

The Law! Fear or Not Fear

By Henry Mahan

Bible Text: Exodus 20:18-21

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You know when I read the 20th chapter of Exodus I get so depressed, so depressed. I get past preaching and almost past worshipping when I read the 20th chapter of Exodus. And I was sitting there trying to account for it. And I think it might be illustrated in this fashion. It would be like taking one of my water color pictures and hanging it in an art gallery next to Michelangelo. Now, that would depress you, wouldn't it? And I guess that is the reason why I get so depressed when I read the law, putting my life against the life of God and my holiness against the holiness of God, my righteousness next to the righteousness of God, my thoughts next to the thoughts of God.

And I would say this. If you can read it without being depressed, you are in trouble. You are not in trouble because you are depressed. You are in trouble if you are not depressed. If you can see in that law any hope, you are in trouble. If you can see in your heart any conformity to that law you are in trouble. If you can see in your life even the faintest identification with that law you are in trouble.

And when God gave this law, look at verse 18. "And all the people saw the thundering and the lightning and the noise of the trumpets and the mountains smoking. When God gave this law he gave that law in a great show of majesty, in a show of power, in a show of great glory. God revealed this law from the mountain. He spoke. The mountain smoked and the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled and the trump of God sounded. It was a time of a revelation of God's majesty.

Why? God could have spoken this law softly accompanied by an angel song, but he didn't. He gave it with a show of glory. He gave it with a show of majesty. And I ask: Why? And I give...I make these suggestions.

Number one, God gave his law in a great show of majesty, number one, to impress the people. And he has impressed me with the authority of that law. This is God's law. This is not a standard of conduct devised by Moses. This is God's law. This is not a few rules of religion. This is God's law. This is not something that man has concocted. This is God's law and it is to be held in respect and reverence. This is the holy, immaculate law of the living God. And that is what it is saying, When he gave that law from that mountain with the smoking mountain and the lightning and the glory of God all around, he is saying, "This is my law. This is my law."

Secondly, I believe he gave it in such a fashion to impress the people not only with the authority of that law, but with the reach of that law. Now, God didn't call the elders of Israel to gather in a tent in their counsels or temple or tribal meeting and whisper the law in their ears as though it were designed for Israel only. But God shouted it from the mountains. This is God's law and this is God's law that is given to govern God's universe, God's universe. It reaches to every son of Adam.

“What the law saith it saith to them that are under the law that every mouth might be stopped and the whole world, the whole world become guilty, the whole world.”

And then, thirdly, I believe God gave this law, accompanied by a show of his majesty and power, not only to impress us with the authority of it, this is God's law and the reach of it. It is given to govern God's universe. But, thirdly, to impress the people—and this is what I said a moment ago—with their utter helplessness before that law.

You know, there is a defense against most every weapon. We can contend with armies of men, can't we? We can contend with forces from other nations, our neighbors, that which is flesh and blood. But I will tell you when the heavens are on fire, when the mountains are smoking, when the lightning is flashing, when almighty God is acting, there is no defense. I have thought often times when I have read about like up north, northeast when these heavy snows, two feet of snow or three feet of snow paralyzes a city or an earthquake. There is no defense, nothing you can do, or a flood. There is no defense, or a tidal wave. There is no defense. All you can do is just fall down. All you can do is just wait on death. All you can do is just wait on destruction.

Turn to the book of Habakkuk. This is one of those little books that is hard to find. Micah and then Habakkuk, over here in the minor prophets. But I want to read verse 16, Habakkuk, chapter three, verse 16. And this is...when we studied a few weeks ago in Bible classes we studied the prayers, Old Testament prayers of some of the great men of God. We missed this one here, Habakkuk three. I read it the other day Habakkuk in his prayer trembleth at God's majesty, God's majesty, God's power. And verse 16 he says in Habakkuk three. Have you got it? Verse 16. Listen to it. “When I heard my belly trembled. My lips quivered at the voice. Rottenness entered my bones. I trembled in myself that I might rest in the day of troubles when he cometh up unto the people. He will invade them with his truth. I tremble.”

Yes, sir, God gave this law to impress us and impress the people with their utter, utter helplessness, helplessness before that awful majesty of God. My belly trembled. And then, fourthly, I believe God gave this law with such a revelation of glory and majesty, fourthly, perhaps someone suggested, perhaps this is a dress rehearsal of the last judgment. If the giving of the law is so awesome think of the enforcement of it. If the giving of the law is so terrible, what will it be like when men are called to account for having broken this law?

God didn't slip off in a corner and give his law. He announced it from a smoking mountain as a dress rehearsal of that great day when men shall be brought forth from every corner of the world and called to account for having transgressed this law.

But fifthly, and primarily, this is the message for the morning. I see all this glory and majesty and holiness and power and God acting in this fashion for a reason and that reason is to shut men up to a mediator.

Now, let me show you that. It says here in verse 18, "When the people saw the thunderings and the lightnings and the noise of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, when they saw it they ran. They ran." The law was given and the people ran. The law was given and the people fled with terror, those that were there, those that saw this majesty and heard this voice and heard this law. They ran. They were filled with terror. It says they stood afar off. The law was given and they feared that death was nigh. They said in verse 19, "Moses, speak to us and we will hear it. But don't let God speak with us lest we die." They felt that death was near.

So what did they do?? What did they do? They asked Moses to be their mediator. They asked Moses to represent them. They asked Moses to approach God for them. They sought a mediator. They cried out for a mediator. Without a mediator they knew that to approach God would bring nothing but death and for God to approach them would bring nothing but death. And they wanted, personally, nothing to do with that holy God.

You say, "What are you saying, preacher?"

I am saying this. Now this is what I am saying. I am summing it up right here. If you ever get a glimpse of God's holiness, if you ever get a glimpse of God almighty's holiness...Now, I know a lot of people use that word and they talk about holiness and righteousness and obedience and all of these things. But if you ever...if you ever get a glimpse of God's immaculate, immutable, infinite holiness the thought of approaching that God on the basis of your right or righteousness will paralyze you with fear. And you had just as soon try to walk into the door of one of the blast furnaces down here as to approach the presence of that God without a mediator if you ever get a glimpse of his holiness.

Now, first of all, let me give you three things. First of all, the Lord as I see it from the Scripture, the Lord, first, in dealing with a sinner, if God is going to bring me or you to salvation and that is what I am interested in. I am interested in knowing God, to know him, to win Christ and be found in him, to know him and the power of his resurrection, to attain to the resurrection of the dead, to have restored what I lost in the fall of what I by sin and nature and rebellion have failed to accomplish. This salvation...When God first deals with a sinner, when God first appears to the sinner, he deals with him and appears to him in a manner that will produce fear.

Now, modern religion...and I am going to say this. It may offend you. But modern religion has missed it totally. And the reason for such shallowness in present day

religion, do you know the reason for such shallowness in present...do you want to know what is wrong? I will tell you what is wrong. They have never seen the majesty and the holiness of God. Modern religion knows nothing of divine justice. Modern religion doesn't touch it, won't deal with it, doesn't preach it because modern religion knows nothing of the majesty and holiness and justice of almighty God.

Job had a revelation of it. And he fell down in the dust and said, "I hate myself. I have been talking about things to wonderful for me. I will never open my mouth again," Job said. God gave him a revelation of his majesty and broke him.

Isaiah saw it. He fell down. When he saw the glory of God his holiness filled the temple and he said, "I am a man of unclean lips and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." Daniel saw it. Daniel saw it, the majesty, the holiness of God. And he said, "My comeliness, my beauty melted into corruption."

Habakkuk saw it, the majesty of God, and he said, "My belly trembles. My lips quiver. Rottenness fills my bones."

The modern religionist talks of God, of Christ always appearing in love and kindness and tenderness. This is totally without support in God's Word. When our Lord first appears to the sinner he appears in judgment, judgment against sin. No man, no man can know anything of mercy until he is convinced of misery. No man can enter into the brightness of Calvary until he has seen the blackness of human nature. No man can appreciate what Christ has done until he knows why he did it. No man can embrace the blood that was shed until he sees the sin for which it was shed.

The question today is: Do you want to go to heaven? The question in the Bible was: Do you want to know God. And God reveals himself to the sinner, first of all, in the brightness of his glory, in the brightness of his holiness, in the brightness of his righteousness and justice. He strips the sinner. He will never clothe you until he strips you. He will never give you life until he slays you. He will never raise you up until he has brought you down. He will never exalt you until he has humbled you.

Saul of Tarsus hit the dust. Saul of Tarsus was in religion. Saul of Tarsus had a righteousness. Saul of Tarsus had a form of worship. Saul of Tarsus had a knowledge of God, he thought. But before he could have a righteousness with which God would be pleased, before he could have a knowledge of the true God, he had to be brought down. He had to see God in his glory.

Do you know what is wrong with us? Sin. And oh the sinfulness of sin. I want to take just one member of our fallen nature, just one member and I am not going to deal with the heart, deceitful above all things and desperately wicked, every imagination of the heart, evil. And I am not going to deal with the mind. Our thoughts are not God's thoughts. The natural mind is enmity against God. I am not going to deal with the hands that move in rebellion against God or the feet that are swift to walk to mischief, or the

affections that are perverted and without natural affections and that love darkness and hate light.

I am going to deal with one little member. This one right here, the tongue. Would you listen to the Bible? Now, listen.

Psalm 52, "Thy tongue deviseth mischief like a sharp razor."

Psalm 52:4, "Oh, thou deceitful tongue."

Psalm 64:3, "They whet their tongues like a sword."

Psalm 123, "What shall be done to thee, thou false tongue?"

Proverbs 6:16, "Six things God hates, a proud look, a lying tongue."

Proverbs 17:20, "A perverse tongue falls into mischief."

Proverbs 25:23, "A backbiting tongue."

Proverbs 26:28, "A lying tongue God hateth."

Romans 3:13, "With their tongues they have used deceit."

James 3:5, "The tongue is a little member, boasteth great things. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth. The tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. It is set on fire with hell."

That is just the tongue. Now, he has moved to the eyes. "Having eyes filled with adultery. They can not case from sin."

You move to the ears. You move to the mind. You move to the hands. You move to the throat. You move to the heart. You move to the...every part of our being is permeated with sin, rebellion.

What Israel saw at this mountain? They didn't just see a little religious ceremony. God spoke. And God spoke his holiness. God revealed his holiness. God almighty at this mountain revealed his holiness and what Israel saw at this mountain is a preview of what every ransomed son of Adam will see if the Holy Spirit is pleased to draw him to Christ. He will show him his sin. And that son of Adam will go off saying, "Can it be that I should gain, I the chief of sinners, I trader, rebel, filled with iniquity from the sole of my feet to the top of my head? Can it be that I should gain an interest in the Savior's blood? Died he for me who him to death pursued? Amazing love, how can it be that thou, my God, should die for me?"

Now, look at verse 19. When God gave the law people ran with terror. Now, verse 19. And they said, “Moses, be our mediator. Speak with us. Speak with God. We will hear. Let not God speak to us lest we die.”

The people turned to Moses. They turned to someone to represent them. And, brethren, when you and I see the holiness of God, the holy law of God. You don't try to begin seeing what you can do to obey him. You don't begin...you are a fool if you begin to look within yourself to see, “Well, I haven't...I have come up pretty bad on this one, but I have done pretty well on that one. But this one over here, well, I blew that one and this one, well, you know...” That's not...to offend in one point is to be guilty of the whole law and when you see his holiness and your wretchedness, do you know what you do? You throw up your hands in total complete surrender and you look for somebody to represent you. That's what Israel did. They backed off. They backed off. And they turned. They said, “Moses, Moses, speak to God.”

Without a mediator a man is in trouble. Now, the sons of sons of Korah learned this. Turn to Numbers 16. You can take this out and look at it later and read it. But the sons of Korah wanted to do away with Moses. They didn't need Moses. They said, “God speaks to all of us. We don't need you Moses. We can do with out you.” And Moses rebuked them in Numbers 16:10. And Moses said, “And he hath brought thee near to him and all thy brethren the sons of Levi with him. Seek ye the priesthood? Is that what you want? Are you seeking the priesthood, you sons of Korah?”

And they were. And so in verse 32 of Numbers 16, “The earth opened her mouth and swallowed them up and their houses and all the men that appertained unto Korah and all their goods. They and all that appertained to them went down alive into the pit and the earth closed upon them and they perished from among the congregation.” They must have done something awful terrible. Do you know what they did? They tried to take the mediator out from between them and God. That is what they tried to do.

Now turn to 2 Chronicles. I will show you another example of this, 2 Chronicles, 26, 2 Chronicles 26, turn over there a moment, verse 16, 2 Chronicles 26:16. Now here was a king, King Uzziah. And verse 16 says, “He was strong. His heart was lifted up to his destruction. He transgressed against the Lord his God.” He went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense. That is what he did. You remember studying the tabernacle, that altar of incense? Aaron, the sons of Levi kept burning. Well, the king came here and he said, “I will burn it.” And they withstood him, verse 17 and 18 says they withstood him and told him he wasn't supposed to do that, only the high priest God ordained.

Verse 19. “And he was angry and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And while he was wroth with the priest the leprosy even rose up in his forehead before the priest in the house of the Lord from beside the incense altar.”

And, verse 21 says, “Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death.” He went in before the Lord with a mediator.”

As I said, if you are sensible of your sins and God's holiness, you will no more attempt to approach the holy, almighty God without a mediator any more than you would walk into a blast furnace.

Someone said this. "Till God in human flesh I see to act as my mediator between me and God. Till God in human flesh I see, my thoughts no comfort can find. The holy just and sacred three are terrors to my mind. But if Emmanuel's face appear my hope, my joy begins. His name, Emmanuel, God with us, God in human flesh, his name removes my fear. His grace removes my sin."

I say this. When Israel stood at Mount Sinai and God revealed himself in his awesome, awful holiness and revealed his law in its holy demands, reaching inwardly and outwardly before and after, governing the whole universe and every son of Adam, revealing the character of God in motive, imagination, attitude, word and deed, Israel reacted like any sensible sinner will react. They backed off. They backed off. They wanted nothing to do with that God because they knew they couldn't deal with him. They knew they had no grounds upon which to deal with him. They knew that they were sinners. They knew that they had broken that law. I don't give this law to you as a rule of life. If I were fool enough to do that and you were fool enough to accept it, you would be the most miserable human being that ever walked on the earth. You would never smile again because I would be giving you an impossible task, totally impossible. And you would have no reason to do anything but run from it, run from it, run from it, fear it, back off, deal with terror.

But now wait a minute. Wait a minute. Israel turned to Moses. "Moses, you got to do something. When God speaks to us we die. Even the words of his voice consume us. The shadow of his presence consumes us."

God said, "No man can look upon me and live. No man can see my face and live."

But Moses...Moses...look at verse 20. Moses said to the people, "Don't be afraid. God has come to prove you. His fear may be before your faces if you sin not" And the people stood afar off and Moses drew near unto the thick darkness where God was. Moses went in and spoke to God and came out and spoke to the people.

Now, Moses is a type of Christ. First of all, in that he loved the people. He loved the people. He said one time God was going to destroy the people and he stood as a type of Christ before the God of wrath, the wrath of God and the people. And he said, "Lord, don't destroy them. If you do, if you destroy them, blot me out of your book." That is an intercession. And that is Christ. He loved the people.

Secondly, Moses was in favor with God. God selected Moses. He appointed Moses. He ordained Moses.

Thirdly, Moses...why was he like Christ? Why is he a type of Christ? Moses was a man, too. He understood the people. Moses had his infirmities and weaknesses and sins. He was a man.

Jesus Christ was a man. He is God man. Listen to this. "God and yet man thou art. True God, true man art thou. Of man and of man's earth apart, one with us thou art now."

Listen to me. I want you to hear this. I know some people in the world imagine that they would believe the gospel if God were to speak to them out of the heavens. Wouldn't that be something? I hear...I am sure a lot of people think that, "Boy, I would really believe if God would speak to me directly. If God would speak out of the heavens like he spoke here I would believe."

Don't you believe it. Don't you even wish for it. The terror of his voice, the terror of his presence, the awesome holiness and majesty of his presence it would fill you with fear. It did Israel. God spoke to them and they ran. God spoke to them and they turned and fled. God spoke to them and terror filled their hearts. God spoke to them and fear filled their hearts. God spoke to them and they looked for death.

Don't you believe it. The voice of God will not convert you. You need a mediator. You need a mediator. You need someone who can speak to God for you, who understands you, who is man like you, but who doesn't have sins like you, one whom God will accept, one whom God will receive, one whom God will communicate with. And that person is Christ.

And then we need someone who can come from God and speak to us and reveal the Father unto us because we don't know God. No man knoweth the Father, but the Son and he to whom the Son will reveal him.

It says Moses drew near into the darkness. And that is where Christ went. He went to the darkness. He walked the winepress of God's wrath alone. He took us to God and he brought God to us. And that is who we deal with in mercy. Christ was tempted in all points as you are yet without sin. He brings to you a holiness you don't have. He brings to you a righteousness you don't have. He brings to you a perfection you don't have. And he gives it to you in what he did from the Father and you are accepted in him.

Listen to this and I will close. Look up, my soul. Look up, my soul, with cheerful eye. See where the great Redeemer stands, the glorious mediator on high with the precious incense in his hands. He sweetens every humble groan. He makes holy every broken prayer. Oh rest my hope on him alone whose power and love forbid despair. He ransomed me from hell with his blood and by his power my foes controlled. He found this wandering soul and brought me to his chosen fold. His spotless robe, the same, appears while ruined nature sinks in years. No age can change its glorious hue, the robe of Christ is always new, always new.

And I am not progressively coming to the point where God will receive me. God received me in Christ to start with. He receives me in Christ now. And my old nature and my flesh—now, listen to me—is no different than it was the day I met God. And yours isn't either. God is not working on your flesh. God has given you a new spirit, a new nature, a new heart. God will never receive your flesh. In the flesh no man can please God. In the flesh dwelleth no good thing. The flesh and blood shall not inherit the kingdom of God. That which is born of flesh is flesh.

Our hope is Christ the mediator. And that is...when God gave that holy law and when God deals with the sinner on the basis of his holiness, not one thing to do and that is turn and run until you find somebody who will represent you. Who is it? Mary can't do it. She is out there running, too. The priest can't do it. He is out there...ought to be out there running, too. The preacher, the church, nobody. Christ, he is at the right hand of the Father and he is the mediator. There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus because he has been a man, is a man and he is God. And he can speak for God to us and for us to God and be heard.

Our Father, we are grateful for the gospel. We are grateful for the hope which we have in Christ. Our hearts would be filled with such impossible fear, such terror if it were not for Christ. There is no good thing dwelling with in us. But there is a good one on thy right hand who is our representative and our advocate and our mediator. Receive us in him. Accept us in the beloved. And we pray in his name, for his glory. Amen.

We will have a verse of a song. Brother Don, what number? 233. Let's sing 233.

Stand please.

[singing]