**The Gospel According to Moses**

**Israel Meets their God**

**Exodus 19:16-25**

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We are working our way through the Old Testament book of Exodus in our series, the Gospel According Moses. Today we finish chapter 19, looking at verses 16-25, in my message entitled, Israel Meets their God. The Lord has rescued Israel, fulfilling his promise to Abraham. They are now encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai for about a year. They have been rescued for relationship, to be God’s treasured possession as priest kings and make him known to the nations. In 19:1-15 God has prepared Israel to meet him and now in 19:16-25, they meet him which will last for almost a year as he makes a covenant with them. My big idea today is that we need a mediator. For humanity to know God, we need a mediator.

**God is Unlike Any Other (16-19)**

God shows up on the morning of the third day in what theologians call a theophany. A theophany is a visible manifestation of God in some form that expresses his presence and character. God is making himself known to Israel and he uses a theophany to do it. We have seen theophanies in Exodus already but nothing this dramatic. The burning bush when God calls Moses to lead Israel (Ex 3:1-5). And the Lord led Israel in the wilderness with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night (Ex 13:22, 14:19, 24). God descends upon mount Sinai in a great display of power - thunder and lightning immersed in a thick cloud. There is also a huge fire that billows up with smoke like a furnace (16-18). There is a trumpet that gets louder and louder as the Lord descends, announcing the coming of their Redeemer and King. God descends to meet with his people. He is the one and true God, unlike any other so called god.

God’s presence is overpowering, both the mountain and the people tremble. The sights and sounds and smells strike Israel with terror. Before there was nuclear power or special effects on the big screen nature was the greatest display of raw power. Trees are like toothpicks; buildings are like paper; thunder is deafening; wildfires, tornadoes, and hurricanes consume everything in their path. Israel meeting their God is a terrifying experience. Yet, this is the God who rescued them from an evil taskmaster like an eagle swooping down to carry its young from danger. He is transcendent, exalted far above creation, so very different from anything created. What we know and see of God, in his creation and word, gives us a miniscule glimpse of the God who is infinite and transcendent (Job 26:13-14). What we know of God is but a fragment of what there is to know. Now this sovereign transcendent Lord establishes a temporary throne on Mount Sinai. And approaching any king must not be taken lightly, especially this One who is unlike any other. None of us take God as seriously as he ought to be taken. God is unlike any other.

**Humanity is Small and Insignificant (21-23)**

The distance between God on the mountain and Israel at the foot of it highlights the greatness of God compared to human insignificance. God is infinite and we are finite. God fills the universe, yet we are but a grain of sand in that universe. We have a hard time admitting our insignificance because our culture makes so much of us. Winston Churchill said, *"we are all worms, but I do believe that I am a glow-worm."* This distance also points to human sinfulness. The Lord instructs Moses to warn the people not to cross the barrier at the foot of the mountain and the priests[[1]](#footnote-1) must consecrate themselves or else they would perish (21-22). Sin separates us from God. When Adam and Eve sinned, they distanced themselves from God by hiding, as if that can be done. When Peter grasped that Jesus was God, he fell on his knees, saying, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord (Luk 5:8). God is unlike any other, humanity is insignificant and sinful. But God is also loving and merciful who rescues us for relationship, but we need a mediator.

**We Need a Mediator (24-25)**

Israel must stay at the foot of the mountain lest God kill them. But Moses, as God’s chosen mediator, freely goes up and down the mountain.[[2]](#footnote-2) Moses points to the need for a better mediator of a better covenant. There is one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all (1 Tim 2:5-6). Jesus is the better Moses who secured our redemption, making us his people (Heb 3:1-6). So, we do not approach God on Mount Sinai but on Mount Zion, the city of God, not with terror but joyfully celebrating all that Christ has accomplished for us by his death (Heb 12:18-24). The mention of the third day also points to Christ three ways: a new life, a covenant, and a mountain. God told Abraham to sacrifice his only son Isaac on Mount Moriah. On the third day of his journey, Abraham saw the mountain from afar and went to it trusting God (Gen 22:4ff). On that mountain God saved Isaac, resurrected him in a sense, by providing a substitute (Heb 11:9). Then God reaffirmed his covenant with Abraham on that mountain. Here, on the third day, God comes to give his people new life, to establish his covenant with them on that mountain. Then on the third day God raised Jesus to life in the resurrection, securing the new and covenant by his death on a hill.

Life Group Questions:

Head

1. What are some of the details of the passage that strike you?
2. Describe the sights and sounds and smells in your own words?
3. Describe some terrifying experience and how you felt?
4. What does it mean that we are insignificant yet God’s treasured possession?

Heart

1. How does the manifestation of God’s presence (16-19) make you feel about/toward God?
2. How does God feel about us if we are small/insignificant/sinful yet his treasured possession?

Hand

1. How does this passage make the gospel applicable to me?
2. What does this passage teach me about following Jesus?
3. How is God asking me to respond?

1. The reference to a priesthood at this point in Exodus is troublesome for some because the Aaronic priesthood is not established until Exodus chapters 28–29. This may refer to a pre-Aaronic priesthood among Israel (see for instance, Gen. 14:18; Exod. 2:16) or it applies to the first-born males (Exod. 13:1–2, 11–16) who were functioning as priests until replaced by the Aaronic priesthood. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Aaron goes up pointing to his future role as priest. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)