

Meeting with God at the Cross

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[0:00] In Exodus chapter 19, we're going to begin reading in verse 14 and read into chapter 20 up to verse 24.

! On the morning of the third day, there was thunder and lightning with a thick cloud over the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast.

Everyone in the camp trembled. Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. Mount Sinai was covered with smoke because the Lord descended on it in fire.

The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace. The whole mountain trembled violently, and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder.

And then Moses spoke, and the voice of God answered him. The Lord descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain.

[1:20] And so Moses went up, and the Lord said to him, Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the Lord, and many of them perish.

Even the priests who approach the Lord must consecrate themselves, or the Lord will break out against them. And Moses said to the Lord, The people cannot come up Mount Sinai because you yourself warned us, put limits around the mountain, and set it apart as holy.

The Lord replied, Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the Lord, or he will break out against them.

So Moses went down to the people and told them. And God spoke all these words. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery.

You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above, or on the earth beneath, or in the waters below.

[2:29] You shall not bow down to them or worship them, for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.

You shall not misuse the name of the Lord your God, for the Lord will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name. Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy.

Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.

For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.

Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you. You shall not murder. You shall not commit adultery.

[3:44] You shall not steal. You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor. You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain and smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance and said to Moses, speak to us yourself and we will listen, but do not have God speak to us or we will die.

And Moses said to the people, do not be afraid. God has come to test you so that you, the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning. The people remained at a distance while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.

Then the Lord said to Moses, tell the Israelites this, you have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven. Do not make any gods or be to be alongside me. Do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold. Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle. [5 : 07] So wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. We can forget how terrible it was when God came and spoke the Ten Commandments to Israel.

God came to them and it was with smoke and thunder and lightning. The people trembled, the mountain trembled.

Hebrews says that Moses trembled. And God said to Moses, don't let the people or the priests come close to me or I will break out against them.

Everything in the situation shows us and it showed them that no one can come to God based on in themselves, in their own efforts, in their own law keeping.

If you want to come to God through the law, you must be prepared to face the thunder and the lightning and all of God in his holy exacting terror.

[6 : 23] But meeting God is what we are about tonight. We are going to meet with God and the Lord suffer. God says, come, come and fellowship with me.

Come close to me. And so we come not because we have obeyed these Ten Commandments. Because I'm sure as I read them, you thought of the ones that you have broken recently. We come not because we've kept the law of God, but because of Jesus and his sacrifice for us. And that's what verse 24 points us to.

And that's the verse that we're going to look at tonight. So if you could, let's look at the very last verse that I read. Verse 24. It says, Make an altar of earth for me and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your sheep and goats and your cattle, wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and I will bless you.

So there's another way to God. And it's through the cross. And that's what I want to look at tonight. Verse 24 tells us four things about the cross.

[7 : 38] It tells us that the cross is a place of blood. It's a place of honor. It's a place of meeting. And it's a place of blessing.

So it's a place of blood. Verse 24 says, Make an altar and a sacrifice and bring your burnt offerings and your fellowship offerings. And you list the animals and all those sacrifices point forward to what we look back to tonight, to the cross of Jesus, to Jesus' own death.

It points forward to what we are remembering tonight. And we can't miss the blood. I'm so glad that I'm a New Testament pastor and not an Old Testament priest.

Because what a bloody, bloody mess it was. Can you imagine it? All day long, animals coming and being killed and dismembered, taken apart, and blood thrown on the altar.

Animals' lives were forcefully, violently taken. Again, the wages of sin is death.

[8 : 55] And these animals are dying in the place of the worshipers. They are dying so that the sins of those people could be covered up.

And yet, none of those deaths, as hundreds and thousands of animals all throughout Old Testament history, as they all died, none of them could finally atone for sin.

They were powerless to cleanse the conscience from guilt. And they were powerless except to say, We need a final sacrifice. We need a final sacrifice.

And they pointed to Jesus. Jesus. And beloved, we can't miss this, that Jesus' life was forcefully, violently taken.

He was brutally chopped down. Remember, as he was being taken out of the city, the women were crying. And he said, Don't weep for me.

[9 : 55] Weep for yourselves. If they do this when the tree is green, what are they going to do when it is dry? And so he was a green tree, and he was brutally chopped down.

So the cross was a place of blood. We can't ever get too fancy or too sophisticated.

Men, at times, miss the simple message of the cross and make it into something it's not. Fact is, is that God demands blood.

The wrath of God is God's righteous demand that the sinner pay with his life. Forcefully taken. With blood.

And men may call that brutal. And men may call it old-fashioned. But to deny that is to rob Jesus of his glory and to rob the cross of its glory.

[11:00] Because on the cross, he interposed his blood. He interposed. He put into my place, into your place, dear believer, his life.

And so it was his life forcefully taken instead of my life violently taken. And it's foolish to Greeks. It's a stumbling block to Jews.

But that is the glory of the cross. Instead of me being torn apart, he was torn apart. God sent his son in my place.

In your place. So the cross was a place of blood. And we remember that tonight. Second, it's a place of honor.

Look at verse 24. The Lord says, referring to the altars. He says, wherever I cause my name to be honored. He's talking about the altar.

[11:57] So wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you and bless you. The altar was a place of honor. Every altar existed to say, God is holy.

God is exalted. God is to be honored and revered and to be loved. He is holy. He is off limits. He should not be touched. He cannot be violated. He's holy.

He's exalted. And so every time we sin, we say, God, you are not worthy of all my heart. You aren't supremely valuable.

So every sin is an attack on the preciousness, on the worth of God. Maybe you've seen, you've heard about this 10-year-old young lady from Denver, Jessica Ridgway, who was abducted and murdered.

She was going to school. And it's an absolutely terrible thing. And the thought of it calls out the wrath of every sensible human.

[13:13] People are screaming for blood. People want to be involved in the bloodletting. One person said, whoever did it deserves to die a thousand slow deaths.

Isn't that hell? A thousand slow deaths. Why such a reaction? Why are people so angry about this? And why would people gladly sign up for the firing squad? Because we innately feel the innocence, the preciousness of young Jessica.

Fathers, you know, that special love that you have for your little girl. And just the very thought of someone hurting them calls out your wrath.

A 10-year-old girl shouldn't be touched. It's off limits. She is, we could even say, holy. And so when a little girl is attacked, everything in us says, no, that's not how it should be.

[14:22] Someone has to pay. And we feel that way about 10-year-old girls. And that's right. And it's good. But we so often don't feel that way about God.

We sin. And it's not that big of a deal. We generally don't feel that way about God's honor. That he shouldn't be touched.

That he shouldn't be attacked. That he should be loved and revered and honored. And so when a little girl is attacked, everything in us says, no. But when God's glory and honor is attacked, we don't feel so good about hell.

We don't think a thousand slow deaths is quite fair. But on the cross, God says no to all of our God-bellittling ways.

He says, no. My name is holy. My name will be revered. I will not be violated.

[15:24] Your sin has consequences. And so when Jesus took upon himself sin and died this terrible, bloody death, he was upholding God's honor.

The cross was supremely a place of worship. Where Jesus, the Son of God, was showing how valuable and honored God is to be.

And he did it as he laid down his life. So how can we honor God tonight? How can we honor God tonight? Well, we can begin by saying, God, I'm a sinner.

I'm a sinner. God doesn't get any honor as long as I don't think I'm that bad of a person. That sin is no big deal.

That I'm not so bad. And we can honor God by saying, God, my sin is terrible. I know it's terrible. I have acted towards you in a way that is so bad.

[16:31] So terrible. My sin is so terrible that your son had to die for it in order to cover it over. And I'm unworthy. And I'm a lawbreaker.

And I've attacked you. And I've attacked your honor. And so when we feel the greatness of God and the sinfulness of our sin, then we honor God. Then we honor Jesus and what he's done for us.

And when we put our trust in Jesus, we say, my sin is so big, I can't take it. I can't take care of it. And we give ourselves to Jesus. And we say, yes, my sins deserve that.

We honor God. So the cross is a place of honor. Third, it's a place of meeting. It's a place of meeting. Verse 24 says, wherever I cause my name to be honored, I will come to you.

I will come to you. What a contrast this is to everything else in the chapter and the surrounding context. God says, stay off the mountain.

[17:37] And the people stayed off the mountain. They trembled. They said, God, don't speak to us. Moses, you can speak to us, but don't let him speak to us or we're going to die.

Everything in the passage shows us that sinful men can't meet with a holy God. But then you come to verse 24 and God says, and I will come to you and I will bless you.

Through the blood of the sacrifice, we can have fellowship with God. Sinful men can have fellowship with a holy God.

And if you are without Jesus. What hope do you have? How can you live with a consuming fire?

The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace. The Lord descended on it in fire. How can you live with everlasting burnings?

[18:49] What the prophet asked. Peace only comes through the sacrifice. It only comes after the blood has been shed. And as I was preparing this message, this is just this feeling of dread came on me because I knew.

We are going to meet with God tonight. And God was going to be here. And if God has not changed, then just how valuable and precious.

How much do we need Jesus? If he's going to come in our midst and not break out against us.

Then how precious is Jesus? But God in Christ comes to us.

And he's here. And that fear has been taken away. To a certain extent. But how careful we should be. How thankful we should be that Jesus has shed his blood for us.

It's only because of him that God doesn't destroy us. That I can meet God and live. Isaiah saw the Lord high and lifted up and he cried out, Woe is me.

[19:58] I am ruined. I am undone. And yet we come. Through the blood of the sacrifice and we meet God and live. So the fire of God struck.

And it struck him. God broke out and he broke out against his own son. And so now my sins, your sins have been paid completely.

See, we can meet with God not because God is not holy anymore. But because the holiness of God, the holy wrath of God, in his love, he's poured all that wrath out on his son.

And that's an amazing love. So how should we love Jesus? How we should love him. And now we can say, Abba, Father.

Now we have this intimate relationship. And now there's tenderness and there's intimacy. Not because God has lowered his glory. But because he's upheld his glory at the cross.

[21:07] And so tonight we meet God through Jesus. And tonight we remember that it's only through the cross. That sinful men can come and have fellowship with God.

So it's a place of meeting. Fourth, it's a place of blessing. It's a place of blessing. I will come to you and bless you. Not only can you meet God because of the cross, but God can bless you.

God, that meeting doesn't end up in your destruction, but it ends up with you being blessed. And so think about the blessing that flows from the cross.

And I mean, we could say so much, but you have joy because of Jesus. Your sins have been forgiven. Your sins have been forgiven.

They've been thrown into the deepest sea and he's never going to remember them again. What kind of joy is ours because of the cross? And we can say, oh, God has loved us.

[22:05] How he's loved us. God blesses you with peace. Whatever my lot, I can say. It is well with my soul. My biggest problem is I've offended a holy God.

But God in his grace has poured out that wrath and that anger on his son. And now I have a smiling face. With glorious power and grace, God has saved me.

But best of all, God comes and blesses us with himself. Remember how he said to Abraham, I am your very great reward.

All the blessings come to a climax, to a finish with God himself. So all of our emptiness, all of our finiteness, all of our creatureliness, all of the things that make us human with our need and our constant desire.

He alone fills that. He alone can satisfy. And so through the cross, God gives himself to sinners. And that's what communion is about.

[23:21] Tonight, by faith, we've received Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And by faith, we feed on Christ. And he says, come without money and buy bread.

Come without money and I will feed you. And by faith, we take the Lord. And he meets us. And he blesses us. And so, as we take communion tonight, don't miss the blessing.

Don't forget the blood. Don't forget the holiness of God. But by faith, come to God through Christ. By faith, take Jesus Christ.

Remember your sin. And remember that all that sin has been paid for. And so now, God can meet you. And he can bless you. All because of what Jesus has done.

Amen.