

Hearing God Speak

Exodus 20:18-26

Thank you for joining us this week as we continue our study through Exodus. We are now about halfway through the book of Exodus. The rest of Exodus tells us what happened at Mt Sinai. God reveals Himself to the children of Israel in ways they have never seen. They learn more about Him and experience Him at a whole new level. As we study this part of Exodus, we hope you will also learn more about Him and experience Him at a level that you have not known Him before.

As we are going through this section of Exodus, don't lose sight of the big picture. Some of these chapters are filled with lots of small details, and sometimes we wonder why all this information is in the Bible. If you start to feel that way, remember where this fits in God's story. God is building a kingdom, and He will redeem what was lost to sin; He will restore His kingdom in the whole world. We know the children of Israel go on and fall away from the true God, but from the children of Israel comes one called Jesus. Through Jesus, God will get it all back! God's plan will not be thwarted.

His story has twists and turns which don't always make sense to us. But remember, His heart is for the whole world to know Him, and this will happen. Understanding this brings purpose to all the Bible because every part points to this end goal. The Holy God of Mt Sinai has not changed; we must humble ourselves before Him and join His team. Don't lose sight of the end when Jesus will be the King of Kings, and we will have the privilege of serving this great king.

I give you this short introduction to remind you of the big picture. God's plan will be accomplished, He was working then, and He still is at work despite how things appear. I thank you again for joining us on Hope for Today; let's go with Bible teacher, J. Mark, for a closer look at today's lesson.

For most people, religion is something of a mystery. It's hard for them to understand. It sometimes produces deep fears. For some, it is a matter of satisfying their god in some way, often at great cost of time or possessions. Some people make their gods so they can control them.

The God revealed in the Bible is different. He wants the love and presence of His people. The book of Exodus reveals that God talked with His people at Mt. Sinai when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. As they were HEARING GOD SPEAK, their hearts were filled with fear.

In Exodus 20:18-26 we read how God dealt with their fear.

18. *And all the people saw the thundering, and the lightning, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off.*

19. *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.*

22. *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.*

I want to help you get rid of your fear in the same way that Israel got rid of their fears. God led them by certain STEPS to deal with their fears.

In the first step

Their Fear Was Experienced.

They saw the sights. The Bible says they saw the lightnings and the mountain smoking. I have never been to Mt. Sinai, but I understand it to be an imposing mountain. To see the lightning flashing, to hear the thunder rumbling and the trumpet sounding, and the smoke rising from this tremendous granite mountain must have been an awesome experience.

I can imagine that the thunder rolled out across the land where they were, and the trumpet sounds amidst the thundering must have given them an awesome sound. It made them very afraid. I can understand why it would have terrified them and why they were fearful.

Then they spoke to Moses and said, "We cannot stand it anymore. You speak to us, and we will hear, but let not God speak to us lest we die." After seeing the lightning and smoke and hearing the thunder and the trumpet, the people of Israel were greatly distressed. They were frightened at the sights and sounds they had witnessed and experienced. This awesome display of God's holiness and glory shook them to the core of their being.

An experience like this would strike fear in most people's hearts. To be exposed to the mighty God of heaven in revelation would strike fear in the heart of anyone. Their fear was experienced; it was real.

In the second step

Their Fear Was Explained.

Moses began to explain to them what was happening. He said that God wanted their fellowship, so He came down to meet with them. Moses said, "Do not fear Him." That should have been comforting to the people standing there. They were in this open barren land right next to the tremendous granite mountain of Mt. Sinai. God had come to put them to the test so they would not need to fear anymore. In fact, Moses specifically said, "Do not fear, for God has come to prove you." He also said that in His testing, He brought them to this place so that the fear of God may be in front of their faces, so they do not sin. That is the proper place for God to be.

In the presence of God, one should be fearful lest he violate the commandments of God and bring down His wrath. That kind of fear is different from the fear they were experiencing at Mt. Sinai. That kind of fear is the fear of restraint, not the fear of trembling in the presence of God. I believe everyone who really loves the LORD has that kind of restraining fear.

Then Moses drew near. I was impressed as I read how he drew near to the thick darkness where God was. Moses did not have the fear that the people had. He was unafraid. There may be a proper reason for this. He had experienced God in a way the people should have experienced Him but had not. So, Moses could come to the LORD without fear. He drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

They needed to know that God intended only good for them, but they could not seem to get this in their minds, so they were afraid.

Then in the third step

Their Fear Was Expiated.

I want to explain that for you, because here, God instructed Moses that they were to build an altar. This altar would be a place where atonement could be made for their sin. That's the meaning of expiate.

They were not to form other gods of silver, gods of gold, or any other gods in any way for themselves. God required singleness of heart. It was important for God to talk to His people, the people of Israel. By talking with them, He demonstrated their worth. He valued them, so He came to talk with them.

But He also expected them to value Him, to engage in proper worship, and not to do as other people around them. So, He restrained them in this area. He required a singleness of heart. He said, "You shall not build gods of silver, nor gods of gold. You shall not make any other gods."

Then He instructed them to make altars. The externals are important. If they follow God's instructions in the proper way, their fear could be expiated, atoned for, taken away. He said, "You are to make an altar of earth to me - not of gold or silver but of earth." You shall sacrifice on that altar your burnt offerings and your peace offerings, your sheep, and your oxen.

God showed them how to worship Him so their fear would be taken away. He said, "If you build an altar of stone, then you build it without the use of a tool. You make it of unhewn rock. You lay it up in a simple way; you shall not go up to it by steps." God was very jealous, and He wanted to be sure that the people did exactly what He instructed them to do. They needed to do what God asked them to do. Then their fear would be completely expiated! It would be taken care of. It would be removed.

Perhaps you also have certain fears when you think about God and about the spirit world. Hearing God speak would be a terrifying experience for anyone, and yet God wants us to take time to come and listen to Him. He wants to remove our fears.

It is a reality that our fears are experienced. We know what they are. Our fears can also be explained as Moses explained the fears of the people of Israel. God wants to come to us and speak to us through the Word. He wants your fears to be expiated, taken away, when you follow God's way. This can be your experience when you have a personal relationship with the God revealed in the Bible.

The LORD said to the Children of Israel that they should not make any gods of silver or gold, or any graven image of any kind. When you come to the God of the Bible, then you come His way, not your way. He can be a personal God to you as you follow His way, and you will hear Him speak.

Thanks, J. Mark, for this teaching, and thank you for being here for this teaching. It is neat to see God's heart for His people here in Exodus 20. He shows the children of Israel more of Himself. They were terrified, but as we just learned, God guided them through their fears.

It is incredible to realize the Lord of the universe wants a relationship with people. He wants your heart. Way back here at Mt Sinai, God came close. Again, many years after this, God came closer. This time He came as a baby. God came in the flesh and limited Himself to a body. His desire was and is the same.

He desires a relationship with you; He wants to be the object of your worship. After all, He alone is worthy. We see God going to extreme measures to make this possible. Today we saw a small part of the story, and thankfully, Jesus has completed it. Through what Christ has done on the cross, we can come into the presence of our Holy God and be in a relationship with Him. This is worth thinking about.

If you'd like a copy of today's teaching, or if you'd like to contact us for any reason, here are a few ways you can reach us. The best way is through email. Our email is hope@heraldsofhope.org. If you don't have email, no problem; just write to us. Our address is: Hope for Today, Box 3, Breezewood, Pennsylvania 15533. Or you can connect with us on our website. Our website is heraldsofhope.org. On our website, you will find some resources, and under the "Listen" tab, there is other teaching similar to what you just heard. If you go to the "Connect" tab, you can message us directly. Again, our website is heraldsofhope.org.

Thank you so much for joining us. We look forward to being with you next week, and till then, go with God and grow in your connection with Him. He is an amazing God to love and serve.