

The Seventh Part in the Series

Exodus: Let My People Go!

“A New Beginning!”

Jimmy Wayne learned never to trust a soul. That’s why he never unpacked his bag. We can’t blame him. Jimmy Wayne never knew his father, and his mother spent more time *in* jail than *out* of jail. When he was a small child, his mother got out of jail *again* and took up with a troublemaker *again*. They loaded Jimmy into the backseat of their Oldsmobile Delta 88. For a year the car was Jimmy’s home. He learned never to trust a soul. That’s why Jimmy Wayne never unpacked his bag.

After living in the back seat of a car for a year, Jimmy Wayne was dumped off at the train depot in Pensacola, Florida. His mother and her boyfriend sped away in their Delta 88. *Jimmy Wayne desperately needed a new beginning.*

We are in our seventh installment in the Book of Exodus called *Let My People Go!* Today we look at Exodus 34. It’s all about a new beginning. Aaron, Israel’s high priest, needs a new beginning. So does Israel. And—most certainly—so do we!

A new beginning is **absolutely necessary**. Why is that? If you were here last Wednesday, you remember that in Exodus 32 Aaron and the Israelites were faced with a huge crisis. They hadn’t seen Moses for 40 days & 40 nights. Was Moses dead? Did Moses leave them? Aaron and the Israelites grow impatient so they make a golden calf and they worship it!

Like them or not, in a huge crisis the IRS knows exactly what to do. The IRS Handbook states, and I quote, “During a state of national emergency, the essential functions of the IRS will be as follows; assessing, collecting and recording taxes.” While everyone panics, the IRS knows exactly what to do! *Get our money!*

But when faced with the huge crisis of not having Moses, Aaron and the Israelites have no idea what to do! That’s why they build a golden calf and worship it! What does Moses do when he comes down from Mt. Sinai? Moses smashes the Ten Commandments, grinds up the golden calf, mixes it with water, and makes the people drink it!

We pick up the narrative in Exodus 34:1, “Then Yahweh told Moses, ‘Chisel out two stone tablets like the first ones. I will write on them the same words that were on the tablets you smashed.’” The Ten Commandments have been smashed! That’s why a new beginning is absolutely necessary.

Let’s face it. We’re not that much different than Aaron and the Israelites. What do we do when faced with a crisis? We become angry, impatient,

faithless, and selfish. We turn to our golden calves and look to them for salvation. God—the holy and righteous and perfect God—this God has every right to dump us off at a train depot in Pensacola, Florida and ride off into the sunset.

But He doesn't! *Our God doesn't do that!* A new beginning is **totally possible**. "Then Yahweh came down in a cloud and stood there with Moses. He called out his name, Yahweh" (Ex 34:5). Yahweh frequently comes down in the book of Exodus. Exodus 3:8, Yahweh *came down* in the burning bush. Exodus 19:20, Yahweh *came down* on Mt. Sinai. Exodus 40:34, Yahweh *came down* to fill the tabernacle with His cloud and His glory. Get it? We can't go up to God. That's why God comes down to us, right where we are—in the basement of our broken commandments.

And what does God do when he comes down? Scold us? Shame us? Berate us? Reject us? Condemn us? No! God cries out, "Yahweh! Yahweh! The compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast-love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and lifting up wickedness, rebellion and sin." A new beginning is totally possible!

Compassionate. This word in Hebrew (*rachum*) is closely related to the Hebrew word for a mother's womb (*rechem*). The idea of compassion, then, expresses the emotional connection that a mother has for a child in her womb. That's how God feels about you!

Slow to anger. If God was quick to anger, His compassion wouldn't last a second in my life. If God shot rockets of wrath every time I sinned, I would be blown to smithereens. But God shouts from Sinai, "I am *slow* to anger!"

Abounding in steadfast love. "Abounding" announces that God's steadfast love isn't limited. God is like the federal government. Whenever there's a need, God just prints off more steadfast love! But there is a difference! God has an infinite treasury of steadfast love to cover all the currency He prints. God's infinite resources of steadfast love will never run out! Could God go in debt? Could God go bankrupt? *Never! Ever!*

Lifting up wickedness, rebellion, and sin. There are only three Hebrew words for sin and God uses all three right here. Why is that? To show that He lifts up every type of sin. *There are no categories of unforgivable sins.* Yahweh lifts up wickedness, rebellion, and sin.

"Wickedness" means twisted depravity. It means we are crooked and bent. Rebellion refers to treason against our covenant King—Yahweh. "Sin" means missing the mark. The Ten Commandments are the bull's eye. We take aim and

miss them far too often. Yahweh lifts up wickedness, rebellion, and sin. Where does he put all of it?

That brings us to Palm Sunday. Jesus rides into Jerusalem on a donkey on a Sunday because the following Friday He is going to lift up the huge mess and place it where? Upon himself—all wickedness, rebellion, and sin! Jesus is Yahweh, in the flesh, “the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast-love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and lifting up wickedness, rebellion, and sin.” Jesus *teaches* this love. Jesus *lives* this love. Jesus *demonstrates* this love by shedding His blood on the cross for you. Palm Sunday announces it. Good Friday shows it. And Easter Sunday celebrates it! *Amazing!*

One day, while aimlessly walking around Pensacola, Florida, Jimmy Wayne—remember Jimmy Wayne?—little Jimmy Wayne spotted a man named Russ working in his garage. Soon Russ and his wife Bea invited Jimmy to live with them. The home was like heaven! A hot bath, hot meals, and even TV! Jimmy Wayne, though, had learned never to trust a soul. Jimmy Wayne still wouldn't unpack his bag.

A new beginning is entirely optional. We can refuse to unpack our bag. We can reject God's love. We can be callous and aloof. But that's not Moses! “Moses immediately threw himself to the ground and worshiped” (Ex 34:8). I invite you to follow Moses. Trust that God is who He says He is. Repeat “Yahweh, Yahweh” until it completely drowns out the voices of fear and shame, guilt and blame! Throw yourself before Yahweh!

Put another way, be a sponge and not a rock. Put a rock in the ocean, and what happens? Its surface gets wet, but the inside of the rock stays untouched. Place a sponge in the ocean and what happens? It absorbs water. The ocean saturates the sponge. God's abounding steadfast-love surrounds us like an ocean! Palm Sunday. Maundy Thursday. Good Friday. Easter Sunday. *Totally amazing!* What's our response? Rock or sponge?

Jimmy Wayne had been rejected so many times that he was much more like a rock—a hard, unmoved rock. We get that. We really do. That's why Jimmy never unpacked his bag. It took another month before Russ and Bea convinced Jimmy that their love for him was real.

So finally, *finally*—Jimmy Wayne unpacked his bag! Jimmy Wayne is now a famous country music singer and songwriter. But his new beginning started when he learned to trust—when he finally unpacked his bag.

It's Palm Sunday! Hosanna! Hosanna in the highest! Our past is behind us. God's grace is before us. A new beginning awaits us. So now what? It's time to

unpack our bag! Why do that? Because we finally have a home. Where? With Jesus! Amen.