

Preparing to Encounter God

6.13.2021

Message 17

Exodus 19:1–25 (CSB)

ISRAEL AT SINAI

19 In the third month from the very day the Israelites left the land of Egypt, they came to the Sinai Wilderness. ²They traveled from Rephidim, came to the Sinai Wilderness, and camped in the wilderness. Israel camped there in front of the mountain.

³Moses went up the mountain to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain: "This is what you must say to the house of Jacob and explain to the Israelites: ⁴'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now if you will carefully listen to me and keep my covenant, you will be my own possession out of all the peoples, although the whole earth is mine, ⁶and you will be my kingdom of priests and my holy nation.' These are the words that you are to say to the Israelites."

⁷After Moses came back, he summoned the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. ⁸Then all the people responded together, "We will do all that the LORD has spoken." So Moses brought the people's words back to the LORD.

⁹The LORD said to Moses, "I am going to come to you in a dense cloud, so that the people will hear when I speak with you and will always believe you." Moses reported the people's words to the LORD, ¹⁰and the LORD told Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. They must wash their clothes ¹¹and be prepared by the third day, for on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. ¹²Put boundaries for the people all around the mountain and say: Be careful that you don't go up on the mountain or touch its base. Anyone who touches the mountain must be put to death. ¹³No hand may touch him; instead he will be stoned or shot with arrows and not live, whether animal or human. When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they may go up the mountain."

¹⁴Then Moses came down from the mountain to the people and consecrated them, and they washed their clothes. ¹⁵He said to the people, "Be prepared by the third day. Do not have sexual relations with women."

¹⁶On the third day, when morning came, there was thunder and lightning, a thick cloud on the mountain, and a very loud blast from a ram's horn, so that all the people in the camp shuddered. ¹⁷Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. ¹⁸Mount Sinai was completely enveloped in smoke because the LORD came down on it in fire. Its smoke went up like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain shook violently. ¹⁹As the sound of the ram's horn grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him in the thunder.

²⁰The LORD came down on Mount Sinai at the top of the mountain. Then the LORD summoned Moses to the top of the mountain, and he went up. ²¹The LORD directed Moses, "Go down and warn the people not to break through to see the LORD; otherwise many of them will die. ²²Even the priests who come near the LORD must consecrate themselves, or the LORD will break out in anger against them."

²³Moses responded to the LORD, "The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, since you warned us: Put a boundary around the mountain and consecrate it." ²⁴And the LORD replied to him, "Go down and come back with Aaron. But the priests and the people must not break through to come up to the LORD, or he will break out in anger against them." ²⁵So Moses went down to the people and told them.

Introduction: Grace has led Israel to God's mountain.

A. All the miracles so far have been undeserved.

1. Israel wasn't perfect.
2. Israel wasn't naturally better than anyone else.
3. Israel wasn't full of faith either.
4. All of the good shown to Israel was due to God's Grace.

B. It is God's grace that leads His people to His presence.

1. We never come to God because we are worthy.

2. We come to God because He loves us and made access for us through the sacrifice of Jesus.

3. It is Jesus who made a way to the Father.

a. *I remind some of us today that you cannot earn your way to God.*

b. Relationships are not earned, they are received.

1. Grace and Holiness are two-sides of the same coin.

A. We are all prone to extremes.

1. We are all prone to live "out of balance".

a. This is why we cannot eat one or two Oreos at a time.

b. We are all prone to extremes

2. Some of us may about "Grace" and live like we have no responsibility at all.

3.. Others hear about "holiness" and forget that Grace is part of the equation.

4. Both extremes of hyper-grace and legalism miss the complex beauty of salvation.

a. Salvation without grace becomes religion.

b. Salvation without holiness becomes humanism.

B. **It was grace that led Israel to God's presence, and it was holiness that would keep them there.**

1. This is demonstrated in verse 5: "Now if you will carefully listen and keep my covenant, then..."

2. As we read our Bibles, words and sentence structure matter.

a. Notice this "If, then" construct.

b. If you will do this...then I will...

3. God speaks to His people often using this formula:

a. If my people pray, then I will hear from heaven.

b. If you follow my commands, then God will do.

4. This is covenant language: God is laying out an agreement, a contract, and the boundaries of a relationship.

a. This may sound wrong to us.

b. But God has always used boundaries with His interactions with humanity.

c. From the very beginning, God set boundaries upon Adam and Eve.

5. Today's passage describes how God set boundaries for Israel's great encounter with God.

6. Remember, that up until this point, they have experienced the power of God but not the presence of God.

7. They had not yet met Him.

2. God establishes guardrails for this Mountain experience.

A. It seems strange to us:

1. They had to wash their clothes.

2. Abstain from sex for 3 days.

3. They were to place boundaries around the base of the mountain.

4. Part of our struggle with these boundaries could be because we are accustomed to unlimited access.

a. In years pass, we only saw movie stars in the movies, but now you can follow them on social media and know what they ate for breakfast.

b. Used to the private lives were kept private, and only exposed by mistake. Not so today.

c. We often read our American culture into Scripture and say that Scripture is wrong.

a. Many say that it was wrong for God to place these boundaries.

b. We accuse God of being "unfair" in placing demands/holiness alongside Grace.

5. God was not wrong in establishing these boundaries.

a. These boundaries prepared Israel for an encounter with a holy God.

b. And failure to prepare and obey would not hurt God but us.

1. **Illus: In 2003, when I was in high school, I went to a trip to Washington DC and went to the Air and Space museum.**

2. There in the museum was a flight simulator.

a. And it only had one rule: take everything out of your pockets.

b. I thought that was a little extreme so I took my wallet out but left my change in my pocket.

c. But the people who designed this new something that I didn't: I did not know that it this simulator would roll 360 degrees and that when they meant "everything out of pockets" they meant everything.

3. I got inside with a friend of mine in the co-seat.

a. As this thing started, it would alternate between who was flying and who wasn't.

b. The simulator starts, and all of a sudden, we were not in control.

c. Before we knew it, we have this stupid thing in a barrel roll.

4. That is all fun and games until the change came out of our pockets.

a. Quickly, we hear the sound of the dead presidents on these coins zipping by our heads.

b. It was a lot like being in a clothes dryer.

c. It didn't take long for me to regret not following the boundaries.

d. The boundaries were not there to protect the machine, they were there to protect me.

B. The boundaries God established served as guardrails.

1. God knew what Israel didn't:

a. To encounter God in the wrong way would lead to death.

b. The priests Nadab and Abihu would die in Leviticus because they approached God in an unworthy manner.

2. Yes, God is gracious but also holy.

a. The God who calls out to us is not only loving and gracious but also holy.

b. *Grace does not give excuse for dishonor and disrespect.*

1. We live in a world that can't balance love and holiness.

2. We can't seem to understand that my love for you does not mean I approve of everything you.

3. God loves us, but does not affirm everything we do.

4. This is why God sent His only Son Jesus.

a. He demonstrated that God can simultaneously love us while not affirming what we say, do, or who we are becoming.

b. **If Love was synonymous with Affirmation, the Cross would have been unnecessary.**

c. It is possible for me to love someone without loving everything they do.

3. **The last half of Exodus provides guardrails for interacting with a holy God.**

a. God desired to have a relationship with Israel unlike any other relationship on Earth.

b. But even this relationship has certain boundaries and guardrails, what we call holy.

1. But we never do those things!

2. When I married Julie, because of my love for her, I agreed to specific boundaries that I would not cross in our relationship.

3. Those boundaries are for our health and benefit.

4. They are for our good.

c. God established the Law, Boundaries because He loved His people.

3. Boundaries were necessary because:

A. **Boundaries remind us we are inherently sinful.**

1. Scripture teaches we are all born in sin.

a. No one has to teach a child to steal, or rebel, or throw a fit.

b. Instead, we have to teach children NOT to do those things.

c. Sin is inherent within us.

- d. Sin comes naturally.
- 2. This is why we need God to draw us.
 - a. Without grace, we would never come to God.
 - b. Without God's forgiveness, we would never be able to enter His presence.
- 3. God's boundaries remind us that we ARE NOT GOD.

B. The boundaries remind us that God's standards are different from ours.

- 1. God demanded the people to consecrate themselves in preparation for this encounter.
 - a. This means that their natural condition was not good enough to experience God.
 - b. *God uses these instruction... "to teach his people about himself and who he is by telling them how they must prepare to meet him."*¹
- 2. Israel was to intentionally prepare for God by laying aside the dirt and uncleanness of the everyday.
 - a. The New Testament Book of Hebrews tells us to "lay aside the sin that so easily entangles" so that we may pursue God.
 - b. This reminds us that our ways are not the same as God's.
- 3. **Some of you may be saying:** But that is all so Old Testament: Surely God doesn't still have boundaries in place?
 - a. Even though we are not under the Law but under grace, God still has boundaries.

¹ Eugene Carpenter, *Exodus*, ed. H. Wayne House and William D. Barrick, vol. 2, Evangelical Exegetical Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012), 19.

1 Corinthians 6:9–10 (CSB)

⁹Don't you know that the unrighteous will not inherit God's kingdom? Do not be deceived: No sexually immoral people, idolaters, adulterers, or males who have sex with males,¹⁰ no thieves, greedy people, drunkards, verbally abusive people, or swindlers will inherit God's kingdom.

b. Even though you and I are not under the Law, God is still holy.

c. God's holiness demands the laying aside of sin while practicing confession and repentance.

C. Just as God established healthy boundaries for Israel in the Old Testament, there still exist today boundaries between man and God.

1. People who persist in sin cannot expect to inherit God's kingdom or stay in His presence.

2. Thankfully, Jesus has made a way into God's presence for those who repent of their sin and change.

a. But we have to confess and repent.

b. [1Jo 1:9 KJV] 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us [our] sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

c. Confession means for us to say the same thing about our sin that God has said.

d. Repentance means to turn away from sin and towards God.

4. The experience is worth the effort.

A. God told Moses to consecrate Israel:

1. On the third day, God would appear in a mighty way.

2. Anytime we see the phrase "third day", "nearly always it is used with a sense of rising anticipation."²

3. Moses had experience God on this Mountain before.

a. In Exodus 3, Moses met God when a burning bush caught His attention.

b. On that day, God said that the proof of God's promise would be that Moses would come back to this mountain.

c. It goes without saying that Moses is excited about encountering God again in this way.

B. But God makes him and Israel wait three days.

1. There is a rising anticipation.

2. What Moses doesn't yet know is this:

a. The God who met Moses in a burning bush a few months before would now meet Moses in a mountain of fire.

b. What awaited Moses was unlike any encounter that any man had ever experienced before.

C. The boundaries, the waiting, the consecration, and the journey were all worth the wait.

1. For us today, I can say that the boundaries, the waiting, the holiness and the difficulty of the journey will be worth it all when we see Jesus.

2. Israel waited to experience God from a distance: But someday, we will be caught up together with Jesus in the clouds and meet the Lord in the air.

3. The glory they experienced at a distance, we will experience up close and personal.

² John I. Durham, *Exodus*, vol. 3, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 1987), 264.

Close: God has made us an offer that Israel could only dream of.

A. You and I have an opportunity to be in relationship with God.

1. Israel had to experience Him from a distance.
2. But now, God has made it possible for the Holy Spirit to live in you.
3. God's grace has made it possible for you to come boldly before the throne of Grace.

B. But, if you would be honest with yourself, you would admit that you aren't living life by God's boundaries.

1. You have boundaries and standards, but they aren't the same as God's.
2. And today you are realizing that you've been living for yourself and not for God.

C. Pray for two groups today:

1. Maybe you find yourself far from God today.
 - a. But today is the day to confess your sin, repent, and be forgiven.
 - b. You want your future to be different and you want to give your life to Jesus.
 - c. If I'm talking to you, in just a moment would you join me on your left, my right so we can pray for you and walk you into that relationship.
2. Maybe you find yourself living by a set standards and boundaries that are yours but not God's.
 - a. You want that to change today.
 - b. You want today to be the day where you pursue God more than ever before.

3. In Just a moment, we are going to pray together and then if God is calling you to respond, would you come to the front today.