

God of the Second Chance: A study in Grace

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Shabbat shalom to all my friends here at Or Haolam. Thank you, Shmuel, for allowing me to visit and to preach here, at one of my favorite congregations. Your love of the Scriptures, both Older and Newer Testaments is well known. Your passion for authentic Jewish expression is honorable. Your desire for all people to know Messiah and your own personal evangelistic calling is excellent. With all that, dear friends, you have a man who cares and a history and future of continued care, so you are in good hands. I hope during my talk this morning, that if you've missed it before, that you won't miss it today, the same passion and love Shmuel represents, that Or Haolam represents. May you meet the God of the second chance today.

Before I enter into the story of today's Bible lesson, let me tell you about my son. Back home in Sydney, in fact airing all over Australia is a commercial. My son stars in this commercial. In fact, the entire "Road Trip" features my son, whose stage name is NachoPop.

He is advertising a spin-off of "So you think you can dance," a show for which he is a choreographer. For those who don't know about the show, here's how it works in all the countries where it is produced and aired. Dancers try out in many cities around the country, in Australia, in October and November. The selectors and judges choose 100 people from all the cities to come to Sydney for the "Top 100" shows. That's the show which is aired each January on the television.

Then after the first three shows are aired, the "Top 20" are selected (by de-selecting the other 80). Then each week, 2 more dancers lose and the show culls the Top 10, and finally Australia's Best Dancer. That's how the season works.

Let me show you the commercial:

{ <http://www.flickr.com/photos/bobmendo/4348841927> }.

So what Nate is talking about on his commercial is that "Top 20" dancers who lose one week will join him on his road trip, and help teach others on the road. So although they lose, they get a second chance (and maybe more) to be on the show.

That's really a great idea.

But wait, there's more. The folks on the road around Australia, who will meet Nate, his crew, and the others are also being given a second chance. You see, some of them might have been those who tried out and auditioned back in November, say in Perth or Melbourne or Brisbane, or any other cities in Australia. And back in November, they got knocked out of the tryouts. But now they are being given a 2nd chance.

I like that.

I like second chances.

Listen to CNN yesterday, about closures of GM auto plants, scheduled to close in October this year, "General Motors is in the process of calling 661 dealers targeted for shutdown to offer them their franchises back, company executives said Friday afternoon. That represents more than half of the dealers who lodged an arbitration appeal last month to fight their planned termination."

God is the God of the second chance. And third chance. And more chances than you ever deserved.

I get this question a lot from Christians. "Do you think after a certain event (the rapture, the good life they live, the millennium, their own death) Jews will be given another chance to accept Messiah Y'shua?" It's a good question, but fails in certain aspects. The implication seems to be

that Jews, all Jews, of all times, have only had one chance, so far, and that it isn't exactly fair of God to expect them to hear and understand and receive Y'shua in only one opportunity.

This doesn't seem to be the reality, though. But we will come back to that one.

In today's sedra, we read about a 2nd chance among the Jewish people. Within weeks, a 2nd chance! Actually more than 2. Did you see that?

By the way, I remember preaching from this sedra portion a few years ago at this congregation here, and covering a very different theme, that is, freedom that God wants to give the Jewish people, and all people. But today we're looking at another theme in Ki Tisa, that is, God extending grace to people, again and again.

So today we see Moses up on Mt Sinai. He's receiving the Torah from God. And this is so basic to everything Jewish, I doubt any Jew, in KC or in Sydney or anywhere, misses this moment in Jewish history. The answer could be given in Jewish Jeopardy in South Africa or in London, "He received the commandments from God on Mt Sinai" and everyone would ring their buzzer and say, "Moses." He is Moshe Rabenu (our teacher) and the giving of the Torah is his ministry.

In our text we read, "And when He had finished speaking with him upon Mount Sinai, He gave Moses the two tablets of the testimony, tablets of stone, written by the finger of God." (Exodus 31.18)

This is why we see 10 Commandment figures and shapes in the form today like this one on the wall or the front of the bulletin. Without the bottom it might look like the McDonald's golden arches.

But when Moses didn't come back down on the 40th day after he ascended Mt Sinai, the people got nervous. It had been nearly 6 weeks already! They assembled in a mob before Aaron, Moses' older brother, and as a result the Jewish people made an idol, a Golden Calf to worship and rose up to eat, drink and frolic. This was a very sad day in Jewish history, less than two months after the Exodus! (Exodus 32.1-6)

And this might have been the end of the story. But it isn't.

God and Moses have a conversation after the idol was built and each says the other is responsible for the Jewish people. Listen to these statements... who did bring the Jews out of Egypt and to whom do they belong?

Ex.32.1 The Jewish people cried to Aaron, "Moses, the man who brought us up from the land of Egypt"

Ex. 32.7 God told Moses, "Go down at once, for your people, whom you brought up from the land of Egypt"

Ex. 32.11 Moses said, "O LORD, why does Your anger burn against Your people whom You brought out from the land of Egypt"

God and Moses seemed to be arguing and that's always right, when people are at stake. But it could be confusing.

Now in the midst of this argument, you might miss it, but please don't. God is giving the Jewish people a 2nd chance. They [We] are guilty. They have built and worshipped an idol. In verse 10, God is ready to wipe us out, "Now then let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them, and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you Moses a great nation."

Moses intercedes for us. But Moses doesn't know the extent of the evil we are doing below the mountain. Even so, God relents and stops the justice due us. In verse 14, the "LORD changed His mind about the harm which He said He would do to His people."

But that's not the end of the story. Moses returns down the mountain and goes postal. He orders a wholesale slaughter of Jewish people, and that day, about 3000 fall by the swords of the Levites. (32.28) Yipes. I guess our 2nd chance is over. Moses shatters the two tablets God had written, with his finger. ("Moses' anger burned, and he threw the tablets from his hands and shattered them at the foot of the mountain." Ex. 32.19). No more Law. No more freedom. No more constitution. No hope. No guidance.

Dark, dark day.

But wait, there's more. Moses and God work it out. Up to the top of the mountain Moses returns. Another 6 weeks. Another set of tablets (Ex. 34) are fashioned and Moses returns to the people with the instructions for life. Hooray a 2nd chance. Or is it a 3rd?

Actually throughout Jewish history we see chances. Not once, not twice, but over and over again.

Abraham calls people to join him in Ur and again in Haran and people join him. (Gen. 12.5). Noah is building an ark and after 120 years there is yet 7 more days of opportunity for people to join him and be spared from the coming deluge.

God is a generous, merciful and loving Creator. Consider Jonah the prophet. He was called from Joppa (near modern Tel Aviv in Israel) to preach the message from God to the people of Nineveh. He chose to go elsewhere and as a result got in trouble, swallowed by a whale, well, you might have heard that story.

That said, you should know that the story doesn't end there. The prophet from inside the whale began to rethink the go/ don't go thing and changed his mind. God had given Jonah another chance, and he was able to turn around, make the message clear and saw the Ninevites come to faith, including the king of Nineveh, who arose from his throne, laid aside his robe from him, covered himself with sackcloth, and sat on the ashes. (Jonah 3.6)

Some of you know I used to lead Jews for Jesus in New York City many years ago. I remember meeting with Bob, a Jewish man in Queens, New York, for over a year. Each Tuesday night, when I was in town, he and I would read the Bible and discuss lessons I wrote, from selected Bible chapters. And he would take it all on board, one week at a time. When I would ask, "Are you ready to receive Jesus as your Savior?" he would often dismiss my question with a polite but offputting 'no.'

Long story short, Bob did finally say 'yes' to Y'shua in about 1984 and grew in his faith. He had to change careers due to some ethical problems he had on the job, and then he and I both moved and lost track of each other.

That was then. This is now. Today we have Facebook and YouTube and all kinds of ways to find each other. Sure enough, last year Bob, who now lives in Southern Florida, got back in touch with me. And although he had some time away from God, he was again re-connecting with the Lord and was seeking godly fellowship.

Is this his 2nd chance? Or his 42nd? Or his 152nd? See? Who can count the mercies of our Lord?

We read in chapter 34 today,

יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ
וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת :
נֶזְכָּר חֶסֶד לְאֲלֹהִים נֶשְׂא עֵז וְכֹחַ
וְחֶסֶד וְנֶזְכָּר לֹא יִנְקָה פֶקֶד אֶעֱוֹן אָבוֹת
עַל־בָּנִים וְעַל־בָּנֵי בָנִים עַל־שְׁלֹשִׁים
וְעַל־רִבְעִים :

"The LORD, the LORD God, compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth; who keeps lovingkindness for thousands, who forgives iniquity, transgression and sin; yet He will by no means leave the guilty unpunished, visiting the iniquity of fathers on the children and on the grandchildren to the third and fourth generations." (Ex. 34.6-7)

The Bible says, "The LORD sustains all who fall, and raises up all who are bowed down." (Psa. 145.14) So when you fall, it's still not over. There's more chance. Come on, reach up, God raises up those who are down and (not) out!

So I return to the question about Jews and a 2nd chance.

Do you see why I think we've been given many, many chances, not only 1, not only a 2nd?

Many Jewish people are aware of information about the Gospel. Many have encountered the truths of Y'shua in school or in the workforce, from Christian television or a Bible in their hotel room. We Jews are well read. Besides that many Christians have been intentional and brought Jesus to Jewish colleagues and friends, that to say they have only had one chance is too limiting. It's almost insulting.

Besides that, a cataclysmic event like a rapture or a millennium or the end of their lives – none of those—are not a panacea to spiritual blindness. Only God can open eyes, and he longs to do just that.

Proverbs teaches us "a righteous man falls seven times, and rises again." (24.16). It's not once, it's not twice, it's more and more.

Remember the words of the Messiah, when Peter, his disciple approached and inquired, 'How often shall my brother offend me, and I forgive him? Seven times?' (Matthew 18.21) and Y'shua's answer? Remember, 70 times 7. Which although I was a high school math teacher in Basehor is NOT 490! Yes, technically it is, but don't keep score. Don't keep count! Love means forgive and forgive and don't keep count. Why? Because people only get one chance or two or three? No, it's countless.

Being given a 2nd chance isn't only about dancing. It's not only about television. It's about your life. Maybe you had everything going and then it fell apart. Maybe you had a great relationship, now it's gone. But wait, there's more. It's not (necessarily) over.

Look up, God's hand is reaching out to you. Trust Him. Listening to this message today could be the beginning of the next chance for you.

[Personal stories of Lutheran church in my neighborhood in Prairie Village, of Dave Wickersham Col. 3:17, of Carolyn if she's there, any other Jewish believers there?]

God told Moses, "Cut out for yourself two stone tablets like the former ones, and I will write on the tablets the words that were on the former tablets which you shattered." (34.1)

It's the same words. He still wants to be in relationship with us. He still wants our freedom. "I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery." (Ex. 20.2-3)

It's only in relationship with Y'shua that we have eternal life. Join us, if you haven't already in that relationship, won't you?