

GOD SAYS WHAT HE MEANS AND MEANS WHAT HE SAYS

Pastor Colin Rieke ~ July 10, 2016



²⁰ The LORD descended to the top of Mount Sinai and called Moses to the top of the mountain. So Moses went up ²¹ and the LORD said to him, “Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the LORD and many of them perish. ²² Even the priests, who approach the LORD, must consecrate themselves, or the LORD will break out against them.” ²³ Moses said to the LORD, “The people cannot come up Mount Sinai, because you yourself warned us, ‘Put limits around the mountain and set it apart as holy.’ ” ²⁴ The LORD replied, “Go down and bring Aaron up with you. But the priests and the people must not force their way through to come up to the LORD, or he will break out against them.” ²⁵ So Moses went down to the people and told them. ^{20:1} And God spoke all these words: ² “I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ³ “You shall have no other gods before me. ⁴ “You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments. (Exodus 19:20-20:6)

I call out to the Lord, and he answers me from his holy mountain,

I was reading an article this last week about the loudest sound ever recorded. And the article began with the account of some ranchers on a sheep camp in Australia on August 27, 1883. They heard a sound like two shots from a rifle. But that noise did not come from a barrel of a gun, but rather from the Indonesian volcanic Island of Krakatoa blowing itself to bits over 2,000 miles away. It is an example of a loud sound heard that drew people's attention. It's for a similar reason that people watch and pay attention to fireworks like were shot off last Monday on July 4. It's why movie producers turn down the volume just before a significant plot twist, only to surprise you with incredible sound. It's the reason why it's natural to raise our voices when we want someone to pay attention to us – whether it's a child throwing a temper tantrum, or a politician attacking an opponent.

A loud noise draws our attention. This was a key component to God coming down on Mount Sinai before he gave the Israelites his Law. While God could have appeared to the people in a natural and even human form (like he did for Abraham a few hundred years before), he chose to descend upon Mount Sinai and reveal some of his glory. He descended with fire and smoke and lightning. It was as if Mount Sinai had transformed into an active volcano. But instead of running away in terror, God wanted the Israelites to watch, to watch, but not come too close.

This is the scene before us in our 1st Lesson for this morning, the Israelites at the base of Mount Sinai, God preparing to give his Law. He had their attention. He wanted to impress upon them how serious his Law is. It is this seriousness that we would do well to pay attention to as well. It's a

seriousness that can be summarized in this way: GOD SAYS WHAT HE MEANS AND HE MEANS WHAT HE SAYS.

1. Don't force your thoughts on God
2. Don't resist his grace on you

(1)

The Israelites didn't really need God to show his miraculous power at Mt Sinai. They had been witnesses of God's miracles for the last several months. They bore testimony to God's 10 plagues on the land of Egypt, they saw his control of nature with the parting of the Red Sea. And for the last three months they had been led in the desert by a GPS – God's Pillar of Smoke. God led them through a wide valley to a plain before a mountain range, one of whose mountains was called Sinai. It was here that God would give to his people, the Israelites, his Law.

This would not be a quick in-and-out kind of stop. Rather, God wanted them to stand at the base of the mountain and take in a little bit of his glory. God wanted the Israelites to know that this was not just his suggestions of what to do, this was God's Law, a law that was complete with punishment for the transgressor. The particular section of law that our section of Scripture is based on this morning is when God gave the Israelites the 10 commandments. Because while God gave them other laws to govern their nation and their acts of spiritual worship, those laws had an expiration date. The 10 commandments, or God's moral law, do not. Not only are they held up by Jesus as God's commands to still follow, but they are also written on our hearts in the form of a conscience.

If they are written on every person's hearts, then why the need for this scene on Mount Sinai? Because even though God wrote his law on our hearts, our hearts have been corrupted by sin, and as such sometimes our conscience can become corrupt. God wanted to record for the Israelites and us his rock solid Law that is not subject to interpretation or change. God's Law SAYS WHAT IT MEANS AND IT MEANS WHAT IT SAYS. So don't force your thoughts on God.

For the Israelites, God gave a special boundary which no one was to cross and ascend up on to the mountain. This was not just because God wanted his space, but because God is holy, and anything he touches is holy, which means that Mt Sinai was holy. God did not want unholy people coming up the mountain. This is why God said, **"Go down and warn the people so they do not force their way through to see the Lord and many of them perish."** The only people who could ascend were those who were called by God – at first Moses and then Aaron. But for the rest of the people, they needed to stay back, lest the Lord unleash his holy wrath.

It is with this background that God gave to his people his Law. In our section of God's Word we heard simply the first commandment – **"You shall have no other Gods."** But in reality, all of the commandments hinge upon this first one, and we see that when God explains what he means. **"You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the Lord your God, am a jealous God."** When God mentions an idol, he is not just talking about bowing down at the shrine of some false god, but rather a god is that to which we look for all good and in which we find refuge in every time of need.

It can be easy to think that idolatry is just a thing of the past, an antiquated notion that we've progressed so far beyond because we know so much more about the world. Take for example, just 13 chapters later in the book of Exodus, shortly after this incident, the Israelites find themselves dancing around a golden calf. That's something that we would never do, right? Or would we? The Israelites poured all their gold into this calf – their earrings, jewelry, their wealth. They fashioned it into a bull calf, the symbol of fertility and strength. The Israelites became dissatisfied with waiting for God, and so instead turned to power, money, and sex. Does this describe some antiquated idea, or rather is this describing the struggles in society today?

Idolatry today is as alive and well in our day as it was in the Israelites' day. Which means God's command to **"have no other gods,"** is just as valid today as it was in the Israelites' day. But unfortunately, it can be so easy to see the idols in the Bible, and miss the idols in our own lives. And when we dismiss the idols in our own lives as not even idols at all, we are forcing our thoughts on God. When we dismiss the notion that our avid pursuit of wealth crowds out our pursuit of God, we force our thoughts on God. When we dismiss the notion of our desire to be liked being more important than our desire to follow God, we force our thoughts on God. When we convince ourselves that God's command about adultery, authority, anger don't really apply to us, we force our thoughts on God. But GOD'S SAYS WHAT HE MEANS AND HE MEANS WHAT HE SAYS. And when he says these are his commandments, they are his commandments. And he means it when he says those who break these commands deserve to be punished.

We deserve God's judgment to break out against us for the times we have forced our thoughts upon him. We deserve God's judgment to break out against us for the times we have shattered his commandments with no regard whatsoever. But thank God we don't get what we deserve. Because Christ, who would come 1,400 years after this episode would pick up all those shattered commands of God we have broke, and he nailed them to the cross, never to be counted against us anymore.

(2)

So GOD SAYS WHAT HE MEANS AND HE MEANS WHAT HE SAYS. This applies to God's Law, which we have broken. But it also applies to God's gospel, which he has kept. God says that Jesus Christ came down to take away the sins of the world, and he means that Christ did take away our sins. Because of this, we have been invited to come into his presence both now and in eternity.

So don't resist God's invitation. Before, we were dead in our sins. But now, God's grace has made us alive. It has made us alive to come before our king. Don't resist his invitation. Just imagine the thoughts going through Aaron's mind when Moses informed him that he was invited up on Mt Sinai, into the presence of God. Thoughts of excitement, thoughts of respectful fear, but certainly not a thought of apathy, not a thought of "I'll pass on this opportunity."

When we put ourselves in those shoes, God's invitation, is much more significant. When we remember that we not only deserve to be eternally condemned and separated from God, but that we don't even deserve to be in his presence or hear his Word of truth, but we are offered that – freely. How can we not jump out bed on a Sunday morning, excited to gather together in God's house once more? How can we not eagerly open up our Bibles at home or in a group to explore and learn more about God's invitation? How can we not help but support with our offerings, time

and talents such a ministry that shares with us and others this good news? How can we not help but give thanks to God?

I have no doubt that the new heart placed in you by Christ desires all of these things. But while here we will always struggle to put into practice all our spiritual heart desires. But it is that struggle that is an essential part of every Christian – the struggle to follow God vs. the sinful nature's desire to follow self. But it is God's Word that can help us in this struggle, which is why I encourage you to join us in worship regularly, to join us in Bible Studies, to start or continue daily devotions by yourself or with your family. They will all help in your Christian struggle.

The article I read this last week about the loudest sound in the world had an interesting ending to it. There are certain sounds that we are able to hear based on how fast they are traveling. But certain sound waves travel too slowly or too quickly for us to be able to audibly hear (think a dog whistle). Scientists have developed instruments to be able to measure and record these sounds. The loudest sound they have recorded was actually a meteor that exploded over southern Russia in 2013. It didn't make the mainstream news because it wasn't audible, but the sound waves from that explosion encircled the globe.

The US Airforce experimented with this loud but inaudible sound and found that those soundwaves were able to inflate and deflate a person's lungs. Why do I bring all this up? Not just so that you can leave hear a little smarter than you were when you came in, but so that you can leave a little spiritually smarter than when you came in. We don't have the same experience as those Israelites did to draw from – with the fire and the thunder and the smoke of God on Mt. Sinai. But God's Word – both Law and Gospel, are just as powerful now as they were back then. God's Word doesn't need to be audibly loud to be effective. It is God's Word that helps you to breath in spiritual air. For it is only by God's grace that we fully understand and believe that GOD SAYS WHAT HE MEANS AND HE MEANS WHAT HE SAYS – both in regards to his Law, and to his Gospel. Amen.