



# HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Meeting God on the Mountain

November 9, 2025

Exodus 19:16-25

Clint Pressley

*<sup>16</sup> On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. <sup>17</sup> Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. <sup>18</sup> Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. <sup>19</sup> And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. <sup>20</sup> 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.*

*<sup>21</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to look and many of them perish. <sup>22</sup> Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them." <sup>23</sup> And Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you yourself warned us, saying, 'Set limits around the mountain and consecrate it.'" <sup>24</sup> And the LORD said to him, "Go down, and come up bringing 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." <sup>25</sup> So Moses went down to the people and told them.*

*(Pastor Prays)*

Yesterday I had the privilege of doing a wedding for a great young couple here at Hickory Grove. In fact, I stood right here with that young couple, and it was a tremendous wedding. Just a great Christian couple, great families, but going up to the wedding day, there is a whole lot of preparation to get ready for that day. In fact, you have the wedding day on Saturday, typically, so you have the rehearsal on Friday. As the pastor, I go to the rehearsal, although I'm the only

one there that actually doesn't need to rehearse. I've done this before, y'all hadn't. A lot of preparation goes into the wedding day. That groom yesterday was anticipating the wedding, and he was really nervous. I said, son, just get behind me, just follow me around and I'll tell you where to go. And a couple of times he ran into the back of me. He was anticipating and nervous about the day.

Now, I thought about that wedding as I was preparing for this message, and somehow, in a higher, holier, more profound way, there should be some sense of anticipation when you are getting ready to meet with God's people and God on a Sunday. I think in the American church, maybe in our church, there tends to be too much of a casual attitude in our hearts. We are coming to worship the living God. The people in the text were going to meet with God, and that day they would receive the law of God. We know it as the Ten Commandments. We'll get to that next week. But in order for them to meet with God, those people had to be prepared. In the same way, although we are not living under the law of God and being afraid, as you see in this text, we do have the grace of God. Nonetheless, we should be prepared to worship because this God that we believe in, the God of the Bible, must be worshipped rightly. In fact, I'll say it like this. Here comes the theme of the sermon, if you like to write things down.

### **A Holy God Must Be Rightly Worshipped**

And because you are a sinner, if you are without Christ, you cannot rightly worship God. Let's go to the text and go through it. If you're a guest, what we normally do is we walk through the passage, and I'll point out a couple of things, and then we will come back and make some application for our lives. Join me there in verse 16. Let's do the study first. Verse 16 says, on the morning of the third day. Okay, let's pause there. You see that phrase on the morning of the third day. Throughout the Old Testament, you'll find several important things happened on the third day. In fact, Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, when he's giving the gospel, he says that Jesus was raised from the dead on the third day according to the scripture. He's talking about the Old Testament. We don't know what passage he was talking about. It could have been this one. The third day was important to the people in the passage because they were going to receive the law. For you and I, the third day is a Sunday. Jesus was crucified on a Friday, he lay on Saturday, still keeping the Sabbath, and on a Sunday, God raised Him from the dead, and there is all of our hope and victory in the resurrection of Jesus on the third day.

On this third day, something else was happening. On the morning of the third day, there are thunders. Look at the intensity; how it picks up, thunders, and lightnings. There's a thick cloud, and inside of that cloud you hear a very loud trumpet so that all of the people in the camp trembled. In verse 17, Moses goes and gets the people and marches them out. See in verse 17, *Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.* Let's go back to the mountain now. Look at all of the descriptors in verse 18. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke. Why? Because the Lord had descended on it in fire. So, I can't come up with enough intensity to display what this might have been like. Think of a nuclear reaction that has come down, burning everything in sight. Verse 18-19 says, *<sup>18</sup> Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. <sup>19</sup> And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder.* In verse 19, Moses is trying to talk over all this and while he's talking, God is answering in thunder. Do you see the intensity here? They were getting ready to get the Law of God. This makes us ask the question that you've got to answer. Has God spoken? And if he has, what is your response? The people are experiencing now this theophany. God has shown up to them.

In verse 20, the text says that the Lord came down on Mount Sinai, and we talk about the word condescending. If somebody says he's pretty condescending, we don't mean that as a compliment to someone. We're saying that the guy's arrogant and acts like he's better than all of us. When we say God condescends, what we mean is that yes, he is better, and he comes down to us. But here the text says, *<sup>20</sup> 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.* He called Moses up to the meeting point. There would be a point where God meets with man. We see that as Calvary. Jesus died on the cross in the place of sinners. God raised him from the dead, and we can know God is at that meeting point, which is the cross.

Now here comes the warning. *<sup>21</sup> And the LORD said to Moses, "Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to look and many of them perish.* They can't see me. If they come here and see, they're going to die. Even the priests, in verse 22, *<sup>22</sup> Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them."*

In verse 23, Moses brings back up what God has said to him. Look, you told us we can't come up, you set limits. In verse 24, you have the Lord saying to him, go down and he gives the third warning. Remember, three times is intensity. In Isaiah chapter 6, when he sees into heaven, he hears the angels singing, holy, holy, holy. Three times, its intensity. There are three warnings here to remind you that if you look and if the people see God, they will die. And then in verse 25, Moses went down and told them.

Okay, so the problem we have with this passage is, what do we do with it? How do I apply it? How does that help you with what you walk through? Last week at our Mallard Creek campus, a young couple that goes to church there, her brother, who is married and has children, was tragically killed in a car accident. And the question is why? How does this help her? We have a brother here in our church at the Harris Campus who just lost his mother last week. How does this help you? Well, I'd like to offer up a couple of ways. I have three points this morning, except I have about 15 sub-points to that first point. That's where I hide them back in that one point. So, what I want to do is look at three big sections here. One is, we take a look at God. We've got to look at God. This is all about God. So that'll be the first point. The second one is, then we look at the people's response. That's us. How do we respond? So, we look at us. And then the third point is where we look at the gospel. That's in Hebrews chapter 12. That writer is talking about this passage. So, God, man, and the gospel is where we're going to be. Let's start with the first one, number one.

### **We need to think about God**

You see that in verses 16, 17, and 18. We have a lot of things that we think about. We're thinking about what we've got to do this week. We're thinking about jobs. Some of you are moving. Some of you are looking at houses. Some of you are thinking about your grocery list. Some of you are wondering when the sermon will be over. We are all thinking. One of the things I want to invite you to do for the next 20 minutes or so is to think about God; that he is majestic and transcendent and holy and dangerous. Hebrews says that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. There are very few passages in the entire Bible that present for us a picture of God like this one. This one right here helps us set our minds to think about God in helpful and sanctifying ways. Look at the descriptions. Let's go through it again. In verse 16, you see the thunder and lightning. You see, the thick cloud has descended. The trumpet is

being blown. In verse 18, that mountain is wrapped in smoke. There is fire like a furnace. There's an earthquake. Verse 19 says, the trumpet gets louder and louder. Then God speaks in thunder.

You know, I finished preparing this message last night, and when I was done with it, I went out on the screened-in porch. It's nice. So I'm sitting on the porch with the dogs out there with me, and I don't know where it came from, but this thunderstorm rolls in, and lightning hits hard, and a thunderclap, and both of those dogs jumped up and ran inside. The thunder scared them to death. There is this sense in this passage, the fear is known as a storm theophany. You know what a theophany is? It is when God shows up and reveals Himself in the Old Testament. Here is a storm theophany. You might remember in the book of Job, there is Job, and he's minding his own business, and he becomes a display of suffering faith. Everything is taken away from him. He has a couple of good friends that come and sit with him. They're doing pretty good as long as they don't say anything. Then they open up their mouths, and they're terrible, terrible friends. We learn a lesson here. When you're with somebody that's suffering, it's okay to not say anything. Just stand there. Bildad, Eliphaz, and Zophar, when they speak, they say terrible things. They're not any good. They're terrible friends. Eliphaz rolls in. He's a young guy who thinks he knows what to say. He's arrogant, too, so he talks. It's no good. And then finally, Job stands up and says, you guys are terrible friends. I wish I had better friends. I also wish God were here so I could tell Him how terrible it is with what he's done to me. And here comes the storm theophany. In Job chapter 38, it opens like this, **38** *Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said: <sup>2</sup> "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? <sup>3</sup> Dress for action like a man.* I don't want to hear the Lord say that to me ever.

What we have here in this text, in Exodus 19, is the unspeakable, awesome, all-consuming majesty of God. His utter uniqueness, that he is a great King before whom everyone must fall on their faces. That if God were the sun, then we are snowflakes and burn up in his presence. He is a blowtorch, and you are papier-mache. In other words, he is dangerous. Why is this here? Why are we reading this? Is this here to scare us? We don't like to think about God like that. We prefer to think about God as a father, really not so much as a father but as a grandfather. Fathers are still intent on discipline. They're raising their children. They're really good at saying no. Grandfathers? They are no good at it. When we think about a grandfather, we go up to him

and speak, and he's going to let us do what we want to do. He's going to give us a \$20 bill and a Werther's original and send us on our way. That's what we think about God sometimes. He's kind of like that. But when you open up this passage, that is not at all what God is like.

What do we see here? There are at least five things that you can see. Here come the subpoints. There are at least five things about God that you can see. Let me just point them out real quickly. Here's the first one, number one. You see his power. Look at his power in verse 16 and verse 18. There's the thunder and the lightning and the earthquake. Why is that important? How does that apply to me? Well, if he has power, then he has power to save anyone. If you are here this morning without Christ, you can be saved. If you will turn from your sin and put your faith in Christ, he will save you. Look at his perfect life. Look at his death on the cross. Look at the resurrection and believe. He has great power to save and restore. If you have a prodigal, you have a child or you have a friend that's walked away from the faith, don't stop praying for them. He has the power to get them back. He has the power to provide. He has the power to give you what you need for the future. If you've walked through abuse and you don't ever feel like you're going to be right again, this passage is for you. He has the power to heal and restore and to make it so that you can flourish. He has the power to keep you. Call on his power. One of the things we notice about God is his power.

Let me give you something else. The second thing is his mystery. You see it in verse 16, the thick cloud, and then down in verse 18, the smoke. So, God was there, but it was in a cloud. It can't be fully seen. You couldn't see through the fog or through the smoke. This is a reminder that there is a mystery in how God works. There are some things about God that we can't see. There are some things about God's plan for your life that you can't know. This is what makes us trust. This is what drives us to faith. You ask the question, why? And sometimes the answer is going to be, it's not any of your business. There's only one God, and you're not it. Or your question might be, when or how long? Or maybe here's the argument you've heard offered up, and hopefully you're not offering this, but the argument would be, if God is so good, why would he let this happen? And you go to this passage right here, and there, what you see is not only the power of God, but there is a mystery around God and how he works and how he is working out his all-wise plan.

There's power and mystery. Let me give you a third thing you'll notice about God here. It's in verse 18. It is his holiness. Verse 18 says that the Lord descended in fire. Not with fire, in fire. He has descended with the strength of a nuclear holocaust to burn up whatever is around. What does the psalmist in Psalm 24 say? He asks a couple of rhetorical questions and says it like this. *Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?* And the answer is, he who has clean hands and a pure heart, which means none of us.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says, only the pure in heart may see God. Do you know who has a pure heart? Nobody. The writer of Hebrews says in Hebrews chapter 12, <sup>14</sup>*Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.* We do not have holiness in and of ourselves. That's why we go to Jesus, and we see his holy, perfect life, his atoning death on the cross, his resurrection, and we say, Jesus did that for me. Why? Because at Mount Sinai, he is a consuming fire. At Calvary, he is a consuming fire. On the day of Pentecost, the Spirit fell in a consuming fire. And when he comes again to get his church, he will be a consuming fire. So, you see his power, you see his mystery, you see his holiness.

Let me give you a fourth thing you'll notice when you see all of these attributes. It is the word sovereignty. Sovereignty. Do you love the doctrine of God's sovereignty? That he is in absolute control. Brothers and sisters, if you can ever learn that doctrine, and that doctrine is not a hard doctrine, it is a soft pillow. Spurgeon rightly said, you put your head on the pillow, you lay down and sleep at night on the pillow of the doctrine of God's sovereignty. Where do I get it? The text says that in verse 16, that there is a loud trumpet blast. Verse 19 says that it's getting louder, getting louder and louder. What is that? It's the announcement. That trumpet is there, saying, somebody's coming. And it's getting louder and louder, and it's a King on the way. Or maybe, back up a little, the trumpet blast is a charge, and here he comes in the chariots of fire, riding into victory. Whatever that is, what do we do with it? What good is it for you? What is our response? There are a couple of ways to respond. One, we need to stand in awe of God. We are not in awe enough of God. We need to go somewhere that amazes you. Stand at the ocean and look and be in awe. Go to the Grand Canyon, look over in that hole, and think, God did that. I rode up to West Virginia this past week and rode over the New River Gorge. God did that. Stand in awe of God. Not only that, I don't know how to say this rightly, but I'm going to try. There ought to be signs of reverence in your life, that you revere. I think we could probably dial back

the casual attitude of worship so that you understand that you enter into the presence of God by the shed blood of Jesus. That you were purchased, and you've been brought to a body of believers on a Sunday to lift up the name of Christ, and it is a sacred day for you. There are signs of reverence.

I think that there's a third thing, the response would be the word repentance, repentance. So let me explain repentance. When you hear the gospel, that God created you in His image. The image of God in you has been covered in your sin. It can't be seen anymore. And that is an offense to God. And yet God in his goodness has given us Jesus. Adam sinned and lost it all for us. Jesus comes as the second Adam. This time, the man kept every conceivable law of God in the right attitude. He did it perfectly, and he earned righteousness. And that righteousness is there for any person that will believe Jesus. But it's not just His life. It's His death on the cross. At the cross, there is the God-man dying in the place of sinners. So, the wrath of God, you're not going to experience the wrath if you are in Jesus. The wrath of God is poured out on Christ, and if you trust in Jesus, his life and death, then you get his righteousness. He takes your sin and pays for it at the cross. So, you repent of your sin. You say, I turn away from my sin, I want Christ, and you believe there is a one-time repentance that goes on, and you will be saved by God when you repent. But once you've done that, there is a proper response for a Christian; it is a daily repentance. Daily repentance. Daily saying, yes, that is sin in my life. I hate that sin in my life. I want to turn away from that sin. Daily repentance.

Another way that we respond to this, what we've learned about God, is worship. We actually show up and genuinely worship God with the body of believers, brothers and sisters, in Christ. That's why Christians sing. When you read the book of Revelation, and you open up to Revelation chapter 5, and you see inside of heaven, what you see there is the elders singing.

You know what else this passage does? I'll just give you this one last thing. This passage gives you hope. You have hope. What you're going through, this light momentary affliction, is preparing for you an eternal weight of glory that's beyond compare. It gives you hope. Second Peter says, it gives us hope that one day Jesus Christ will return, and when he does, he receives his church to himself and makes everything right. All of that to say, we need to think more about God. Okay, that's one scene. Now take the camera and turn it over to the people. Look at the people. That's you there. That's your second point, number two.

## **We need to think about ourselves**

I want to be careful how I say that because if this is all you hear, you will walk out, and it sounds selfish. You think about yourself. But what I mean is, think about your sin. Do you see them in verse 16? Look at them. Look at them in verse 16. The text says that the people trembled. Why did they tremble when God descended? The people trembled because they were unworthy sinners. I mean, the warning they get is, don't come near. Don't even try to look. You see it in verses 12 and 13, in verses 21 and 22, and in verse 25. Three times they're warned. Why? Because they're unworthy even to talk about his majesty. They are to speak his name with apprehension. What I'm trying to say is that there is a great gulf between God and us. It is an uncrossable chasm. We can't get there. And this great gulf should bring about conviction of sin. And when I say conviction of sin, here's what I don't mean. I don't mean for you to say I'm convicted, I'm not perfect. Nobody's perfect, I'm not perfect. That's not conviction of sin. That's not an admission of guilt. That's an admission that the rest of us are just as bad as you. I'm not perfect. Or you might say, you know, I know I need to do better. Or your confession might be something like this, look, I make mistakes. I don't mean that. That's not repentance. What I mean is a deep and profound impression that there is something wrong with me, and I can't fix it. I know I'm supposed to be one way, but I'm not like that. I'm not the way I should be. I need the help of another. I need the God-man. I need His perfect life in place of my sinful life; I need His death on the cross to take the wrath of God away. My sins, your sins are not just mistakes. Your sins flowed up to heaven and are a stench in the nostrils of God. My sins are extremely offensive to God. In fact, in Colossians, Paul says, on account of these, the wrath of God is coming.

Kevin DeYoung is a Presbyterian pastor here in town. He's a friend of mine. Kevin DeYoung is right when he says, our question should not be, why do bad things happen to me? The question should be, why does God ever allow anything good to ever happen to us? When we think about God, that's the first point. We think about God, and then we think about ourselves. If you're not careful, it puts you in despair. Thinking about God, thinking about yourself adds to and creates despair. But we don't end there. Our invitation is not to Mount Sinai. We must go to the book of Hebrews. In Hebrews 12, the author of Hebrews is writing a commentary on chapter 19, right here. And here's what he's going to do. He's going to compare Mount Sinai, where the law is

given, to Mount Zion, where Christ saves. And that brings me to my third point. This is where I'm going to close, number three.

### **We need to think about the Gospel**

It's Hebrews 12, starting in verse 18. What does he say? Look at the comparison. Here's what he says. You haven't come to what might be touched. You haven't come to a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest. You've not come to the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that there would be no further messages spoken. You've not come to a place like they had. They couldn't endure it. The order was given that even if a beast touches the mountain, it'll be stoned. And indeed, it was so terrifying that Moses said, I tremble with fear. That's not what you've come to. You Christians, you've come to Mount Zion. You've come to the city of the living God. You've come to the heavenly Jerusalem. You've come to innumerable angels and festal gatherings. You've come to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven. You've come to God, who is the judge of all, and the spirits of the righteous made perfect. Best of all, you've come to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to his sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel. You see, the invitation that God gives us is not an invitation to come to Mount Sinai, where everyone cowed in fear. The invitation is to come to Mount Zion to receive the grace of God found in the shed blood of Jesus. Come and be received. Come and be welcomed. Come and be loved by God in Jesus. Claim the life of Jesus for your life. Claim the death of Jesus on the cross in your place. Claim his resurrection from the dead as your victory. Claim the eternal love of God as your hope. There is joy. There is forgiveness. There is restoration. There is eternal life at Mount Zion with Jesus. So when you think about God this week, think about his holiness. When you think about yourself this week, think about your sinfulness. But don't stop there. Rejoice this week in the gospel and the saving power of God found in Jesus. With that in mind this morning, let's go to the Lord in a moment of prayer and commitment.

*(Pastor prays)*