

Dinner on the Mountain, Exodus 24, BCF 2012.10.21

Summary and explanation of the passage. God had been saying “stay away” from Mount Sinai lest they die, and now he says, “come up”. What happened? The sprinkled blood of the covenant. God was taking them to be his people and bringing them into fellowship with himself. We will see this is not the ultimate or eternal covenant, as their commitment to obey would not last the month, that a covenant will be needed that actually writes the Law on the hearts of his people.

The only way he can deal with us is both as the created image of God, but also fallen and rebellious. There is so much within us that calls out for God’s judgment. What brings the righteous wrath of God and his grace together is the sprinkled blood of the covenant. The difference (before chapter 24) between “stay away” and “come up” (chapter 24) is the blood of the covenant.

The idea of having the blood of sacrificial animals thrown on this gathered crowd of Israelites may seem barbaric. But from the dawn of time even today people realize, whether they will admit it or not, that there within us and in our actions that which calls for restitution, that we need atonement and redemption, that payment or restitution was needed, that sin was costly, that death was ultimately required... that life comes at the expense of death.

Substitution. From the first sacrifice in the Bible, in Genesis (Abel’s sacrifice of a lamb) to the last book of the Bible, this principle that life comes at the expense of death is seen. It all points to the work of Jesus, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world.

Revelation 5:9, 12 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are you...for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God from every tribe and language and people and nation,"... "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

To have the blood sprinkled on the people of God was to acknowledge that fellowship with God would come only at the cost of the death of a Sacrifice. All of this was designed to point ahead to Jesus’ death which would give us life. His death and resurrection reverses the natural order of things. Life comes at the expense of death.

They were told before that if they tried to come up on the mountain to see God they would die. Now the group could actually come up and see God and not die, and in fact have dinner with God, because a substitute had died in their place.

Let’s work out some applications...

1. Know who you’re dealing with.

Holiness and righteousness + kindness and communion. The holiness of God and the love of God go together, they are inseparable.

And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank. (Exodus 24:11) ...Now the appearance of the glory of the LORD was like a devouring fire on the top of the mountain in the sight of the people of Israel. (24:17)

“God is light...” (1 John 1:5) ...“God is love...” (4:16)

It's not that he was mean and now he's nice, or that he has a gruff exterior but a kindly heart. He is always and infinitely holy, righteous, transcendent and at the same time kind, gracious, inviting to fellowship with him. He is both the Consuming Fire and the Lord of the Feast. As David Crowder sings, “He loves like a hurricane.”

Beware of two errors in regard to the nature of God. One is to assume, like many do today, that he is all banquet and no fire. In other words, he exists to make us happy and of course we can come into his presence and hang out. This is the post-modern, American view of God as slightly senile grandfather and beneficial provider. All gifts and no judgment. As Christians we come to God and enjoy his presence because his Son bore the fiery judgment. This is why we pray “in Jesus name”. Think about that. That's not a closing formula or some kind of hash tag, but a confession that our receiving grace and mercy from God, and having live in him, comes through the death and resurrection of his only Son.

The other error is to be so afraid of God as consuming fire that we see him as harsh, unforgiving, stern. This is common for Christians who have been believers for a while. We have understood that he is a consuming fire, a righteous Judge, but we are so aware of our failures and sin and unsuccessful attempts to live for him that we feel like we don't deserve to be at dinner but deserve to stand outside. We see him not as a doting grandfather, but rather as a critical boss who can't be pleased or IRS accountant. Begrudging, hard to please. And this is not true either. He is the Lord of the feast, the master of the banquet, the creator of beauty, the builder of a jewel-like city, who invites us to come. Again it is not your worthiness but the sprinkled blood of the covenant that gives you entre to the banquet and the Lord's presence.

How we think about God shapes how we relate to him and how we live. So...

2. Take a risk and come.

He had been saying “stay away” lest you die, and now he says, “Come up and eat and drink.” It must have felt risky, frightening even.

But they do come up. Now it's still somewhat at a distance, and Moses gets to dwell longer. In this event being in the presence of God and seeing him is not permanent, and not universal for all his people. But this group comes up and enjoys the Lord for a short season. Mosaic covenant → eternal covenant...

Hebrews 10:1 For since the law has but a shadow of the good things to come instead of the true form of these realities, it can never, by the same sacrifices that are continually offered every year, make perfect those who draw near.

How did they see the Lord? There's no real description, and it is what theologians call a "theophany," a manifestation of God, like the burning bush which Moses saw. God is spirit, invisible, and we can't physically see his essence. Yet **John 1:18**... *No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.* Perhaps the mention of a human form is to foreshadow that. Not that God is some kind of exalted human, but that God's Son would be a human and would be exalted... God deals with us through the mediation of his Son Jesus.

Anyway they are invited to come up, to see the Lord, and to actually have dinner. Amazing!! Notice all the places in the Bible where the Lord says, "come". Those alienated are invited to come and be reconciled, forgiven, adopted. He calls his children to keep coming, keep seeking, keep receiving, keep tasting...

Isaiah 55:1, 3 "Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price... ³ Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant...
John 7:37 *"If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink."*

Psalms... "Come and see, come and hear, come and taste..."
Matthew 11:28 *Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*
John 6:37 ... *whoever comes to me I will never cast out.*

Reckon these things to be true – both your sin and need, and his amazing mercy and grace – and then come to his banquet and eat. Don't be afraid to draw near to God. "Do not dare not to dare..."

"Now, Bree," he said, "you poor, proud frightened Horse, draw near. Nearer still, my son. **Do not dare not to dare.** Touch me. Smell me. Here are my paws, here is my tail, these are my whiskers. I am a true Beast."

"Aslan," said Bree in a shaken voice, "I'm afraid I must be rather a fool."

"Happy the Horse who knows that while he is still young. Or the Human either..."

(C. S. Lewis, *The Horse and His Boy*, Chapter 14)

3. Keep using your access.

This passage reminds us and foreshadows for us the work of Christ to bring us into God's very presence. And in the new covenant that presence is eternal, but most often unseen in this life.

Miracle of union: where I am he is, where he is I am. Like when school when "one parent" is needed. One represents both. So, I am never out of his presence, and in some mystical way my presence is already there in heaven.

Ephesians 2:6 “[he] raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus...

Prayer, ongoing prayer. Special season of seeking to know and see the beauty of God, but also “practicing the presence of God” (brother Lawrence). All needs, not just presentable. And, we are always in a place of need.

Hebrews 4:16 ¹⁶ Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.

4. Remember what you saw on the mountain.

They will go down and promptly fall into idolatry. This mountain high will last less than a couple of weeks. How quickly they forgot! How quickly we forget!

Even the disciples had difficulties and unbelief... transfiguration: glimpse of Jesus glory, and then down to face difficulty, testing, trial, death.

Matthew 17:2 ² And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light.

Why can't we all have such powerful visions? It would be so much easier to believe! Even in the Bible these kinds of events were rare! Miracles and signs didn't happen all the time. Perhaps even because such signs and miracles really have short-lived effect upon us. But these events are written down for us so that the Israelites and we – and most of the church for 2000 years -- might believe the witness of Moses, and the prophets, and the Lord Jesus and his apostles. Unbelief has more to do with problems within us than it does with lack of evidence.

But we do get glimpses of the glory: in creation, in the church, in the Bible (primarily). Foretastes by the Spirit. The joy of forgiveness, the warmth of his love, the power of his might, ... you've tasted. Don't forget. Write it down. Give thanks for them. Remember.

We must ultimately walk by faith.

2 Corinthians 4:18 ¹⁸ as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

2 Corinthians 5:6-7 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight.

Illus. Using GPS to find a rural church. (Direct route, cattle trails through Giles... I had to trust that voice to get me there and it did.) We take God at his word.

5. Think much of what lies ahead.

God is a God of beauty. There is a jewel-like appearance to his glory. He stands upon a pavement of crystal-clear, deep blue sapphire. So many rocks and minerals can be transformed into works of art and immense value.

Illus. visit with Paul and Elna to the gem shop at Greenbriar and to see the beauty of polished and cut stones.

In Genesis 2 the gold, bdellium, and onyx of the region of Havilah is mentioned. God's law is described as being more valuable than gold. (Ps 19) "There is gold and abundance of costly stones, but the lips of knowledge are a precious jewel." (Proverbs 20:15)

All the way to Revelation... the eternal City of God's people, the new Jerusalem, is described using gems. A place of infinite worth and stunning beauty. We might say it's the glory of God and of a God-built environment.

Revelation 21:3, 10-11 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God... And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal.

Men's Fraternity this week. How do you think of heaven? Floating around on a cloud playing a harp? More tangible, beautiful, active, purposeful than we usually think. Application: if you have a gold ring, or jewels, of any kind... use these as reminders of the beautiful city to come which is radiant with God's glory. (Not necessarily a reason to buy more jewelry!)

Jan Lu's engagement ring. Emerald with two small diamonds on either side: reminder of the two of us before the throne of God.

Final application: the Lord's Supper. In our chapel, weekly, we have a feast, every Lord's day, the day of Jesus' resurrection. It's a humble feast that helps us remember and look ahead. It's an ancient practice that we carry on from the early church onward. We remember him who's death brought us life. We share, pray, sing, reflect. We partake of the bread and cup to remind us that Christ invites us to fellowship with him. But it is also a meal that looks ahead to the great banquet to come, the marriage feast of the Lamb.

Luke 22:19-20 ¹⁹ And he took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me." ²⁰ And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in my blood.

It's an informal time of sharing, praying, singing, and taking the bread and cup as testimony of our trust in him. Every Lord's Day at 9 am in the chapel—we would welcome you!