

MEETING WITH THE ALMIGHTY
The Life of Moses: Deliverance Through Faith
Exodus 19:1-25
 Chadron Berean Church

Just outside our worship center there is a big sign that says, “*Helping people to really know Jesus Christ.*” The sign has been there so long you may not even notice it anymore. But I like that sign because it’s a reminder of what we’re all about. As a church, we want to know Jesus Christ and be like Him so we can help others come to know Him as well. But how do we do that? And if that’s what we’re about, why is it that so many of us feel like our relationship with Jesus is shallow? Like we don’t really know Him? That’s what we want to talk about this morning as we continue our study on *The Life of Moses* from Exodus 19. We are moving from the Exodus out of Egypt to the second half of the book which is the giving of the Law at Mt. Sinai.

I. ISRAEL CAMPS AT MT. SINAI. (VV. 1-17)

1 “In the third month after the sons of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on this day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. 2 Then they set out from Rephidim and came to the wilderness of Sinai and camped in the wilderness; and there Israel camped in front of the mountain.

So God has delivered Israel from Egypt and as we’ve seen, He is now working to get Egypt out of Israel. He has saved them and now He is going to work on them, sanctifying them, setting them apart to be His people and to be like Him. Saving them was just the beginning. So He brings Israel out into the middle of nowhere where they are forced to rely on Him and they can focus on Him. No worldly distractions. No crutches. Just them and God and His Word.

3 Now Moses went up to God, and Yahweh called to him from the mountain, saying, “Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the sons of Israel: 4 ‘You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I lifted you up on eagles’ wings and brought you to Myself. 5 So now then, if you will indeed listen to My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; 6 and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.’ These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel.”

So Moses goes up to the mountain alone and God tells him that He wants to make a **covenant** with Israel. Some consider these few verses to be the very heart of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible that Moses authored). They contain the nature and purpose of the theocratic covenant that God makes with Israel at Mt. Sinai.¹ He makes a covenant with them (the Old/Mosaic Covenant) and provides them with His Law (Law of Moses/Mosaic Law) to carry out that covenant and govern the nation. It is not the same as the unconditional New Covenant of promise that we have with God through Christ. It’s a temporary and conditional covenant for this chosen nation by God (Dt. 7:7-8).

But we see the *why*: that God desires to make them a **kingdom of priests and a holy nation**. In the ancient world a priest would typically know things about his “god” that others didn’t. He

would enjoy a close relationship with that god and introduce others to that god and show others how to worship his god as well. And while not all of the Israelites would be part of the official priesthood like Aaron and the Levites, I think this could be understood to mean that the nation would function as a priesthood to the nations around them in the sense that they were intended to be a light to the world and show the world the *way to Yahweh* and *ways of Yahweh*.² But in order to be a light to the world, God wants Israel alone with Himself in the wilderness for a while where they can spend time getting to know Him.

7 So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words which Yahweh had commanded him. 8 And all the people answered together and said, "All that Yahweh has spoken we will do!" And Moses brought back the words of the people to Yahweh.

So Moses communicates this covenant with the **elders** of Israel and the elders communicate with the **people** and they **agree** to this covenant. It's one of the most important moments in the history of the world. In agreeing to this, they were bound to this conditional covenant which included blessing for keeping the covenant and cursing for breaking it. For that reason, He's going to remind them that this is not a covenant to take lightly and that He ought to be feared.

9 Yahweh said to Moses, "Behold, I will come to you in a thick cloud, so that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe in you forever." Then Moses told the words of the people to Yahweh. 10 Yahweh also said to Moses, "Go to the people and set them apart as holy today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments; 11 and let them be ready for the third day, for on the third day Yahweh will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12 And you shall set bounds for the people all around, saying, 'Beware that you do not go up on the mountain or touch the border of it; whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. 13 No hand shall touch him, but he shall surely be stoned or surely shot through; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the ram's horn sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain." 14 So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and set the people apart as holy, and they washed their garments. 15 And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman." 16 So it happened on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. 17 And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

So in preparation to **meet** with Almighty God, God establishes His presence in some unique ways. His appears in the form of a **thick cloud** with flashes with **lightning** and **thunder** and **trumpet** and in a blazing **fire**. It's really a terrifying sight for them. Exodus 20:18 tells us they trembled at it and didn't want to go near God (Ex. 20:18). Even if they wanted too, they can't. There is a boundary there that cannot be crossed. But it's all to show them that there is no one like Him and He must be respected and **feared** because He is a **holy** and righteous God.

As such, they are to be prepared to meet Him. That's what the **washing** and the abstinence was representative of: moral purity. They were to show complete devotion to God on this occasion. You have to think, they didn't exactly shower every day like we do. Washing and devotion signified a special occasion and a special relationship. Being in a relationship with God requires holiness (2 Tim. 2:19). Four times in Leviticus God says, "*Be holy, for I am holy.*" Later,

individuals and priests like Nadab and Abihu would be struck down for carelessly entering the Lord's presence without treating Him as holy (Lev. 10:1-2). He's trying to shape that awareness.

II. **YAHWEH DESCENDS ON MOUNT SINAI. (VV. 18-25)**

18 Now Mount Sinai was all in smoke because Yahweh descended upon it in fire; and its smoke ascended like the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain trembled violently. 19 And the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder; then Moses spoke and God answered him with thunder. 20 And Yahweh came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain; and Yahweh called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. 21 Then Yahweh spoke to Moses, "Go down, warn the people, lest they break through to Yahweh to see, and many of them perish. 22 Also let the priests who come near to Yahweh set themselves apart as holy, lest Yahweh break out against them." 23 And Moses said to Yahweh, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for You warned us, saying, 'Set bounds about the mountain, and set it apart as holy.'" 24 Then Yahweh said to him, "Go down and come up again, you and Aaron with you; but do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to Yahweh, lest He break out against them." 25 So Moses went down to the people and told them."

The next time a dark, severe thunderstorm rolls around, think about what it would be like to walk up into it. It's the last thing you want to do. You want to do the exact opposite! Go inside and hide! But this time, God allows only **Moses and Aaron** to ascend the mountain where God has **descended**. Notice: everything is on *His terms*. Again, He's teaching them that no one should thoughtlessly barge into God's presence without being prepared because His blazing holiness will break out against that person. His presence is to be respected. Feared. Careful to come to Him on His terms. He is an awesome God. In the next chapter, God will give them the 10 commandments, but that's as far as we are going today because I think there is a lot here to learn from when it comes to our NT priest-like function as "mediators" like Moses who know God and help make Him known to others (2 Pet. 2:5-9). We need to be reminded of some things here:

1. We were made for a **relationship** with God.

That's why God brings Israel out to this place. He wants a unique relationship with them. He wants Israel to know Him and to help others come to know Him as well. He intends to use Israel to reach the world (Gen. 12:3). But the fact that there is a big problem between us and God is plainly evident. The problem is that God is holy and righteous and good, and man is not. Man is a rebellious sinner. Because of that, there is a **barrier** or **separation** between man and God that cannot be crossed without a chosen **mediator** (a go-between). **Psalm 5:4** says, "*For You are not a God who takes pleasure in wickedness; No evil can dwell with You.*" **Romans 3:23** says, "*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" and we deserve to be separated from God forever because of it. The wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23).

This really is the first step to knowing God. Unless we know who He is as a holy and righteous one we won't understand who we are and that we need a remedy. We tend to think we are good by nature. Ask anybody on the street and they will probably tell you that they think they're going to heaven because they're a "pretty good person" because they haven't murdered anyone or done anything "too bad". But God is dispelling that myth with this intense manifestation of His

awesome and unapproachable presence. This is the whole reason for the **Law** in the first place. It was designed to show us our need for Jesus. It's a **tutor to lead us to Christ** (Gal. 3). We are to look at the Law and the 10 commandments and say, "Yep. I've broken those laws. I need a Savior." It's like a mirror that reveals our imperfections. Or like an x-ray machine, it can look inside us and show us our faults but can't fix us. It wasn't given so that we would use it to try and be good enough. It was to reveal our need for a Savior.

This why we naturally are so spiritually out of tune with God. We need to understand **sin** is a **barrier** between us and we desperately need a Savior to mediate between us. Moses is a **mediator**. He is a go-between for Israel and God. But the NT says Jesus, who is both God and a sinless Man, is our perfect mediating **high priest** between sinful man and holy God. He died in our place to take the punishment we deserved (Heb. 3:16). So Moses is just a foreshadowing of Jesus who would come. **1 Timothy 2:5** says, "*For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.*" Jesus is the ultimate and only mediator we need between us and God. He is the one who through His life and death and resurrection, made restoration possible so that we can all enter God's presence and **draw near to God with confidence** (Heb. 10:1-25; 4:16). But it's only by grace through faith in Christ (Eph. 2:8-9). Those are His terms and you only come to Him on His terms. So in your heart this morning, maybe you need to call out to Jesus to save you from sin for the first time. But take this message seriously. It's God's gospel, or good news. And it's the only way to heaven.

You know, sometimes I think we get the impression that the OT was a God of judgment, and the NT God is a God of love. While the OT does emphasize our separation so that it can lead us to the one who can bring us near, it's still faulty thinking because the revelation of Jesus Christ—God becoming a man—is even more amazing than what happened at Sinai and comes with even greater accountability. **Hebrews 2:1-3** says, "*For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away. For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable [the Law], and every trespass and disobedience received a just penalty, how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?*" How shall we escape if we treat the gospel of Christ flippantly? Hebrews says it's like trampling the Son of God underfoot and insulting the Spirit of grace (Heb. 10:26-31). He opened a **new and living way into the presence of God** (Heb. 10:1-25) and we will die without mercy for our sins and suffer the fiery pains of hell forever away from God if we reject the gracious gift of eternal life in Jesus Christ (John 3:16).

2. God wants us to meet with Him regularly.

You might've noticed that Moses makes a lot of trips up and down that mountain. It's somewhere around 7 times in total recorded. But God doesn't just want to show up in a massive, glorious display for a day and then call it good. He wants to *dwell* among these people. They are going to camp for 11 months at Mt. Sinai and the next 40 years in the wilderness learning from God with His presence among them. The principle is that He doesn't just want to save us. He wants a relationship. To meet with us regularly. To dwell with us. And it is required of mediators—those who help others come to know their God—to get to know their God and be like Him.

One of the spiritual disciplines that we constantly need to develop and maintain is a **quiet time or devotional time** with the Lord. It's a time, preferably each day, where you take time to spend with God, in His **Word** and in **prayer**. It should become a **habit** for us. Sometimes I think we want to grow in our relationship with the Lord, but we want something newer or faster or easier, but there just is no replacement for personal devotional time when it comes to knowing God. We need corporate worship, for sure, but personally spending time in God's Word and in prayer has no replacement either. Our problems tend not to lie in finding something new, but in something that we are neglecting that we already know to be true and aren't practicing (2 Pete. 1:12). So how's your devotional life these days? Your prayer life? Those are often convicting questions. There's a few things we can do to improve our meetings with Almighty God.

a. Come with a prepared heart. (vv. 10-11; 14)

A consecrated heart. Israel had to come clean, and so do we when we go to meet with God. You have to think you are entering the presence of a holy God and that requires confession and repentance of sin. We can't be hiding anything. Relationships require transparency. He knows it all anyway so just lay it out there. **1 John 1:9** says, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."* I find that so necessary to remaining in fellowship with God and walking with Him.

b. Come willing to obey. (vv. 3-6)

God says to Moses in **Exodus 20:20** that God came in this fiery fashion so that the **fear** of Him would remain on them and that would be dissuaded from sinning. I don't know about you, but the fear of God keeps me on my toes spiritually. I don't want to experience His discipline. Chuck Swindoll said, *"Anyone who sins willfully has temporarily blocked out their fear of God."* He also said our spiritual lives tend be shallow when we have a shallow, superficial view of God. Christ is our friend and our brother, but He's also Almighty God who deserves our respect.

In **2 Corinthians 7:1**, Paul says, *"Or what agreement has a sanctuary of God with idols? For we are a sanctuary of the living God; just as God said, 'I WILL DWELL IN THEM AND WALK AMONG THEM; AND I WILL BE THEIR GOD, AND THEY SHALL BE MY PEOPLE. Therefore, COME OUT FROM THEIR MIDST AND BE SEPARATE,' says the Lord. 'AND DO NOT TOUCH WHAT IS UNCLEAN, And I will welcome you. AND I WILL BE A FATHER TO YOU, And you shall be sons and daughters to Me,' SAYS THE LORD ALMIGHTY. Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God."* Again, you see the emphasis on holiness and cleanliness linked with God's presence. Do you want to know God? Obey Him. Obedience is how we demonstrate our love for God (John 14:15). We shouldn't expect God to speak to us through His Word in our devotional time if we already have it in our hearts that we aren't going to obey.

c. Come willing to listen. (vv. 5, 9)

God didn't want His instruction falling on deaf ears. He said to **listen to His voice**. I can't help but think of when Jesus was transfigured before Peter, James and John on the mountain and the Father testified, *"This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to Him!"* (Mt.

17; Mk. 9; Lk. 9). Today, we might not hear God audibly speak, but He speaks through His Word, the **Scriptures** and that's far better than some Mt. Sinai experience or transfiguration (2 Pet. 1:19). Everything we need to know about God is recorded for us in His Word. We listen to God as we read the Word of God or hear it preached or taught. We should meditate on His Word day and night (Josh. 1:8). Learn it. Memorize it. Pray it. Sing it. Contemplate it. I also believe that God's Spirit communicates with our spirit in ways I can't express. He nudges us at times. But again, you need to be grounded in the Word to know what might be a nudge or Spirit-inspired conviction and what is just your emotions. God won't contradict His Word. One of the most practical ways I have learned to listen to God is through a journal, writing down what God has been teaching me and seeing a pattern and growth over time.

But it's like I mentioned already, the reason we might feel shallow isn't because we need something new. It's because we need to get back to doing these simple things we already know to be true, like meeting with God regularly. But that's hard to do in our world. Our devotional life is the first thing to go when we get busy or distracted. The world is loud. There's a lot of voices out there. Social media might make it easier for us communicate with friends, but it is making harder for us to communicate with God by taking our time if we're not careful. I want to share a clip out of an article that I shared in the very first sermon I ever preached. The subject was on prayer. It's a bit outdated, but it was true then and it's true now. It's even more relevant.

"The day began with my alarm clock jolting me awake. I immediately turned on my Blackberry to hear it chime for each voicemail and email that had been left while I slept. I stepped into the shower where I listened to my waterproof radio. I then turned on the television to catch some news while I dressed. Driving to work I tuned in to some radio talk banter. Throughout the day the chime on my laptop kept ringing as emails arrived, and my cell phone continued to vibrate and ring on my hip. Before long, I needed a break, and I put on my iPod to go for a walk. On the drive home, I again listened to the radio in an effort to drown out the blaring horns of frustrated fellow commuters. After eating dinner and tucking my five children into bed, I turned on the television to watch a show I recorded on my Tivo. As I drifted off to sleep, it dawned on me that I had not had one minute of silence during my entire day. In that moment, God deeply convicted me that I was addicted to the false trinity of our day. The gods known as noise, hurry, and crowds. I remembered the words of missionary martyr Jim Elliot, who said, 'I think the devil has made it his business to monopolize on three elements: noise, hurry, crowds... Satan is quite aware of the power of silence.'"

Pretty convicting stuff, huh? As we close, I just want to encourage us this morning to soundproof our lives a bit. To slow down enough to meet with God. If we're too busy for Him, we're just plain too busy. We were created for a relationship with Him, and we need to take time for that. If we want to know Jesus, be like Jesus and make Him known, we have to spend time with Him.

¹ Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Exodus*, 174. Accessed 4/21/2023.

² Duane A. Garrett, *A Commentary on Exodus* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel, 2013), 460.