

Meeting with God

Exodus 19:1-25

Open your bibles with me to Exodus 19.

In verses one and two we are told that three months after leaving Egypt and after travelling to various places, the people of Israel arrive and camp ‘in front of the mountain.’

The mountain, as we will see, is Mount Sinai and God has brought them here to meet with Him.

The three month reference stood out to me because it has been three months today since we last met in person to worship the Lord.

I remember being completely amazed, and I still am, at how fast life was turned upside down.

We went from meeting as usual one week to watching online the next.

We scrambled to do as much as we could online and I am so thankful for everyone who worked hard on that and to those who volunteered to make videos, the hours of editing, the troubleshooting of technology problems, and everything else that went into that.

It was the best we could do, but we all agreed that no matter how much we put online, it just cannot compare with meeting in person.

I know as Spirit filled believers we can worship God anywhere, but God commands us to gather together for worship for a reason.

We need each other for encouragement and accountability, we need each other so that we can both receive and give the love that Christ commanded we have for one another.

There is something unique about joining together in person for the exaltation of Christ that a great benefit to our souls.

When we gather for church we are not only seeking to meet with one another, we are also seeking to meet with the LORD.

We are asking and expecting God to show us more of Himself and to further shape us into the image of His Son for the sake of His glory.

We do this with the expectation that one day we will be in the visible presence of the LORD forever.

Are you looking forward to that day?

[That is the reason the LORD has brought the people of Israel to this mountain. He is going to show them more of Himself. He is going to meet with His people. Over the years I have noticed the odd bill board by the side of the road that says, “Prepare to meet the God.” Are we

ready for that? Don't you want to be? Our text this morning has some important lessons for us about meeting with God. Here is the first...]

Point #1 – To meet with God we first need to be rescued.

No one can get into the presence of the LORD without God saving them.

I love what God said to Moses when He first called him to go back to Egypt and lead the Israelites to freedom.

Moses asked the LORD, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

Who is Moses? He is nobody, but listen to how God answers his question.

God says, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you this it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

The sign is it is going to happen!

Here we are in chapter nineteen and we find the people of Israel exacting where God said they would end up, back at the mountain.

This is the mountain where Moses met the LORD at the burning bush and it is where the people are about to meet with Him in a way unlike anything they have experienced so far.

Before that happens though they are to be reminded about how they arrived there (3-8).

Time after time in the book of Exodus we have seen God do miraculous things in order to save the Israelites.

There is no way they would be standing at this mountain if it were not for all that the LORD had done.

He says it is like they have been carried on ‘eagles’ wings.

[I didn't know this, but a number of commentaries point out that some eagles were known to carry their young from the nest when teaching them how to fly. They also fly under their young so in case something happens they are there to catch them if they fall. In other words the eagle does not let its young fall, it does not simply kick the little bird out of the nest and then say you are on your own.]

In the same way God does just get the people out of Egypt and then leave them.

He is there the whole time keeping them safe until they arrive at this mountain where He is going to meet with them.

God says if they will obey Him then he says they will be His, “treasured possession” which speaks about His care and delight for them.”

He says they will be “a kingdom of priests” that is they will exist as a nation to make God known and be a means of bringing others to the LORD.

Thirdly, He says they will be a “holy nation” which means they will be set apart for the purposes of God.

Those are all amazing things about belonging to the LORD and the New Testament says the same things about the Church, but notice that all of it depends on first being rescued.

No one saves themselves, no one enters into a relationship with God by his/her own strength or works.

Salvation does not come from obedience, but rather obedience comes from salvation.

[It’s been three months since these people have been freed from slavery. Three months they have travelled and now they have arrived at the place where they will experience an awesome display of God’s presence and they are there because God has rescued them. It is the same for us. If you are a Christian here today for worship it is because God has rescued you from your sin and because of that you can look forward to experiencing God’s presence in far more glorious ways than what the Israelites experience here at Sinai. In addition to being reminded of their rescue, the people are told about the seriousness of what is about to take place. This is a much needed reminder for the church today. **Verses 9-15** show us that...]

Point #2 – To meet with God we need to appreciate His holiness.

A truly substantial relationship with the LORD depends on understanding His uncompromising perfections.

Remember the people had just committed to doing “everything the LORD has said” and right away they are given an opportunity to follow through on that commitment.

Look with me at **verses 9-14**.

The people are going to experience the presence of God in a greater way than they have to this point.

In preparing for this experience Moses is told to ‘consecrate’ the people over a two day period.

To consecrate something is to set it apart for God.

The people are also to ‘wash their clothes’ which is an obvious sign of cleansing.

The clear picture is the need for purity when approaching the LORD.

I have no doubt that verse 12 will offend the sensibilities of many people.

Many people would say, “Whoa wait a minute. That sounds pretty extreme to be put to death for just crossing the line and touching the mountain without permission.”

My question is, why do people find that to be extreme?

It is because they see disregarding the holiness of God as a small thing.

Don’t let that be a small thing in your heart in mind.

Look with me again at verse 11.

It says that “the LORD will *come down* on Mount Sinai.”

What does it mean for the infinite almighty God Who is present everywhere to come down?

Commentator John Hannah rightly says this picture teaches us about God’s transcendence (Completely distinct and totally superior to all created things).

It means the Triune God Who is eternal, all-powerful, all-knowing, completely pure, just, holy, loving, merciful, gracious, sovereign, and beyond all understanding is incomparably greater than us.

If we want to know this God, to be in relationship with Him, then we must appreciate His holiness.

[When I was very young my father taught me to have a healthy respect for fire. He showed me the danger of it and warned of the pain that I would experience if I ignored his warning. I’ve had enough accidental minor burns to know firsthand how important it is to have an appreciation for what fire can do. I know better than to be careless around fire.]

Do you know that God describes Himself as a ‘consuming fire’ in the Bible? (Deut 4:24, Isaiah 30:27, and Hebrews 12:29).

We ignore this reality about the nature of God at our own peril.

Too often people in churches have been given an image of God like an indulgent grandpa Who would never be upset by anything we do.

That leads a person to minimize the seriousness of sin and show contempt for God’s righteous judgement.

Worst of all, failing to appreciate God’s holiness blinds a person to the preciousness of Christ, it causes us to take our redemption for granted.

Jesus died on the cross precisely because God is Holy and we are not and it is only faith in Christ that can bridge the gap between us and the LORD.

[The cross is not intended for us to dismiss the holiness of God, it is the way we come to experience and enjoy the goodness of God’s holiness. If we are to truly know the LORD, to

truly be in relationship with Him then we must appreciate His holiness. Having prepared themselves for two days to meet the LORD, it happens on the third day. It is an awesome scene and it teaches us a third important lesson...]

Point #3 – We must meet with God on His terms.

It is impossible for sinful people to come to the LORD however they want, but instead we must approach Him according to the direction He gives.

The people had been told that they were only to approach the mountain when ‘the ram’s horn sounds a long blast’ and that happens in verse 16, listen.

We are again reminded of the holiness of God with the appearance of a ‘thick cloud’.

The cloud graciously provides a veil between the visible presence of the LORD and the people, but notice even the cloud, thunder, and lighting, which precedes God’s appearance causes the people to ‘tremble’.

The word ‘tremble’ has the sense of being afraid for your life.

Jesus talks about this when He teaches people how to order their fears.

He says, “Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matthew 10:28)

The book of Hebrews confirms this when it says, “It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:31)

This is a fearful scene which underscores the importance of paying attention to what God says.

With the sound of the trumpet Moses knows it is time to lead the people to the mountain and that is what we see next (17-25).

To say the least this is a dramatic scene. God descends on the mountain in ‘fire’ and as He does so the sound of the trumpet announcing His arrival grows ‘louder and louder’.

This is the scene of a Royal procession, but it is very different from any earthly display.

When people (rulers or leaders) have a big display at their arrival it always makes them appear greater than they are, but God’s display here serves to give the people as much as they can handle of how great the LORD truly is.

In His greatness He does something that is both amazing and gracious, He speaks.

The people actually hear God speak to Moses according to verse 19.

He calls Moses up the mountain and He gives him some more instructions.

The people are ‘not to force their way through to see the LORD’ if they do ‘many’ will ‘perish’ according to verse 21.

Only Moses and Aaron are to go up the mountain, ‘But the people must not force their way through to come up to the LORD, or He will break out against them.’

Do you see? We don’t meet with God however we feel like it, we meet with God in the way that He prescribes.

[Imagine going for a drive and coming to a river and having a choice between two bridges to get to the other side. Beside each of the bridges there was a big sign. One of the signs said, “This bridge is engineered to the highest safety standards” and the other sign said “This bridge was built however the workers felt like it”. Tell me, which bridge are you going to drive over?]

How is it that we can understand the need for following directions in many areas of life, but be blind to that need when it comes to God?

It is impossible for us to know God unless He reveals Himself to us.

He is so great and we are so small that we could never know Him unless He makes Himself known to us.

Amazingly He does that here! He speaks to the people.

He does that for us! He has spoken to us in His written WORD!

This book is the one that Jesus, Who was raised from the dead, says is God’s word and it tells us how we can be ready to meet with God.

Jesus makes it really clear in John 14:6, “I AM the Way, The Truth, and the Life, and no one comes to the Father except through me.”

No longer are we left at the foot of the mountain. No longer are we left outside the curtain of the tabernacle, but we now can come directly to God.

Hebrews 10:19-22, “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.”

Are you ready to meet God this morning?

Do you know that you need to be rescued from your sin?

Do you have an appreciation for the holiness of God?

Are you coming to on His terms?

I hope you can say with confident faith in our saviour that you are eagerly awaiting the final trumpet when Christ will descend and gather His people to Himself forever.