

The Story (5): Moses: To Keep You from Sinning

(Exodus 19, 20:18-20)

I. Introduction

- A. Not long after we bought first house, it was decided we needed ceiling fans in bedrooms
1. Installing ceiling fans was not in my skillset, so I did what I always did—I called Dad
 - a. We bought a bunch of ceiling fans and he came over to install one. Just one.
 - b. I'd watch him and install the rest (usually me helping him meant holding flashlight)
 - c. I carefully watched him and in about an hour, we were done... and I was on my own
 2. You know sometimes when you have people following you forget they are following?
 - a. He forgot he was teaching and thought he was just installing and took short cuts
 - b. Like turning off electricity! I soon discovered that that is not the best way to do it
 - 1) I touched a live something that zapped me off ladder thru Tressa's closet door!
 - 2) I'm laying there with my hair smoking; Lynn runs in, "You'll wake the baby!"
 3. It makes sense to have a healthy fear for something so powerful that it can kill me!
- B. That's what the people of Israel needed as they continued their way to the Promised land
1. I'm not talking about ceiling fans but a healthy respect for the power of glory of God
 - a. Last week in "The Story," we noted the contrast been what they saw and did
 - 1) They saw God's power as he humbled Egypt, parted Red Sea to give freedom
 - 2) But what they did was to grumble and complain at each difficulty and hardship
 - b. We suggested the reason was they couldn't decide of God among them (**Exo 17:7**)
 - c. They had seen in powerful ways what the Egyptians recognized as the finger of God
 - 1) Yet they didn't have that healthy respect, that sense of awe, that fear of God
 - 2) Because they did not fear the Lord, they did not live like they feared the Lord
 2. God's voice will then speak from Mt. Sinai—the Ten Commandments (**Exo 20:2-5a**)
 - a. A really bad trivia test question, "How many Ten Commandments are there?"
 - b. A much better trivia questions is, "What is the first of the Ten Commandments"
 - 1) Right answer is, "It depends on who is counting!" Jews start with **Exo 20:2**
 - 2) They combine **Exodus 20:3-4** into one ... against idolatry (*they should know*)
 - c. Hard to argue with that! Law is based on the fact God has the right to give it!
 3. It is not surprising then that God introduces the Law by introducing Himself on Sinai
- C. The point of **Exodus 19-20** is to give Israel a healthy fear of God, something they lacked

II. Moses: Up and Down the Mountain

A. I mentioned last week that Exodus naturally divides into two parts

1. **Exodus 1-18** is Moses and the exodus, the story of leaving Egypt (last week)
 - a. We know this part best—baby Moses, the burning bush, the plagues, Red Sea
 - b. Some of the story we know wrong because we're more familiar with the movies!
 - c. The story isn't dramatic enough in the book; the movies have to change it up
2. **Exodus 21-40** is the Law of Moses, instructions for the Tabernacle and it's building
 - a. They don't make movies about this part of the book, but it really continues theme
 - b. God comes close in giving Ten Commandments; Israel begs Moses to talk to Him
 - 1) God will come near His people in the Tabernacle which represent His presence
 - 2) Exodus ends as the Tabernacle is filled with the glory of God (**Exo 40:34-35**)
3. **Exodus 19-20** is a transition text; God prepares His people to receive His covenant
 - a. Israel has travelled through the desert to Mt. Sinai and now camps at its foot
 - 1) This was where Moses had met God in the theophany of the burning bush
 - 2) Now Israel will meet God and received the law/covenant promised to Abraham
 - b. But the people need to be prepared before they meet God; let's note that quickly

B. How will God get His people, who have been less than cooperative, ready to meet Him?

1. He begins by reminding them of His victory and protection (**Read: Exodus 19:3-6**)
 - a. They had seen God's power at the Red Sea; they had seen His protection in desert
 - b. Israel never really buys into God's love and care for them; that's why they grumble
 - c. **Question:** Will we see God's past provision and love to us? *Will we trust in Him?*
2. They were not to take this meeting with God lightly—so there was preparation
 - a. No one was to approach Mt. Sinai early; they were to wait for the signal (**19:12-13**)
 - b. There were some typical OT purification rituals to show holiness and readiness
 - 1) They were to purify themselves by washing their clothes (**19:14**)
 - 2) They were to abstain from sex for the three days before the meeting (**19:15**)
3. Some churches dim the lights when it's time to start; God lit things up! (**19:16-19**)
 - a. This was anything but typical ritual; God shook the earth by His power and presence
 - b. Mountain trembled, the sound of trumpet blasted and then the very voice of God
 - 1) This was the context of receiving the Ten Commandments! It was frightening!
 - 2) God warns them not to rush up the mountain (**Exo 19:21**). *Was that a problem?*

- C. In the context of this shock-n-awe, they hear God speak the Ten Commandments
1. So the context of the Ten Commandments is this awesome, awful presence of God
 - a. People are so rattled they beg Moses for there not to be a matinee! (**Exo 20:18-19**)
 - b. For this one brief shining moment, Israel knew what it meant to fear the Lord
 - 1) God will remain near them—in the Tabernacle and in the pillar of cloud & fire
 - 2) They needed to see God’s presence among them, but never take it lightly
 2. They had to see awesome presence of God and never forget the experience (**20:20**)
 - a. Moses says that this whole experience of the shock-n-awe of Sinai was a TEST.
 - 1) This is the same word used of the testing of Abraham to offer Isaac (**Gen 22:1**)
 - 2) It’s also the word often used of Israel when they test God’s patience (**Exo 17:2**)
 - b. What was the test? To connect the Law of God with the awesome person of God
 - 1) They would not take God’s law seriously unless they first took God seriously
 - 2) If you take God seriously, his awesome presence will demand your attention
 - 3) So Moses told Israel that the fear of the Lord would keep them from sinning
 - c. To fear and respect the PERSON of God meant that they would respect His LAW
 3. Is that not true today? Do we have trouble obeying God before we’ve lost our fear?

III. Conclusion

- A. Our songs this morning stressed fear and how God’s grace takes away our fear
1. Most of the songs that we sing that mention “fear” stress how God takes it away
 - “*A wall of fire about me, I’ve nothing now to fear*” (Lily of the Valley)
 - “*Nothing will I fear as long as You are near; please be near me to the end*” (Thy Word)
 - “*Replace all doubts and fear with faith so bold...*” (Restore My Soul)
 2. Most songs that mention fear are pretty much like these examples—fear is taken away
 - a. Even an old imposing hymn like “*A Mighty Fortress*” is about not fearing

*“And though this world with evil filled Should threaten to undo us
We will not fear, for God hath willed His truth to triumph through us.*”
 - b. I’m not saying any of those songs are wrong; we aren’t slaves of fear (**Rom 8:15**)
 - 1) The grumbling and complaining we saw in Israel was caused by a spirit of fear
 - 2) That fear came to fruition when they refused to enter the Promised Land
 - 3) They were afraid of the giants when they SHOULD have been afraid of God
 3. Paul reminded Timothy that God have us a spirit of power, not fear (**2 Tim 1:7**, NLT)

- B. On the other hand, shouldn't God be more frightening than electricity and ceiling fans?
1. Is it still a fearful, dreadful thing to fall into the hands of a living God? (**Heb 10:31**)
 - a. Was that not why God shook the mountain? And why it was clouded with smoke?
 - b. Was that not the reason for shock-n-awe on Sinai as God gave the Law of Moses?
 - c. Israel needed to fear God before they would come to take God's Law seriously
 2. Moses said it would be the fear of God that would keep them from sinning
 - a. OK, so it didn't work. As soon as Moses headed up the mountain, they build a calf!
 - b. They never really saw the fear of God, and so they never took His Law seriously
- C. The question is, "*Will we make a connection?*" Do we respect and "fear" God?
1. We're too sophisticated for hellfire-n-damnation; some are too sophisticated to obey!
 - a. Have we replaced the fear of God with a freedom to pick-n-choose among His laws
 - b. "*Fear of God*" seems like old-fashioned idea that has gone way of flannelgraph
 - c. Besides, "fear of God" never meant fear, right? It just means "healthy respect"
 - 1) I have a healthy respect for installing ceiling fans... *I ignore them altogether*
 - 2) But we're not really supposed to fear God; he's our big buddy in the sky, right
 2. It makes sense to fear something that can kill—and that seems the point of this story
 - a. Several times Moses was told to tell Israel, "*Mess this up and it will kill you*"
 - b. God didn't seem to be aiming for "healthy respect" when He shook Sinai to its core
 - 1) Is it respect that causes Isaiah to cry, "*I'm ruined...I have seen God*" (**Isa 6:5**)
 - 2) The word Isaiah uses is the Hebrew word for "*destroyed...*" as in "*dead*"
 - c. Healthy respect? Awe? OK, but let's not forget a dose of holy fear (**Luke 12:5**)
 3. Do we see obedience as optional because we've disconnected God and His Law?
 - a. Do we think that grace means that God no longer judges sin as being sin?
 - b. Do we think that grace means that God is no longer someone to be feared?
 - c. He loves us and His presence is with us; we must never lose a sense of holy fear
- D. I mentioned that most our songs that mention "fear" talked about it being taken away
1. There is one notable exception, and it's in our most famous song on grace—
T'was grace that taught my heart to fear and grace my fears relieved
 - a. Grace teaches us know the fear of God... and it takes away all other fears
 - b. Moses said the fear of God keeps us from sinning. *We'll take Him seriously*
 2. Do you take God and the presence of God in your life seriously today?