**The Gospel According to Moses**

**The Fear of God and the Worship of God**

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David Taylor

After a summer break, we are back in our series, The Gospel according to Moses, working through the Old Testament book of Exodus. Israel has received the ten commandments and is still at the foot of Mount Sinai.[[1]](#footnote-1) We are now going to see happens, their response to these commandments. What is the proper response to someone giving you a set of commands? How should you respond when someone tells you what to do? Maybe it is a friend or a co-worker, a teacher or a parent, an employer or a police officer? Depending on who it is and your attitude at the time, you may try to negotiate, ignore it, or if you get pulled over by a police officer, you may say yes sir. How about when God gives you a command? Today, we will look at Israel’s response to God’s commandments. And we just saw in today’s passage the proper response to God’s commands is fear and worship. Specifically, a fear to be desired and worship on God’s terms.

**The Fear of God (18-21)**

God has made himself known to Israel in mercy by freeing them. At the foot of Mount Sinai, Israel encounters God in a theophany. The people have a threefold reaction – fear, trembling, and moving away from God’s presence. Remember, before Adam and Eve sinned, they enjoyed God’s presence but afterwards, they hid from God’s presence (Gen 3:8). As terrifying as this was, God was being merciful and kind, protecting them from his presence. No one can see God and live.

We have seen God’s presence in like this already. When God called Moses to lead Israel, he appeared in a burning bush (Ex 3:2). When God led Israel our of Egypt and through the wilderness, he appeared as a cloud and pillar of fire (Ex 13:21-22, 14:19, 24, 16:10, etc). But here, God descended, condescended, upon a mountain so that it trembled and the people trembled at the sight. Their instinct is not, “hey, God’s over there! Let’s go look!” As they witness the sights and sounds of Sinai, their instinct was to step back: “God is there, we had better tread carefully.” Fearing death at the sound of God’s voice (Deut 4:32; 5:26), the people ask Moses to mediate, “you speak to us, do not let God speak to us or we will die (20:19).”[[2]](#footnote-2) God is not to be trifled with, taken lightly. We are a culture that prizes casual spirituality. But God is anything but casual. This picture may seem strange or foreign. It may be offensive that they feared being put to death. But you cannot understand the gospel without understanding the picture of God at Mount Sinai.

But look at how Moses addresses their fear (20). He contrasts two types of fear, one to be avoided and one to be desired, cherished, even nurtured. One drives you away from God and one drives you toward God. God does not want you to pull away in fear but drawn near to him in fear. God mercifully and lovingly led them by the hand to this place to introduce himself not to destroy them. God wants a different fear, a fear to be desired, almost synonymous with faith. It is the fear that sends you running from his judgment into the arms of mercy. The purpose of this fear is obedience. God is calling Israel to follow him with a life of faithful obedience. We follow Jesus in discipleship the same way, a life of faithful obedience. God is testing Israel to see if they will obey his commandments. He tested them in the wilderness, to see if they would trust and obey him[[3]](#footnote-3) and God is testing them again. God is saying in essence, “I have shown you my mercy by rescuing you and making you my people, my treasured possession and taking you to the promised land. Will you trust that I am a promise keeping God? Sadly, the people stood far off while Moses drew near to God (21). So, the proper response to God is a fear that draws you draw near to God and obey God. And drawing near to God leads to worship so God gives instructions about worship.

**The Worship of God (22-26)**

It is significant that the first instructions after the giving of the ten commandments is about worship, worship on God’s terms. God has Moses reiterate the first two commands, have no other gods, and make no carved idols (22-23). Notice what he says, “you have seen that I talked from heaven (22).” In other words, “I am the only true God and I am invisible so you don’t need other gods and don’t make idols because when you saw me, you didn’t see me, you only heard me.” Secondly, he goes on to say, “be careful how you approach me.” Though God will eventually instruct Israel to build elaborate altars, at this point, he wants them to make simple dirt altars for worship. Pile up dirt for altars and if you make stone altars, don’t use tools to shape them (24-25). Keep them simple, unlike the nations around them. In other words, be careful how you approach me, draw near to me, worship me. But how can a people draw near to God when fear drives them away from God? Through the provision of sacrifices to atone for their sin. Israel needs an altar, a place where sacrifices can be burned to atone for their sins. Do you see how gracious God is already at the beginning of these instructions? God is making a way for them because he knows they are sinful. God gives the terms for worship and then makes provision for worship.

How do we respond? First, most of us should take God much more seriously. God desires fellowship and intimacy with us. We are his treasured possession, his beloved, his children, bought by the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ but approaching God is anything but casual or careless.

Secondly, in Moses, Israel had a prophet who spoke God’s revelation to them; a deliverer who rescued them; and an intercessor who interceded before God on their behalf. We have a better Moses in Jesus Christ who gave us a better revelation in the gospel, a better deliverer who rescued/rescues us from sin and Satan, and a better High Priest who intercedes for us. Have you tasted the goodness of God found in Jesus Christ!

Finally, have no need to fear God’s judgment if we cling to Jesus. Jesus is a better Mediator and High Priest who made atonement for us, who took our sin as the better sacrifice so we can approach God with boldness and freedom. His death and resurrection defeated sin and death for us. Don’t play around with God, flee his judgment by clinging to Jesus Christ (Heb 12:18-26).

Life Group Questions:

Icebreaker:

Tell us about something you have feared in the past or still fear?

Head

1. Use your imagination to describe God’s presence at Mount Sinai in own words (Ex 20:18).
2. How did David describe the two kinds of fear?
3. What does it mean to be intimate with God but nor casual?
4. How does the right fear of God lead to the proper worship of God?

Heart

1. Which fear of God has been your bent in life?
2. Do you ever remember a time you were terrified of God?
3. Do you ever think about your relationship with Christ ever being too casual?
4. What are reasons we all struggle with taking our relationship with God too casually?

Hand

1. How does the fear of God lead to following Jesus in discipleship?
2. How is God asking me cultivate a fear to be desired?
3. How does the what Exodus 20:22-26 say about worship apply to my worship now?

**God Gives his People Leaders**

God was watching over Israel by calling Moses to lead Israel at eighty years of age (3:7ff). The people of Israel did not see it that way at first, but he was the man God called to lead Israel. God gave Moses the Passover instructions and Moses then gave those instructions to Israel’s elders to lead Israel in the Passover (21).[[4]](#footnote-4) God watches over his people by giving them leaders who lead. Ie leadership development

**God Gives His People His Word**

God was watching over his people by giving them his word. This will become even more prominent as we go through Exodus. They needed to trust his word to be protected. The final plague reminds us that all of us are subject to judgment because of sin (Heb 9:27). it is appointed for man to die once, and after that comes judgment[[5]](#footnote-5) God watched over those who trusted his word as evidenced by the blood on their doors. God was teaching his people the need for a substitute for sin. So they watched and they waited that night with their families. Their hope for protection was not in themselves but in the one who watches over them. In the same way God protected Noah’s family inside the ark, God protected Israel inside their homes. God watches over us by giving us his word.

1. The ten commandments is not the first time God gave laws, but it is the first time they are codified in written form. God has given laws to his people since Eden and passed down in oral tradition. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. God warned Israel repeatedly of death at Mount Sinai, see Ex 19:12-13, 21, 23-24. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Ex 15:25-26; 16:1-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. When God first called Moses, he instructed Moses to tell the elders first then also (3:6). As the Old Testament develops, the prominence of Israel’s elders increases, becoming more formal under Moses’ leadership (Num 11:16ff). The New Testament builds upon this structure with elders leading and teaching the church (1 Tim 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-16). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](https://ref.ly/logosres/esv?ref=BibleESV.Heb9.27&off=3&ctx=fice+of+himself.+27%C2%A0~And+just+as+o%EF%BB%BFit+is+) (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 9:27. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)