

Title: **GRACE AT SINAI**

Text: Exodus 19:1-20:26

Subject: *Israel at Sinai*

Introduction:

When you think about the law of God and the giving of the law at Sinai, are you a little uncomfortable? When you think about the Ten Commandments, do you feel a little uneasy? — Or are you one of the very few people in this world who understands why the law was given at Sinai and what the law teaches?

Proposition: The law given at Sinai was “*our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ*” (Galatians 3:24). The purpose of God in giving the law was to show us our need of a Savior and to point us to his dear Son as our Savior.

Our text tonight is Exodus chapters 19 and 20. The title of my message is **GRACE AT SINAI**. Obviously, I cannot give a complete exposition of these two chapters in a single message; but these two chapters really should be read together.

GOD’S PROMISE

When the children of Israel left Rephidim, the place of murmuring, they came to the Mount of God at Sinai. While Israel was camped before the Mount of God, Moses went up to Sinai to God. And the very first word the Lord God gave to his people at Sinai was a promise of pure, free grace (Exodus 19:1-6). The Lord gave Moses a specific message for his people. You will notice in verse 3 that he referred to his people both as Jacob and as Israel. He wanted them to remember what they are by nature and what he made them by grace. — “*Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel.*”

(Exodus 19:1-6) “In the third month, when the children of Israel were gone forth out of the land of Egypt, the same day came they *into* the wilderness of Sinai. (2) For they were departed from

¹ Date: Danville — Tuesday Evening — July 22, 2008

Buck Mountain Baptist Church, Roan Mountain, TN — (07/23/08)

Tape : Exodus #76

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Rephidim, and were come *to* the desert of Sinai, and had pitched in the wilderness; and there Israel camped before the mount. (3) And Moses went up unto God, and the LORD called unto him out of the mountain, saying, Thus shalt thou say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel; (4) Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and *how* I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself. (5) Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine: (6) And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These *are* the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.”

First, he reminded the children of Israel of what he had done for them already, reminding them specifically of the grace and power of God they had already experienced. — “*Ye have seen what I did unto the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you unto myself*” (v. 4). Then he promises that he will make these chosen people, the people he had redeemed to himself...

- his own peculiar treasure above all people,
- a kingdom of priests,
- and a holy nation.

Yes, there were **conditions to the promise** (v. 5). The Lord said he would do these things for Israel, “*if*” they would obey his voice and keep his covenant. But, remember, that which God requires of his people he always gives to his people. So the “*ifs*” of God are not to be read by us as conditions we must meet but as promises of God assuring us that he will meet the conditions he requires. I will show you evidence of that fact, with regard to these specific promises, before I am done.

PRESUMED GOODNESS

God made his promises of grace to his people and sent Moses to declare them to the people at the foot of the mount. Then, as soon as Moses proclaimed God's promise, the elders of Israel gave a unified answer that exposed the great evil that plagues the hearts of all men by nature. That is pride! How horribly proud we all are! How horribly God hates pride! Yet, there is in us all a presumption of inward goodness that makes all men think they can, by one means or another, to some degree or another merit God's favor. That is what we have before us in verses 7 and 8.

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(Exodus 19:7-8) “And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the LORD commanded him. (8) And all the people answered together, and said, All that the LORD hath spoken we will do. And Moses returned the words of the people unto the LORD.”

What an outburst of self-righteousness and ignorance! Until the greatness and holiness of God is seen, and the exceeding sinfulness of sin felt, man is ever ready to make his empty promises to God, presuming that he is really good and not evil, that he is really able to do what God requires and not utterly impotent. The young ruler is a was just like these Israelites at Sinai (Mark 10. 17-22)

A MEDIATOR PROVIDED

Now, watch verse 9. The Lord God provided a mediator for his poor, sinful, ignorant people.

(Exodus 19:9) “And the LORD said unto Moses, Lo, I come unto thee in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with thee, and believe thee for ever. And Moses told the words of the people unto the LORD.”

Throughout these two chapters, Moses is clearly typical of our Lord Jesus Christ as our great Mediator. The law, Paul tells us in Galatians 3:19, “*was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.*” No less than ten times, the Spirit of God tells us, Moses went up to the Mount to speak to God for the people and came down again to speak to the people for God. Oh, how we ought to give thanks to God continually for that one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus!

GOD’S REQUIREMENT

(Exodus 19:10-11) “And the LORD said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, (11) And be ready against the third day: for the third day the LORD will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai.”

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The word “*sanctify*,” as you know, means “set apart.” Yet, the act by which the people had to be sanctified tells us that they must be set apart and prepared (made ready) to meet the holy Lord God by being made pure, holy and clean before God. This purity and holiness was symbolized by a ceremonial washing.

If you and I would be ready to meet God, we must be readied both by blood atonement, the precious blood of Christ shed as our Substitute, and by the sanctifying work of God the Holy Spirit in the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5-6).

(Titus 3:4-7) “But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, (5) Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; (6) Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; (7) That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

There is something particularly instructive about the third day in Scripture. The Lord told Moses to make the people ready “*against the third day*,” because he would come to them the third day (vv. 11, 15, 16).

- On the third day God raised the earth from chaos and caused it to bud with life (Genesis 1:9-13).
- On the third day Abraham offered Isaac on Mt. Moriah (Genesis 22:4 — *Jehovah-jireh*).
- Christ was raised on the third day.
- The flesh of the sacrifice was burned on the third day (Leviticus 7:17).

Throughout Scripture, the third day was the day of deliverance and victory, the day of resurrection and life.

A STRICT PROHIBITION

Now, watch the next thing revealed at Sinai. God said, I will come down to my people on the third day (And in the third day of time he did just that!); but they cannot come up to me (vv. 12-15).

(Exodus 19:12-15) “And thou shalt set bounds unto the people round about, saying, Take heed to yourselves, *that ye go not* up into the mount, or touch the border of it: whosoever toucheth the mount

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shall be surely put to death: (13) There shall not an hand touch it, but he shall surely be stoned, or shot through; whether *it be* beast or man, it shall not live: when the trumpet soundeth long, they shall come up to the mount. (14) And Moses went down from the mount unto the people, and sanctified the people; and they washed their clothes. (15) And he said unto the people, Be ready against the third day: come not at *your* wives.”

No one was allowed to even touch the Mount of God with his hand, let alone climb it! If they dared do so, they were to be stoned or shot on the spot. Remember, the whole congregation had boasted that they could do whatever God required to give them acceptance with him. Here, the Lord God says, if you even try to satisfy me with your polluted hands I will destroy you.

- The touch of your polluted hand upon God’s ark will result in eternal ruin. — *Uzza!*
- The gaze of your curious, speculative eye (19:21) upon God’s salvation, the wonders and mysteries of God, will be the everlasting ruin of your soul. — The 50,000 men of Bethshemesh (1 Samuel 6:19-20).

UNAPPROACHABLE HOLINESS

In verses 16-25 the Lord God gives a magnificent display of his unapproachable holiness.

(Exodus 19:16-25) “And it came to pass on the third day in the morning, that there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud upon the mount, and the voice of the trumpet exceeding loud; so that all the people that *was* in the camp trembled. (17) And Moses brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God; and they stood at the nether part of the mount. (18) And mount Sinai was altogether on a smoke, because the LORD descended upon it in fire: and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mount quaked greatly. (19) And when the voice of the trumpet sounded long, and waxed louder and louder, Moses spake, and God answered him by a voice. (20) And the LORD came down upon mount Sinai, on the top of the mount: and the LORD called Moses *up* to the top of the mount; and Moses went up. (21) And the LORD said unto Moses, Go down, charge the people, lest they break through unto the LORD to gaze, and many of them perish. (22) And

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let the priests also, which come near to the LORD, sanctify themselves, lest the LORD break forth upon them. (23) And Moses said unto the LORD, The people cannot come up to mount Sinai: for thou chargedst us, saying, Set bounds about the mount, and sanctify it. (24) And the LORD said unto him, Away, get thee down, and thou shalt come up, thou, and Aaron with thee: but let not the priests and the people break through to come up unto the LORD, lest he break forth upon them. (25) So Moses went down unto the people, and spake unto them.”

When the Lord God came down upon Sinai, his coming was announced by a sevenfold (perfect) expression of his terrible majesty and unapproachable holiness. — Thunder, — Lightning, — Cloud, — Fire, — Smoke, Quaking, — and A Trumpet. — There was nothing to encourage hope, attract the guilty, or pacify the accusing conscience. Such is the character as the great Judge of all the earth, who must do right. He is all terror!

There is no mention made of blood-atonement. So there is no hope for man this way. — “*Our God is a consuming fire*” (Hebrews 12:29). Well might we cry, like those men of Bethshemesh who remained, — “*Who is able to stand before this holy LORD God?*”

SIN EXPOSED

In chapter 20, with the giving of the Ten Commandments, the Lord God exposed the sin and guilt of this people who had boasted, “*All that the Lord hath spoken, we will do!*”

(Exodus 20:1-17) “And God spake all these words, saying, (2) *I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. (3) Thou shalt have no other gods before me. (4) Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: (5) Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the LORD thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me; (6) And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love me, and keep my commandments. (7) Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless*

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that taketh his name in vain. (8) Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. (9) Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: (10) But the seventh day *is* the sabbath of the LORD thy God: *in it* thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that *is* within thy gates: (11) For *in* six days the LORD made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them *is*, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the LORD blessed the sabbath day, and hallowed it. (12) Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee. (13) Thou shalt not kill. (14) Thou shalt not commit adultery. (15) Thou shalt not steal. (16) Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour. (17) Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that *is* thy neighbour's."

The law's purpose is to identify sin, condemn sin and condemn the sinner. The people were appalled, not by what God required (that was all holy and good), but by their own sinfulness that they now knew prevented them from doing what God required. When they saw that God demands perfection, they withdrew from the Mount as quickly as they could (v. 18).

(Exodus 20:18) "And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw *it*, they removed, and stood afar off."

A MEDIATOR DESIRED

The purpose of God in giving his holy law at Sinai was to show his people their need of a Mediator, to shut us up to Christ and faith in him. And that is precisely what happened with these Israelites at Mt. Sinai (20:19-21; Job 9:30-33). The terrors of Sinai reveal the need for Calvary!

(Exodus 20:19-21) "And they said unto Moses, Speak thou with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die. (20) And Moses said unto the people, Fear not: for God is come to prove you, and that his fear may be before your faces, that ye sin not. (21) And the people stood afar off, and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God *was*."

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This was all the nearness to God they could accomplish when their imaginary goodness was exposed for the evil it was. Sin exposed, guilt felt, causes needy souls to want a mediator. — We cannot come to God without Christ!

(Job 9:30-33) “If I wash myself with snow water, and make my hands never so clean; (31) Yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch, and mine own clothes shall abhor me. (32) For *he is* not a man, as I *am*, *that* I should answer him, *and* we should come together in judgment. (33) Neither is there any daysman betwixt us, *that* might lay his hand upon us both.”

THE WAY REVEALED

Now, as we read Exodus 20:22-26, remember we are still at Mt. Sinai. We are still learning “*what the law saith.*” In these last verses of Exodus 20 the Lord God shows us the Way by which sinners may and must come to him, not by works but by blood, the precious blood of Christ.

(Exodus 20:22-26) “And the LORD said unto Moses, Thus thou shalt say unto the children of Israel, Ye have seen that I have talked with you from heaven. (23) Ye shall not make with me gods of silver, neither shall ye make unto you gods of gold. (24) An altar of earth thou shalt make unto me, and shalt sacrifice thereon thy burnt offerings, and thy peace offerings, thy sheep, and thine oxen: in all places where I record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee. (25) And if thou wilt make me an altar of stone, thou shalt not build it of hewn stone: for if thou lift up thy tool upon it, thou hast polluted it. (26) Neither shalt thou go up by steps unto mine altar, that thy nakedness be not discovered thereon.”

- The burnt-offering is Christ.
- The peace-offering is Christ.
- The sheep and the oxen portray Christ, our sin-atonement Sacrifice.
- The altar upon which we come to God is Christ. — An Altar of Earth — An Altar of Stone, but not Hewn Stone — No Stairs!

GOD’S GIFT

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I told you when I began my message that I would show you in the Book of God that God’s “if” in Exodus 19:5 is to be read, not as a condition that must be met by us, but as God’s promise to us that he would meet the condition, supplying for Jacob and Israel, the whole house of his elect, everything connected with the promise. So, let’s read the promise again (Exodus 19:5-6).

(Exodus 19:5-6) “Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth *is* mine: (6) And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These *are* the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel.”

In Christ, by his obedience unto death as our Substitute and covenant Surety, every sinner who comes to God upon this Altar, by this Sacrifice, by faith in Christ has perfectly obeyed his voice and kept his covenant. — And now, because of our perfection in Christ, the things promised in Exodus 19:5-6 are ours (1 Peter 2:5-10).

(1 Peter 2:5-10) “Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ. (6) Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious: and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. (7) Unto you therefore which believe *he is* precious: but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner, (8) And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, *even to them* which stumble at the word, being disobedient: whereunto also they were appointed. (9) But ye *are* a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: (10) Which in time past *were* not a people, but *are* now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.”

THE law demands a weighty debt,
 And not a single mite will bate;
 But gospel sings of Jesus’ blood,
 And says it made the payment good.

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The law provokes men oft to ill,
And churlish hearts makes harder still
But gospel acts a kinder part,
And melts a most obdurate heart.

“Run, run, and work,” the law commands
Yet finds me neither feet nor hands;
But sweeter news the gospel brings;
It bids me fly, and lends me wings.

[Such needful wings, O Lord, impart
To brace my feet and brace my heart;
Good wings of faith and wings of love
Will make a cripple sprightly move.]

With these a lumpish soul may fly,
And soar aloft, and reach the sky;
Nor faint nor falter in the race,
But cheerly work, and sing of grace.

Amen.