

As I was reading in Exodus this past week, I thought of Harry Truman. Not the former President of the U.S. but the owner of Spirit Lake Lodge at the base of Mt. St. Helens in Washington. In the spring of 1980, Mt. St. Helens, an active volcanic mountain, was making some ominous threats to nearby residents. The mountain trembled for almost two months. Ice and snow at higher elevations began melting from the heat of the magma approaching the surface. A bulge on the north face was growing by 5 feet per day. Scientists sounded the alarm that the volcano was about to erupt, and people fled – everyone except Harry Truman, a grumpy 83-year-old who made it clear to everyone that he was staying put despite the warnings. “They’ll never get me off this mountain,” the old curmudgeon boasted. “Spirit Lake and Mount St. Helens are a part of me -- they’re mine. They’re as much a part of me as my arms and legs.” On May 18, 1980, the mountain erupted burying the arms and legs of Harry Truman under 150 ft. of volcanic debris.

It is a sad story, and a tragic one. But the story of one stubborn old man is not nearly as tragic as countless Christians who won’t come down off another quaking mountain – Mt. Sinai.

Exodus 19 begins this way - **19:1-3**...Mt. Sinai is also known as Mt. Horeb. This is the same place Moses encountered the burning bush. It is also the place where Elijah hid from Jezebel after he defeated the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. In Exodus 19-20, Mt. Sinai provides the setting for one of the most significant events in the history of God’s people – the giving of the Law summarized in Ten Commandments. This monumental event came complete with special effects.

“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. ¹⁷ Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. ¹⁸ 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. ¹⁹ And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. ²⁰ The LORD came down on Mount Sinai.” Ex. 19:16-20

It was on Mt. Sinai that God delivered the Law to Moses and the events that followed were disastrous. A lot of people died. But the good news is there is another mountain that leads to life. I want to take you there this morning, but we have to start at Mt. Sinai.

What was so important about this event? Why was the Law so significant? I’ll give you four purposes for the Law given through Moses.

1. God's Law reflects God's nature. There are many more commandments besides these ten, 600 more in fact, but these 10 summarize the Law. They are sort of like the Cliff's Notes version of the Law of God. The Ten Commandments explain how man is to be related to God (first four commandments) and how man is to relate to one another (last six commandments.) Jesus reduced all the commandments into one Great Commandment – Love God by loving people.

2. God's Law identifies God's people. The Hebrew people were chosen by God to be His representatives and were set apart by their adherence to the Law.

⁴'You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. ⁵Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; ⁶and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel." Ex. 19:4-6

God chose the Hebrew people to be His agents. They were to know Him and make Him known. The Law was given to distinguish God's people over against all the other surrounding nations. For example, the Law says, **"You shall not boil a young goat in its mother's milk."** Ex. 23:19. Why not? Because the pagan Canaanites used to boil a baby goat in its mother's milk as a fertility ritual. They used something intended to give life, mother's milk, to take life. So, the Law served as a distinguishing feature of those who represented the one, universal God. To this day, observant Jews cannot eat anything prepared in a kitchen where milk products and meat products are in the same vicinity. That food is not considered kosher.

3. God's Law exposes human nature. **"All the people answered together and said, "All that the LORD has spoken we will do."** Ex. 19:8. Only they didn't. In fact, while Moses was receiving the Law of God, these people were making a golden calf to worship because they wanted a god who was visible like all the other people around them. All the nations of the earth were to be blessed by a people who insisted on being like all the nations of the earth!

4. God's Law serves as a tutor. The apostle Paul made the argument to the Galatian Christians that **"we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. ²⁴So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came."** Gal. 3:23-24. Exodus reflects the childhood of the people of God. Every parent knows that rules for children are different from the rules for adults. Children are told, "thou shalt not" often without explanation. Run with scissors, play in the street, eat cookies for dinner. As your child grows and matures, you no longer need to tell them these

things. As a child matures, they begin to understand the reason behind the prohibition. Full-grown adults shouldn't need a bunch of laws. Do we really need to be told, "Thou shalt not murder? Steal? Commit adultery, a form of stealing?"

The Law was our tutor or guardian until we reached maturity. Now, we are no longer under the Law because we are the recipients of a better covenant. Did you know there is a whole book of the Bible dedicated to helping Christians get off Mt. Sinai and onto Mt. Calvary? It is called Hebrews. The book addresses the tendency Christians have of mingling the Old Covenant with the New.

"Christ has obtained a ministry that is as much more excellent than the old as the covenant he mediates is better, since it is enacted on better promises. ⁷For if that first covenant had been faultless, there would have been no occasion to look for a second. (Hb. 8:6-7) In speaking of a new covenant, he makes the first one obsolete. And what is becoming obsolete and growing old is ready to vanish away." Heb. 8:13

The Law, delivered by Moses, was an essential part of an Old Covenant between God and His chosen people. It consisted of specific rules given to specific people in a specific place at a specific time for a specific purpose. The OT Law is "good and holy and righteous" according to Romans 7:12 but it is not MY Law. As a Christian, I am called to a higher law, a better covenant, a NEW covenant. The New Covenant was not God's "Plan B." It was part II of His redemptive plan. Jesus didn't come to make improvements to the Old Covenant. He initiated a New Covenant with a new ethic. The Old ethic asked the question, "What does the Law require?" The new ethic asks, "What does love require?"

"But wait Gary, are you saying we should do away with the Ten Commandments? Shouldn't we have them displayed in every school room in America?" If you believe, as many Christians do, that the goal of the Christian life is simply modified human behavior then go ahead, hang them on the wall. If you believe the Bible is a course in sin management, put those commandments up there. But God wants us to move from Mt. Sinai to Mt. Calvary. Here's the bottom line:

God's Law leads to death. God's Spirit leads to life. The Law was given 50 days after Passover. This will become known as the Day of Pentecost. 13 centuries later, on the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit was given to the church. Exodus recounts the response of the Israelites to the giving of the Law – the worship of a golden calf. As a result, 3,000 of them were put to death. On the day of Pentecost in the NT, according to Acts 2:41, 3,000 people received the Holy Spirit and were baptized. What is the message? The Law leads to death. The Spirit leads to life.

Do you want to live on Mt. Sinai or Mt. Calvary? According to the apostle Paul, those who live on Mt. Sinai are under a curse. **“For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law and do them.’” (Gal. 3:10)** What is the curse? The curse consists of exposing our sin but not giving us the power not to sin.”

As Christians, we are not under the Law. We have moved from Mt. Sinai to Mt. Calvary where Jesus fulfilled the Law and shed His blood as the atonement for our sin. God never intended His people to settle down on Mt. Sinai. Our eternal destiny is found on Mt. Calvary. We now live under another Law, a better Law. **“The law of the Spirit of life in Christ has set us free from the law of sin and death.” (Romans 8:2)** The Holy Spirit is the Law of God written upon our hearts.

What are we to do with this passage? I suggest we do what the people of Israel did – just not how they did it. **“Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow and let them wash their garments ¹¹ and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. ¹² And you shall set limits for the people all around.” Ex. 19:10-12**

Consecration is a word used to describe a moment of dedication to the Lord. We will never make progress toward spiritual maturity without first consecrating ourselves. Under the Old Covenant consecration was an external ritual that involved washing your clothes and avoiding women. In the New Testament consecration is an internal matter of the heart. Paul describes it this way to the Romans. **“I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Ro. 12:1**

1. Where are you living right now? Mt. Sinai? Mt. Calvary? Do you find yourself commuting back and forth? “I know I am saved by grace but I must DO better. I must obey the Bible.” The Old Covenant is spelled DO. The New Covenant is spelled DONE. No one is saved by keeping the Law. You cannot be saved by grace and then sanctified by the Law. Don’t go back to Mt. Sinai.

2. How will you respond to God today? Try to do better? Wallow in guilt and shame because you have failed to be a good Christian? Or “present your body a living sacrifice to God?”

So, what’s it going to be? Life/death? The blessing/the curse? Clavary/Sinai?