

Sermon Notes



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1/11/26

Thin Places – Mountains

Acts 17:22-28

Last week, we introduced the subject of Thin Places. If you were unable to be here, please go back and listen on our website or go to our Facebook Streaming page and watch it there. It will help you get context for what is to come.

I mentioned several examples of Thin Places in scripture last week: caves, houses, the Table, mountains, boats, wells, rivers, and wilderness. This is by no means a comprehensive list. As we go through this series, my prayer is that you will start seeing Thin Places in your daily life. You don't have to go to a Thin Place...they also come to you.

Mountains have always been special. You may love the flat stillness of the prairie, and I would admit that there is beauty to be found there, but you really have to look. But when you get your first glimpse of the mountains, there is awe. It is a natural human response that is there for some reason. (cresting the front range to see the endless peaks to come).

It shouldn't be a surprise, then, that mountains have always been centers of worship. For some people, going up meant getting closer to God, for God and the gods were "up there" somewhere. There are thousands and thousands of mountains around the world where there are remains of altars and other centers of worship. The Himalayas are full of prayer drums, prayer wheels, prayer ribbons, and temples up as high as people could put them, as worshippers tried to get high enough to let God see them.

Getting the attention of your local god has consumed humanity for as long as there have been humans. Remember the contest between Elijah and the priests of Baal? It took place, by the way, on a mountain. When Paul went to look for pagan worshippers to tell them about Jesus, he went top of a mountain in the city limits of Athens...and there they were. And his words to them included (Acts 17:22-28).

There is a question that probably came up about that time: were they close to the God of whom Paul spoke because they were on a mountain? Paul would say, of course, no. They were close to Him because they were His children, and God is always near His children. Unlike mountains, humans were spoken into being. We are greater than stone and wood and gold, and so is the God who made us.

But why are mountains such special places, then, if they do not bring us physically close to God? One answer would be: they take us further away from other gods, other noises, all of the distractions that make our life leak away before we know it (movies were a lot more fun to watch at home before iPhones). Mountain tops are quiet places (one of the reasons Everest is such a disappointment to climbers).

In Colorado, we have several friends who climb the Fourteeners. There are 53 mountains in that state that top 14,000ft. They cite the challenge and the sense of accomplishment they feel when they climb, but if you talk to them long enough, they will talk of Thin Places. They feel closer to God because they have tuned out the rest of the world and allowed themselves to be open to hearing from God. They can see His majesty and power without being distracted by an email.

Let's think back to a time in the life of Moses. He was over 80 and had just humbled Egypt by announcing that the God of Heaven was not going to allow His children to be enslaved any longer. God sent the plagues against Egypt to show them that their gods could not protect them against the One, True God.

They started leaving Egypt going in one direction but God changed their direction and sent them toward the Red Sea. Can you imagine the cacophony of all of those people moving in a mass with their animals and goods? You would have seen their dust from miles and miles away. And then...the divided sea. And then...they arrive at a mountain that is shaking and cloaked by cloud. And then...the silence and God's call to Moses to come up.

Moses went up, of course, but it wasn't to get closer to God; it was to get away from the noise and distractions of crowd. Jesus made it a practice to get away. Think about that for a moment: no one has ever loved people more than Jesus. No one. Ever. And yet, he is repeatedly said to be going to this or that private place, sometimes staying more than a month in complete or nearly complete isolation. Why? To see the Thin Places and to hear from God, sometimes we need to stop hearing other voices.

Let's go back to that mountain: on the 3rd day of the 3rd month after they left Egypt, they arrive at the mountain (more of a range than a single peak). God gives Moses a quick message for the people, which Moses then delivers. Then, God reveals that something special is about to happen (Exodus 19:9). The people prepare for something holy to happen. They clean themselves up and are given strict orders to kill anyone who would disturb the meeting between Moses and God (Exodus 19:10-13).

And then... (Exodus 19:16-20). You see, God was not living on the mountain. He went there for the very purpose of meeting with Moses. But Moses needed to be away from the noise. Moses was not a sweet, gentle, patient man. He was a difficult person to work with from time to time, and his temper got the better of him more than once. God needed Moses' full attention on that mountain.

We often speak of the 10 Commandments, and so we should. But God gave Moses hundreds of laws on that mountain. What happened to the people during this time? Moses was up there for a long time so the people thought he might not have survived. He was old, the mountain was dangerous, and meeting with a powerful God was unlikely to be safe so...could they get some other gods to help them move through the desert? (Exodus 32:1,2)

Aaron did not make them another god; he made them an understandable and predictable image of their God. They then devolved quickly into pagan worship and debauchery. Why? Because they did not go quiet. They did not embrace the holy. They were distracted by their daily needs and by the crowd and by their uncertainty. Remember: the devil does not need to get your eyes on him. He only needs to get your eyes off of Jesus.

Perhaps it is time for us to take personal inventory of our lives. What takes our eyes off Jesus? What noises crowd out the voice of God? How many Thin Places do we fail to notice because our eyes and minds are busy elsewhere?

We will look at mountains again, but I would like to leave you with a simple exercise. Consider going to get fast food via the drive-thru. For most of us, the very reason we are not going inside a proper restaurant or eating at home is that we are busy, distracted, and we have places to go, things to do. So we don't even take the time to go inside the fast-food restaurant. No, we get in a line of cars.

The options are lit up in front of us. We speak to a person via a speaker and are told to pull up to the first window. We hand bits of paper and metal, and are handed, in turn, a slip of paper. We move to the next window and, if we are in luck, are handed what we ordered. We dole it out quickly or set the bag down and head back into the traffic and noise of our day.

No Thin Places there, right? Or...are there? What if we slowed down and noticed more? Let's not demand a home-cooked meal or even that you go into the restaurant and sit down. Let's stay in that drive-thru line. Is there a Thin Place there? There certainly can be. We have money for food. Are you aware how rare that is? And we have a large variety of food right there in front of us, not endless bowls of rice or stone-ground wheat with a bit of goat's milk. While hygiene may not be perfect, it is miles above that of most of the world.

So...we have money and we have food and we have safety. All very rare things that most of the world longs for and never gets. What if we stopped for a moment and thanked God – not with a perfunctory prayer before eating but with an acknowledgement that this is a Gift from His hands? What if we became a Thin Place for the workers by the way we treated them?

I experienced a Thin Place last week that hit me so hard that I had to share it with Kami. I went to Kroger. I could go on and on about the riches to be found in that store, but that wasn't it. It was what hit me on the way out. I had gone in, placed everything on my list into the cart, and paid without running a tally in my head and wondering how much of what I needed I could actually afford. I knew I could pay for whatever I picked up. And that is a relatively new place in my life. It became a Thin Place because, for just a moment, I allowed myself to notice. I allowed myself to be quiet and think about what just happened. I went up a mountain in my mind and saw what God had done...and I was grateful.

Do not ask God to make Thin Places. Ask Him to quiet you so that you can enter the ones all around you.