

## Mt. Sinai - Exodus 19-20 - June 13, 2021

### I. Introduction.

A. Jeremiah 9:23 reads: **Let not the wise boast of their wisdom or the strong boast of their strength or the rich boast of their riches but let the one who boasts boast about this: that they understand and know me, that I am the Lord, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,**” declares the Lord.

B. One of the key things to grasp from this passage is that we are not simply to know about God, but that we are to know him. The Hebrew word used for “know” is “yada,” which implies an intimacy and depth of connection. Indeed, this is the same word used in Genesis 4:1 where we read, “Adam knew Eve and she conceived.”

1. This isn’t simply knowing about. It’s not facts and information. To know in this way implies a significant connection.

C. One of the things you realize when you compare the Jews and the Greeks is that they had very different approaches to knowing.

1. The Greeks were philosophers. For a Greek what mattered was the life of the mind. It was all about ideas. Actually applying them was optional. Which is how we often operate today. You can have tenured ethics professors who do not live ethical lives. You can have people teach finance who do not apply the principles they advocate.

2. This would not happen for a Hebrew. In the Jewish world, knowledge must be embodied. Lived out. The goal isn’t to be smart it’s to be wise. And wisdom implied right living. In the Jewish approach, you might have a high IQ and degrees on top of degrees, but if you are not applying and incarnating what you knew, you were not called smart, you were called a fool.

3. Meanwhile the Greeks had this group of public intellectuals – called sophists (which is from the Greek word for wisdom) who could be hired to argue any side of a case. They were the original spin-doctors. The Sophists were very smart and tricky, but the Jews would never argue that a sophist was wise.

D. I share this to say, it is easier to know about God than it is to know Him. We can memorize lists of His attributes, we can have an understanding of who He is without actually knowing Him, trusting Him, resting in his love and goodness. In many ways it’s easier to know about than it is to know, but knowing is the goal.

E. Our focus in this series is not information but relationship. It’s not about head knowledge but a heart knowledge – it’s about personal transformation.

1. Which doesn’t mean the head doesn’t matter. Don’t go there. Making time for knowing and listening, for contemplation and reflection does not mean we can be any less focused on making sure our thoughts conform with the Word of God.

F. But we want to meet with – to experience – God. To draw into His presence. To rest in Him. To know – not just to know about –the Lord God Almighty.

## Mt. Sinai - Exodus 19-20 - June 13, 2021

- II. The text for today - as last week – is from the Book of Exodus. Which is a favorite of mine.
- A. Great stories and rich theology – the call of Moses, his dustup with Pharaoh, the 10 plagues, the Passover, their escape through the Red Sea, Mt. Sinai – it’s a great book.
- B. People who start in Genesis with a commitment to read through the Bible – this year I am going to do it! - generally make it through Exodus before they stop. The story pulls them along. They crash in Leviticus – so they do not make it much further than Exodus. But Exodus is great.
- C. Last week Anson walked us through Moses’s encounter with God in the burning bush. That was Exodus 3. Today, we remain in Exodus - and with Moses.
- D. We actually begin with the second half. The first half of Exodus is all about the people getting out of Egypt. The second half is all about the people entering into a covenant relationship with God. It’s about picking back up with the deal God had offered to Abraham.<sup>1</sup>
- E. I am going to be reading now from Exodus 19. The people are out of Egypt and this is how the deal is being worked out. They are now out of Egypt, back in Israel and gathered at the base of Mount Sinai.
- III. Exodus 19:3. V3 **And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, “This is what you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I carried you on eagles’ wings, and brought you to Myself. Now then, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My own possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.”**
- IV. V. 7: **So Moses came and called the elders of the people, and set before them all these words which the Lord had commanded him. Then all the people answered together and said, “All that the Lord has spoken we will do!” And Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord. Then the Lord said to Moses, “Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also trust in you forever.”** (The cloud is a consistent theme here. God often seems to manifest himself in the clouds, Jesus will return with the clouds – there is a sense in which the clouds are associated with his glory).

## Mt. Sinai - Exodus 19-20 - June 13, 2021

- V. **Then Moses told the words of the people to the Lord. V. 10: The Lord also said to Moses, “Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and have them wash their garments; and have them ready for the third day, for on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. But you shall set boundaries for the people all around, saying, ‘Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall certainly be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall certainly be stoned or shot through; whether animal or person, the violator shall not live.’ When the ram’s horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.” So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. He also said to the people, “Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman.”** (Consecrate yourself. Take this seriously. Clean your clothes. Do not have sex. Focus).
- VI. **So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud over the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled.** This is a consistent theme. When God shows up, people are overwhelmed. We see this with Isaiah in Isaiah 6. “Woe is me.” We see people be overwhelmed with angels show up. The goodness and purity – which we often make light of. Goody-goody is seen as naïve. No. It is powerful and pure and it immediately highlights that we are not.
- VII. Some of this we pick up by comparison.
- A. Throughout the Bible, when angels show up, people quake in fear. They are too good. And yet, the angels that are in the presence of God, cover their face – they hide in a sense – because God is too good for them.
- B. In Isaiah 24:23 we are told that the “moon is confounded and the sun ashamed when the Lord of Hosts reigns.
- VIII. **And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.**
- IX. V18: **Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire;** Interestingly, as we move through the Bible, the fire gets bigger. In Exodus 3 – what we looked at last week – a bush was on fire. Now it’s an entire mountain. If we jumped ahead to 2 Kings we’d see Elijah calling down fire from Heaven.

## Mt. Sinai - Exodus 19-20 - June 13, 2021

- X. Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because the Lord descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the entire mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him with thunder. Then the Lord came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. Then the Lord spoke to Moses: “Go down, warn the people, so that they do not break through to the Lord to stare, and many of them perish. Also have the priests who approach the Lord consecrate themselves, or else the Lord will break out against them.”** This is something we see throughout the Old Testament sacrificial system. The priests – who are coming before God for the people – must have someone advocate for them first. There needs to be a sacrifice. An innocent life must be offered.
- XI. And Moses said to the Lord, “The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us, saying, ‘Set boundaries around the mountain and consecrate it.’” Then the Lord said to him, “Go down and come up again, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, or He will break out against them.” So Moses went down to the people and told them.**
- XII. At this point, the people will still want the deal, and still act as though they are going to keep it. As I have noted, Moses will return to the mountain, but the next time he comes down they will have made a golden calf.
- XIII. Look, there is a lot here. For our purposes, let me be sure you see a couple things.
- A. First, after calling Moses to the top of the mountain, God tells him that He will manifest his presence to the people in “a dense cloud, so that the people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.”
1. I already noted that there are other references to clouds being linked to God. And that in the New Testament, we will be told that Jesus will return with the clouds. There is a sense in which clouds suggest God’s glory.
  2. There is also speculation that they served other purposes as well. Later we’ll see that He will lead them with clouds by day which will provide shade in the desert.
- B. But here what it highlights is that there are limits to our ability to see God, which would overwhelm them. And we pick up more on this with the voice of God, which everyone heard and did not like. It scares them. They say to Moses – you meet with him and tell us what he says.<sup>2</sup>
- C. And as we read further in Exodus, we will see additional guidelines and restrictions about when and how they could approach him.

**Mt. Sinai - Exodus 19-20 - June 13, 2021**

1. These do not all apply to use because we come in the name of Jesus. Everything changes with Jesus. But they help us understand who He is and how this works.
- D. And what we come away with is a sense that God was very willing to meet with them, but this was not about satisfying their idle curiosity. And this was on His terms not theirs.<sup>3</sup> And that they were to have a sense of holy fear. That God was not – IS NOT - someone to be taken casually. That his holiness and goodness are overwhelming. That His glory and power are overwhelming. We are to approach Him as King.
- E. We need a healthy fear of God.
- XIV. There is more to be said, but not today. As you know, I have tried – I suspect somewhat unsuccessfully – to understand and explain what it means to fear God.
- A. Some say it only means respect. They highlight the idea that Jesus invites us to call God, Abba (which translates as Dad).
- B. That is all true, but there needs to be the fear.
- XV. I think C.S. Lewis does a great job when he casts Jesus as a lion in the Chronicles of Narnia. In some settings, Aslan is soft and safe. But in others He is a roaring lion that overwhelms and terrifies.
- XVI. So let me end my devotion by reading a brief section from *The Silver Chair* – one of *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Lucy – a young girl – is meeting Aslan, the Christ figure. She is very, very thirsty, and has raced to a stream, only to find her way blocked by this lion. I pick up the conversation in the middle.

## Mt. Sinai - Exodus 19-20 - June 13, 2021

A. "Are you not thirsty?" said the Lion.

"I am dying of thirst," said Jill.

"Then drink," said the Lion.

"May I — could I — would you mind going away while I do?" said Jill.

The Lion answered this only by a look and a very low growl. And as Jill gazed at its motionless bulk, she realized that she might as well have asked the whole mountain to move aside for her convenience.

The delicious rippling noise of the stream was driving her nearly frantic.

"Will you promise not to — do anything to me, if I do come?" said Jill.

"I make no promise," said the Lion.

Jill was so thirsty now that, without noticing it, she had come a step nearer.

"Do you eat girls?" she said.

"I have swallowed up girls and boys, women and men, kings and emperors, cities and realms," said the Lion. It didn't say this as if it were boasting, nor as if it were sorry, nor as if it were angry. It just said it.

"I daren't come and drink," said Jill.

"Then you will die of thirst," said the Lion.

"Oh dear!" said Jill, coming another step nearer. "I suppose I must go and look for another stream then."

"There is no other stream," said the Lion."

XVII. There is no other stream. What we are thirsty for is Christ. Not information about Christ, but Christ himself. He is both overwhelming holy, with a white hot goodness that keeps the proud away, and he is gracious and welcoming to all who approach in meekness, awe and — dare I say — even a little fear.

XVIII. Campus Pastors Setup for the Lord's Supper

A. The Sinai event offers helpful perspective in two ways as we move into Communion and take time to experience God's presence among us here today. First, there are boundaries around God's presence he will not allow us to cross, both to protect us from being overwhelmed by his glory and to prevent us from indulging our selfish desires for more glory than is fitting. Second, a fear of God should not drive us away from his presence. It should drive us away from sin. As was the case with the burning bush, this experience of God's presence foreshadowed even greater experiences of his presence after the coming of Jesus.

## Mt. Sinai - Exodus 19-20 - June 13, 2021

<sup>1</sup> God is offering to turn the Jews into His people – a kingdom of priests who will be the people through whom the whole world is redeemed. What happens first – which is where I am going to read – is that He asks if this is what they want. And they say, “Yes.” He then calls Moses up and gives him the basic terms of the deal. That is – the Ten Commandments. The people will read these and say, “Great. We are ready to sign.” God will then call Moses up to develop the deal more. There will be seven chapters about the way to build the tabernacle – so God can come down and dwell in their midst (like the old days in the Garden of Eden). While God and Moses are working out the details, the people rebel. They grow impatient and demand that Aaron makes them a golden calf – which violates the first two commandments of the deal they just signed. God will say, “deals off.” Moses will intercede. There is a section in which God will talk about – and demonstrate his mercy while punishing sin. The book ends with the Tabernacle being built, but Moses cannot enter it. The people have become Pharaoh – their own worst enemy. The Book will stop there and we will need to get to Leviticus – which sets out the rules for the Levites (the priests) about how to approach God. We obviously read all of this from the other side of the cross – Jesus the ultimate sacrifice. And we see the goal of knowing and trusting and resting in this amazing God.

<sup>2</sup> By the way, there will be more about this in the next chapter - Exodus 20. Vs. 18 reads: “When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, “Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die. Moses said to the people, “Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning.”

<sup>3</sup> In his commentary on this, Matthew Henry argues that when it relates to the Lord we must not covet to know more than God would have us know; and he has allowed us as much as is good for us.” And then this money line, “a desire of forbidden knowledge was the ruin of our first parents.” Matthew Henry, 357.