GOD LOOKS LIKE JESUS

Jesus embodies God's patient identity, *Matthew 5:38-42*

God "proclaimed the name of the LORD"[1] when He revealed Himself to Moses on Mount Sinai, disclosing to Moses the character of the God covenanting with him and the Israelites (*Exodus 34:6-7*). Because it contains His explanation of His identity, Exodus 34:6-7 plays a crucial role in understanding God's character. John offers a pair of equally important passages for understanding God in his gospel. After recording Jesus' declaration of his divine identity (*John 8:58*), John wrote that Jesus informed his disciples, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (*John 14:9*). Because God looks like Jesus, we gain insight into God's announcement of His identity in Exodus 34 by examining Jesus' life and teachings. This lesson continues an exploration of God's character by considering how Jesus embodies God's "slow to anger" identity (*Exodus 34:6*).

"A God…slow to anger"[2]

Even though He announced His slow-to-anger identity to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7, God is the first character in the Bible to become angry. However, a few features about the appearance of His anger help us better understand its relationship with His patient identity.

- God's anger makes its first appearance far into the Bible's narrative; *it emerges 54 chapters into the Bible's story*. In contrast to anger, grief and sorrow offer the first emotions God experiences in the Bible, and they appear early in its story (*Genesis 6:5-6*).
- God only became angry after Moses' fifth objection to the commission God gave him (*Exodus 3:10-11, 13; 4:1, 10, 13-14*).
- God's anger did not lead to punishment or violence; it instead led to His concession to Moses' stubbornness and fear (*Exodus 4:14-15*).
- The final appearance of God's anger in the book of Exodus, His anger over Israel's golden calf incident (*Exodus 32:1-14*), offers a valuable contrast to its first occurrence. A few differences separate God's anger with Moses from His anger with Israel.
    - God had just entered a covenant relationship with Israel that forbade making and worshipping idols (*Exodus 24:3-8; 20:4-6, 22-23*). No such precedent preceded Moses' interactions with God in Exodus 4.
    - Israel's covenant with God explains why He did not respond to its rebellion in the same way He responded to Moses' resistance.
    - The covenant setting of the golden calf story reveals that God's intended actions offered a just and measured response to Israel's covenant betrayal.

[1] All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.
[2] Exodus 34:6.

- However, God permitted Moses' intervention on the nation's behalf and "relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people" (*Exodus 32:10-14*).

"I have given you an example"[3]

The writer of Hebrews commented that Jesus "is the exact imprint of [God's] nature" (*Hebrews 1:3*). Because they come from the same 'mold,' the gospels' record of Jesus' life and teachings can offer us insights into the patience that defines God. But Jesus' patience does more than illustrate God's "slow to anger" identity; his patience provides us "an example" to imitate (*John 13:15*). Consider the following three examples:

- Jesus demonstrated considerable patience with his disciples during the years they traveled with him, remaining committed to them despite their numerous struggles (*cf. John 17:6-19*).
  - Consider the following passages that indicate Jesus' frustration with his disciples:
    - John 14:9 - "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip?"
    - John 13:38 - "Will you lay down your life for me? Truly, truly, I say to you, the rooster will not crow till you have denied me three times."
    - Matthew 15:16 - "Are you still without understanding?"
    - Matthew 16:8-11 - "O you of little faith…Do you not yet understand…How is it that you fail to understand…"
  - Jesus remained patiently committed to his apostles despite their struggles because of the goal driving his relationship with them – he sought to equip them for a mission (*cf. Matthew 4:18-19; 28:18-20*). Jesus' objective reminds us that patience serves a purpose; it does not stand alone.
- Following his teaching about forgiving a "brother [who] sins against you" (*Matthew 18:15-20*), Peter asked Jesus how many times he should forgive that brother (*Matthew 18:21-22*). Jesus answered with the parable of the unforgiving servant, instructing Peter that forgiveness ought to be unlimited (*Matthew 18:23-35*). His parable offers insight into how God's slow-to-anger character expresses itself in interpersonal relationships – patience co-mingles with mercy and forgiveness.
- Near the beginning of the final week of his life, Jesus wept over Jerusalem, lamenting its rejection of him (*Matthew 23:37-39; Luke 19:41-42*). Even though his comments contained a judgment, they were marked by his deep compassion for those with whom he had worked for years. Jesus' lament reminds us that love predisposes us toward patience and reconciliation.

God's "slow to anger" character, modeled for us through Jesus, ought to take root in our lives. Nurtured by a selfless love for others, it should grow into a willingness to endure wrongs and hardships for the benefit of others so that we can cultivate with them the relationships God created us to enjoy.

[3] John 13:15.