

Exodus 19:1-8

Theme: Do it all

What would you have to see someone do in order for you to do anything that person said without hesitation? If I saw someone pick up a car and hurl it down the street then turn to me with instructions, I'm gonna do it.

There are other moments which move us to respond just as deeply. How about a display of love, understanding, or care that was so meaningful to you that you had to reflect it to others? What happens when true power and inexhaustibly deep love are at work together? That's Sinai: God's overwhelming power paired with profound, tender love at work to draw his people close to himself and into a relationship marked by trust, belief, and a willingness to do for the other.

It's a breathtaking scene. About a million and a half people camped in front of a mountain topped with fire/cloud. God speaks. The ground shakes. It's intense. Why reveal himself this way? Because God wants to leave a lasting impression of who he is, that he is majestic, powerful, authoritative, good, caring, loving. He wants his people to know the God who does it all for them, so that they would be saved, live as his people, and be blessed. Earlier, Moses worried aloud, "Who will I say sent me to free them from slavery?" Now God answers that question clearly, "*You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.*" (**Exodus 19:4**) They had seen it: the plagues, the Sea, deliverance, protection from enemies, manna, quail. God rescued them, gently carried and brought them to himself. Now God entered into a covenant with them.

Then comes a jarring line, "*Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of the nations you will be my treasured possession.*" (**Exodus 19:5**) Seems like a switcheroo. "I delivered you, now you gotta earn it." Nah, that isn't what God is saying because this covenant is about being a nation, it wasn't designed to be a way for people to earn salvation. Scripture is clear, OT and NT, that righteousness is not achieved by works of law, but given by God as a gift of grace, received by faith. Abraham was declared righteous by faith way before Sinai. The people standing and staring at this mountain, who'd break this covenant almost immediately, were not saved by their obedience, or lack thereof, but by believing in the Lord.

What was the point then? Couple main things. First, Israel's designated God's treasured nation through which the Messiah would come. Second, it taught the world, Israel included, its absolute need for a Savior. The law exposes human inability to do God's will. The covenant points forward to the one who'd complete it and set it aside for a more glorious covenant. This matters for us big time. The conditional aspects of Sinai's covenant are not our burden to carry. Especially on Christian Education Sunday, this is something worth learning and engraining. Our right standing with God doesn't depend on how well we keep the commands given through Moses. That work has already been done by Jesus. Your righteousness before God depends *entirely* on him, not on what you've done or failed to do, but on everything he's done in love. That's why Jesus loves the way he does. Love keeps the law. Jesus, the Law-Keeper, is the Savior of lawbreakers who puts us in a one-sided covenant.

The Sinai covenant had and has a purpose for daily life. It both reminds and displays God's people and their purpose. "*You will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.*" God says (**Exodus 19:6**) Priests intercede and mediate, they represent the people before God not as judges, but advocates! Because of Christ, Scripture says the same thing of us! Peter wrote about this in our second reading and **Revelation 1:6** says Jesus has made us, "*to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father.*" By faith, we're God's treasured possession and we're given priestly work to do. That means we intercede and advocate for others before God and if we're willing to go to that highest of levels, certainly we'll advocate

for one person to another. We pray, we speak peace, we broker reconciliation in our corners of the world. Jesus, the Prince of Peace, calls us peacemakers and says we're blessed beyond belief to live like it. Let's do it. That's what Israel said, too!

When God gave his will, the people responded, "*We will do everything the LORD has said.*" **(Exodus 19:8)** All of it though? History answers that question honestly. Israel failed repeatedly. They were conquered, exiled, and became a laughing stock because they were the treasured people, but turned their backs on the God of glory which is human pushback to an impossible task.

So why did God want them to do it all at all? Not to save themselves, but to live visibly as his people. Their lives were meant to spark curiosity among the nations. Even their diet and dress set them apart. God intended others to ask questions and learn about the mercy, care, welcome, and love that undergirds and fulfills the law. If we're honest, we sound a lot like Israel. We say we want to live this way, say we're nothing but committed. The reality, however, is familiar: spectacular failure, followed closely by major defensiveness when failure's pointed out. We rejoice in our status as God's children, people headed for heaven, but struggle, or don't sometimes, to live in ways that reflect this blessed reality.

This, moments of failure, is where God does his most impactful work for us. Not in Sinai's striving, but at the cross! There, on a smaller but infinitely more meaningful mountain, Jesus takes upon himself not only our failure to do his will, but also the guilt and shame that come with it. The Law-Keeper is lifted up as Law-bearer, carrying our disobedience in his body, silencing every accusation, and declaring all forgiven.

Jesus tells his followers to teach everything he's commanded which includes how he saved the world and what salvation looks like in believer's hearts. It looks like the voluntary service he literally embodied. That's why he urges us toward welcome, gentleness, and yielding love. Jesus impresses a life of active love on us because love is the whole point of the law. When you're loving your neighbor, you're doing right by them and by God without having to consciously check off commandments. Love does no harm to its neighbor, so just love.

Live this way without fear of your past sins because they're gone. You have Jesus' righteousness and the Spirit's illumination! So when he says, "My dear friends, these things are good for you and others," we say, "Yes, I wanna do that!" with conviction. Not because we think God wants us to say that, not to earn anything, but just because it's true, we love him, and are wise to the goodness. Jesus' love and power worked in perfect harmony throughout his life and during his suffering and death. Jesus freed us from the burden of trying to do it all by actually doing it all perfectly.

Jesus did it. He won. He saved us. Jesus made us God's people. Jesus has empowered us to declare God's marvelous works with our words and lives. Help us learn this, Lord. Help us remember. Help us live. Amen.