

Exodus pt. 41
Exodus 20:18 - 26

I. Introduction

- A. As we return to our study of the Book of Exodus a review is helpful. God's chosen people, Israel, had been enslaved in Egypt for hundreds of years. God hears their cries for deliverance and protects Moses from infanticide. Moses grows up in the Pharaoh's palace as part of the royal family. As an adult, he kills an Egyptian guard and is forced to flee into the wilderness. Years later, God appears to Moses in the burning bush and calls him to be a prophet and deliverer of the Hebrews. Moses and his brother, Aaron, return to Egypt and God begins a campaign of devastating plagues on Egypt. Pharaoh continues to harden his heart towards God and eventually he loses his own son in the tenth and final plague. God leads the Hebrews out of Egypt through the Red Sea and begins to provide for them in the wilderness. Finally, God leads them to Mount Sinai to enter into a covenant with them.
- B. 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 whole mountain quaked violently. When the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. 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. (Exodus 19:18 - 20)
- C. As God comes down onto Mount Sinai in a powerful display of His glory, He gives the Ten Commandments to the Nation of Israel. Our text today, picks up immediately after the commandments are given.
- D. "All the people perceived the thunder and the lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin. So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was. (Exodus 20:18 - 21)
- E. One of the challenges of preaching through the Old Testament is that it isn't always easy to determine how these things may apply to us today as Christians. So today I'd like to show you how this story in Exodus is really a foreshadowing of the New Covenant, in several ways.

II. The Giving of the Law and the Judgment

- A. We see in Exodus 19 and 20 that when God descends upon Mount Sinai it brings about lightning, thunder, fire, smoke, and an earthquake. It is also accompanied by the sound of trumpets getting louder and louder.
- B. The people have been instructed not to come close to Mount Sinai or touch it lest they die. Exodus 20:18 records the response of the people.
 - 1. All the people perceived the thunder and lightning flashes and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking; and when the people saw it, they trembled and stood at a distance. (Exodus 20:18)
 - 2. Why are the Hebrews so afraid?
 - a) God's Power and Glory are Terrifying

- (1) Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire. (Hebrews 12:28 - 29)
- b) God's Claim and Commandments are Total
- (1) "God had just given them his righteous requirements in the form of the Ten Commandments. They could see that God was demanding their total allegiance in every aspect of life. He required them to worship him alone and to love one another in everything they did and said. [...] Undoubtedly there were some things about [the Law] that they didn't yet understand: [...] But surely they understood that God was making an absolute claim on their worship, time, relationships, possessions, bodies, speech, and desires. [...] Back in chapter 19 they had promised they would do whatever God said, but as they found out what was included, they panicked. They were frightened by the total demand of God's law." (*Preaching the Word: Exodus*, pg. 638 - 639)
- C. We see a similar picture in the book of Revelation surrounding the events of God's ultimate victory and judgment.
1. After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven, and the first voice which I had heard, like the sound of a trumpet speaking with me, said, "Come up here, and I will show you what must take place after these things." Immediately I was in the Spirit; and behold, a throne was standing in heaven, and One sitting on the throne. And He who was sitting was like a jasper stone and a Sardis in appearance; and there was a rainbow around the throne, like an emerald in appearance. Around the throne were twenty-four thrones; and upon the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white garments, and golden crowns on their heads. Out from the throne come flashes of lightning and sounds and peals of thunder...(Revelation 4:1 - 5a)
 2. "If the giving of the law, while it was yet unbroken, was attended with such a display of awe-inspiring power, what will that day be when the Lord shall, with flaming fire, take vengeance on those who have willfully broken His law?" (Charles Spurgeon)
- D. Most people think they will go to heaven by being a good person. The problem with that is, it is God who decides who gets into heaven not us. God is the One who decides what goodness looks like and how good a person would have to be to go to Heaven. As we consider the context of our passage today lets evaluate ourselves simply on the Ten Commandments.
1. Have you worshiped God alone?
 2. Have you worshiped any idols?
 3. Have you always taken the Lord's name in a worthy manner?
 4. Have you always kept a Sabbath?
 5. Have you always honored your parents?
 6. Have you ever murdered?
 7. Have you ever committed adultery?
 8. Have you ever stolen?
 9. Have you ever lied?
 10. Have you ever coveted your neighbor's stuff?
- E. If we're honest, we've broken all of these commands. Many times over.

III. The Law and the Gospel

- A. There is this tension in the Bible. God wants a relationship with us and longs for us to draw near to Him but at the same time God is perfect in His righteous holiness and we cannot come into His presence.
- B. Law
1. So the people stood at a distance, while Moses approached the thick cloud where God was. (Exodus 20:21)
 - a) What is the effect of the Law? God is entering into a special covenant relationship with the people and their response is fear, dread, and distance. The New Testament sheds light on the Law and its purposes. The Law was good but it could never bring people into an intimate relationship with God fully.
 2. Now we know that whatever the Law says, it speaks to those who are under the Law, so that every mouth may be closed and all the world may become accountable to God; because by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for though the Law comes the knowledge of sin. But apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested, being witnessed by the Law and the Prophets, even the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all those who believe, for there is no distinction; for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:19 - 24)
 - a) The Law “shuts every mouth.” It prevents us from speaking back to God. Notice that Paul says, “all the world may become accountable to God.”
 - b) “By the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight.”
 - (1) Here we see the problems with the Law: Not only can we not perfectly keep the Law no one will be justified by the Law anyway. The Law cannot save us. In fact, it condemns us and demonstrates why we deserve God’s wrath. It’s because of the Law that we know that we are sinners.
 - (2) In John Bunyan’s famous book *the Pilgrim’s Progress* the main character Christian lives in the City of Destruction. One day he meets a character named Evangelist who tells him of God’s wrath and judgment. Christian flees the city and begins his journey towards the Celestial City. As he journeys he faces many challenges and enemies. Perhaps, the worst obstacle is that he is carrying a heavy burden on his back that represents his sins. As he journeys this burden only gets heavier and heavier. Until he meets a character called Mr. Legality who offers a short cut to relieving the weight of his burden. Mr. Legality leads him to the village of Morality and to Mount Sinai to keeping the Law. Yet the burden only grew heavier on his shoulders as he tried to live in legalism. My favorite part of the story is when Christian, after leaving the legalistic road, finds the cross and his burden is released from his back, rolls down a hill, and ends up in an empty tomb sealed by the stone.
 - (3) So then what is the purpose of the Law?

3. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, so that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves in Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise. (Galatians 3:24 - 29)

C. Gospel

1. Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death. For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did; sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. (Romans 8:1 - 5)
 - a) So the Law cannot save it only condemns. And here Paul says triumphantly that "there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus." This is the power of the gospel. It does what the Law cannot do.
 - b) Paul says, "For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did;" through Jesus.
 - c) Jesus is God yet He comes "in the likeness of sinful flesh" to be "an offering for sin."
 - (1) He isn't sinful. He isn't sinful flesh. He came in the likeness of sinful flesh.
 - (2) He came to be an offering for sin. Even though He never sinned, He died as the penalty for sin.
 - (3) He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him. (2 Corinthians 5:21)
 - d) Pay attention to the last phrase of Romans 8:5, "He condemned sin in the flesh, so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us, who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit."
 - (1) Jesus condemned sin in the flesh. He condemned that which condemns us. Notice the irony. Therefore there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus - sin doesn't get to condemn us anymore if we are in Christ - but Jesus condemned sin in the flesh.
 - (2) Not only does Jesus pay the penalty of our sins but He made it "so that the requirement of the Law might be fulfilled in us." Remember when we used the Ten Commandments as the measurement of our holiness a moment ago? We are all guilty of breaking the Law, we stand condemned by it. But Jesus never sinned. He never broke the Law. And He has fulfilled the Law on our behalf. He has done for us what we could never do for ourselves. He has given us what we could never earn. He has blessed us with what we could never deserve. He wraps His perfect righteousness around us and washes us clean.

IV. Moses and Jesus

A. Moses

1. Then they said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen; but let not God speak to us, or we will die." Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid; for God has come in order to test you, and in order that the fear of Him may remain with you, so that you may not sin." (Exodus 20:19 - 20)
 - a) God has come down to meet with the people in His dreadful glory. Notice what their response is: they ask Moses to speak to them on God's behalf. They run to Moses as a mediator.
 - b) This makes sense to us today. When we find ourselves in legal trouble, the first thing we do is contact a lawyer.
 - c) Generally speaking, a mediator has two responsibilities:
 - (1) To speak to God on behalf of the people
 - (a) Throughout the Exodus account Moses consistently intercedes for the people.
 - (b) By the way, the New Testament teaches that every Christian is included in the "priesthood of believers." We are all supposed to intercede to God on behalf of others in prayer.
 - (2) To speak to the people on behalf of God
 - (a) Moses tells the people to not fear God.
 - (b) Moses tells the people that God is testing them with the Law.
 - (c) Moses tells the people that God wants the "fear of Him" to remain with them so that they do not sin.

B. Jesus

1. First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time. (2 Timothy 2:1 - 5)
2. But now He has obtained a more excellent ministry, by as much as He is also the mediator of a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises. (Hebrews 8:6)
3. For you have not come to a mountain that can touched and to a blazing fire, and to darkness and gloom and whirlwind, and to the blast of a trumpet and the sound of words which sound was such that those who heard begged that no further word be spoken to them. For they could not bear the command, "If even a beast touches the mountain, it will be stoned." And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, "I am full of fear and trembling." But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel. (Hebrews:12:18 - 24)

4. Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need. (Hebrews 4:14 - 16)
5. Come carefully, but come close.

V Conclusion and Application