The Rescue of God’s Presence

I have often wondered how I would feel to be in God’s immediate presence like Adam & Eve, Moses, or the children of Israel throughout their history. I have never personally had an encounter like did, but I got a taste back in 2004. I was just getting to know my dear friend Danny Ovalle, and on one particular summer evening Danny and his wife Cyndie invited me over for dinner. We had an awesome time of sharing stories and jokes and I felt so welcomed and cared for by them. It was obvious to me that although I hadn't known them long, on this night I meet people who were going to be significant to me. After hours of great food and conversation, Danny invited me onto his closed in porch so we could pray together. It seemed so natural and so intimate to transition to thanking our heavenly Father and praying for direction in each other’s lives. It had been overcast that evening and it began to rain as we stepped out on the covered porch. As we grew deeper into prayer, we began to hear thunder rumbling in the distance. It didn’t really impact us, but we just kept praying. Minute by minute it started to get closer, and closer, and closer. Then suddenly while we were in mid-sentence, the loudest crack of thunder blasted our ear drums as a lightning bolt struck a tree no more than 100 feet from where we were. We stopped praying immediately as we both sat in sheer terror and awe as we wondered aloud if God was responding to our prayers directly with this sample of His power. Regardless, we were both convinced that God was with us and was listening. We both knew that His presence changes everything and that was our only hope.

Although we were terrified, Exodus 19 puts my little story to shame in every way as Israel actually saw the glory of God descend upon Mount Sinai, and it changed everything about how they would live their lives. He was preparing Israel for the giving of the covenant to them, which would define their relationship, and reshape their entire culture. We see this in the three messages that God tells Moses to give to Israel before He meets them.

Big Idea: God reshapes us around the rescue of His presence.

How does God prepare Israel for the reshaping of their culture? Vision for Intimacy, Preparation through Cleansing, and Exclusive Access

1. Vision for Intimacy

- at the outset, God needs to define their relationship – why? Because he taking them to the next level:

Exodus 19:3-6 Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel: 4 You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. 5 Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; 6 and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

- everything about this language is relational: “house of Jacob” (family), “I bore you you on eagle’s wings and brought you to myself” (care), “obey my voice” (listening), “my treasured possession” (value), “kingdom of priests” (connection and service), “holy nation” (pure and unified)

- why the conditional language? does Israel have to earn their identity? not at all – Israel did nothing to earn their status as God’s firstborn or their rescue from Egypt

- God clearly wants more than a one-way relationship, which is what it has been up to this point, and His vision for them will never be realized if they don’t trust Him

- due to 400-year influence of Egypt, God is looking to reshape and re-create the culture of Israel – this covenant means they will have a new vision, a new mission, new values, and new way to live
Exodus 19:7-8 So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the LORD had commanded him. 8 All the people answered together and said, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do.” And Moses reported the words of the people to the LORD.

- Israel’s response is understandable (they were able to obey Pharaoh as his slaves), yet cringe-worthy (they had already failed in many ways)

2. Preparation through Cleansing

Exodus 19:9-16 And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever." When Moses told the words of the people to the LORD, 10 the LORD said to Moses, "Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments 11 and be ready for the third day. For on the third day the LORD will come down on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. 12 And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, 'Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. 13 No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot; whether beast or man, he shall not live.' When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain." 14 So Moses went down from the mountain to the people and consecrated the people; and they washed their garments. 15 And he said to the people, "Be ready for the third day; do not go near a woman."

- God wants the people to prepare for the giving of the covenant in three ways: washing their clothes, setting limits around the mountain, and abstaining from sex

- just as Moses learned at the burning bush, we see here that God’s presence creates sacred space wherever it goes

- why no sex? this is a picture of the culture of heaven where there is no marriage or need for sex (Matthew 22:30)

- if they are in the wilderness, where would they get the water to wash their clothes? Moses had struck the rock with his staff at the base of the mountain as God offered to stand in judgment (Exodus 17:1-7)

- don’t miss the picture Moses is giving us: Israel was cleansed by the substitutionary judgment of God

3. Humbling of Exclusive Access

- on the third day, the anticipation builds as Moses brings Israel to the foot of Sinai to meet God

Exodus 19:16-18 On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled. 17 Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. 18 Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the LORD had descended on it in fire. The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly.

- as God descends upon the mountain, smoke encompassed the air, the ground began to shake, the shofars grew louder and louder

Exodus 19:19-20 And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. 20 The LORD came down on Mount Sinai, to the top of the mountain. And the LORD called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up.

- when Moses spoke, God answered with thunder, and God called him up the mountain: God reiterated to Moses to warn Israel about the restricted access
EXODUS: Rescued with Blood

Exodus 19:21-25 And the LORD said to Moses, “Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the LORD to look and many of them perish. 22 Also let the priests who come near to the LORD consecrate themselves, lest the LORD break out against them.” 23 And Moses said to the LORD, "The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you yourself warned us, saying, 'Set limits around the mountain and consecrate it.'" 24 And the LORD said to him, "Go down, and come up bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the LORD, lest he break out against them." 25 So Moses went down to the people and told them.

- why the restrictions? this harkens back to Adam & Eve having been exiled from the garden (Genesis 3:21-24)

- although this passage ends in a very bleak word of warning, this is not how our story ends

- the rescue we experience comes from presence of Jesus and it changes everything about this bleak picture:

Hebrews 12:18-24 For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest 19 and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them. 20 For they could not endure the order that was given, “If even a beast touches the mountain, it shall be stoned.” 21 Indeed, so terrifying was the sight that Moses said, “I tremble with fear.” 22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, 23 and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

1 Peter 2:4-10 As you come to him, a living stone rejected by men but in the sight of God chosen and precious, 5 you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ...9 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God’s people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Revelation 1:4-6 John to the seven churches that are in Asia: Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, and from the seven spirits who are before his throne, 5 and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the firstborn of the dead, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood 6 and made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

- because we can’t obey the covenant, Jesus came to do it for us, and He was judged in our place

- therefore, through Christ we have a sharper vision for intimacy with God, not only because He became one of us, but because He sent the Spirit to inhabit us writing God’s law on our hearts

- through Christ we have perfect cleansing and our robes are dipped in His blood

- through Christ we have exclusive access to the throne of God even now

What about you?
Do you share God’s vision for intimacy with Him?
Are you intentional with how you pursue Him?
Does His presence in your life humble you?