

Understanding God in the Old Testament
Genesis 19

A God Who Draws Close

What I was to tell you that the President of the United States was going to visit us today. What if the Queen of England had chosen Hope Chapel Healdsburg as the location for her next visit. How would that change the way you prepared yourself, or the way that you would present this building, or even what words would you be ready to speak? Would it be any different from your everyday life?

I can speak from personal experience, that there come times when circumstances require us to step it up a notch, or change the routine of our day, to strive beyond the norm to something a bit more special. I find myself currently consumed with this idea of the missions trip to Africa that I will be taking, and how I will try to hone in my messages, my sermons, my ideas and such. And sometimes I feel like it goes beyond my ordinary routine.

Is it right or wrong to routine one minute and out of the ordinary the next, when it comes to our relationship with God? That is the biggest question we can ask, because it seems to me that many followers of Jesus fall into a routine and they live below the special circumstances of having a personal relationship with God.

If I was to announce to you that the president of the United States had changed his plans this morning, yet we have an even greater guest joining us this morning and his name is Jesus Christ, would it be a let down or an upgrade? Would we be disappointed or would we be proud and amazed that he would come?

We treat certain things as important and priority, we treat certain people with respect and admiration, while we let other things take second place. We have to have our priorities right and understand that the greatest person that we could have here today is God himself, and the reality is that he is here. How we prepare ourselves for the president or the queen should be less of a priority than if we are to prepare ourselves for God. So I hope this morning that you got ready, you prepared your heart, you are on the edge of your seat, because God is here.

The beauty of our relationship with God is that in spite of who he is and what we are, he still chooses to draw close. In the lives of the Israelites we have seen him protect, we have seen him lead, we have seen his promises, we have seen his heart. In Exodus 19 we read of God's first visitation with the nation of Israel. God doesn't want to remain distant, he want to draw close to them only if they want to follow and draw close to him. It is a great example that **We serve a God who doesn't force us to follow him, but he grants us a choice.** Look at **Exodus 19:3-6:**

3 Then Moses climbed the mountain to appear before God. The Lord called to him from the mountain and said, "Give these instructions to the family of Jacob;

announce it to the descendants of Israel: 4 'You have seen what I did to the Egyptians. You know how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now if you will obey me and keep my covenant, you will be my own special treasure from among all the peoples on earth; for all the earth belongs to me. 6 And you will be my kingdom of priests, my holy nation.' This is the message you must give to the people of Israel."

Notice that God reiterates everything that he has done for the Israelites up to this point. First, the Israelites saw what God did to the Egyptians. Second, he carried them on "Eagles Wings" Speaking of how God swooped down with deliverance and cared for them, and carried them on his back with the effortless strength and swiftness like an eagle. We see a great example of this metaphor in **Deuteronomy 32:11-12** where it also describes this initial relationship between God and Israel.

11 Like an eagle that rouses her chicks and hovers over her young, so he spread his wings to take them up and carried them safely on his pinions. 12 The Lord alone guided them; they followed no foreign gods.

31 But those who trust in the Lord will find new strength. They will soar high on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint.
Isaiah 40:31

God took care of them and he gave the nation of Israel proof that he was for them and not against them. His request for the return of obedience and commitment was completely justified. In a sense he was telling them, "If you truly love me and commit to keeping our agreement then you will be my most prized possession in all the earth." The Israelites decision was to open up a special relationship between them and God – making them priests and a holy nation. What do those two terms means this morning?

1. A Special Relationship

For those of you who have been a part of our Wednesday night class we have looked that difference between a priest and a prophet. A prophet always represented God to mankind, while a priest represented mankind to God. A priest was to minister to God. **Israel was to be a nation who would lead men to God** (a great calling) but today we all can experience the joy of leading people to Jesus because the Israelites didn't keep their agreement with God and they disobeyed him. They were going to be the ministers to God leading others to him.

When it comes to the term "holy nation" I think we all kind of picture a bunch of people praying on clouds, dressed in white, making no mistakes, completely pure. But that is not what this term means. The term holy means "to be set apart". **The nation of Israel was to be set apart, different from any other nation.** How? God was about to give them rules and laws to function by. They were laws unlike any other nation, they were rules that governed the heart, and they were given directly from God because unlike any other kingdom, God was the King. God's response to their commitment and love was to

make them a people who would be special to him, and who would be different from any other nation on the earth.

I think that Israel's response to God wasn't one of obedience, love and trust, and that they were more concerned about the prestige than they were following God. They wanted the title of Priest and Holy but weren't willing to put the effort and commitment in. God comes to us today and asks, "Do you want to be close to me, do you want to know what I want from you, do you want to trust me and love me as your God?"

Yet will our response be, "I like the idea of being a Christian, I like the title and all the benefits" and yet we shy away from the idea of intimacy with God. **Many Christians want the prestige of eternal life and acceptance with God, yet aren't willing to take the time to get to know God.**

God comes to us today and asks, "Do you want to obey me?" In fact, even Jesus said in **John 14:21:**

21 Those who accept my commandments and obey them are the ones who love me. And because they love me, my Father will love them. And I will love them and reveal myself to each of them."

"Do you want to love me, do you want a relationship with me?" For the Israelites their answer was a definite yes. In fact in **Exodus 19:8** it tells us:

8 And all the people responded together, "We will do everything the Lord has commanded." So Moses brought the people's answer back to the Lord.

"Yes, God! We want a relationship with you and we are willing to do whatever it takes to have it." God responds and tells Moses, "Get ready. Here I come." Look at **Exodus 19:9-13:**

9 Then the Lord said to Moses, "I will come to you in a thick cloud, Moses, so the people themselves can hear me when I speak with you. Then they will always trust you." Moses told the Lord what the people had said. 10 Then the Lord told Moses, "Go down and prepare the people for my arrival. Consecrate(Purify) them today and tomorrow, and have them wash their clothing. 11 Be sure they are ready on the third day, for on that day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai as all the people watch. 12 Mark off a boundary all around the mountain. Warn the people, 'Be careful! Do not go up on the mountain or even touch its boundaries. Anyone who touches the mountain will certainly be put to death. 13 No hand may touch the person or animal that crosses the boundary; instead, stone them or shoot them with arrows. They must be put to death.' However, when the ram's horn sounds a long blast, then the people may go up on the mountain."*

2. Two ways God prepares the people of Israel

In verse 10 we read of two ways that God wants to prepare the people of Israel in order that they will be ready to listen to him. First, God tells Moses to purify the people. This is a spiritual preparation. The term **(A) Consecration** here means to **"Call them off from their worldly business, and call them to religious exercises, meditation and prayer, that they may receive the law from God's mouth with reverence and devotion."**

There are times when we need to get our minds off of the worldly busyness and business the things of this physical world and body, and think on things that are spiritual and beyond the natural realm. In order to be ready to hear the voice of God I need to isolate myself from the things of this world and focus on God's word, on his leading, being spiritually minded and ready to listen. That is why in **Exodus 19:15** we read:

15 He told them, "Get ready for the third day, and until then abstain from having sexual intercourse."

He's not saying that sex is bad, but what he is trying to establish for them is that the things of God go far beyond the physical and natural things of this earth. **We need to get our minds thinking about things beyond this physical life if we are ever hear the voice of God.** That is why Paul wrote in **Colossians 3:1-2**:

*1 Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand.
2 Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth.*

If we want to maintain our relationship with God, we need to take time out of life and spend time thinking about the realities of heaven, thinking about the spiritually rich heritage we come from, thinking about the wealth that Paul talked about in **Ephesians 1:3** where he says:

3 All praise to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly realms because we are united with Christ.

There are going to be times when our flesh stand in the way of our relationship with God. - sin, physical limitations, giftings, abilities. There are times when we become completely frustrated with our humanness (If we haven't already). Even though we are physical beings, God wants to connect with us on a spiritual level where he can speak to us and where we can go against our human nature and see his power and strength manifested. Moses prepares the people by getting their minds on the spiritual things rather than on the physical things.

B. Washing.

The second way Moses is to prepare the people is by having them wash their clothes. This is a physical preparation with two definitions. The first is that **the act of washing their clothes made them mindful of their own need for washing.** It established the idea that they were coming before a pure, clean and holy God. One whom they didn't deserve to be in the presence of. Their action established an attitude or mindset that prepared their heart.

I've heard the saying that says, "Act first, then your heart will follow." When coming before God it doesn't hurt to take a physical posture of kneeling, or bowing down, or raising your hands, because it establishes a mindset of who we are coming before.

That is why we sing and worship God at the beginning of service because it help to put us in the mindset of the realities of heaven, and it physically postures us to think about who we follow, what he has done for us, how important he is to us and so on.

Another way **washing** clothes prepared the Israelites to visit God is it **presented physical evidence to everyone around them that this was an important event that required one to be clean and holy.** It's like seeing someone in dress clothes one minute and someone in a three piece suit. People don't think much about us dressed in everyday street clothes, but you put on a suit and dress up and people start asking questions. It's the same idea here.

So the Israelites prepare themselves and God shows up. Look at **Exodus 19:16-20:**

16 On the morning of the third day, thunder roared and lightning flashed, and a dense cloud came down on the mountain. There was a long, loud blast from a ram's horn, and all the people trembled. 17 Moses led them out from the camp to meet with God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain. 18 All of Mount Sinai was covered with smoke because the Lord had descended on it in the form of fire. The smoke billowed into the sky like smoke from a brick kiln, and the whole mountain shook violently. 19 As the blast of the ram's horn grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God thundered his reply. 20 The Lord came down on the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses climbed the mountain.

You look at this account and wonder, "Do I really understand who I get to have a relationship with?" This is the God of the Universe we're talking about here. In fact, God warns the people of Israel not to touch the mountain because is so pure that his presence cannot be touched by sinful mankind. The punishment is death. Sinful mankind cannot touch the presence of God otherwise they will die. **It is only through the shed blood of Jesus Christ that we can touch the presence of God with Christ's transferred holiness covering us.**

We serve a God who draws close not to destroy us but to develop relationship with us. He comes to us and asks the question, "do you want to be with me?" Many accept and yet many reject him. Some accept him because of what they can get out of him, others

accept him because it seems to be the fad of the time. Yet, there are still those true worshippers of God who want to be with him, who want to get to know him, who want to serve and obey him because of their love and gratitude for what he has done for them.

We serve a God who wants to draw close to us, yet the choice is ours. We have tasted of his goodness and kindness, he has shown himself trustworthy, and he simply wants us to make him our God by serving him in love. Many have chosen to follow God yet when it comes to the serving part, that is left for someone else. By making him our God, we are telling him that we will do whatever he asks. Whatever he asks instead of taking on the easy assignments.

We serve a God who wants to draw close to us, but we need to be willing to prepare ourselves for his visitation. We need to spend time away from worldly things, thinking about heavenly things, escaping from the physical reality and thinking on the Spiritual realm – things of eternal value and purpose. We need to physically posture or position ourselves at times to get our minds and hearts directed towards the heavenly realities and the greatness of our God. Take action and let our hearts follow.

When we think about the true reality of God it should put fear into us, but when we think of the reality of Jesus Christ it should turn that fear into boldness.

We need to make a choice, prepare ourselves, and embrace the special relationship we have with God. Today, if we are true followers of Jesus we are God's own special treasure from among all the nations of earth. We are people who can lead others to God and who are different from anyone else in this world yet only because we have Jesus Christ.

God is with you all the time. God is here this morning! Did you prepare yourself? Will you prepare yourself any different than you have been? My prayer is that we be people who get ready for our visitation with God. Let's Pray!