

EXODUS 20:18-26 - FEARING AND WORSHIPPING GOD

It was the year 1992, and a national, nominated party candidate for the office of the president of the United States of America, indisputably the most powerful political office in the world in our time, was being interviewed by a group of adolescents on MTV. And the fateful question came, "What kind of underwear do you use? Boxers or briefs?" We don't know much about reverence and awe of human authority in our days. We are familiar and even flippant with the greatest of human authority in our own time. And that makes it difficult for us to appreciate the reverence and awe with which we ought to approach the living God. And you see this in many ways, especially in the setting of school and the relationships between students and teachers and administrators. People who are supposed to be under authority seem to be very cavalier.

The second grade teacher had just spoken sharply to a little boy and pulled him off another child that he was beating up. As she straightened him up and squeezed his shoulders tightly, he exclaimed to her, "Don't you touch me, lady, or my lawyer will sue you." Would you have ever said that to your 2nd grade teacher? This is not surprising today what kids will say to authorities. There is no respect.

The new graduate student walked into Dr. Robert Cave's office. Dr. Cave was a department chairman, and he was a respected professor at his institution. The first words of this graduate student, I'm not making this up, this happened recently, although the terminology used by this student is going to sound like he was right out of the late 60's, he said to Dr. Cave, "Yo, Bob. You know, dude, you're really going to have to help me with this schedule 'cause it's harshen my gig."

I can't imagine saying that to my teacher.

This is where our society is at today with the lack of respect for authority. There is no proper fear. No wonder that today there is a lack of the fear of God in the church. This is vital for people to understand, that they must be in awe of God.

The reason God came down and spoke to the ears and hearts of the people of Israel from His own mouth was that they would fear Him.

After we have finished the Ten Commandments, we see the people tremble at the very presence of God. The thundering and lightning and the trumpet blasts and the voice of God was too overwhelming for they had experienced a taste of the glory of God and they knew they fell short of that glory. They had a proper response in fearing God. When one fears God, they then can worship God. That is what we will see in our text today.

1. FEARING GOD

VV 18-21

The presence of the Lord brings fear and trembling. The Israelites were absolutely terrified. God's nearness can be a terrifying thing

for sinners.

A. TERROR

18

1. Glorious majesty of God—It had been designed by God to have such pomp with every word accented with thundering and lightning, much louder and brighter than usual. This would help one in learning to fear the Lord. God had just put on display, His great majesty. They were told earlier to not get too close and as God is in their presence they are actually fleeing. God met with them and they ran.
We desire to get close to God and that's good, but He wants us to recognize His holiness and not to presume upon Him and have a lack of reverence. Before, they had wanted to get close and gaze but now they were keeping their distance.
Israel got the message of God's holiness, glory, power, might, sovereignty, and transcendence. Reverence and awe must be at the top of our thoughts as we are in His presence.
2. Picture of judgment----One day, sinners without forgiveness will have to approach the throne and be called to account for their failure to meet the standard God had set. That would be frightful and terrible. This is what the Law does.
3. Grace and truth----John 1:17, The law given by Moses was meant to frighten men while the grace and truth brought by Christ would be welcome.
Heb 12:18—Light, liberty and joy is brought in the New Testament. Even when there is an awe, we know the great grace that is given us.

B. REQUEST

19

1. Mediation
The voice of the Lord makes the people to appeal to a mediator, that being Moses. They want him to stand in between them and God. They didn't want to hear God's voice anymore, but that Moses would be the speaker to them. They were begging that God would no longer speak, it was so frightful. This seems odd because they were God's people, but they just could not bear it. They had been terrified here, but they were not deterred from idolatry a little later on.
It's interesting to note that they complained at Moses and had doubted him, but now they know that he is God's mediator for them. Now they know they need a mediator, now more than ever.
2. Pledge of obedience
The people in Exodus 19 had already said that they would follow whatever God said. They were not changing that statement. They still want to follow God, but with Moses speaking in between.
3. Fear of death
They were saying they would die if God spoke to them. They knew they could not endure the voice without mediation of the holy exalted God. So they ask Moses to mediate for them, for the presence and voice of God would kill them. They sensed that they ought to be judged. Many today think they can just walk right into the presence of the Lord with their arrogant sin and demand everything from God. At least the Hebrews had a fear. They saw the holiness of God, their sin, and their need of a mediator.

1. Do not fear

Moses explained the design of God in His terror. The people of God should not be scared of Him. God's purposes are good. His visitation was not meant to cause dread.

Many times in biblical history, there were supernatural appearances made by angels or the Angel of the Lord. Every time that happened people would be fearful. They would then be told not to fear.

Luke 1:11-12, 29-30, Judges 6:22-23, Mark 16:5-6

2. Getting the right fear of God

Moses told them that they were not to be afraid because God had come to destroy them but to refine them. Moses was saying this experience should not make them afraid that God would destroy them but it should make them afraid of doing anything that is contrary to who He is and what He wants. They needed to be aware of the incredible power, glory and majesty of God ought to keep them from choosing to sin against Him. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with You to keep you from sinning.

Don't be afraid of God so you can fear Him. A paradox. Don't be afraid, God is giving you a taste of Himself so that this memory will stick with you to keep from sinning.

3. The healthy balance

There is a difference between being frightened and fearing God.

Heb 12:28-29, Rev 14:7, 19:5

A debilitating fear will give way to a healthy fear and it will result in faithfulness.

We are not to be afraid of God in that He will strike us dead if we do wrong, but that we should have a reverence of God's majesty, a dread of His displeasure, and an obedient regard to His sovereign rule over us. Stand in awe and sin not.—Ps 4:4

We are humble in ourselves because we know what we deserve, and we know we don't have a right in His presence.

But we also come to Him believingly because we know that the Lord is good. C.S. Lewis captures this so beautifully in his writings. Many of you are fans of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and know those passages in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* where he describes this so effectively. I'll just refer to two of them.

One is that famous scene where Lucy and Susan are talking with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver about Aslan, the lion. It goes like this: "Is - is he a man?" said Lucy. "Aslan a man!" said Mr. Beaver sternly. "Certainly not. I tell you, He is the King of the wood, and the son of the great Emperor-beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of the Beasts? Aslan is a lion - *the* lion, the great Lion." "Ooh!" said Susan, "I thought he was a man. Is he - quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion." "That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver; "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly." "Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy. "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you." "I'm longing to see him," said Peter, "even if I do feel frightened when it comes to the point." That's precisely how the fear of God is. He's great! He's the King. There's nothing safe about Him. But He's good." And you cannot help but be drawn near to Him.

Lewis goes on to say this: "People who have not been in Narnia sometimes think that a thing cannot be good and terrible at the same time. If the children had ever thought so, they were cured of it now. For when they tried to look at Aslan's face they just caught a glimpse of the golden mane and the great, royal, solemn, overwhelming eyes; and they found that they couldn't look at him and they went all trembly... But, "His voice was deep and rich and somehow took the fidgets out of them. They now felt glad and quiet.

Fearing God is that controlling sense of the majesty and holiness of God and the profound reverence that flows from it for Him. The fear of God is that joy-filled reverence and awe of the one true God which shakes us to the core of our being. And it brings forth a response of faith and love. and it didn't seem awkward to stand there and say nothing."

D. THE MEDIATOR'S APPROACH TO GOD 21

1. People stand back

The people continued to stand afar off, conscious of guilt and afraid of God's wrath. Fallen man cannot approach God without a mediator.

2. Moses draws near to God

Moses could not have done this if God had not called him. The people needed a mediator, one who would go for them before the presence of God. On the mountain, he would receive the "Book of the Covenant". This was an extended series of commands and instructions to be given to Moses. This makes up the rest of the book of Exodus..This describes Moses' role as a mediator of God's instructions to the people.

3. Mediator needs the Great Mediator

Moses, being a fallen member of the human race, needed a mediator too. His ability to do the work of a mediator was grounded in the mediation of a greater Mediator. That, ultimately of course, is Jesus Christ.

2. WORSHIPPING GOD VV 22-26

This is where God wanted the Israelites, worshipping Him. This was the whole goal of redemption. They were delivered to worship.

A. WORD-BASED 22

Exodus 20:1

Worship is to be saturated with God's Word. It is the central part of worship.

You have seen that I have spoken. That seems strange. Seen and spoken

Why would God say this? You would think that He would have said

You have heard what I have spoken.

God spoke but was not seen in any form. God did not come in a visible bodily form. He spoke in a cloud on Mt Sinai as He was in Heaven.

The spoken Word takes on great meaning here. Israel's worship is to be derived from the Word of God.

This is the one, true, transcendent God, who is to be worshipped through and by the Word of God.

Our worship today is focused on the Word. God has spoken, but we

do not see Him. We worship Him in spirit and truth. The Word

instructs us on who God is and what He does, while we are to conform

to it personally through the Holy Spirit.

B. NO IMAGES 23

Exodus 20:4-5

Worship is to go to the true God and there are to be no images.

This sums up the first two commandments. This prohibits the making of visible images of God, even if they represent Him.

Our worship is not to be associated with visible forms. God restricts such actions in human creativity in worship. This is why meeting places are to be plain. They can be nice looking buildings but there are to be no representations of God with all the elaborate, ceremonial man-made objects. We are to worship God by the Word.

C. SIMPLICITY OF MEETING WITH GOD 24-26

God authorized two types of altars, one of earth and another of uncut stone. It was not to be adorned. It doesn't matter what the altar looks like, it's what's on top of it. It is the sacrifice that matters. We are to offer ourselves up as living sacrifices.

When you do what I say, I will come to you. That is what it's all about.

God said he would be with us. What a foretaste of His glory.

The uncut stones would keep them from making idols out of them.

They were not to be like their pagan neighbors. The uncut stones would discourage them from making idols.

Why is nakedness mentioned in verse 26? The pagans had sexual rituals they practiced in their worship. Some cultures had their priests serving their gods in the nude.

Wherever God's people meet to worship Him, He will be with them and reward them.

If we obey, worship Him according to the Word, seek His face, God will meet with us.