and the beer is cold, I’m happy.” That attitude! For others, our sinful disobedience against God takes a more respectable shape: we may be good and decent – yet our

sins are sins of pride, or self-righteousness, or things we fail to do that we could have or should have done, or simply leaving God out of our thoughts and daily living. And we are still prone today to worship the “golden calves” of success, money, pleasure.

We all need someone to intercede for us – someone to come between our sin and a holy God. Hebrews chapter 7 calls Jesus our Great High Priest. One function of a priest is to go between God and the people – and to bring people to God. Hebrews 7:25 tells us, “Therefore (Jesus) is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives *to intercede* for them.” *If you’ve never trusted Christ as the only One who takes away your sins, and brings you into the presence of God, trust Him now as Your Savior!*

But you know, being a priest is a function of every Christian. 1 Peter 2:5, 9 (written to followers of Jesus) says this: “You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be *a holy priesthood*, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...you are a chosen people, *a royal priesthood*, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

If you’re a believer, you’re a *priest*! You may say, “I’m no priest. I don’t wear a clerical collar. I’m not employed by the Roman Catholic Church.” There were 2 young boys out in one of their front yards, playing. One was a Roman Catholic and the other a Protestant. The Catholic priest happened to pass by, and the Catholic boy said, “Hi Father.” It wasn’t more than a couple of minutes later, and the other boy’s United Methodist pastor was approaching. The Protestant boy whispered to his friend, “Here comes my pastor.” The Catholic boy, a little more outgoing, greeted the United Methodist pastor, “Hi Father.” When they passed, the United Methodist boy said to his friend, “Heck, he ain’t no father. He’s married and has 5 kids!”

If you are born again, and part of God’s family, you are a priest. You are a part of God’s royal priesthood! That means we are to intercede for people, and bring them to God!

We can do this through prayer. Intercessory prayer – praying on behalf of others – is a great ministry! Can you think of a time when, perhaps you were ill, or going through a rough time, and a Christian friend or friends prayed for you? Wasn’t it a big lift? Adam Hamilton is senior pastor of one of the largest United Methodist churches in the country. As his church was just starting out he used to personally stop by the homes of people who first visited his church. If there was a follow up visit, he would ask people to tell him about themselves and their family. He would listen to their story, then tell his story of how he found Christ. At the end of the visit he would close with prayer. He remarks how this was awkward for some of the folk. They were not used to having anyone pray for them. But he would often notice that when he had finished, there would be tears in the eyes of the persons he prayed for. He also told how, when the church collects food items, he does his own neighborhood. He drops off a bag for his neighbors to place food into, and asks if there is anything that he can pray for them about. Some do ask him to pray. There on their front porch or steps, he prays for people. Again, he remarks how moved some of them are that someone would do this.

Intercessory prayer! We can pray for sick people. For people out of work. For people struggling in one way or another. We can pray for the church. For the pastors, leaders, ministries. For Sunday worship!

We can pray for lost people – people who don't know Christ. If you're a follower of Jesus, how much time have you and I spent this week praying for people we know who have not yet come to Christ? We often focus on praying for people who are *physically ill*. This kind of prayer is a good thing. But it's even more important to pray that *spiritually ill people* will find salvation in Christ! Most of us have family members, neighbors, work associates who aren't Christians. One of the greatest ministries we can engage in is to pray regularly for lost people!

For many years Mike Slaughter was lead pastor at Ginghamburg United Methodist Church near Dayton, Ohio. Mike is one of the most creative and effective pastors and church leaders in our time. That church grew from a little country church to a megachurch under Mike's leadership. Mike tells how he became a Christian at age 18. He ran from God for a while. Finally he said, "God, I'm done running. Here I am." Afterwards he told his grandfather about the experience of turning his life over to Christ. The grandfather, a man of God, said, "Mike, I've been praying for you every day for 18 years." Intercessory prayer – praying for others – is not a waste of time. It's one of the most important things we can do!

There's another way besides *prayer* that we can, like Moses, intercede for others, and be a "priest" who brings people to God. ***We can intercede on behalf of others by our actions.*** We can be there for others in their time of need.

It was about 12:30, 1 a.m. and I was awakened from sleep by the ring of telephone. A man in the church was calling to say that their only son had just been killed in Montana when his Jeep overturned. I went to their house, and stayed all night until the next morning. Members of their small group came, one by one, to be with this brokenhearted mother and father and their daughters. We talked. We prayed. We cried. In the days following, those believers were priests/intercessors for this distraught family, and helped them find the strength of God to deal with the loss of their son. That's what the Body of Christ (the Church) is meant to be – a fellowship where we are there for one another – to intercede and help us be close to God!

By our actions, we can also be priests/intercessors on behalf of those who don't know Christ. There's that old truth that most unbelievers will not go to church, they won't read the Bible, and "we are the only Bible a foolish world will read" (as the poem goes). We can help bring lost people to Christ by sharing our faith with them when an opportunity presents itself, and by loving them and caring for them with an unconditional love!

Moses – the intercessor!

We see something of the great heart of Moses and his sacrificial love for the people as he goes to God on their behalf. That's *our mission*, too, if we're followers of Jesus!

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