

14. Encountering the Almighty

9/10/2006

All to my shame, the reason for my attendance to the church was not pure when I was a little kid in Seoul, South Korea. The neighborhood Christian church was giving away cup cakes for the Sunday school kids. So I went there.

After I became a college student, I dated one girl who was a member of an Assembly of God church. To get extra brownie points from her, I attended there until we broke up.

In other words, I had no concept of true reason for attending church service like many people in America. Some go to church because it is a religious thing to do on Sunday mornings. Some do it because it is what their spouses want. Others do it, because they are in a tight corner and thinking that if they go to church, God would give them special favors. But still many people come to church to worship God with the right mindset.

This morning we are going to not only learn from the Lord what kind mindset we should have before we attend Sunday morning services and Midweek Bible Studies, but also how we should prepare ourselves in our own personal encounter with God Almighty.

A. AT THE MOUNT OF GOD

Exodus 19:1-2 In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day, they came to the Wilderness of Sinai. 2 For they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the Wilderness of Sinai, and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain.

Just as God had promised Moses, way back before the exodus from Egypt, Moses and the Israelites would now worship the Lord together at Mount Sinai where he met God for the first time at the Burning Bush. They camped there for the next eleven months.

B. GOD'S PLAN FOR ISRAEL

Exodus 19:3-6 And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, "Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: 4 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. 6 And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."

Can you see how tender the words of the Lord are? Eagles spread their wings underneath their eaglets to catch them as they learn to fly. In using this image, God says He safely carried and delivered His weak-minded Israel people out of Egypt and through the wilderness.

God originally intended for Israel to be a special treasure unto Him. He wanted them to be a people with a unique place in God's perfect plan, a people of great value and concern to God.

Apostle Paul longed for Christians to know how great a treasure they were to God.

Ephesians 1:18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints

God intended for Israel to be a holy nation, a nation and people set apart from the rest of the world, the particular possession of God, fit for His purposes. As God's people, we must be set apart, thinking and doing differently than others in this world. Apart from knowing and doing God's word, God's destiny for Israel would never be fulfilled.

C. A WAY TOO QUICK PROMISE THAT WOULDN'T LAST

Exodus 19:7-8 So Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before them all these words which the Lord commanded him. 8 Then all the people answered together and said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do." So Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord.

The Israel people may have been sincere, but God knew that their hearts were prone to do evil. It wouldn't be long before Israel would turn to the idolatry.

Just like these Israelites who promised to the Lord that they would follow Him a way too quick, I found that many people quickly promise that they would do what the Lord wants. In a short while, they break the promise, then I ask them the reason. They come up with a wide range of flimsy excuses from "The devil made me to do it," to "I couldn't help it." God is not interested in our lip service, but our actions that bring the results.

D. PREPARING FOR GOD'S PRESENCE

Exodus 19:9-15 And the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and believe you forever." So Moses told the words of the people to the Lord. 10 Then the Lord said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their clothes. 11 And let them be ready for the third day. For on the third day the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12 You shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. 13 Not a hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or shot with an arrow; whether man or beast, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds long, they shall come near the mountain." 14 So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and sanctified the people, and they washed their clothes. 15 And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not come near your wives."

We today are accustomed to having soap and water readily available, and extra clothes hanging in our closets, but people in Bible days didn't enjoy such luxuries. They couldn't take showers daily, and only the wealthy had stores of extra garments. That's why bathing and changing clothes often marked a new beginning in the Bible.

If there is anything basic to human nature, it is that we need boundaries. God showed Israel that obedience is more important than what they say or what they want. We don't doubt that some cocky Israelites felt like going beyond the boundaries set by God, but they were to submit their desires to obedience.

Because of His presence, that place had become holy, and God's holiness would consume the people with sins. Out of protection for His people, God made sure that Moses and the people realized how these boundaries cannot be violated.

The rest of the Scriptures do not teach that there is any inherent uncleanness in sexual relations between husband and wife. But in this situation, God wanted the people to demonstrate their desire for purity by putting on clean clothes and restraining the flesh.

E. ENCOUNTERING THE ALMIGHTY

Exodus 19:16-19 Then it came to pass on the third day, in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain; and the sound of the trumpet was very loud, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. 17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 Now Mount Sinai was completely in smoke, because the Lord descended upon it in fire. Its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. 19 And when the blast of the trumpet sounded long and became louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him by voice.

Moses led the people right up to the barrier at the very foot of Mount Sinai, where they could see, smell, hear and virtually taste the fire which engulfed the mountain – as well as feel the earth shake under their feet when the whole mountain quaked greatly.

Can you imagine how these Israelites would feel in the presence of God at the foot of Mount Sinai? It would be more than standing right in front of an active volcano without lava running down to our feet.

Exodus 19:20-25 Then the Lord came down upon Mount Sinai, on the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. 21 And the Lord said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to gaze at the Lord, and many of them perish. 22 Also let the priests who come near the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out against them." 23 But Moses said to the Lord, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai; for You warned us, saying, 'Set bounds around the mountain and consecrate it.'" 24 Then the Lord said to him, "Away! Get down and then come up, you and Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest He break out against them." 25 So Moses went down to the people and spoke to them.

"The Lord came down" – what a beautiful picture of the Lord's condescending grace, seen in its ultimate form in God coming down to become a man in Jesus Christ.

I don't know if you have noticed that this is the third time Moses went up to the top of Mount Sinai. Now God is telling him to go down again. It is no wonder why Moses was kinda cranky to God. But God straightens him out quickly.

Those who through rebellion, curiosity, or raw daring presumed to go up on the mountain would perish. The glory, holiness and greatness of God is not to be subjected to scientific inquiry or a way to prove one's misguided courage.

Exodus 19 gives a powerful picture of the awesome fear each Israelite must have felt at Mount Sinai. It is easy to think that this would inspire them to a holy lifestyle for the rest of their lives. Yet, not forty days from this, the whole nation will be practicing an orgy around a golden calf, praising it as the god that brought them out of Egypt.

Awe in God is one thing, submission to God's will is another and it is every Christian's responsibility. Israel had plenty of awe, but they had very little submission to God's will.

F. MOUNT ZION, NOT MOUNT SINAI

Under the New Covenant through Jesus we come to a different mountain, that our salvation and relationship with God is centered at Mount Zion, not Mount Sinai.

Hebrews 12:18-24 For you have not come to the mountain that may be touched and that burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, 19 and the sound of a trumpet and the voice of words, so that those who heard it begged that the word should not be spoken to them anymore. 20 (For they could not endure what was commanded: "And if so much as a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned or shot with an arrow." 21 And so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, "I am exceedingly afraid and trembling.") 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are registered in heaven, to God the Judge of all, to the spirits of just men made perfect, 24 to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling that speaks better things than that of Abel.

- Sinai speaks of fear and terror, but Zion speaks of love and forgiveness.
- Sinai is in a dry desert, but Zion is the city of the Living God.
- Sinai, with all its fear and power is earthly; but the Mount Zion we come to is heavenly and spiritual.
- At Sinai, only Moses could come and meet God; at Zion, there is a general assembly.
- Sinai had guilty men in fear, but Zion has just men made perfect.
- At Sinai, Moses is the mediator, but at Zion, Jesus the mediator.
- Sinai put forth an Old covenant, ratified by the blood of animals; Zion has a New Covenant, ratified by the blood of God's precious Son Jesus.
- Sinai was all about barriers and exclusion; Zion is all about invitation.
- Sinai is all about the Law, Zion is all about grace.

Therefore, we shouldn't come to Zion as if we were coming to Sinai. We must put away our hesitation and get bold in coming to God.

G. APPLICATIONS

Nevertheless there is much for us to learn at Mount Sinai. We learn of God's holy requirements and what we have to do before we can come to Him in our daily lives.

- 1) We must receive God's word daily as our guidance.**
- 2) We must be set apart from the worldly things.**
- 3) We must be cleansed by His forgiveness through our prayer.**
- 4) We must come to God in His term, not ours.**

This coming Thursday or next Sunday, before you come to the church service, stop and take time to be right with the Lord. Then come to the service with an expectancy to hear from God. The Bible guarantees that you will.