

It's a privilege to continue in our verse-by-verse study through the Book of Exodus. It is such a privilege to be a part of a church where we value verse-by-verse study through books of the Bible. When doing that, sometimes preachers can be tempted to think that a particular verse or passage is a little dry. Not today. I can tell you as we go through Exodus, there's no reason for a preacher to ever think like that. This dramatic story is wonderful in that something back in the days of Moses and Exodus relates so well to where we are today and our relationship with Christ.

In fact, many scholars believe Exodus 19 to be one of the most important chapters in the entire Bible. The truths there help us better understand God and his grace. The challenges presented in this chapter help us understand what it means to obey and follow God. There are attitudes here that he offers, and he says we need to have these attitudes to obey and draw near to God.

Then there's this example of Moses being the mediator between God and his people and how that points to Jesus Christ our mediator. So, it's just a beautiful chapter. I want to build on this idea in this chapter that Moses met with God; the people of Israel met with God, and we're given guidance here for us to meet with God. To prepare to meet with God, we need to remember who God is and what he has done for us.

On the first day of the third month after the Israelites left Egypt—on that very day—they came to the Desert of Sinai. After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain. Exodus 19-1-2

We are three months out from when they were delivered from Pharaoh and crossed the Red Sea. They turned southeast and followed this pillar of fire and cloud and were likely down in the desert of Sinai, on the Sinai Peninsula. It's fascinating to me to think back to chapter 3 and realize that this is where Moses met God at the burning bush.

It was very subtle, but God said to him, "You will return, and you'll worship me here." And here we are. God didn't tell Moses he was going to bring two

million children of Israel with him, but here we are. Sinai is a mountain of granite. It rises 7500 ft above sea level, and there's this mountain range around it as well, creating this amazing amphitheater. It's hot. It's rocky. It's hard. It's steep. It's treacherous. There's a monastery today at the foot of Mount Sinai where tourists can buy souvenirs and get cold drinks. It was also a very beautiful place. Depending on the angle of the sun and the time of day, there were dramatic color changes and shades that would highlight this beautiful mountain.

But God's plan here was still the same. He was taking the people of Israel to the land of Canaan, which was, at this point, the opposite direction, but he was taking them through the desert first. We have this great vantage point today to be able to look back and see that this young nation still had a lot to learn, and they needed to be in the desert in order to learn what God had for them. They were going to stay at Sinai, just to kind of fast forward through the entire book of Exodus; they're going to be at the foot of Sinai for a year.

It's good for us to remember that if we're confused about God's plan for us, or we're questioning things, we're getting impatient that to get to Canaan, to get to that place that God has for us, he often sends us through the desert first. We need to let that sink in a bit.

Does it ever seem to you that he takes us to another place from where we know he wants to take us? Are there possibly deeper things that God wants to teach us that we can only learn in the desert? If you find yourself in some kind of desert this morning, it doesn't mean that God has forsaken you at all. Consider what God might want to teach you in this particular season. It appears that he may be taking us away from where we know he wants to take us. Why would he do that to teach us things?

Then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel: 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you

on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Exodus 19:3-4

I hope we're listening carefully to this because God is going to speak to Israel plainly in the following chapters about things they must do. In the next chapter, he gives us the 10 Commandments and the following chapters are filled with laws, principles, and regulations. God is going to tell them over and over again what they must do for him. But here's what we need to remember: before God ever told them what they were to do for him, he reminded them of what he did for them first. We can only meet God and have a relationship with God because of what he first did for us.

It's foundational for us to understand in terms of having an intimate relationship with God and meeting with God is the truth that he first reached out to us with his grace. None of us deserve God's favor. None of us deserve to have a relationship with God. None of us are entitled to meet with God. We meet with God because God himself gave us a way. So, we meet with God because of God's grace, not our own merit.

God tells Moses to remind the Israelites where they were, how he rescued them, and how he carried them on eagle wings. Eagle wings is just a beautiful picture. Eagles nest very high up in the highest trees, the highest buildings, or mountain places because they are safe from predators there. When the mother eagle carries her young, she doesn't grab them with her talons. She puts them on her back and carries them safe and protected. When the time is right, she pushes those eaglets out of the nest, and they either fly or fall. If these young eagles don't fly on their own right away, the mom swoops down under them, spreads her wings, and catches them. She then carries them to safety. Eventually, these young eagles mature and learn to fly.

So God is telling them to remember what he did for them. They were baby eagles, and he protected them. He carried them. He fought for them. He protected them from the Egyptian armies who wanted to kill them. And now he was teaching them how to fly. So, the idea of God's grace is foundational, not just in the New Testament but also in the Old Testament.

God, of course, calls us to obey and do things for him. There's no disputing that. But everything he calls us to do is always put in the light of what he has done for us first. His grace allows us to serve him not out of obligation but out of gratitude, not serving with any sense of entitlement, and not by thinking that somehow

we can earn the favor of God's love. The core of the Christian life is not what we do for God.

The core of the Christian life is what God has done for us. Everything good that happens for God's kingdom today happens because God first loved us and reached out to us. So we celebrate that every Sunday together.

Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites." Exodus 19:5-6

So God is saying, "Here is your part." They are to obey him and keep his covenant. What is a covenant? It's an agreement. God promises blessing if Israel obeys the covenant, which would include the law of God, soon to be revealed in chapter 20. The covenant also includes a sacrifice. Something living must be sacrificed. Something living of value must be sacrificed in order to ratify the covenant. And the covenant also requires obedience. So, God chose Israel for his covenant. Israel didn't earn any special keep my covenant. He gives them three ways they will be blessed.

God's Treasured Possession

The first way is that out of all the nations on earth, Israel will be God's treasured possession. The idea is that the king owns everything, and out of everything he owns, Israel is the most valuable to him. To the two million people at the foot of Mount Sinai, God is saying that Israel has a special place in his plan for all nations. If they obey, they will be his special treasure to him.

Kingdom of Priest

Then, he calls them the kingdom of priests. Someone has defined what a priest does. 'A priest announces God and summons the people to God.' I like that definition. What priests are called to do is serve God, recognizing that they are appointed into a sacred role to obey and pursue holiness. But also to recognize that they are appointed to another sacred role, and that is to be of service and useful to those around them who are in need. The covenant that God established with Israel through Moses was intended to point people of other nations to God and make Israel the light of the world to serve the world.

A Holy Nation

This was a holy nation, and they were called to operate differently from the other nations around them. Their

view of important things like power, money, life, and morality now needs to come from God's perspective. The word holy in Hebrew means there's a weightiness and heaviness to this call of being different from the Canaanite cities and their pagan sacrifices. This is different from the Egyptians, who built their temples as they were trying to reach up to their gods.

It's just a little one-off here. In Jesus Christ, God came down to find us. We didn't build a pyramid to try to reach up to God. I love Peter's words as he makes this connection between what's said here in Exodus 19 and what he writes in his letter. He says that because of Jesus, we are:

But 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. 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. 1 Peter 2:9-10.

So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the Lord had commanded him to speak. The people all responded together, "We will do everything the Lord has said." So Moses brought their answer back to the Lord. Exodus 19:7-8

So Moses told them of all the blessings if they obeyed. Israel thought it sounded great. I don't doubt that they wanted to obey. I don't doubt that they thought they could obey, but they didn't obey. They put other gods before Yahweh. They didn't bring God's light to other nations, and in just a few short months, at the foot of Mount Sinai, while Moses was up communing with God on the top of the mountain, they formed a golden calf and began to dance around it and proclaim that it was the golden calf that brought them out of Egypt and to the foot of Mount Sinai.

I'll go ahead and state the obvious here. If we want to meet with God, we need to prepare ourselves and prepare our hearts to be willing to obey and be willing to follow. Isn't it strange that a little nation, even in modern terms today, geographically probably about the size of New Jersey, remains at the center of world history 3,500 years later after this event here? One little nation is the focus of whatever is in our news. Because there are wars, there are rumors of wars, there are protests, there are crackdowns.

Today, Israel is in a shooting war with no end in sight, and throughout history, this little nation and

ultimately through Jesus, the King of Israel, the world got an understanding of who God is and how he deals with his creation, with mankind. It's hard to explain without the scriptures how a country can be so loved by some nations and so hated by other nations.

The Lord said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, [The language is the idea is this cloud is denser than anything you've ever seen before.] so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you." Then Moses told the Lord what the people had said. Exodus 19:9

We're seeing here that there's a barrier between God and man. It takes different forms for God's awesome power. His majesty, his holiness would be terrifying to see, and we would not be able to survive being in the presence of some someone, something so awesome. God wants to make sure that people understand that they need a mediator. They need Moses, who was God's choice to be the mediator.

And now, in the next few verses, it's going to blow their minds. He lays out intentional ways for us to prepare to meet with God. There is intentional preparation that we need to strongly consider here.

And the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. Have them wash their clothes and be ready by the third day, because on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. Exodus 19:10-11

Consecrate means to have them set apart. They come with their heart set on God and, as an outward symbol of that, wash themselves and wash their clothes to demonstrate their heart's preparation.

Put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, 'Be careful that you do not approach the mountain or touch the foot of it. Whoever touches the mountain is to be put to death. They are to be stoned or shot with arrows; not a hand is to be laid on them. No person or animal shall be permitted to live.' Only when the ram's horn sounds a long blast may they approach the mountain." Exodus 19:12-13

Think through this in terms of your life and your relationship with God. How do you approach God? Is it possible that some of us might approach God too casually? Is it possible that we're not doing any type of preparation to meet God? Verse 12 says limits. It means they put a fence around the base of the

mountain, some barrier or boundary so they couldn't touch the mountain.

Why? Because the mountain was so holy because God was there. In fact, if we jump forward to Exodus 33, God tells Moses that no one can see his face and live. Literally, if they saw him, his glory would kill them. So look at the consequences here of crossing God's boundary—stoned or shot down by an arrow. Approach reverently. This is not a time to be frivolous because God is holy.

After Moses had gone down the mountain to the people, he consecrated them, and they washed their clothes. Then he said to the people, "Prepare yourselves for the third day. Abstain from sexual relations." Exodus 19:14-15

It's like fasting. Deny yourself normal pleasures for three days. This is a valuable lesson. How important is it for us to prepare ourselves to meet with God? As we started our service today, God is so pleased that we're here. There could be a dozen different things that you all could be doing this morning, yet you chose to come here. God drew you here so you could meet with him. Consider what we might be doing to prepare for our time to meet corporately like this. How do I settle my mind and pray, maybe on Saturday night or getting up a little early and planning, so it isn't as chaotic in terms of getting here and getting our families here?

I remember those days with young kids. Think through how you prepare. And then, when we meet with God in our devotional times, certainly, there's a level of casualness there. For me, there's the comfortable chair; for others, it might be the coffee. It may be a walk outside, but we need to keep a few things in mind as we prepare to meet God. This will please him.

We need a place, and your place probably isn't Mount Sinai. It may be your living room, a bedroom, or a study space; you need a space that is set apart for meeting God. What's your regular space? When is that time to meet? A good rule of thumb is when and where I can meet God 30 minutes a day. As believers, we draw our life from God. Jesus tells us in John that he's the vine, and we're the branches, and apart from him, Jesus warns, we can do nothing.

So in your devotional time with Jesus, maybe there's a prayer, something like: God, I want to obey you, and I'm not here to play games. I'm here to invest 30 minutes in listening to your voice. I want to hear from you. I want to hear what you're saying in your word. You are the most

important. You are the most urgent, and you are the most life-giving relationship I have in my life.

He would respond very favorably to that. Then there's scripture. When we meet with God, open our Bibles. Don't worry about finding some new, terrific, unknown insight. Practice truth, the truth that you hear over and over again, that he enlightens you and applies that truth to your marriage, parenting, career, words, work ethic, schoolwork, and to your relationship with your neighbors. As God wanted his children to hear his words, as we see in Exodus 19, he wants his children, us, to hear his words.

Another good way to meet with God is journaling, writing down your thoughts, your feelings, and your struggles. Journaling will help you remember what God said, and it's private. It's only for you. Don't share your journal with other people. It's between you and God. It's a very sacred space as you process, confess, repent, and open your heart to what he's saying to you. Hopefully, the Holy Spirit is directing you about what is important that you need to add to your life or to take away from your life in order to prepare to meet God.

Next, he goes into an attitude of reverence. There's something about these next verses that confronts the place in our minds and hearts to rethink what reverence may look like in our lives.

On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the Lord descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. As the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him. Exodus 19:16-19

In scripture, trumpet blasts would announce the coming of God and summon the people to God, in this case, to the foot of Mount Sinai. Fire, heat, smoke, earthquaking, trumpet blasts growing louder and louder. Moses is speaking, and God is answering. I'm wondering if, at this point, Moses is speaking and saying, "Please stop, Lord. The people are terrified. I'm terrified."

At parties or groups, sometimes we ask questions as an icebreaker, such as, if you could go back to a time in history and witness something that went on in history, what would that be? I'm looking at this, and I can't think of anything more I'd rather see than something like this. To see two million people quaking before the power and presence of God descending from the top of Mount Sinai.

The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up and the Lord said to him, "Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the Lord and many of them perish. Even the priests, who approach the Lord, must consecrate themselves, or the Lord will break out against them." Exodus 19:20-22

Some of us may have had very profound spiritual experiences, and what a beautiful thing it would be to sit around and talk about the Lord moving in our lives in profound ways. I look at them at Mount Sinai, and I say, "Man, if I was there, I saw that fire, I smelled that smoke, I felt the thunder and the earthquake and heard those trumpets from heaven, I would never, ever sin again."

How'd that go for Israel? When God revealed himself in this amazing way, it impressed them. It frightened them, but it didn't transform them. In the old covenant, Moses was their mediator. And our final point this morning is we meet with God today through our mediator. Let's finish the last couple of verses.

Moses said to the Lord, "The people cannot come up Mount Sinai because you yourself warned us, 'Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.'" The Lord replied, "Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the Lord, or he will break out against them." So Moses went down to the people and told them. Exodus 19:23-25

In the Old Testament, the children of Israel met with God through their mediator, Moses. In the New Testament, we meet God through our mediator, Jesus Christ. We talk about a personal relationship with God. I talk about it. Pastors here talk about it. And I can understand the fear that some of us might have when we hear that. Like the Israelites, you might think, "What? You want me to go to the foot of Mount Sinai? I am a sinner." And I understand that feeling.

But the good news is we don't live by the old covenant any longer.

I am so excited to tell you about the new covenant. Let me start with what is written in the New Testament Book of Hebrews. I hope this will encourage you this morning.

You have not come to a mountain that can be touched, and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom, and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them because they could not bear what was commanded: "If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death." The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, "I am trembling with fear." But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. Hebrews 12:18-24

The blood of Abel might throw us some of us. Abel was murdered unjustly. He was killed, and his blood cried out from the grave for vengeance. But the blood of Jesus, who was also murdered, is better because Jesus' sacrifice of blood calls out not for vengeance but for mercy for sinners.

Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful and worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, for our "God is a consuming fire." Hebrews 12:28-29

Hebrews 12 explains the difference between the Old Covenant and the New Covenant. It explains the difference between Moses and Jesus. It explains the difference between life under the law and life under grace. The Old Covenant comes from Mount Sinai. The New Covenant comes from Mount Zion, which is simply a poetic term for the name of the City of Jerusalem. And Hebrews 12 tells us that we come to the foot of that different mountain.

The law came down on Sinai. Jesus Christ came down on Zion. Jesus Christ gave his life for you and me. There cannot be a covenant without a sacrifice, and the value of a covenant is determined by the size of the sacrifice. The old covenant was about an ongoing

ritual of animal sacrifices. The new covenant is about one sacrifice, once and for all: Jesus, the Lamb of God, sacrificed for our sins. Sinai speaks of fear and death, and Zion speaks of love and forgiveness. Sinai is out in the wilderness. Zion is the city of the living God.

At Sinai, only Moses could ascend and meet with God. At Zion, all of us can approach the throne of God boldly and find grace and mercy in our time of need. At Sinai, guilty people cower in fear. At Zion, guilty people are made righteous, and they are clothed in Christ's righteousness through faith, through the death of Christ, and the belief that sinners are made righteous through the sacrifice of Jesus, who is the only righteous one.

Sinai is powerful; don't get me wrong, it is a powerful revelation of God, but Zion is a greater revelation because the revelation is the person and the work of Jesus, the God-man in the flesh. The people were summoned to a boundary, but at Zion, they were summoned to him, and there were no boundaries. We're invited to his holy presence. We're invited into God's holy presence through the righteousness of Christ, not our own. At Sinai, the people were summoned out of an encampment. What we know in the gospel of Jesus Christ is that we weren't summoned from an encampment. We were summoned from the grave. We came out of the grave into a new life with Christ.

God does reveal himself perfectly on the third day. Jesus revealed himself on that third day through his resurrection, and his resurrection brings not just awe and wonder but also transforming power to bring new life to us. At Sinai, God was veiled by the thickest cloud. At Zion, there was once a veil in the temple that separated us from a holy God. But upon Christ's death on the cross, that veil was torn in two, and there was no restriction, no hindrance to coming into the presence of God anymore.

The old covenant failed because Israel failed. The new covenant succeeded because Jesus did what Israel couldn't do. Jesus is the light of the world. Jesus became our priest. Jesus is the king of kings who rules his holy nation, his church. Jesus accomplished what Israel couldn't accomplish.

For those of you who think about your relationship with God and wonder if you are performance-based

in your relationship with God. I used to focus on law to orientate myself to God. It's time for you to come to Zion and put your trust in Christ and his righteousness, not in your own. There is so much good news here. So much to gain when we meet with God and have been given the gift of the new covenant.

I hope the Holy Spirit has grabbed your attention in some way, challenging you to an action step to meet with God. It is a privilege and a blessing to meet with God. And I just want to encourage you to make a decision to meet with him.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.

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