

## ***Lessons from the Exodus 11*** 1-14-01

Today I would like to bring out next to the last lesson from the Book of Exodus. Certainly there are many more. We may visit the Children of Israel as they wander in the wilderness in the book of Numbers. It is kind of discouraging to consider these murmuring people that are our examples and serve as a warning to us. It is discouraging in the sense that if we do not press forward for the prize of the upward calling that we read about in Philippians 3, that we will slide back into the nature that the Children of Israel so often exhibited. I would like to think I am made of nobler material and yet when I examine honestly that old nature I placed on the cross with Christ, I see it is no different at all from these rebels. I hate to think of what I would have done had I been one of them in this story we are about to read. Let him that thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

The witnessing of a miracle will not help. The visible manifestation of God leading me will not help. The words of a man who talks directly with God in an audible way will not help. Directions written with the finger of God only make it worse. Funny how at times we are tempted to desire those visible things thinking they would make a difference. We have the example of a whole nation that says those visible things make no difference whatsoever. And that point is exemplified in Exodus 19- 32. This passage is at Mount Sinai (Jabel al Musa) and Moses makes many treks up and down the mountain. We think of two in particular but it didn't happen the way many of us have in mind.

Ex 19:1-8 (NIV)<sup>1</sup> In the third month after the Israelites left Egypt--on the very day--they came to the Desert of Sinai.<sup>2</sup> After they set out from Rephidim, they entered the Desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert in front of the mountain.<sup>3</sup> Then Moses went up to God, and the LORD called to him from the mountain and said, "This is what you are to say to the house of Jacob and what you are to tell the people of Israel:<sup>4</sup> 'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

<sup>5</sup> Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,<sup>6</sup> you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words you are to speak to the Israelites."<sup>7</sup> So Moses went back and summoned the elders of the people and set before them all the words the LORD had commanded him to speak.<sup>8</sup> The people all responded together, "We will do everything the LORD has said." So Moses brought their answer back to the LORD.

They have come to Mount Sinai and Moses has met with God. God asks if they are willing to obey fully and keep his covenant so they can be his treasured possession, a kingdom of priests, a holy nation. God wanted to touch the world through Israel. He was placing them in the middle of the nations. The intersecting roads of trade went right through Israel. God wasn't sending them off to some corner of the globe to be hermits who were so other-worldly that no one could relate to them. He was setting them right in the middle of the nations to be a lighthouse. He wanted their obedience to his ways to be a shining difference that would influence the world. The people say they will do whatever God asks. When Moses goes back up the Lord has him take Aaron along and they receive the Ten Commandments. The people are watching this but are frightened for their lives.

Ex 19:16-19 (NIV)<sup>16</sup> On the morning of the third day there was thunder and lightning, with a thick cloud over the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast. Everyone in the camp trembled.<sup>17</sup> Then Moses led the people out of the camp to meet with God, and they stood at

the foot of the mountain.<sup>18</sup> Mount Sinai was covered with smoke, because the LORD descended on it in fire. The smoke billowed up from it like smoke from a furnace, the whole mountain trembled violently,<sup>19</sup> and the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder. Then Moses spoke and the voice of God answered him.

Moses and Aaron ascend and receive the Ten Commandments and then go back down to the people. Ex 20:18-23 (NIV)<sup>18</sup> When the people saw the thunder and lightning and heard the trumpet and saw the mountain in smoke, they trembled with fear. They stayed at a distance<sup>19</sup> and said to Moses, "Speak to us yourself and we will listen. But do not have God speak to us or we will die."<sup>20</sup> Moses said to the people, "Do not be afraid. God has come to test you, so that the fear of God will be with you to keep you from sinning."<sup>21</sup> The people remained at a distance, while Moses approached the thick darkness where God was.<sup>22</sup> Then the LORD said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites this: 'You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven:<sup>23</sup> Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold.

They want to keep their distance and let Moses to be their Mediator. So Moses returns to God and receives the laws of daily life. When he reports them to the people "they responded with one voice, 'Everything the LORD has said we will do.'" (24:3) They have seen God talking with Moses, heard his voice, seen the mountain quaking at his presence. Twice now they have said, "Hey whatever He says, we'll do it!" Moses writes everything down in a Book of Covenant and confirms the covenant with sacrifice, with the blood of animals. Ex 24:7 (NIV)  
7 Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it to the people. They responded, "We will do everything the LORD has said; we will obey." This is the third time they have promised to obey. The deal is now made and sealed with blood. Moses and Aaron and Aaron's sons and seventy elders feast with the Lord who was visibly manifest.

And now God calls Moses up again and Joshua goes part way with him, and waits behind as Moses enters the cloud of God's glory. The Israelites said it looked like the top of the mountain was being consumed by fire. For forty days and forty nights Moses did not eat or drink as God showed him all the detailed plans for their worship. From the collection of the funds to make it to the priestly robes, anointing oil and the furniture of the Tabernacle, every detail was laid out before Moses. When Moses returned he carried the tablets of testimony written with the finger of God. But by the time he reached Joshua he could already hear the party going on down below.

Chapter 32 tells us what happened while Moses and Joshua were on the mountain. The people thought Moses walked into that fire and was consumed. We don't know how long they waited but eventually they gave up waiting and decided to make their own religious practices. What God had revealed to Moses was nothing like the world's religions but what the people invented was just like Egypt from which God had delivered them. Aaron – who less than a month before had seen God, fashioned a golden calf for them and then declared a feast to Jehovah??? Where are the 70 elders that sat before God? They have broken the covenant they have just made and three times vowed to keep. Ex 32:6 (NIV)<sup>6</sup> So the next day the people rose early and sacrificed burnt offerings and presented fellowship offerings. Afterward they sat down to eat and drink and got up to indulge in revelry.

They had probably seen the Egyptians worship in the same way. That is where we end up when we let go of the ways of God – worshiping like the world – something visible,

manageable, but that give free reign to my desires. Imagine the heart of God that had vowed that they would be his people, a kingdom of priests, his holy nation to influence the world. He sees them now acting like the world. God tells Moses He will destroy them and start again with Moses. But Moses pleads with God and intercedes for the people. Then he ground the golden calf to powder and put it in the water and made the Israelites drink it. 1Cor 10:6,7 read it.

The cover up of Aaron is sad commentary. Ex 32:21-24 (NIV)<sup>21</sup> He (Moses) said to Aaron, "What did these people do to you, that you led them into such great sin?"<sup>22</sup> "Do not be angry, my lord," Aaron answered. "You know how prone these people are to evil."<sup>23</sup> They said to me, 'Make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him.'<sup>24</sup> So I told them, 'Whoever has any gold jewelry, take it off.' Then they gave me the gold, and I threw it into the fire, and out came this calf!"

One sin leads to another. Aaron is pulls a smooth one by blaming it on the people – he knows Moses can relate to that. But what is most amazing to me is here is a man who has seen God, heard his voice, and he is more afraid of Moses than he is of God. But here we are in his shoes. We know what a great work has been done on our behalf on the cross. In a greater way than that of Moses, Jesus intercedes for us. And still we turn to things of the world, and cover for it, make excuses for it. We blame the world around us for our idolatry.

What other warnings and admonitions are we to take from this sad story? How quick the people were to give up! It reminds me of Saul waiting for Samuel to do the sacrifice before the battle. He waited and it seemed Samuel was overdue and so he took the role of the priest and offered it himself. Like these Israelites we too can make vows to God to be his people, an example to the world. Then when we think there is some kind of justification or things aren't going like we planned, or taking place too slowly for us, we find an excuse to live out the evil in our old nature. Watch out for making excuses to justify what you know is not the will or way of God! You will suffer for it.

They had really just begun as a people of God, just vowed to do whatever He said. They heard his commands, they knew what they were doing was contrary to the covenant they just entered into. But they still connect their faith with the man- Moses. When he is gone, they give up and slide to the bottom. Is our faith in a man? Or the Son of Man? How we need to hear from and speak to God for ourselves. A visible revelation will not help you. They saw it – they forgot it or made excuses for it. It just makes us more accountable when we see something. We need our heart of stone to be transformed and that is the wonder of the New Covenant. This old one they made was broken in hardly a month. We cannot be changed by rules, revelation, fear, in a permanent way. We need a relationship with the living God ourselves based on his obedience not ours. His presence in us transforms our heart from one bent on rebellious selfishness to that of 'giving love' (agape) that is the Lord Himself.

You can make all the vows you want, it wont change your heart. You can be convicted, you can see a revelation but what you need is the transforming presence of Christ in you. I think this is why Jesus was disgusted with all the vow making of his age. That time period placed great emphasis on vows and how they were worded. But Jesus knew they were worthless without a transformed heart. Don't cut deals with God; surrender totally and completely to His Lordship in your life.

How quickly they convinced Aaron (a man) to take them the direction their hearts wanted to go. Congregations often call a man to lead with a heart like their own. That is a frightening thought if our hearts are not transformed. If they are, we call on the One man that is like our transformed hearts – the Lord Jesus, to lead us.

How easily Aaron justified his actions and twisted things in a way that showed he feared Moses more than he feared God. This is a nasty tendency of the old nature, cover for your faults. The Spirit of God says just the opposite, confess and forsake them. When we cover for them it is because we want people to believe we are at a more mature place in our walk than we are. And when our sins find us out – and it will – they find out we are in a less mature place than we think we are! Just come clean – if you want peace with God and his favor upon you confess and forsake your sin.

And finally Moses made them drink their sin. Heavy metals are toxic to our system. I don't know what it does to you when you ingest gold but it can't be good. We always end up eating the consequences of our rebellion. God makes us taste it so we can face up to how bad it is in his sight. Sometimes man will justify it and say it wasn't as bad as it seemed. Then God makes him eat it and find out how awful it is in the eyes of God.

But there are two good examples, and I saved them for last because I didn't want to end on these sad notes but on the positive. Moses and Joshua set the good example for us. Moses was there in the glory of God for 40 days and nights being shown how God wanted them to worship. As we have seen before all those instructions are pictures of our Lord Jesus and say something of Him. When God calls us to meet with Him, He miraculously takes care of the physical. Moses didn't need to eat or drink. Go three or four days without water and you will be dead - So many times in Scripture the Lord tries to show us He is our Provider. Moses received the pictures of Christ that would inspire generations to come and He was blessed with a greater revelation of God through the Tabernacle and its furniture and rituals. He obviously received something of the heart of God in the process for when he returned he powerfully interceded for the people. Is 53:12 Jesus makes intercession for the transgressors.

Joshua is the other example often overlooked. He waited up there right outside the cloud. He could have brought provision but he waited those 40 days and nights on the mountain. He was not like the people down below. He never gave up. Sometimes we are tempted to think God has forsaken us. He has left us. "As for this Moses fellow, we don't know what has happened to him so lets..." Not Joshua, he endured and waited in faith believing Moses would return. Now I want you to consider that Moses is one of the Old Testament (Covenant) types of Christ. Where is Joshua? As close to him as he can physically be. Only Moses could enter that cloud of glory. He could of wandered down and enjoyed his comfort but he chose to wait. What purpose did it serve? Only God knows but his being on the mountain waiting kept him from the revelry going on below. Sometimes our waiting on God seems to accomplish nothing we can point to, but then again, if it kept us from temptation that would lead to sin, it was more than worth it.

Let us be like Moses and Joshua instead of those in the camp. Let us have an ear to hear what God would instruct us in worship that we might worship in spirit and in truth, in reverence and awe. Let us wait on Him and stay as close as we can and even if we see no visible results, trust and believe that this is the place He would have us, close by his side. – Let's close with a reading of Hebrew 12:18-29