

PM Exodus 19 Meeting God at Sinai

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[0 : 0 0] If you have your Bibles, to turn to the book of Exodus again, the book of Exodus, and this evening we're going to look at chapter 19, chapter 19.

Now as I said this morning, we're going to begin sort of a semi-consecutive series on the Ten Commandments. I'm due to be here, I think another maybe twice, this side of 2021 and then a couple of times in 2022, so I thought it would be good and apposite to speak on the Ten Commandments and we begun that study this morning.

But this evening, we're coming to chapter 19. Now the Ten Commandments are contained in chapter 20, so we're going to, as a further introduction to the Ten Commandments, look at chapter 19 and we'll read the whole of this passage this evening.

And I'm reading from the English Standard Version. Israel have now come to a place in the desert called Mount Sinai, where they will receive the Ten Commandments.

On the third new moon, after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai and they encamped in the wilderness.

[1 : 3 3] There Israel encamped before the mountain. While Moses went up to God, the Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob and tell the people of Israel.

You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine.

And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel.

So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him. All the people answered together and said, All that the Lord has spoken, we will do.

[2 : 4 3] And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord. And the Lord said to Moses, Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud that the people may hear when I speak with you and may also believe you forever.

When Moses told the words of the people to the Lord, the Lord said to Moses, Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow. And let them wash their garments and let them wash their garments and be ready for the third day.

For on the third day, the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, Take care not to go up into the mountain or to touch the edge of it.

Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot. Whether beast or man, he shall not live.

When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain. So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people and they washed their garments.

[4 : 14] And he said to the people, Be ready for the third day. Do not go near a woman. On the morning of the third day, there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain.

And a very loud trumpet blast so that all the people in the camp trembled. Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God. And they took their stand at the foot of the mountain.

Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln.

And the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke and God answered him in thunder.

The Lord came down on Mount Sinai to the top of the mountain. And the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain. And Moses went up.

[5 : 20] And the Lord said to Moses, Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the Lord to look and many of them perish. Also let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out against them.

And Moses said to the Lord, The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you yourself warned us, saying, Set limits around the mountain and consecrate it. And the Lord said to him, Go down and come up bringing Aaron with you.

But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest he break out against them. So Moses went down to the people and told them.

Amen. And may God give us good understanding of that passage. Now before we come to... Good, now can I turn you turn with me back to the passage that we read a moment ago in Exodus 19.

And you'll see from the bulletin sheet that the title to the sermon this evening is Meeting God at Sinai.

[6 : 39] Meeting God at Sinai. In chapter 19, we have set before us the events that lead up to the great arrival of God the King in full awesome majesty at Mount Sinai.

Chapter 19 and verse 1 is the fulfillment, in fact, of the promise that God made to Moses when Moses first encountered God at this very place, Sinai, at the burning bush back, which is recorded for us in chapter 3, when Moses first met God at Sinai.

When Moses met God on that occasion, amongst other things, God had promised then and commissioned him that he would, Moses would lead the people out of Egypt and they would come to worship at this very mountain.

Listen to the words of chapter 3 and verse 11. When Moses is standing before him, before God, at the burning bush with his feet unshod, Moses said unto God, as he was commissioned to go to speak to Pharaoh, to lead the children of Israel out, Moses said to God, Who am I?

That I should go unto Pharaoh and that I should bring the children of Israel out of Egypt. And God said, Certainly I will be with you.

[8 : 26] And this shall be a sign to you that I have sent you. When you have brought the people out, you shall serve God upon this mountain.

So God is a promise keeping God. God always keeps his promises. And this verse tells us that the Lord's people had been brought to this place outside of Egypt, where they could hear and receive the law, to formally be given God's covenant to them as a nation.

So it's no accident that they find themselves here at Sinai. Sinai is a place where they are going to worship God.

Here at Sinai, they will receive the Ten Commandments and other laws. God's moral law.

They will receive here the blueprint in the Ten Commandments for godly living. Here they will get also detailed instructions as to how God is to be worshipped.

[9 : 52] In Exodus 19, we come to the very first formal gathering of God's people. And it's interesting that they gather together formally to hear God's word.

That's significant. Because one of the most important things, if not the most important thing, is that we gather to hear God's word as God's people.

And Mount Sinai is the key mountain in the Old Testament. And the people, according to this passage, are to prepare to meet God at Sinai.

Verse 2 tells us in our passage, they are camped before the mountain, or as other translations say, in front of the mountain. Now just by way of background, in this chapter, Moses, I don't know if you noticed it, he is going up and he's going down the mountain.

He goes up and down the mountain. In this chapter, I think, I know I'm an accountant, but I think I counted three times that he goes up and he goes down, descends the mountain. Remember, Moses is 80 years old when this situation takes place.

[11 : 15] This account that we have. Now as to the location of Mount Sinai, there's been much conjecture, conjecture. We're not sure exactly, the exact location of this mountain.

It might be a mountain that is known today as Jabal Musa, a mountain that's about 7,500 feet high. But the good news for Moses is that the people actually are camped, not at the very bottom of the mountain, but actually some way up the mountain, perhaps on a plateau at about 5,000 feet.

Maybe Jabal Musa, Mount Sinai, is a bit like Scottish mountains. I don't know if you've ever ascended Scottish mountains. They're very deceiving, especially if you're a child, because they have what's called false summits.

And you think you're getting to the top of them, and then you suddenly find out that you're on a plateau and that the mountain top, the peak is actually further on. It may be that that is the picture that we have to have in our minds when we think of Mount Sinai.

And there are reasons for me saying that. But Moses is the only one who will go to the top of that mountain with God. Moses is going to be a go-between, a mediator, between the people and God.

[12 : 44] As God will deliver his laws and his covenant to Israel. Now we spoke about covenants a little bit this morning, and I don't want to say much more on that, but there are two parties to the covenants in the Bible.

God and either an individual or God and his people as it is here. God is the one who initiates the covenant and the agreement.

He is the sovereign one, the overlord in the agreement. He's the most important person. And the other people are his subjects.

The other party are his subject. The people, the children of Israel here. But God takes the prime place and he is the one who initiates the covenant, the agreement, the relationship.

And so I think we should rightly consider him first in our passage. Look at verse 4. We have the actions of God and we have the credentials of God as the overlord.

[14 : 02] Look at what he says to Moses on his first ascent. He says, You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

So three things are outlined here by God as a great covenant initiator and the one who has the rights to demand of his people.

He has the rights to demand their obedience. The three things are there in verse 4. He says to Moses, Look what I did to the Egyptians.

Look how I bore you on eagles' wings. Look how I brought you to myself.

It was God who was their Redeemer and Saviour. It was he who had brought them out of Egypt by his mighty hand.

[15 : 09] It was he who had sent the plagues upon Pharaoh that we read of earlier in the book. It was he who had brought the children of Israel across the Red Sea. It was he who had led them out of Egypt.

Look at what he did to the Egyptians as the children of Israel crossed over onto the Red Sea across through the Red Sea and the water came back and destroyed all of Pharaoh and his army.

It was God who had borne them on eagles' wings. It was God who had brought them to himself. It was by his mighty hand that he had brought them out.

Exodus 3 going back again in verses 7 and 9 tells us that God was the one who saw their predicament. God was the one who heard their groanings in Egypt.

he knew their sorrows. He knew their bondage and it was he who took the initiative and decided to come down to deliver them and he tells Moses that and he told Moses that when he commissioned him at the very first to lead the people out that he had saw that he had heard and that he was going to come and redeem his people.

[16 : 45] But in chapter 6 and verse 5 down to 8 and perhaps if you want to turn to that we should read that together. Exodus chapter 6 verses 5 to 8 because they play as it were into this scene.

again God is speaking to Moses and he says these words in chapter 6 verses 5 down to 8 he says moreover I have heard the groaning of the people of Israel whom the Egyptians hold as slaves and I have remembered my covenant that was the covenant that he had made with Abraham he had given Abraham promises that he was going to make a great nation of Abraham's seed and this is it coming to fulfilment now he says I have remembered my covenant say therefore to the people of Israel I am the Lord and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians and I will deliver you from slavery to them and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment I will take you to be my people and I will be your God and you shall know that I am the Lord your God who has brought you out from under the burdens of the

Egyptians I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham to Isaac and to Jacob I will give it to you for a possession I am the Lord it is God who is remembering his covenant that he made with Abraham and he covenanted to in these seven I wills did you read them I will bring you out I will deliver you I will redeem you I will take you to be my people I will be your God and so on I am going to do this God says I will free you I will redeem you so it's no accident that they find themselves here at Sinai for God had promised it he had covenanted it to them but you see God didn't just save and redeem his people out of

Egypt from slavery and from bondage there's more to the relationship than him merely being a saviour as it were he brought them out so that they would be his people a peculiar treasure he will be their God he says he wants to have a relationship with his people a relationship where he will speak and they will listen they will hear his voice and he will expect obedience God saves them and God saves people so that they can enjoy his presence so that they can be in fellowship with him and here in Exodus 19 and 20 he's going to enter formally his covenant with them he shall set out the terms of the covenant in the chapters that follow verse 5 tells us in chapter 19 they are to obey his voice and to keep his covenant and only if and only if they do so will they enjoy the blessings of being his people they will be a peculiar or a special treasure to God conditioned on their obedience to enjoy that relationship

John L. Mackay in his commentary on this says obedience is not our part in a two-sided bargain but our grateful response to what the Lord has unilaterally decided and done they are going to hear his commands they are going to hear his voice the voice will tell them all what the great overlord sovereign God expects of his subjects God's credentials as the great saviour and God's requirements as the great overlord and sovereign king are what Moses hears on his first visit up the mountain in verses 4 to 6 enjoyment of the covenant will only be experienced through obedience obedience someone has said in summarizing

[22 : 32] Christianity that Christianity is really obedience obedience to God obedience to Christ the hallmark of the genuineness of the people of God is that they possess they listen to and obey the word of God so what does that look like in 2021 for us 20 or so people here this evening many of us who profess faith in the Lord Jesus the question comes to us it's one thing to listen to God's word but it's another thing to obey God's word how obedient are we to God's word when it cuts across us when it challenges us when it rebukes us do we shrug our shoulders or do we bow under the word of

God the children of Israel verse 6 are going to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation they will have access to God and Moses is to tell them all of this when he comes down the mountain God took his people Israel into this relationship for a purpose so that through them he might be exalted and that the world might know and hear of God you know so it is with those of us who are Christians here this evening we come under the new covenant of grace in Christ Jesus they had experienced grace also in God's redemption salvation and their duty out of love was to obey

God and so it is with us we are brought into union with the Lord Jesus by our faith in him that is done unilaterally by God we don't contribute anything to that it is all by God's grace that we are saved it is he who saves it is he who calls it is he who justifies it is he that brings us into union with Christ but that union with Christ and with God leads to communion communion and communion is a two way relationship they have been brought to him taken out of the corrupting influence of Egypt which is a picture of the world they are now living on his goodness and kindness and grace but now they are to focus and develop an intimate obedient relationship with their master but that relationship isn't straightforward because

God is holy and we and they are essentially sinful and those two do not mix as it were but let's look at the second party to the covenant the recipients of the covenant the people of Israel you see the problem for them is that God cannot be approached lightly that's what this passage tells us in so many ways so Moses descends the mountain again verse 7 let's read that so Moses came he comes down the mountain and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him and all the people answered together and said all that the Lord has spoken we will do and Moses goes back up the mountain again and he reports the words of the people to the

Lord and then in verses 9 down to verse 13 God responds with what Moses is now to tell the people God tells them that he is now going to come down in three days time he's going to come down in a thick cloud he's going to speak to Moses but he's going to speak to Moses in a way that they will all hear and when God speaks on this occasion when he comes down they will all hear but they will all hear God's vindication or authorization also of Moses as God's spokesman and mouthpiece look at verse 9 and the Lord said to Moses behold I am coming to you in a thick cloud that the people may hear when

[28 : 33] I speak with you and may also believe in you forever God is authenticating here in Exodus 19 that Moses is the great mediator Moses is going to be the go-between and so in three days God is going to come and they're all going to see him verse 11 and they're all told to be ready get ready be prepared for the third day for on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai in sight of all the people they're all going to see God but then from verse 10 forward look at the problem that the sinful people have God outlines because he's holy he's of purer eyes than to behold their iniquity and so

God outlines the parameters and the boundaries of the relationship based on his intrinsic holiness they are called to do three positive things did you notice that three things that they must do in preparation for God's arrival first of all in verse 10 the people must sanctify themselves the Lord said to Moses go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow verse 10 and let them wash their garments and be ready for the third day they are to sanctify themselves they are to make themselves holy they are to wash their garments verse 10 and they are to get ready they are to get prepared and that's also reiterated again down in verse 15 for a second time as if they were in any doubt of God's commands and requirements you see there are boundaries to be set by God in verse 12 you shall set limits for the people all around now we're all been used to over the last 18 months of limits haven't we one meter two meter don't come near

God is setting the limits here because of his holiness he's saying I am going to come and you're going to come near but not too near because of my holiness so they're to sanctify they're to wash their clothes they're to get ready but then there are negative things that they're to do in preparation for God the things they mustn't do look at verse 12 beware he says take heed you must not go up on the mount verse 12 again they must not touch the border of the mountain and if they do so they will surely die whoever touches the mount shall surely be put to death not even an animal must touch the mountain or it also would be put to death verse 15 tells us that they must also abstain from sexual relations for these two days in other words as you take a step back or as you read this passage what are we to gather from this

I submit to you there's to be no casualness with the people of God no presumption on their part no curiosity either don't get too near they're being told you need to focus you need to be single minded there needs to be obedience there needs to be purity in your life these are God's demands for his people only when the trumpet sounds do they as it were in verse 13 do they get the green light to change the metaphor only when the trumpet sounds a long blast they shall come up to the mountain the scene is all screaming be ready be clean beware don't presume don't be casual in your approach to God you better take care with God on pain of death for he's holy obedience isn't optional it's not negotiable it's mandatory you see

God defines the terms on how they must approach him where they must approach him God sets the parameters God sets the rules this is how they are to respond to his commands and so in verse 16 on the third day God does come it was a terrifying experience when God came down there were thunders and lightning a thick cloud covered that mountain the trumpet sounded longer and longer and louder and louder and the people in the camp Moses tells us trembled verse 17 as Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet

[35 : 18] God at Sinai the mountain he tells us in verse 18 was on smoke as God ascended descended in fire on the mountain the smoke billowed up off the mountain not only were the people quaking in dread of this holy God the whole mountain quaked greatly verse 18 tells us at God's presence and as the sound of the trumpet crescendos in verse 19 God speaks in the thunder the instructions the boundaries are so important that they repeated to Moses once again for the third time when he ascended up the mountain in verse 20 and following we don't have time to look at it well what are we to learn from all of this in 2021 whilst this took place many centuries ago as we said this morning we need to remember that God hasn't changed in his character has he he is still holy he is still majestic he is the one to be worshipped as such that holiness has not been turned down

God hasn't been tamed as it were he is still the one who determines who can approach him he must never be approached lightly yes as God's people today we can come boldly into his presence because we have been forgiven but we do so with reverence and godly fear it's he who determines how we can approach him no one should presume upon him nor should we be casual in his presence he's not the big man up there he's the almighty god the sovereign the maker of heaven and earth we are invited to come near and yet not too near we can only come to god through the lord Jesus Christ and we can be brought nigh to god in a way that they couldn't in the old testament but as it was then so it is now our sin naturally precludes us from coming into god's presence as believers when we gather to hear god's word as they did here we should prepare and do it with seriousness i take it to myself when we go to church do we pray before we go to church to hear god's word or do we just turn up because it's something that we do we don't come to be entertained when we come to hear god's word what do you expect when you come to hear god's word do you come with a spirit of obedience and submission or with a less fair attitude do do

I when I hear god's word take it or leave it but great and awesome and majestic as Sinai was something even greater and better and superior has arrived saved the writer to the Hebrews in chapter 12 says a greater mediator than Moses has come Jesus Christ God hasn't changed we as sinful people haven't changed but what has changed is that a greater mediator has come in Jesus Christ as Christians we are privileged to live after the cross of

Calvary and Jesus Christ death something and someone far superior has arrived the writer to the Hebrews says we are not come to that mountain with Moses mediating but we have come to another mountain Mount Zion and to Christ as the mediator of the new covenant you see Christ perfectly represents both parties God and his people Moses went up the mountain to intercede between God and the people but Christ has come right down into this world to reveal the father to us right down to deal with our sin and he did that in his life and in his death at the cross as we saw this morning

God's law and as we shall see demands absolute righteousness absolute perfect obedience and conformity and no one Moses included no one apart from Christ was able to render to the great judge that perfect obedience but Christ rendered to God on behalf of sinful human beings like you and I that obedience in his life and at the cross of Calvary he took the punishment that people like you and I deserve for breaking God's laws and so a new and a living way is open to us there is a new access to

[43 : 04] God through Christ death forgiveness and pardon are freely available through faith in Christ Sinai speaks to us of God's sovereignty of his wrath of his holiness of his judgment seen in the fire and as sinners we are all under that law and under that condemnation of that broken law you see nothing was declared that Sinai of God as a father gracious and merciful there was no promise at Sinai of grace in any way to assist or to meet

God's demands but now Christ has come the new mediator the better mediator the superior mediator has through his life and death in the words of John Newton's hymn he has hushed the law's loud thunder he has quenched Mount Sinai's flame he calls us now as his people who are no longer condemned but justified to live in obedience to his law we didn't read the passage in Hebrews 12 for time but in that passage the writer to the

Hebrews as he speaks to Christians who were reverting back to Judaistic traditions going back to some ceremonial laws he says you're free from that he ends with a warning he says the voice that spoke at Sinai speaks today the same voice that caused Israel to fear and tremble speaks today he speaks to you today through his word and through his son the Lord Jesus but he also brings a note of warning he says there was a time of shaking at Mount Sinai when the people shook and the earth shook but he says there's a time coming when not only the earth will shake as it did at Sinai but the whole earth will shake when

God returns a second time to judge the world in light of that the writer says we ought to worship God with reverence with awe and with godly fear why the writer to the Hebrews says in chapter 12 and verse 29 for our God is still a consuming fire let's pray together father we confess in your presence this evening that you are not very often in our estimations the high the holy and lifted up one in our affections and in our thinking father we confess our sin with before you this evening father you are the great and high and holy one the one who is immortal invisible the only wise god father we pray that we might see you as that as your people that we might obey you in your word that we might take your word far more seriously than we've ever done before father for those who do not know you this evening as their father we pray that they might come that they might bow the knee before you recognize that they are sinners that they deserve the condemnation that they are under but father we thank you that you have provided your son the lord jesus to be a savior to bring us close to you to bring us into a relationship with you father we pray that we might all prize that relationship father we recognize that there is a day coming and we recognize that so often we don't live like this but that there is a day coming when you will come to judge the world in righteousness by that man jesus christ oh father help us not to trivialize it not to reject it not to put it off but to own up to the fact that that is something that will take place and help us to fashion our lives in the light of that day of judgment and day of reckoning father we ask these things just now in jesus name amen there to people you so