

Exodus 19

Prepare to Meet Your God

As you can well imagine, this is an extremely difficult time for me, and for our family. And I have to admit, at first I thought, "Lord get me out of here! Just get me out of here. I can't present your word right now."

That's how I feel. But how we feel and what God wants us to do can be two very different things.

Thirteen years ago my dad asked me to preach my mother's funeral. At the time I thought "No way." But I did.

Three years ago as I sat in the funeral director's office at the same funeral home the funeral director read me my dad's written request that I preach his funeral.

Once again I thought, "I can't do this." But I did.

And the reason I did both times was because I had to stop and ask myself "How real is God to me? Is the Bible really sufficient for me? Are God's promises enough to see me through?" And as I weighed those questions out, I answered each one with a definitive "Yes!"

And my reasoning went this way, "If God isn't enough for me in the time of some trouble here on planet Earth, then I'm just kidding myself if I think I can trust Him for eternity."

If I can't minister to other people, what's that say about my relationship with God? How am I going to say to any body else whose going through trouble, "Let's read the Bible and pray," if I can't say God's my present help in time of trouble?

So this morning I want us to look at our difficulties in light of the reality of God's truth.

Wednesday night, as the elders met to pray and discuss Ben's resignation we decided on the letter and the announcement today. One of our kind of practical questions was, where would Jim read this letter in the service?

As we were brainstorming, someone said, "Let's read it at the end so the congregation won't be so distracted from the message that they won't be able to concentrate on God's Word."

The more we thought about that the more we came realize that it needed to be the other way around. We didn't need to drop this announcement on you at the end of the service and then say, "And all God's people said, 'amen.'"

We quickly realized that the announcement needed to come before the message. That we all needed to be brought back to God as our source of strength and wisdom.

Four months ago we started a journey through the OT book of Exodus. This has been a challenging study to me personally.

What we've seen over and over again is the reality of God's faithfulness to His people. God made great promises to the Hebrews. At times they probably felt like He had abandoned them, but He never did.

God never abandons His people. God never makes promises that He doesn't keep. God never says one thing and do another.

Today we've come to a unique chapter, **Exodus 19 page 67**

Exodus 19 takes place 3 months after the Hebrews left Egypt. They were held there as slaves for Pharaoh's building projects. We know that the ancient Egyptians loved to design and build stuff. They had elaborate cities, they built pyramids, they built the Sphinx.

It's believed to have taken 100,000 laborers about 20 years to build the mammoth Khufu pyramid, using an estimated 2.3 million blocks.

The Hebrews were free labor for the Egyptians for 400 years.

During that time the people cried out to God. They didn't know it, but God was carefully laying the foundations for the fulfillment of His plan.

The Israelites would become a great people. They would have the land we call Israel today. And all the necessary preparation of people and cultures was being worked out by Jehovah God.

Finally the time came and God used Moses to lead the now 1 million or so Hebrews out of Egypt. He used plagues, miracles, opening the Red Sea, brining water from a rock, providing bread from heaven.

All that was so these people might have an unshakable confidence that He is the Lord and besides Him there is no other.

For three months God has led them around the desert until they come to a very significant place. The place is Mt. Sinai.

Mt. Sinai, or Mt. Horeb is the place where God spoke to Moses from the burning bush. It's the place where God said, "Moses, I'm choosing you to fulfill my plan."

It's the place where God told Moses to take off his sandals because it was holy ground.

Mt. Sinai is the place where God will give His people the 10 commandments. But there's something really important that has to happen before God gives Israel His laws. That's what chapter 19 is about. Chapter 19 is about preparing to meet God.

I don't know why you come to church. It might be for the music. If it is you really got a surprise today, didn't you?

The truth is you can get great music on WRBS or you can buy some great CDs at the Christian Book store. You don't need to come here to get good music.

Maybe you come here for the sermon. Hey, you can flip through your radio dial most anytime during the day or night and catch a great sermon. You can listen on line to any number of really great expositors of God's Word.

There's no shortage of tapes and videos you can pick up. You don't even have to get up early on Sunday. You don't even have to brush your teeth or comb your hair. You can just stretch out in your Lazy Boy and listen to good, solid, encouraging sermons by a variety of speakers.

I believe the real reason we come to church is to meet God. To meet, and then worship God. Not that He's not omnipresent and He's not with us everywhere, but there's a unique sense of meeting Him corporately here.

How do you prepare to meet God? Have you ever thought about that? Do you just filter in here Sunday morning never giving a thought to preparation, or is there something we should think through before the service ever starts?

Let's see what God tells His people to do in our passage today and see what we can learn about getting ready to meet God.

There's really three levels of preparation in this chapter. The first is in the spiritual realm. It involves grabbing a hold of an understanding of Who it is we're worshipping.

Read vs 3-4

God has a bit of a reminder He wants Moses to give to the people. God says, "I made a clear distinction between you and the Egyptians. I bore you on eagle's wings to myself."

In the Book of Deuteronomy Moses expands on this "eagle" imagery: *"As an eagle stirs up its nest, Hovers over its young, Spreading out its wings, taking them up, Carrying them on its wings, So the LORD alone led them..."* (Deuteronomy 32:11).

While there were times when God seemed to the Israelites to have abandoned His people, in reality, God was like the mother eagle. The mother eagle has to stir up the nest and force her babies to use their wings. God had to force the Israelites to "try their wings."

When Israel thought she was about to perish, God swooped under her and lifted her up.

What a beautiful picture of the loving and compassionate care of God for His people.

Did you ever notice how many times we get into these unbelievable situations. We don't see the way out. We wonder about the character of God.

He's just kind of "pushing us to the edge a little bit saying, use your wings. I'll be with you. And it's like He lets us get right up to the edge. In fact He lets us start to topple over the edge and suddenly God lifts us up.

Read vs 5-6

Now remember, God had already made an unconditional covenant with Israel through Abraham. God said back in Gen 12 *"I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."*

God chose Israel. But now He calls for a response on their part. He says You'll be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation if you do what I'm about to tell you."

Conditional blessings can be attached to unconditional covenants.

In Psalm 89 God promises that a descendant of King David will be the eternal king. Jesus Christ came as a direct descendant of King David through both his mother and his father. He's the eternal king.

But now watch this, God says of David, *"If his sons forsake My law And do not walk in My judgments, If they break My statutes And do not keep My commandments, Then I will punish their transgression with the rod, And their iniquity with stripes."*

Nevertheless My lovingkindness I will not utterly take from him, Nor allow My faithfulness to fail. My covenant I will not break, Nor alter the word that has gone out of My lips."

Here in Exodus 19 you have the same sort of thing. God is saying I made a promise to you that I will never break, but, honor me and you'll experience all kinds of blessing.

We don't live under the Old Covenant, the Law of Moses, we live under what's called "The New Covenant." That's why we don't offer sacrifices and have a priestly class, and keep religious feasts.

But we still worship the same God. Years ago Sandy & I directed a ministry to a Youth Detention Home in Pompano Beach, FL. We'd take teams from FBC to give a message about how to be forgiven by God and then we'd spend time one-on-one with the kids.

One day this new chaplain who was over the county youth detention program came to me to tell me we needed to change our message. He said, "We don't want you to come in here and talk about heaven and hell and scare the kids."

There were kids in there charged with murder. Some of them scared me.

But he said, “We don’t want to talk about the God of the OT. That’s a God of judgment and wrath. We want to talk about the God of the NT. We want to talk about the God of love.”

I don’t know what Bible he was reading, but in mine the God of the OT demonstrates His love over and over, and the God of the NT is very explicit when it comes to wrath. In fact, Jesus talked more about hell than He ever did of heaven.

The truth is, there isn’t an OT God and a NT God. There’s one God. And the Bible says He’s *the same yesterday, today, and forever*.

That same God says to us, I love you. Nothing’s going to change that. But if you obey you’ll experience my blessings.

Here’s where we need to begin: **Read vs 16-18**

What is all this? What it is is a reflection of God’s holy nature. We’ll never understand God’s love if we don’t understand His awesome holiness.

God wanted to make sure the Hebrews understood. Before the Israelites could meet with God, they needed to have that appropriate sense of reverence, gratitude and awe.

Listen: We don’t meet with God as equals! He’s our superior. In the NT book of Hebrews we are told, *Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire.*

AW Tozer writes, *“No one can know the true grace of God who has not first known the fear of God.” It seems to me that we have lost some of that reverential fear. Sometimes we are overly and inappropriately familiar with the Almighty. Sometimes we relate to God as the great Gift-giver in the sky. And when we do this, we diminish who He is. Before we meet with God we must remind ourselves that we are about to meet with GOD.”*

* He’s Holy, we are sinners in need of mercy and grace

* He’s all-powerful, we are weak

* He’s wise and sees all, we think we are wise but we can only see the present

* He’s the Creator, we are the created

* He's the standard by which we define and measure our lives, He's not defined by us.

Then there's step 2 of Spiritual preparation. It's to make sure that we have the right relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. When we come to salvation through Christ, His sacrifice covers our sinfulness. We no longer need to be afraid of God's wrath. It has been poured out on Christ in our place.

But, we still must respond to God's offer of grace. You and I must make a choice: either we will depend on our goodness or His. We must choose whether to rely on ourselves or to rely on Jesus. If we want to meet with God, we must come to Him in the way that He has prescribed. And that way is through the cross of Christ.

Even as believers it is important to remember, every time we come before Him, that we are here by His grace and by His invitation. He is truly an awesome God of incredible power and might.

He loves you. He invites you to be part of His family. When we lose sight of who He is, worship becomes an empty, meaningless and even disrespectful ritual or it becomes a superficial exercise in emotionalism and instead of moving toward Him, we are actually moving away from Him.

So there's spiritual preparation.

The second level of preparation is a preparation of the will.

Read 7-8

Think about what just happened here. God says "Moses, tell my people to keep my covenant," and they all say, "*All that the LORD has spoken we will do.*"

He hasn't told them what they have to do and they're already on board with it.

The 10 commandments don't come until the next chapter and the rest of the over 600 commands follow that.

It's like, God wasn't going to speak unless the people were prepared to listen. These Jews needed to realize that God has a right to command His people.

We need to realize that God has a right to command His people. God has a right to

command us. Until we're willing to obey Him we're not ready to meet Him in worship.

God wants people who say, "I'll do whatever it is that You want me to do, just tell me." Not people who say, "God you tell me what you want me to do and then I'll decide whether I like what You have to say or not."

Remember, God always related to Israel by grace. He chose them to be His own not because of their size, their power, or their goodness. He chose them out of His mercy and love. God told Abraham (Genesis 12) that he would bless him and his descendents. In Genesis 15 God swore "by himself" that He would do what He had promised for Abraham. This was an unconditional promise. God would be gracious to Abraham and his descendents.

Now at Sinai it looks like God is changing the rules. He's going to hit these Hebrews with a boatload of commandments and laws. But He really isn't changing. God is still committed to Israel. God WILL bless Israel. But, enjoying God's blessing is contingent on the obedience of the people. God will bless . . . but the people have to obey to enjoy that blessing.

Do you have that willing spirit? Are you OK with whatever God brings your way or do you pick and choose?

"Alright God, I like this happy part of my life. I'll acknowledge you there. I'll go to church. I'll sing the songs. I'll do the "Christian thing."

"But God don't ever lead me into a time of tragedy and heartache or I'll just forget about You. I'll reject you. I'll become disillusioned with You."

We've probably all met those people. They used to be walking with God. Then their life, their marriage, their family, their health, whatever, collapsed and so did their faith.

You want to meet God? You want to really meet God? Then make sure your will is willing. Make sure He's the Lord, not your "genie in the magic lamp" you just call on to grant your wishes.

When these people said, "Alright Moses we're ready for whatever God has up His sleeve," they were showing that they had implicit trust in the character of God.

That's what it took for them to commit themselves to obedience without knowing what it is that they would obey.

Do you have implicit trust in the character of God? Do you have absolute, complete, unqualified, wholehearted, genuine, real trust in God's character?

That's a question only we can answer for ourselves. But if you don't have it, or If I don't have it, then we need to step back and ask ourselves why that is. What is it that would cause us to question the integrity of our God?

I'll guarantee you it won't be because of the Bible. It'll be because of our experience. And that's where we have to begin to let the Bible take over our lives.

It's a learning, growing process, but without it you can forget about really knowing and walking with God.

*So there's spiritual preparation.
There's a preparation of the will.
And thirdly there's physical preparation.*

Read vs 10-15

What's this all about? Wash you clothes, don't touch the mountain, and don't have sexual relations with your spouse.

As we've seen all through Exodus, God used physical reminders and illustrations of spiritual truths. Here God was getting some important points across.

There were no laundromats in the desert of Sinai. For the people to make that special effort to wash their clothes was a sacrifice of time, precious soap, and precious water.

At first we might say, I thought God was only interested in the heart. Doesn't the Bible say, *Man looks on the outward appearance, God looks on the heart?*

What message was God trying to communicate to the people by making sure that they washed their clothes? I think He was doing two things.

1.) He was telling the people that if they wanted to meet Him, they had to be

willing to get clean. They had to see the symbol of washing in light of preparing for the presence of God.

The outer cleansing was to illustrate the need for a clean heart.

2.) I think that He was illustrating the fact that the law He was getting ready to hand down to them could only clean them on the outside. It had no ability itself to clean them on the inside. Even if by some miracle they were able to keep the whole law from that day on, all that would have been affected was their outward actions. They were going to need something else beyond the law to clean them on the inside. (Rev 1:5) . . . Jesus Christ . . . loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood. We have to be clean in order to meet God's requirements, but we can't get clean through our own efforts or by keeping the law.

How about telling everybody they couldn't even touch the mountain? What's with the death penalty for not keeping the boundaries?

God was making it clear. He set the boundaries. Our job is to obey. Our job is not to see how close we can get with out crossing the line.

God was about to give a whole series of boundaries for life. He wanted the Hebrews to get off on the right foot. God is infinitely holy. He sets the boundaries. We don't always have to understand why He sets the boundaries. We just have to obey. And if we don't God takes it real seriously.

What about the sexual relations? Was God saying sex is sinful? I mean, remember, God created the sexual relationship between a husband and wife. Sexual intimacy in marriage is a good thing. It's a God ordained thing.

The reason God prohibited it in this instance wasn't because it was wrong. It was because He wanted the people's full attention on Him and on what He was getting ready to tell them. He didn't even want something that He Himself had created to sidetrack them.

God expects our undivided devotion and attention too. If you are like me, sometimes when I go to God in prayer, that is when 101 different things that I have to do that day pop into my head.

You ever have that happen?

All of those things will wait. My focus at that moment is supposed to be on the Creator of the universe. Wow.

Right now, as you sit here there are scores of different things that are going on in your life - responsibilities, plans, pains, heartaches, fears. Can I ask you to do something? Put all that aside for a moment, and concentrate on God. Concentrate on God and what He wants from you right now.

Give Him all of who you are, and He will take care of all those things in His time and in His way. Just think about and act on what you know God is telling you right now this morning. Don't let the fears and worries of tomorrow stop you from doing what you know you need to do today in your relationship with God.

Before you walk into this room on a Sunday morning you can physically prepare. Go to bed at a decent hour so you can concentrate. Pray before you get here and before the service starts. You can leave home early enough so your not sliding into the parking lot, pushing the kids out of the mini van, and racing to get here before we're 10 minutes into the service.

Prepare to meet your God. And stand in amazement that God wants to meet you.

Doesn't that make just go, "Pfff, wow!" God wants to meet you.

He's made the way through His Son. He wants to be real in your life. He wants to be preeminent in your life.

Hebrews 12 brings us into focus:

For you have not come to the mountain that...burned with fire, and to blackness and darkness and tempest, 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.

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, to an innumerable company of angels, 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, to Jesus the Mediator of the new covenant