

A LESSON ON REVERENCE EXODUS 19:16-25

INTRODUCTION:

Someone has observed that if reverence were a knot on the head, then modern man would have an indentation. Reverence for God is just not a part of modern man's response to God. This is especially true when you understand the word "reverence" includes fear and awe of God. Although nearly everyone in America says he or she believes in "god" this is not the God of the Old Testament or the God revealed in Jesus Christ. According to a best selling survey of American's attitudes and trends, "For most Americans, God is not to be feared or, for that matter, loved. He is irrelevant. Another survey tells us that most Americans view God as a friend rather than a king."

In God's view, reverence for Him is one of the first lessons in life. When He established His covenant with the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai, He revealed Himself to them in such a way that they would learn reverence. In his inspired reflection upon what happened at Mt. Sinai, Moses would later say to the people of Israel, "Remember the day you stood before the Lord your God at Horeb, when He said to me, 'Assemble the people before me to hear my words so that they may learn to revere me as long as they live in the land and may teach them to their children.' You came near and stood at the foot of the mountain while it blazed with fire to the very heavens, with black clouds and deep darkness. Then the Lord spoke to you out of the fire. You heard the sound of the words but saw no form; there was only a voice" (Deut. 4:10-12).

So everything that happened on this awesome day at Mt. Sinai was to produce in the heart of God's people a trembling before Him, a fear of Him, an abiding reverence of Him.

When we study this remarkable event that happened at Mt. Sinai, we learned some things about God that if they are properly understood will produce reverence toward. Let us go to school tonight with the people of Israel so that we, too, can learn the lesson on reverence.

I. AN UNDERSTANDING OF HIS SPIRITUALITY PRODUCES REVERENCE.

The phenomena in the physical realm at Mt. Sinai were most impressive. It was almost totally overwhelming to the people of Israel as they stood at the foot of the mountain. There were crashing sounds of thunder and fingers of lightening streaking all around the mountain. There was a bellowing smoke that was coming from the mountain and a burning fire in the midst of the smoke. There was the sound of a trumpet that grew increasingly loud as the minutes passed by. The earth beneath their feet was trembling as though the whole earth was being shaken with a massive earthquake. Then there was a voice, and awesome voice that they heard speaking with Moses on the mountain. When you analyze what they saw, it is obvious that they never saw God. They heard His voice, but they never saw His form. Moses is careful to remind the people of this in his reflection with them on the significance of the event as it is reported in Deuteronomy. They saw no form or likeness. Rather, they only heard a voice. All of this is a reminder to us of the spirituality of God. Man cannot see God for God is spirit.

1. His spirituality means that He cannot be seen.

The God who revealed Himself at Mt. Sinai is invisible. All that they people saw at Mt. Sinai was things that attended His presence. They saw nature responding to the presence of God, but they did not see the God Himself to which nature was responding. The God of the Bible is an invisible God. No eye can ever see Him.

2. His spirituality means that He has no body.

In our thoughts about God we tend to give God a body. It is said when Michelangelo painted the scene of the creation in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican that the face of God the Creator had a strong resemblance to Michelangelo, the artist. That is true for most of us. We tend to project our own image on to the God that we visualize in our minds. Our minds have difficulty comprehending an eternal being who has no body. But God is spirit and thus He is an incorporeal being, a being with out a body.

3. His spirituality means that He can be omnipresent.

If God had a body, then it would be by its very nature place limits upon Him. My physical body is necessary for my being as a creature but no such body is necessary for God. This body that I must have in order to be who I am means that I am finite, limited. One with a body can only be in one place at one time. But the eternal God is omnipresent - He can be every where equally at the same moment in time. As God manifested Himself to His People in this awesome encounter at Mt. Sinai, this did not mean that He had forsaken heaven. His descending to the mountain did not mean that He absented heaven. While He was being manifested on the mountain, He was still fully occupying His throne in heaven. God is spirit and the understanding of this reality of God produces reverence and awe in the heart.

One implication of this is that we are never able to escape the presence of God. Frances Thompson came to this conclusion about God after seeking to be a fugitive from God. He was raised in a Christian home but feared the cost of being a disciple of Christ. He studied for the priesthood, then medicine, flunking out of both because of laziness. The only thing he got out of his study of medicine was an addiction to narcotics. He would do anything to get his daily fix: hold horses, clean the dung off the streets, sell matches, or clean boots. And all the while he was running from God.

Thompson had a hidden talent for putting his thoughts and feelings into poetry. One day he sent off to a newspaper publisher one of his poems about God's pursuit of him. The publisher was so impressed that he began a search all over London for the anonymous poet who had sent the poem. When they found Thompson, they found a man broken in body and in spirit. He had no shirt under his rumpled coat. His worn shoes gave him little protection from the icy streets. He wore no gloves to protect his hands from the cold as he had written his lines. What he had written expressed his sense of the impossibility of escaping the inescapable God. Eventually, Frances Thompson became a Christian. He is now recognized as one of the great poets of English literature. His poem, "The Hound of Heaven" has gained immortal status because it expresses the heart of every man who has run or is running from God. His poem reads,

"I fled Him, down the nights and down the days;

I fled Him down the arches of the years;

I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways,

Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears

I hid from Him and under running laughter.

Up vistaed hopes I fled;

And shot, precipitated,

And down titanic glooms of chasm fears,

And from those strong Feet that followed after.

But with unhurrying chase,

And unperturbed pace,

Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,

They beat and a voice beat

More instant than the Feet -

"All things betray thee who betrayeth me."

The invisible God is the inescapable God. When you realize the spirituality of God it produces in you an appropriate reference of God.

II. A VISION OF HIS HOLINESS PRODUCES REVERENCE

The manifestation of God on the mountain that caused the people of Israel to tremble was the manifestation of His holiness. The symbol of His holiness on the mountain was the fire. The scriptures do not indicate that God was the fire or the fire was God, but rather that God was in the fire. We are told in other scriptures that "Our God is a consuming fire." Fire is the apt symbol of the holiness of God. Paschal had his life changing encounter with God in 1654, he wrote in

bold, capital letters in his journal that day the word, "FIRE!" When Israel walked away from Sinai that day and returned to their tents, they knew that God is in the fire.

1. His holiness is like fire in its power to consume.

Indeed our God is a consuming fire. We know of the ability of fire to consume. It is able to consume almost everything known to man, if it is hot enough. The God of the Bible is holy and whenever anything that is unholy comes into His presence, the fire of His presence consumes it. It is this awareness that God is holy, that He is a consuming fire that brings to the heart of man reverence.

When we become aware of the holiness of God, we tend to fall before Him like Isaiah and cry, "Woe is me!" We realize that our sinful condition would be totally out of place in the presence of God. We fear that if we came into the presence of God in our sin that it would mean that our total destruction. God is holy!

2. His holiness is like fire in its power to purify.

One of the lessons God taught in scripture about fire was its purifying power. Fire has that ability to burn up the dross to, separate the good from the bad. Whenever men want to purify precious metals, they put them in the fire. While they are in the fire, the pure, valuable metal will be separated from that which is of lesser value. The presence of God has the same impact upon our lives. When we come into His presence in our defilement, His presence will burn up that which is offensive leaving only that which is pleasing in his sight. God is holy - a purifying fire!

III. A VISION OF HIS MAJESTY PRODUCES REVERENCE!

The God, who came to the mountain, is in His person a majestic being. It is best to see the physical phenomena that happened that day as being nature's response to the presence of the Creator. It is true that the Scriptures indicate that the people of Israel trembled that day. But Moses is carefully to report that the whole earth trembled much before Him. The created earth was so aware of and responsive to the majestic presence of God that it shook and trembled before Him. This is the God that we know in Christ.

1. The world of nature trembles before His majesty.

Israel should have been rebuked by the way nature responded to the presence of God. They had a tendency to be too casual about God. In just a few days this same group of people will desecrate themselves before a little idol that they have made to represent God. They soon forgot about His majestic presence. We are like that. We need in our life constant reminders of His glory and majesty. But the whole creation trembles before Him.

2. We should tremble before His majesty.

Reverence toward God is the proper response for every created being before Him. We should walk with awareness that He, the living God, is so majestic in His person and in His glory that we should lie prostrate before Him, trembling lest we be destroyed by His holiness. We should be crying out with Isaiah, "Woe is me! I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of uncleanness!" This is a part of our response to God that modern man has lost. We have lost the fear for God. It is one of the first lessons of life.

However, this is not the only revelation that God ever gave of Himself. We must not stop by learning about God at Mt. Sinai. If this is all we ever learn of God, then we may tremble before Him, but we will never trust Him. God came to earth in the person of His Son, Jesus, at Christmas time, lived out His 33 years upon the earth, and died a sacrificial death on another little mountain near Jerusalem, so that we might love Him and trust Him. While God wants us to tremble before Him in reverence, He wants more than that from us. He also wants us to love him and to trust Him. Thank God for this added word of revelation that the holy God of Mt. Sinai is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who died in our place at Calvary.

At this Christmas time, may God grant to each of us the balance between trembling and trust. May He give to us the mature perspective of all adoration.