

A Mountaintop Experience

Long Beach Alliance Church • January 15th, 2012 • Pastor Chris Lankford

***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.***

~Exodus 19:20 (NASB)

1) The Terrifying Presence Of God

- A) Finally Israel arrives at Mount Sinai (the mountain of God, Exodus 19:3). God invites Israel into a treaty relationship in which Israel will be God's people, and the people will be faithful to God as His people (19:1-17).
- B) As Israel settles at the base of Mount Sinai, the LORD comes down in fire, heavy smoke, terrifying tremors, and loud sounds which terrify the people (19:18-20).
- C) Moses warns the people to stay back (not that they needed much convincing), or the Lord will "break forth upon" the people, resulting in their deaths (19:21-25).

2) The Interesting Problem Of The Law

- A) When Moses is on Mount Sinai (the traditional location for Mount Sinai is the picture on the front of our worship guide today), God speaks ten commandments (ten laws) which form a foundation for "The Law" (20:1-17).

- B) However, we know as New Testament followers of Jesus Christ, that Jesus Christ fulfilled all the requirements of the Law (Romans 8:1-4). Followers of Christ are released from the Law, and live in the Spirit (Romans 7:4-6).
- C) By virtue of a relationship with Jesus Christ who fulfilled the Law, Christians are no longer held under the rule of the Law, but are ruled by the Spirit of God (Galatians 5:18).

3) Religion vs. Relationship (Video Interlude)

- A) False religion (the religion referred to in the Jefferson Bethke video we just watched) is a life lived by rules without relationship (Matthew 23), which Jesus condemned.
- B) However, there are other verses in the Bible where “religion” is not a bad thing (James 1:26-27). The enemy is not religion. The issue is why are we religious at all?
- C) Pastor and author Tim Keller articulates these helpful “boundaries” for living according to “false religion” or according to the “gospel” (true religion).

RELIGION: I obey-therefore I’m accepted

THE GOSPEL: I’m accepted-therefore I obey.

RELIGION: Motivation is based on fear and insecurity

THE GOSPEL: Motivation is based on grateful joy.

RELIGION: I obey God in order to get things from God

THE GOSPEL: I obey God to get to God-to delight and resemble Him.

RELIGION: When circumstances in my life go wrong, I am angry at God or my self, since I believe, like Job's friends that anyone who is good deserves a comfortable life

THE GOSPEL: When circumstances in my life go wrong, I struggle but I know all my punishment fell on Jesus and that while he may allow this for my training, he will exercise his Fatherly love within my trial.

RELIGION: When I am criticized I am furious or devastated because it is critical that I think of myself as a 'good person'. Threats to that self-image must be destroyed at all costs

THE GOSPEL: When I am criticized I struggle, but it is not critical for me to think of myself as a 'good person.' My identity is not built on my record or my performance but on God's love for me in Christ. I can take criticism.

RELIGION: My prayer life consists largely of petition and it only heats up when I am in a time of need. My main purpose in prayer is control of the environment

THE GOSPEL: My prayer life consists of generous stretches of praise and adoration. My main purpose is fellowship with Him.

RELIGION: My self-view swings between two poles. If and when I am living up to my standards, I feel confident, but then I am prone to be proud and unsympathetic to failing people. If and when I am not living up to standards, I feel insecure and inadequate. I'm not confident. I feel like a failure

THE GOSPEL: My self-view is not based on a view of my self as a moral achiever. In Christ I am "simul iustus et peccator"—simultaneously sinful and yet accepted in Christ. I am so bad he had to die for me and I am so loved he was glad to die for me. This leads me to deeper and deeper humility and confidence at the same time. Neither swaggering nor sniveling.

RELIGION: My identity and self-worth are based mainly on how hard I work. Or how moral I am, and so I must look down on those I perceive as lazy or immoral. I disdain and feel superior to 'the other'

THE GOSPEL: My identity and self-worth are centered on the one who died for His enemies, who was excluded from the city for me. I am saved by sheer grace. So I can't look down on those who believe or practice something different from me. Only by grace I am what I am. I've no inner need to win arguments.

RELIGION: Since I look to my own pedigree or performance for my spiritual acceptability, my heart manufactures idols. It may be my talents, my moral record, my personal discipline, my social status, etc. I absolutely have to have them so they serve as my main hope, meaning, happiness, security, and significance, whatever I may say I believe about God

THE GOSPEL: I have many good things in my life—family, work, spiritual disciplines, etc. But none of these good things are ultimate things to me. None of them are things I absolutely have to have, so there is a limit to how much anxiety, bitterness, and despondency they can inflict on me when they are threatened and lost.

4) Living According To Law Or According To The Spirit

- A) As we approach Mount Sinai with the Israelites and consider what God required of them as "His chosen people," we live in the tension of following Law or living free from the Law.
- B) Sometimes the Law represents things that are easy with which to understand and agree (e.g. Exodus 20:13). There are other aspects of the Law which are harder to understand or agree (e.g. Exodus 20:8).
- C) Like most things in life, and especially in the Bible, the issue is not generally "the Law." The issue is why do we follow God at all? What drives the interior of our spiritual walk with God? Are we living religiously (abiding by the Law) or are we living by the gospel (abiding in the Spirit)?