

JULY 21st

THE HOLINESS OF GOD ON DISPLAY

"Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. 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. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder."

EXODUS 19:17-19

You know how you can remember certain moments in your past, as if they are frozen in time? Do you have any moments like that? I recall a moment in my preaching calling that is quite distinct. It has to do with the holiness of God. When I was a youth pastor in Minnesota from 2007-2014, there was about a 3-month period when I was the only pastor on staff and handled most of the ministry duties for the whole church, including preaching. There was one Sunday when I was preaching from one of my favorite passages of the Bible, Isaiah 6 and the throne room of God. Isaiah has a vision of the throne room, and the entire house is filled with smoke. Now, I kid you not, as I was reading that exact verse in the sermon, the fire alarm for the church went off! We evacuated the building (about 250 people), then when we received the all clear, we entered back into the sanctuary and resumed exactly where we had left off. An experience that I for sure will never forget! Well, Exodus 19 isn't Isaiah 6, but we have the same God that is showing His people how special He truly is. What does God teach them here?

Here in Exodus 19 God shows His people that He is near His people and far from His people...at the same time. The technical terms for those ideas are the immanence of God and the transcendence of God. Notice first that God comes to Moses in a thick cloud on the mountain. God shows His presence and comes down to Moses, but He still is covered with a cloud. Later, God answers Moses in a sound of thunder as the entire Sinai Mountain is wrapped in smoke and the entire mountain shakes. Can you imagine standing in the sandals of the Hebrew people at this moment? This is the same God that conquered the supposed mighty gods of Egypt and opened a dry path through the Red Sea. God is so big and grand! They get an amazing glimpse of the greatness of God. He is absolutely perfect and powerful, a God to be respected and honored. Did you know that God's appearance here in Exodus 19 lays the foundation for the command in Exodus 20 to not make a graven image? God cannot be contained in any image made by human hands, even when that image represents Yahweh. Why not? Because God is completely holy (transcendent) and cannot be contained by anything. He is God. Here at the base of the mountain, we learn our first lesson about God's holiness.

God has specific instructions for Moses to give to the people as they approach Sinai Mountain. They cannot touch the mountain, and they must take two days to wash their clothes and purify themselves. This is an act of special preparation. They are preparing to approach their holy God, and they must be ceremonially clean to meet Him. Lesson number 2 about God's holiness is that His people must prepare themselves to meet Him because He is holy and will not be defiled by anything common. As Moses receives the Law, God tells the people in Leviticus 19:2, "You shall be holy, for I the Lord your God am holy."

Men, if we're honest, we struggle to see God's holiness and to work at our holiness. But God. The people prepared themselves to meet God at the mountain, and God has sent a Substitute that saves us because of His perfect work on the cross. Many of the New Testament letters state that His people are saints. That's not a Roman Catholic idea. That's a gospel idea. We are declared saints (holy ones) because we receive Christ's righteousness when we trust Christ to save us. When our Father sees us now, He sees only the perfect life of Christ. This is why we can approach a holy God with boldness. Indeed, He is holy...and He is near. He brings us to Him because of Christ. What an amazing God!

Spend some time thinking about God's holiness. Write down three impacts that the holiness of God can make in your life today.

For Further Reading: Isaiah 6:1-7