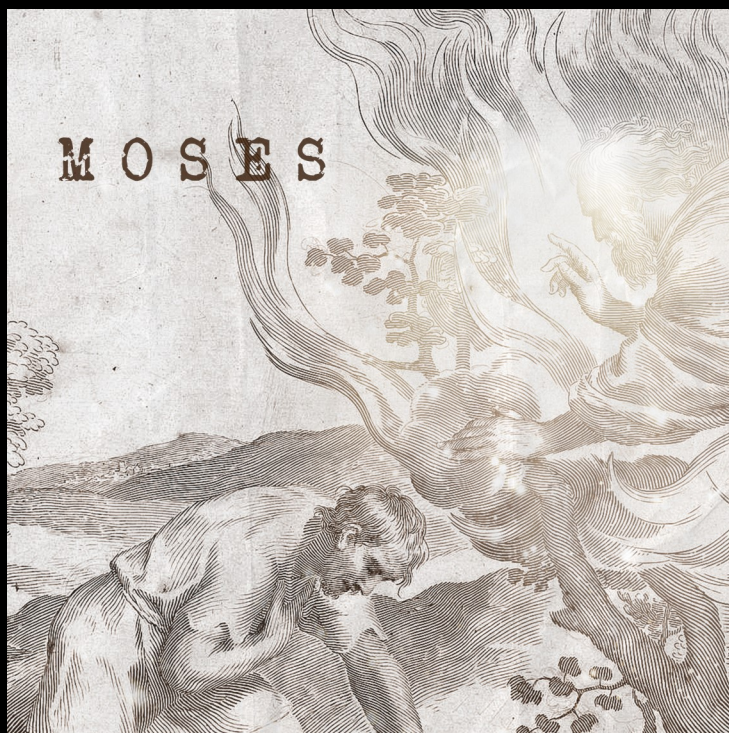


# Moses

Daily Devotionals

*Believers*  
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# Introduction and Purpose

In Exodus 3, Moses has his first encounter with the majesty of the Living God. In exile for murdering an Egyptian, Moses takes his flocks up Mount Horeb, where he sees the strangest thing he has ever witnessed—a bush aflame with fire, but not consumed. Intrigued by this wonder, Moses draws near to catch a better look. But as he gets close to the bush, a voice calls out to him, “Moses, Moses! Do not come near; take your sandals off your feet, for the place on which you are standing is holy ground.” (Exodus 3:4–5 ESV)

Moses first meets God in the light. This is true of all of us. Fifteen hundred years after Moses met God, the Apostle John would write about Jesus, “In him was life, and the life was the light of men.” (John 1:4)

After many years of following God, Moses would have another encounter with Him, this time on Mount Sinai. Moses dared to make a request of God: “Show me your glory.” And God did. This time, God did not appear in a burning bush. Instead, He told Moses to hide in the cleft of a rock, and he passed by him in a cloud.

God told Moses that he would only see his back, “for man shall not see me and live” (Exodus 33:20). Moses would “see” God, but he would only see God’s back because God is too wonderful to be fully seen and understood. Later, John would write about Jesus, “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” (John 1:18)

Moses the uninitiated first saw God in the light. But Moses the mature saw God in the darkness of the cloud.

This is essentially the spirituality of the Fourth Century Cappadocian Father Gregory of Nyssa. Gregory believed that we first encounter God through the light when God opens our eyes to the truth of the gospel. But we grow to know God better through the darkness, as we better appreciate the “bigness” of God—that He surpasses all human understanding.

Over the next six weeks, we are going to look at some of the writings of Gregory of Nyssa to see how we can continue to grow throughout our lifetime.

Gregory was an important figure during the time when the church was articulating the doctrine of the Trinity. He, his brother Basil of Caesarea, and their family friend Gregory of Nazianzus are known as the Cappadocian Fathers. They advocated for the Nicene Creed and Gregory of Nyssa participated in the landmark Council of Constantinople. The Second Council of Nicaea (787 AD) included him as one of the “venerable doctors and indomitable champions of the Church.”

In addition to his work on the Trinity, Gregory wrote extensively on philosophy and mysticism. His theology is very difficult to understand and has only recently begun to be appreciated in the West. The reason we have chosen to look at his spirituality is that one of his works on mysticism is called *The Life of Moses*. In it, he tells the story of Moses as an allegory for the Christian life. Also, we thought it would be fun to look at spiritual formation from someone other than Dallas Willard and Richard Foster (this devotional series will be similar to what we did with Ignatius of Loyola in *Sacred Spaces*).

*The Life of Moses* is an interesting read. There are a lot of good ideas, but Gregory’s treatment of the Bible is different than the way we are used to reading it. For instance, when God tells Moses to remove his sandals at the burning bush, Gregory interprets this as a metaphor for the crucifixion of the flesh (Galatians 5:24). He interprets the crossing of the Red Sea as a symbol for baptism, and the bitter waters of Marah as the difficulty of living a life of virtue shortly after conversion. We don’t typically look for allegorical understandings of texts like these, but his interpretations are fun and his theology is true.

In the devotionals that follow, you will find a mix of Gregory of Nyssa’s allegorical interpretation of the life of Moses along with parallels that we have found that interact with Gregory’s theology (the same ideas from different Bible passages).

We hope that this allegorical reading of Moses’ life encourages, exhorts, and maybe even stretches you a little. We’re praying that as you encounter God in scripture you too are aware of both the truth of the gospel, and the “bigness” of God.

- Matt and Jeremiah

# The Plagues

## *3/11/2019 (Monday) The Fear of the Lord*

“But Pharaoh said, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey his voice and let Israel go? I do not know the Lord, and moreover, I will not let Israel go.” Exodus 5:2 (ESV)

Pharaoh was the uncontested, unquestioned, supreme authority in all of Egypt. He was the latest in a long line of rulers who pretended to be gods, and the people around him believed it. His nation was built on the backs of slave labor, and order was enforced by whips and swords. He wasn't the guy to come to with constructive criticisms. So when a random shepherd and his brother show up and tell him his workforce needs to be released, it's surprising that Pharaoh even granted them an audience.

He was a man so wrapped up in his own self-importance that when he was confronted with God he responded, “Who is the Lord?” His response indicates a strong sense of self-importance, he is after all the Pharaoh. In his heart of hearts he is the unquestioned master of his destiny. If there is some God out there, God will have to answer to him.

Contrast this with Moses' first meeting with God in Exodus 3:11. Where Pharaoh asks, “Who is the Lord?” Moses asks, “Who am I?” Proverbs 9:10 tells us, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.”

The Bible uses “fear” to mean reverence, terror, awe, or respect, and the “fear of the Lord” is best read as a combination of all of these. What Moses understood, and what Pharaoh failed to grasp, is that true wisdom begins in our approach to God. If we start out trying to make God jump through hoops, to prove himself to us, to meet our demands, we're fundamentally misunderstanding the relationship we're invited into.

How have you understood “the fear of the Lord” in your life? How does this influence your approach to God?

**3/12/2019 (Tuesday)**

## ***Bleeding the Nile***

“Thus says the Lord, “By this you shall know that I am the Lord: behold, with the staff that is in my hand I will strike the water that is in the Nile, and it shall turn into blood.” Exodus 7:17 (ESV)

The first plague that God uses to demonstrate his power is turning the water of the Nile river into a bloody mess. Some commentators suggest that each of these plagues specifically showed how much greater God was than the pretender gods of Egypt. By making the Nile bleed, God was giving the Egyptians a demonstration of his power.

But maybe even more interesting is how God sent that message. God doesn't send an impressive contingent of the finest and best, he sends an old man with a stick.

Rather, an old man with a stick who isn't a great public speaker, and his brother who's supposed to do the talking, but stays quiet most of the time. God sends two shepherds with their walking sticks into the court of Pharaoh and turns the place upside down.

Just the sticks they walked up with are making the Nile bleed, because God is on their side.

Just the sticks they walked up with will rip the Red Sea in half, will bring life-giving water from a stone, will turn the tide of battle.

If God can use a couple of shepherds and their sticks to do all that, how much more can we trust God to use us for his glory?

Corinthians 1:27 says, “But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong.”

God seems to like the idea of taking the lowly and making big things happen. Whether you feel well-equipped, or like shepherd with a stick, know that the same God who made the Nile bleed is using the weak in the world to make big things happen.

### **3/13/2019 (Wednesday)    *Piles of Frogs***

“The Nile shall swarm with frogs that shall come up into your house and into your bedroom and on your bed and into the houses of your servants and your people, and in your ovens and your kneading bowls.” Exodus 8:3 (ESV)

The frogs that infested the Nile were another demonstration of God’s power that was even more impressive than the Nile being turned to blood. You could look away from the water if you wanted, but there was no escaping these frogs. Home from work? Frogs. Ready to make dinner? Frogs. Ready to go to bed? Frogs. The frogs were inescapable.

Gregory of Nyssa read this passage as an allegory and suggested that frogs could be read as the evil that infests a life apart from God. Our sins infest every secret corner of our lives, especially the hidden places. He wrote, “And if you search the storeroom, that is to say the secret and unmentionable things of his life, you will discern in his licentiousness a much greater pile of frogs.”

As an allegory, Gregory wanted to make the connection that our old lives, apart from God, are infested through and through with sin and it’s effects. We can choose either to allow this sort of life to continue, uncontested, or we can live a life that doesn’t leave room for all these “frogs”.

Whether we read this as Gregory did or not, it’s hard not to see how just like the plague of frogs infested the Egyptian homes, evil can be pervasive. Even if you’ve been following Jesus for decades, there might still be secret “storerooms” where great big piles of frogs sit quietly in the dark.

Luke 8:17 says, “17 For nothing is hidden that will not be made manifest, nor is anything secret that will not be known and come to light.”

Consider today the places where you need to clean house. Where have some frogs been piling up in your life?

**3/14/2019 (Thursday)**

## ***Clouds of Gnats***

“Then the Lord said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your staff and strike the dust of the earth, so that it may become gnats in all the land of Egypt.’” Exodus 8:16 (ESV)

While gnats might not seem worse than frogs, as far as plagues go, you might not be picturing enough gnats. If you’ve ever accidentally walked through a swarm of gnats on a warm evening and breathed them down into the bottom of your lungs, you might have an idea of how this could be bad.

More than that, the plague of gnats marks a turning point, in that it’s the first time Pharaoh’s court “magicians” couldn’t pretend to be on par with God.

Exodus 8:18 says “The magicians tried by their secret arts to produce gnats, but they could not. So there were gnats on man and beast. 19 Then the magicians said to Pharaoh, “This is the finger of God.”

When the Nile bled they were able to make some sort of imitation color change, and when the frogs appeared they managed to produce a few as well (even if they couldn’t get rid of them after). But when God stirs up clouds of gnats thick as the dust of the earth, they finally had to admit that something was happening that they couldn’t compete with. This God of Moses was incredibly powerful.

This isn’t to say they’re willing to recognize the God of Israel as the one true God, but they had to admit that God’s power was beyond them.

One way or another, we will all acknowledge God’s supremacy, whether it’s in the here and now, or sometime yet to come. We’ll see that gnats didn’t do it for Pharaoh and it took quite a bit of loss and death before he recognized who God was.

The question we have to ask isn’t whether we’ll acknowledge that God is who he says he is, but when.

**3/15/2019 (Friday)**

***Light and Dark***

“Then the Lord said to Moses, “Stretch out your hand toward heaven, that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, a darkness to be felt.” 22 So Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was pitch darkness in all the land of Egypt three days. 23 They did not see one another, nor did anyone rise from his place for three days, but all the people of Israel had light where they lived.” Exodus 10:21-23 (ESV)

After the gnats came flies, then the death of livestock, then boils, then hail, and finally an all-encompassing, inky-black darkness. Especially terrifying is the phrase, “a darkness to be felt.” This wasn’t the sort of darkness that consisted of simply a lack of light, it was something far deeper.

Gregory of Nyssa suggests that this darkness illustrates the choice we have to either walk in darkness or in light. He writes, “Some continue on in darkness, driven by their evil pursuits to the darkness of wickedness, while others are made radiant by the light of virtue.”

In Gregory’s reading, the darkness that fell on Egypt could be seen as the sort of life that we can choose to live apart from God. The sun shines on all of us, just as the free gift of salvation is equally available to Egyptian, Israelite, or anyone who would receive it. The question is whether we will continue on in darkness, or begin to walk in the light.

In the plague of darkness, God demonstrates to Pharaoh just how much a human being relies on God’s grace. There simply isn’t any life apart from the sun, and there isn’t any life apart from the sustaining, self-giving, relentless grace of God.

Colossians 1:17 says of Jesus, “And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Whether we choose to follow the life giving life that is offered to us, or continue to walk in darkness, the truth remains that we are utterly dependent on God.



**3/16/2019 (Saturday)**

***A Hardness of Heart***

"Then Pharaoh said to him, "Get away from me; take care never to see my face again, for on the day you see my face you shall die."  
Exodus 10:28 (ESV)

The hardening of a heart can be a terrifying thing, it's like a little death on it's own. It can be slowly forming callous that develops gradually over time, or it can be a sudden and violent turn. However it happens, it's the closing off of our hearts from the possibilities that God is inviting us into.

Pharaoh's heart is hardened again and again in Exodus, but this hardening of a heart isn't limited to Pharaoh, or the Old Testament, we still harden our hearts today. When we say, "You can't possibly be God when..." When we're convicted of truth and continue on living a lie. When we refuse God's invitations to trust him more. When we see where God is leading and decide we'll go our own way instead.

The bad news is, just like Pharaoh, we continue to harden our hearts against the miraculous displays of God's power we see in our lives.

The good news is a hard heart isn't always the end of the story.

We'll see the disciples hearts hardened in Mark 6:52, and later be reborn into new life in Jesus. We see warnings against a hardened heart in Hebrews 3:13, meaning there's a possibility of change. We see the promise of a new heart if we'll just turn back to God in Ezekiel 36:26.

Maybe most encouraging is 1 Timothy 2:4 that tells us God wants everyone to turn to him and be saved. If you've been a long way off, you're invited home. God will give you a new heart.

If you've hardened yourself against what you know God would have you become, turn back, God will give you a new heart. If you think you can't possibly be softened, know that the same God who put you together in the first place can make you brand new again. He will give you a new heart.

# The Passover

3/18/2019 (Monday)

*The Death of the Firstborn*

“So Moses said, “Thus says the Lord: ‘About midnight I will go out in the midst of Egypt, 5 and every firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh who sits on his throne, even to the firstborn of the slave girl who is behind the hand mill, and all the firstborn of the cattle. 6 There shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there has never been, nor ever will be again.” Exodus 11:4-6 (ESV)

The plagues that came before were nothing compared to what was happening during the Passover. Each illustration of divine power over Egypt had just been a prelude to what was to come. God was sending the Angel of Death through the whole land of Egypt, and the firstborn of everyone, from the highest royalty, to the lowest slave, and even the animals in their care, would be cut down.

For Gregory of Nyssa, this dramatic action by God wasn't meant to be understood as a literal death of the first-born, but as an allegory that points us to a spiritual truth. He believed that the entire Exodus narrative was an illustration of the soul's flight away from wickedness, and just as the Israelites were rescued from Egypt, so we too have been rescued from sin.

The death of the firstborn in Gregory's view was meant to represent how we are called to “put to death” the very first birth of evil in our hearts. All of the vice that might otherwise grow to maturity had to be put to death. For Gregory, this passage demonstrates the battle that we all undertake to rid our lives of sin.

An allegorical reading of this passage might be a novel and rewarding experience for you, or it might be frustrating. What can this way of encountering scripture teach you?

Does it reinforce beliefs you already have, or allow you to see from a different perspective?

**3/19/2019 (Tuesday)**

***Ready to Travel***

“In this manner you shall eat it: with your belt fastened, your sandals on your feet, and your staff in your hand. And you shall eat it in haste. It is the Lord's Passover.” Exodus 12:11 (ESV)

In Gregory of Nyssa's reading of this passage, every detail, even the unassuming clothing worn during the Passover has significance to the life of Faith.

He writes, “It is clear what the traveler's equipment figuratively stands for: It commands us explicitly to recognize that our present life is transient.”

The Israelites were invited to participate in the Passover meal with their sandals on, with their belt cinched up around their tunic, and with the traveling staff in hand. In the Exodus narrative this was because they were prepared to leave Egypt at a moments notice, no delays.

Gregory sees a reminder in these instructions that the life we live now is just a snapshot in the life that we live in Christ.

Hebrews 1:10-12 says, “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; 11 they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, 12 like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.”

Whether this passage specifically reminds you that the world is temporary or not, it's important for us to remember that this life is in fact remarkably short in the scope of eternity. There will be a time when all the heavens and the Earth will pass away, but we all have an eternal destiny that we are living into one way or another.

How does it change your perspective to think of this present life as transient? What are some ways you can remember that this present life is transient?

### **3/20/2019 (Wednesday)    *The Meaning of Blood***

“The blood shall be a sign for you, on the houses where you are. And when I see the blood, I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt.” Exodus 12:13 (ESV)

On the 10th day of the month, every household of Israel went out and picked one lamb. Just a year old, and entirely without blemishes or markings, as white as snow. For four days that lamb was kept with them, until the night of the 14th day of the month when it was slaughtered, it's blood spread on the top and the sides of the door to their homes.

Remember that this was a family event, not done at some far-off location but at home. You couldn't get the lamb slaughter done for you. Also, for slaves in Egypt there probably wasn't a large flock of sheep to choose from, it was very likely a well-known animal, maybe more like a pet than groceries.

As the final plague that God sent descended on Egypt, the people of God were given these instructions, and told that the blood of the lamb would be a sign for them. A sign that death had already visited that house. The only way to avoid the death that was to come was through the sacrifice of a lamb without blemish or spot.

It was a demonstration of God's grace, and it was a sign that pointed forward as well, a sign that said freedom from bondage wasn't cheap. It was a way of physically illustrating a spiritual truth.

The freedom that we have from death and sin is only accomplished through the final Lamb, Jesus. While a single precious lamb was slaughtered for each household in Passover, in John 1:29 Jesus is called the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

Think today about what it would have been like to choose one innocent lamb without blemishes or markings. To keep that lamb with you for a few days, and then to sacrifice it.

How do we connect to the reality, or distance ourselves from the reality, that Jesus died in this way on our behalf?

**3/21/2019 (Thursday)**

## ***Sacrifices Fulfilled***

Way back in the Garden of Eden, when humans first broke relationship with God, we learned that sin had a heavy price. In Genesis 3:21 God makes clothes out of animal skins to cover Adam and Eve's nakedness, something that required the death of a sinless animal, given on their behalf. Something innocent died so that relationship with God could be restored.

Atonement is the term we use to describe how our break from right relationship with God is set right. The Hebrew word for atonement is kaphar, and means "To cover." God used the innocent blood of animals to demonstrate both our inability to cover ourselves, and the high cost of our sin. As humans continued to sin, we needed to keep covering our sin, over and over. But it didn't stay that way.

The sacrifices that God used to illustrate the high cost of sin pointed forward to what God was doing to finally reconcile us to Him. The animals killed to clothe Adam and Eve, the Passover Lamb, the sacrifices offered in the temple, all point forward to what God accomplishes in Jesus' once and for all sacrifice on our behalf.

Hebrews 10:10 tells us "...we have been sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all."

There are no more sacrifices to offer. There was only one truly spotless lamb who could take away our sins, "once for all", and he willingly gave his life on our behalf.

The cost was finally and fully paid by Jesus on your behalf. Hebrews 10:18 says, "Where there is forgiveness of these, there is no longer any offering for sin."

There are no more sacrifices that you have to be made to cover our sins, we are forgiven.

**3/22/2019 (Friday)**

## ***Unleavened Life***

“You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwelling places you shall eat unleavened bread.” Exodus 12:20 (ESV)

During their preparation for Passover, the people of Israel were instructed to avoid all leaven. The little bit of rising agent that infused their bread, ballooned and bloated it out, was to be completely avoided during the Passover. Like the blood of the lamb, this was a physical reality that illustrated a spiritual truth. Leaven is the sort of thing where a little bit makes a big difference, and in the Bible it’s often used to illustrate how pervasive sin can be.

Galatians 5:9 says, “A little leaven, leavens the whole lump.” It only takes a little bit of yeast to make your bread rise, and a little bit of sin can change quite a bit.

We live in a time after the Passover, when the final sacrifice for sin has already been made. What will you do now? Will you cleanse your house of the things that allow for sin to grow? Or will you tolerate the things you know will eventually grow into sin.

1 Corinthians 5:7-8 says, “Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed.” In this passage, Paul reminds us the time for tolerating little bits of sin is over.

Like a house cleansed of leaven for Passover, we’re called to live lives cleansed of sin.

Where are places in your life where you have been willing to tolerate “just a bit” of something that could grow into sin? What’s the little thing that you know needs to go in your life?

Where are you being called to clean house?

**3/23/2019 (Saturday)**

## ***Plundering the Egyptians***

“And I will give this people favor in the sight of the Egyptians; and when you go, you shall not go empty, 22 but each woman shall ask of her neighbor, and any woman who lives in her house, for silver and gold jewelry, and for clothing. You shall put them on your sons and on your daughters. So you shall plunder the Egyptians.” Exodus 3:21-22 (ESV)

Early on God promised Moses that when the Israelites left Egypt, they wouldn't be leaving empty-handed. Their years in slavery didn't seem like the best place to accumulate wealth, and God's people needed to be equipped to follow where God was leading them.

After the warnings, after the plagues, and after the Passover, Pharaoh had finally given up his hold on God's people. Just as he promised, when the Israelites were finally freed, God sent them out loaded down with riches.

Gregory of Nyssa sees the plunder of the Egyptians in this passage as taking what learning we can from the culture around us. He writes, “The loftier meaning [of the Israelites plundering the wealth of Egypt] is therefore more fitting than the obvious one. It commands those participating through virtue in the free life also to equip themselves with the wealth of pagan learning by which foreigners to the faith beautify themselves.”

In his view, we should take the time to study and equip ourselves with the “...such things as moral and natural philosophy, geometry, astronomy, dialectic, and whatever else is sought by those outside the Church ”

Gregory's allegorical reading reminds us that there is no truth that is not God's truth.

We as the people of God don't need to fear any field of study, or any “pagan learning”, because anything that reveals the glory of God, whether it's deemed “secular” or otherwise, can and should be plundered by God's people.

Where have you seen pagan/secular ideas avoided? Where have you seen them successfully “plundered?”

## The Red Sea

3/25/2019 (Monday)

*Light that Leads*

"And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night." Exodus 13:21 (ESV)

As the Israelites departed from Egypt, God anticipated their needs and provided for them

The physical needs their old life had once fulfilled were no longer available to them. In slavery, they'd had measure of protection. After all Pharaohs didn't want his workforce getting stolen. They had a measure of guidance too: Do the work and be quiet. Leaving Egypt behind still meant leaving behind these imitations of care. But God doesn't call us out of slavery and leave our needs unfulfilled.

God's provision came in the form of a supernatural beacon, a constant demonstration of his presence with them. A guide and protection through the wilderness. A shelter from the noon-day sun, and a tower of unexplainable fire at night. It moved at a rate they could follow, aware of their needs and limitations, it paused in places where they would find rest. In the cloud and the fire, God provided for his people in a way they had never experienced, never realized they needed.

While slaves to sin they had only hints at what true provision was supposed to be, but in the presence of God they found the fulfillment of what they had not even known they needed. God provided for his people in ways they couldn't anticipate, to meet needs they didn't know they had. By joining with them.

In the same way, God anticipated the needs that you and I have and even more profoundly than a cloud or a flame, he sent his son to be with us. 1 John 4:9 says, "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him.

Where have you seen God meeting needs you didn't even know you had?



**3/26/2019 (Tuesday)**

## **Following in Faith**

"22 The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people." Exodus 13:22 (ESV)

God had demonstrated his mighty power to free his people from slavery, he provided for them in ways they'd never expected, and was a constant presence with them, but what was next? God leads them with a cloud.

An impressive cloud, to be sure, but still it was a cloud by day and a fire by night. Can you imagine following a cloud as our 5 year plan? God sometimes guides and leads in ways that don't always make sense to us or to the world around us.

In his commentary on this passage, Gregory of Nyssa sees the pillar of cloud that guided the Israelites as an image of how we are led by the Holy Spirit of God.

Following God's plan doesn't always make sense to us, but it is the plan that is best for us. Gregory of Nyssa writes, "Whoever follows Him will cross the water; He will clear a passage for him and bring secure redemption, burying in the sea the one who pursues to enslave us."

God reveals himself to his people, and guides us through his Holy Spirit, sometimes in ways or to places that seem just crazy. The stakes only get higher as we realize the life we left behind wants to draw us back into slavery. The choice that we're presented with is to follow God, even when that means following in a way that doesn't make sense to everyone else, or to go back to Egypt.

Gregory of Nyssa points out an important point, God will secure your redemption if you follow him.

Consider today, where is God inviting you to follow him? (Or if you really want to dig deep, "Where wouldn't I follow?")

### **3/27/2019 (Wednesday)    *Freedom from Slavery***

“When the king of Egypt was told that the people had fled, the mind of Pharaoh and his servants was changed toward the people, and they said, “What is this we have done, that we have let Israel go from serving us?” 6 So he made ready his chariot and took his army with him, 7 and took six hundred chosen chariots and all the other chariots of Egypt with officers over all of them.” Exodus 14:5-7 (ESV)

In Pharaoh's army Gregory of Nyssa sees “the various passions of the soul by which man is enslaved.” He imagines the archers, chariots and drivers, and the armed soldiers as the sinful tendencies in us that try to pursue and enslave us.

This can be a familiar sensation for those of us who have been, or still are, hounded by a particular sin or proclivity, or even memories of guilt.

In various places the Bible describes our enslavement to sin, to death, to destruction. To the things that we used to be under. And just like the Israelites were pursued by the armies of Egypt, we can feel pursued by our past. Hounded by the armies that once enslaved us. We can run all day and still feel the ground shake as those armies chase after us. The masters we once served don't let us go easy.

The good news is, for those who have been made a new creation, for those who have been baptized into the family of God, we are no longer a slave to the masters we once served.

John 8:36 says, “So if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.”

The sin that once bound us in chains has been broken. The master we once served has been left in the past. The armies that chased us have been drowned, for good, at the bottom of the sea.

Remember today, that if the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed.

**3/28/2019 (Thursday)**

***Looking Back***

“They said to Moses, “Is it because there are no graves in Egypt that you have taken us away to die in the wilderness? What have you done to us in bringing us out of Egypt? 12 Is not this what we said to you in Egypt: ‘Leave us alone that we may serve the Egyptians’? For it would have been better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.” Exodus 14:11-12 (ESV)

As God led his people out of Egypt, away from old familiar life of slavery, their only security was a cloud leading them by day and a fire by night.

As the days stretched on, it would have been easy to look back at where they'd been. Sometimes the hardest part of following where God is leading is leaving the old self behind. The Israelites knew that they were slaves in Egypt, they realized their situation, but it had become familiar.

You knew what to expect in Egypt, you knew where you stood. Sure it was slavery, but it was familiar slavery.

When God calls us out of slavery, the identity of who we once were is left behind. You are no longer a slave.

You may have been a slave to sin, Romans 6 tells us that we were, but that's not who you are anymore. It's scary to leave behind places that we used to call home, it's scary to let the old self die, and it's tempting to return to the slavery we once knew, to the familiar places of bondage.

But God has not left you in slavery. You have been brought out of slavery and into something new. Even if you want to pretend, you are not who you once were. God has rescued you.

Where are the places in your life where you're tempted to look back to your old life? What has God specifically freed you from? How is God changing who you used to be?

**3/29/2019 (Friday)**

## ***The Red Sea***

Following God out of Egypt and into the desert was hard enough, not to mention that they had to follow a cloud as they left. Why wouldn't God just give them the map already? Why all this blind following? Then the Israelites found themselves smack up against the sea, nowhere left to go, and the situation seems like a big mistake. But they're right where God wants them to be, and they're about to be brought through the water.

Gregory of Nyssa observed a parallel between this moment of being brought through the water, and our own baptisms. He wrote that the Israelites, "...by passing through the Red Sea, proclaimed the good tidings of salvation by water."

At the Red Sea, the enemies that had been hounding the Israelites were defeated, crushed beneath the immensity of the water. In the same way, the old life of sin and death that lays claim on us is finally and ultimately defeated through Jesus' work on the cross, and we celebrate that reality by participating in the Baptismal waters.

Like the Israelites, we're invited to walk into the new life God has given us, and we're saved as we pass through the waters. If passed through the waters of Baptism, you are truly free from the evil that pursued you.

Gregory of Nyssa writes, "He who has gone down into it with the army of the enemy emerges alone, leaving the enemy's army drowning in the water." The enemies that once pursued you were finally and forever destroyed through Jesus' work on our behalf. There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ.

If you have passed through the waters of Baptism, there is no longer anyone who can lay claim on you. You have been made new. Romans 6:4 says, "We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life"

Reflect today on the significance of your baptism. What does it mean that you have been baptized into death, so that you might walk in newness of life?

**3/30/2019 (Saturday)**

***The Greater Miracle***

The parting of the Red Sea is one of the best known Biblical miracles. It's been the subject of movies, songs, and writings for generations.

There's something about God's direct action in history, that catches our attention. The pressing of the waves to either side, piling up water into walls, blasting the bottom of the seabed dry, all point to a power beyond anything we could accomplish. But maybe the most miraculous aspect of the parting of the Red Sea is that God takes the time to notice us at all.

It's still certainly a miracle, but it's not actually so surprising that the same God who said, "Let the waters under the heavens be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear." acts again and the waves obey. What's miraculous is that he is invested in the lives of his creation enough to intervene.

It's still a miracle, but it's not surprising that the same God who rebuked the wind and sea and said, "Peace! Be still!" acts again and the waves obey.

The greater miracle is that the God of creation is concerned at all with you and I. He's invested in what happens to us. Cares so much that he didn't leave us to the death and darkness that surrounds us.

The greater miracle is that we are seen, we are known, and we matter to God. 1 John 4:9-10 says "In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we have loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins."

Consider today the greatest miracle that has ever occurred. God knows about us, God cares what happens to us, and God loves us.

## Manna

*4/1/2019 (Monday)      Looking Back Again*

“And the whole congregation of the people of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron in the wilderness, and the people of Israel said to them, “Would that we had died by the hand of the Lord in the land of Egypt, when we sat by the meat pots and ate bread to the full, for you have brought us out into this wilderness to kill this whole assembly with hunger.” Exodus 16:2-3 (ESV)

You may have noticed that this isn't the first time the Israelites have looked back to Egypt. A real part of following after God is the times when we get discouraged and paint the old life as better than it was.

We sometimes look back and think about how things were “before”, whatever your before was. “Before” you knew what that God's plan for your life didn't include putting your way first. “Before” when you had things easier when you could let the world around you dictate what was right. Or even “before” when things just seemed easier.

Looking back for the Israelites meant missing meat pots and bread, but for us it could be almost anything. We learn to find comfort in slavery as best we can, and we start to confuse what Egypt has to offer with what is good for us.

2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.”

You aren't the person that you used to be, you are a new creation. It can be incredibly hard to let go of the familiar places where we used to go. The temptation to go back is something that the Israelites understood as soon as they had left Egypt, and is equally compelling to us today.

No matter how far away from “before” we get, when we take our eyes off of what God is giving us we are tempted to go back.

Take time today to reflect on what it means that you are a new creation in Christ.

## ***4/2/2019 (Tuesday) Faithfulness in the Desert***

Romans 8:38-39 says, "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, 39 nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord."

One of the greatest assurances that we have is that God will never leave us on our own. Despite what the circumstances of our lives might look like, the same God who has freed us from slavery to sin and death is faithful to remain with us. This is especially true when we enter periods of our lives that seem especially bleak, the wide empty places that seem to never end, the figurative desert times.

It can be a shock to find yourself suddenly in a dry expanse of oppressive, dead, country, especially if you've just come out of a season of abundance. Our highest highs are often followed by unexpected lows, and it can be confusing if not terrifying to realize that your vibrant spiritual life has suddenly become bone-dry.

The Israelites must have understood this. 10 supernatural acts of God's might over the greatest military power of their day, an escape from slavery in the middle of the night, culminating in the final defeat of Pharaoh's army in the Red Sea, and then desert. Bleak, seemingly endless sand in every direction. In the midst of that desert, and not outside of it or far off from it, God is still with his people.

The same God who brings us through our highest highs is faithful to walk with us through our lowest lows, and to provide for us in the midst.

The unstoppable, unquenchable, faithful, never ending love of God is present with us through every desert, through every season. There is no place you can go, no desert you can be taken into, and nothing you experience that will force the love God away from you. He is faithful.

**4/3/2019 (Wednesday)**

***Life-giving Bread***

"Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, I am about to rain bread from heaven for you, and the people shall go out and gather a day's portion every day, that I may test them, whether they will walk in my law or not." Exodus 16:4

After escaping from Egypt, wandering through the desert times, and finally acknowledging their need before God, the Israelites need is met with God's provision. God's faithfulness continues.

In his reading of this text, Gregory of Nyssa sees the manna given from heaven as an image of Jesus, the bread of life. He writes, "The bread then, that does not come from the earth is the Word."

It's worth considering that while the Israelites had, "meat-pots" and "bread to the full" in mind, that's not how God met their need. God knew exactly what they needed, even more than they did. That's a hard truth for us to take in too. God knows the best possible provision to your need, even if you have a favorite in mind.

You might imagine steak and lobster, (or kale and avocados), would suit you best, but God truly knows what you need and he supplies it. In the same way, Jesus was not what the people expected. He says In John 6:35 "...I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

He was expected, and hoped for, as a conqueror, but he came as a servant. The people wanted a warrior to overthrow Rome, and God sent a servant who was crucified.

We know now that Jesus was the best possible provision to our need, but it was probably hard to take in at the moment.

Consider today where God is providing for your need, especially if it doesn't look exactly how you expected.



**4/4/2019 (Thursday)**

## ***Dependence***

While the desert times that we walk through are notoriously hard, it's easy to forget that we're also tested in God's provision. On the surface, the Manna that God sent seemed like a sweet deal. No gathering of grains, grinding it out, rolling the dough, (avoiding sand as best you can), and baking the bread before you eat it. It's just, there.

Psalm 78:25 calls it angel's food, so you know it had to be pretty good, but somehow this provision of delicious angel bread is also some kind of test to see if they'll follow the law.

It's hard to picture how an eating contest in the desert could be a test, but imagine what it would be like to truly trust God for your daily bread. Not even your week to week, or paycheck to paycheck bread, but your daily bread. Something in us pushes back against the thought of being that dependent, we want to be safe, secure, self-sufficient. We often want assurances, much more than we want dependence.

But what the Israelites are learning, and what you and I are learning as well, is that we have to rely on God daily. Deuteronomy 8:3 explains, "And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord."

We were made to be sustained by God in a constant, everyday, every moment kind of way. It is through God that we live and move and have our being, and our need for food is a powerful illustration of our need for God. Like the Israelites relied on God for mana, every day, we rely on God to be spiritually fed, every day.

As you go through your day to day take time to consider how your physical hunger can remind you of your daily need for God. How are you eating?

**4/5/2019 (Friday)**

## ***On God's Terms***

And the Lord said to Moses, "How long will you refuse to keep my commandments and my laws? 29 See! The Lord has given you the Sabbath; therefore on the sixth day he gives you bread for two days. Remain each of you in his place; let no one go out of his place on the seventh day."

Exodus 16:28-29 (ESV)

Manna from heaven seems like a pretty straightforward concept, God provides it we eat it, end of story. But as the Israelites quickly learned how they used what God was giving them was as important as the provision itself.

God uses every opportunity to teach us about who he is, and about who we are, and God's cook book on manna was very specific. The Israelites learned that it pays to read the instructions. On the one hand some of them try to store up some extra Manna (Exodus 16:19-20), and they quickly find it rotting and infested with worms. They had to learn that God was their provision, and that they couldn't stockpile their way into a false security.

On the other hand some of them entirely neglect God's instruction regarding the Sabbath (Exodus 16:22-27), and are surprised to find that no manna available for collection. Living in accordance with the rhythms God establishes is the best case for our survival, and ignoring God's established rhythms led to some hungry Israelites.

It's only when they learned to receive what God, on God's terms, that the Israelites were able to be provided for as God intended. It can be tempting to misuse the resources that God gives us, to stockpile away what we think will keep us safe, or to work when God has called us to be still. There is an aspect of dependence on God's provision shown in this passage that can be uncomfortable to us. More often we prefer the illusion that we are providing for yourself than the reality that it is only through God's provision that we live, move, and have our being.

Consider today the places where God has called you into dependence on him. How comfortable are you with the reality that you are dependent on him? Where is that hard to let go of in your life?

**4/6/2019 (Saturday)**

***God's Self-Revelation***

“Moses said, “This is what the Lord has commanded: ‘Let an omer of it be kept throughout your generations, so that they may see the bread with which I fed you in the wilderness, when I brought you out of the land of Egypt.’” Exodus 16:32 (ESV)

A recurring theme in Gregory of Nyssa’s understanding of God is that God is entirely unknowable, apart from what he reveals to us. We can’t know anything about God that God hasn’t taken the time and effort to reveal to us. He writes of God, “He becomes visible only in his Operations, and only when He is contemplated in the things that are external to Him.”

When we read about God’s provision to the people of Israel, on one level it’s a story about some hungry people getting fed. They needed food, God gave them Manna. Straight forward. But look back on all the things that Chapter 16 has revealed to us about God. We can’t look to the old life for food, we have to trust that God will provide for us, God knows what’s the best way to provide for us, we need to accept provision on God’s terms.

Each of these truths are available to us through God’s actions. God tells us about himself, reveals himself, and makes himself visible to us through his actions. In the generations that followed the Israelites wandering in the desert, the bit of manna that was kept over served as a reminder of what God had revealed about himself. Look back on where you’ve seen God’s operations in your life.

Where have you been provided for? Strengthened? Protected? How has God’s actions in your life allowed you to see him more clearly?

# Water from the Rock

4/8/2019 (Monday)

*Following Directions*

"All the congregation of the people of Israel moved on from the wilderness of Sin by stages, according to the commandment of the Lord, and camped at Rephidim, but there was no water for the people to drink." Exodus 17:1 (ESV)

As the Israelites travel through the desert, keep in mind that God has led them everywhere they have been. The pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night has been a constant beacon to them on their journey, and that guidance is with them through the very last verse in Exodus.

This direct input from God on their lives has led them into, and through, what the Israelites might call some pretty tough spots. Getting out of Egypt seemed like a good plan, but then God drove them through the Red Sea. Yes, he dried up a path for them, but that probably wasn't the route they expected.

After crossing the Red Sea they ran out of water and thought they might die. God did provide them some new, sweeter water, but they might have planned that out a different way.

They followed that cloud out into the desert, away from their favorite food and that sure seemed like a bad call. Sure, God cracked the heavens and fed them manna, but it wasn't what they expected, and it might not have been what they wanted at the time. And in chapter 17 God's got them in dry country with no water in sight. All this from following God's lead. It can seem like God doesn't know where he's going in the Exodus, and sometimes it feels that way in our own lives.

What we can trust is that if God brought us to a place, it is for our very best. Not often our most comfortable, but what is best for us. Look back on what Israel has learning about God in each of these circumstances, about who they are, and about God's plan for them. Remember that God doesn't lead us places for no reason or on accident.

Look back on the places in your life where you followed God's lead somewhere unexpected. What did God show you?

**4/9/2019 (Tuesday)**

## ***What are You Like?***

“Therefore the people quarreled with Moses and said, “Give us water to drink.” And Moses said to them, “Why do you quarrel with me? Why do you test the Lord?” 3 But the people thirsted there for water, and the people grumbled against Moses and said, “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our livestock with thirst?” Exodus 17:2-3 (ESV)

It's interesting that when things start going bad, the people's first instinct is to blame Moses. Even though Moses has been pretty clear that it's God who's doing the heavy lifting, everyone seems to think that he's really pulling the strings. Whenever the people run into a tough spot in the desert they've looked back at Egypt, or grumbled at Moses. While this might seem a bit ungrateful, it makes sense if you remember where their coming from.

We saw in Exodus 1:11 that Pharaoh wanted them for labor and later for death, and that's sort of been the paradigm they're operating out of. They've been told that their only worth the blood, sweat, and tears they've got to give, and it would be hard to shake that. If all you've got is a hammer everything is a nail, and if all you've ever had is an abusive, self-deluded, false-god-pharaoh as a ruler well it might be hard to give the real God the benefit of the doubt.

These questions from the Israelites might just seem like whining, but it also might be a more serious question their asking.

Will you just kill us when you get what you want, like Pharaoh?  
Will you let our children die, like Pharaoh killed our children?  
What about the animals, will you leave us without any security?  
Just what kind of guy is your God Moses? Just what kind of God are we following? What sort of life have you rescued us into?

Ask yourself today how your own Exodus has shaped your expectations of God. What's the hardest promise of God for you to believe?

## **4/10/2019 (Wednesday)    *Imitating Jesus***

“So Moses cried to the Lord, “What shall I do with this people? They are almost ready to stone me.” Exodus 17:4 (ESV)

In verse 4, the Israelites’ thirst goes unquenched, tensions rise, and we get a sneak peak into Moses’ personal prayer life. Apparently things have gotten to the point where Moses’ perceived failures as a leader have lost him the favor of his constituents. They’re at a place where Moses’ resignation won’t be enough, and he’s convinced that there’s about to be a bloody change of leadership.

We know that Moses isn’t really the one to blame here. Moses has been following God through this desert just like the Israelites, and no doubt he’s thirsty too. But he still catches the blame, and apparently he’s aware that an execution isn’t far off.

If you’ve ever been the recipient of blame you didn’t deserve, you know how frustrating this situation is, especially if you’re also experiencing the negative effects that you’re currently being blamed for. One of the best examples that Moses gives us is the importance and effectiveness of taking our problems to God.

Moses knows that he’s not the cause of this water shortage, he knows that he didn’t guide them into the desert, but he doesn’t waste time justifying himself to the crowd. He turns to God in prayer.

Philippians 4:6-7 tells us, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.”

Whether you’re in a circumstance that you recognize isn’t your fault, or if you’ve brought yourself someplace tough all on your own, take time today to follow Moses’ example.

Pause for five minutes today and acknowledge the things that are weighing on you. Take the time tell God about all the things that have you worried, frustrated, or concerned.

**4/11/2019 (Thursday)**

***God's Work Through Us***

“And the Lord said to Moses, “Pass on before the people, taking with you some of the elders of Israel, and take in your hand the staff with which you struck the Nile, and go. 6 Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb, and you shall strike the rock, and water shall come out of it, and the people will drink.” And Moses did so, in the sight of the elders of Israel.” Exodus 17:5-6 (ESV)

The main source of water in the Sinai region is from seasonal rainfall. As with most deserts, there are massive bursts of life, followed by long periods of barely-hanging-in-there. Life in the desert is adapted to this sort of ebb and flow, but people traveling over the dry land want something a bit more regular than seasonal rain.

God's action in the world demonstrates that he isn't bound by the ordinary, and he makes life flow in unexpected ways, and in unexpected places. Even while meeting a very basic need, God is instructing his people about who he is.

The people might expect a rain dance out of Moses, or something to that effect, but God does his own thing. He's not bound by expectation, and he's making something new here.

You thought water could only come from the clouds? With me it can come from a rock. You thought you were a nation of slaves? You're now my chosen people, royalty.

Our expectations on how things will be, how they ought to be, how God ought to do things, constantly and unfailingly falls short of God's capacity to innovate.

He is the God who brings water from stone, and who defeats his enemies through his death. You and I have not yet begun to scratch the surface of God's creative, life giving acts.

Take time today to consider God's creatively compassionate love for you. Where has he brought life to you in unexpected ways?

## **4/12/2019 (Friday) *Is the Lord Among Us or Not?***

“And he called the name of the place Massah and Meribah, because of the quarreling of the people of Israel, and because they tested the Lord by saying, “Is the Lord among us or not?” Exodus 17:7 (ESV)

The Israelites are convinced that this time it's going to finish them off. They've finally met an insurmountable obstacle, no way they're getting out of this. Never mind that God has sustained them again and again in their journey, this time is the big one. This God they've been following has gotten what he wanted from them and now he's going to ditch them out in the sand. At least that's the fear.

One of the enduring strengths of God's word is how often it's surprisingly relatable across time, distance, and cultures. Sure we might have a tough time figuring what a cubit or an omer is, but our fundamental fears and doubts are pretty relatable. The Israelites have such a tough time with believing that God is for them, that God is fundamentally on their side, that God will never leave them or forsake them, that Moses names the place after their fears.

Honestly I respect them for being honest enough with themselves to ask this question, it is a raw sort of faith that doesn't press down disbelief in order to appear holy. These are a people going through a crisis, because they understand that their lives are quite literally on the line. If God is with them, they'll probably be ok. But if the Lord is not among them, they're in big trouble. There's a difference between knowing the truth about who God is intellectually, and allowing that truth to translate to something deeper.

Moses and the Israelites both experienced the same God. They'd been through the plagues in Egypt, they were at the Red Sea, they're actively eating Mana at this point. But the assurance of Moses seems to be hard for them to grab a hold of.

While it's not a silver bullet against doubt, it's encouraging to see our spiritual ancestors struggling with the same questions we have today. And the same God who brought them out of Egypt, through the wilderness, established them as a nation, and brought salvation through them for the entire world is with us today.



**4/13/2019 (Saturday)**

## ***The Stone and the Water***

The Bible uses a lot of imagery to make a point, and it seems like the more complex the topic, the more varied the illustrations. This is especially true when writers attempt to describe who God is.

Psalm 18:2 says, “The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold”

In 1 Peter 2:6 Peter recognizes Jesus as the “cornerstone of the Church”, and Jesus identifies himself as a source of water in John 4:14 when he says, “but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

Each of these metaphors about God serve to illustrate a particular point, or emphasize a particular aspect. In 1 Corinthians 10:4, Paul draws on several images at once, he writes of the Israelites, “...and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank from the spiritual Rock that followed them, and the Rock was Christ.”

In this passage, Paul connects the events of Exodus 17 with the life of Jesus. He illustrates the continuity of God’s provision, and God’s message across centuries. There is a spiritual rock that is our safety, our security, and our salvation. And when we were dying, when we were worn out and dried up and all but dead, that rock was struck to provide living water for us. Streams of life come from our Rock, and anyone who is willing to drink will not die.

Consider the places where you’re in need of spiritual water, or shelter, or refuge. How does understanding Jesus as our cornerstone, or as the source of living water change the way we think?

## Mt. Sinai

4/15/2019 (Monday)

*God Reveals Himself*

“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. 19 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.”

Exodus 19:18-20 (ESV)

Biblical scholars have suggested that Mt. Sinai is probably a different name for the same mountain that Moses encountered God in a burning bush years ago.

Imagine Moses leading the Israelites through an ever-more-familiar desert as they followed God’s leading. He would probably have recognized the places where he used to water his sheep, or maybe a place where he knew to find shade in the middle of the day. As they continued on, he might have recalled the fascination and awe he felt when he approached the bush that burned and would not be consumed.

Now God’s self-revelation has broadened, and instead of revealing himself in a burning bush, God has descended in fire on an entire mountain. God remains the same as he ever was, but now he reveals even more of himself to his people. They’ve seen God move in power against the Egyptians, guide them as a pillar of cloud and fire, seen God provide food and water, and now God is revealing the immensity of his power.

The history of God at work in human life is one of ever-increasing self-revelation. God makes himself known to us again and again, ultimately culminating in the life of Jesus.

God’s ultimate self-disclosure comes hundreds of years from this mountain set ablaze in the presence of God with us. God reveals himself to us in majesty and power, and in the lowly form of a child.

What does it tell us about God that his greatest act of self-revelation is not in a mountain bathed in flame and wreathed in smoke, but as a child?

**4/16/2019 (Tuesday)**

## ***Unrelenting Holiness***

“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.” Exodus 19:21 (ESV)

The idea that God might “break through” or “break out against them” can be a terrifying idea. Is God the sort of God who might just flip out at any moment? Should I be on my best behavior so I don’t make him mad?

One of the aspects of God that we see demonstrated in this passage is God’s holiness. God’s holiness is not an aggressive or attacking force set against us, it’s more like the Sun that shines on us.

A right relationship with the sun is a life-giving and pleasant experience. But the closer you get to the sun, the more that experience changes. We’re almost 93 million miles from the sun, and our bodies start to burn if we’re outside for too long even at this distance. Our cells start to die at about 113°F. The surface of the sun is almost 10,000°F. An unmediated experience with the surface of the Sun will atomize you. It isn’t a function of malice, or anger, it’s just the reality of what the Sun is.

God’s holiness is a reality of who God is. Nothing unholy, or impure can exist in the presence of God’s perfect holiness. It’s not that God is malicious or angry with the Israelites, it’s that his holiness is infinitely more than the surface of the sun is hot.

When we talk about God’s holiness, it can be easy to think of it as “niceness” or as something that we have to keep clean. God isn’t concerned that the sin of the Israelites will contaminate him, God is concerned that they will be consumed in the presence of his unrelenting holiness.

Reflect today on God’s holiness and his mercy. How are the two related in the lives of the Israelites? In your own life?

## 4/17/2019 (Wednesday) Consecration

“Also let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out against them.” Exodus 19:22 (ESV)

The priests who were considering coming near the Lord had to consecrate themselves, to avoid being destroyed by God’s holiness. We read a few verses later that they gave up even that idea, because of how intensely present God was at Mt. Sinai.

Consecration is the act of setting yourself apart from the unclean, or unholy, day to day things. It’s a recognition that the God is God and we are not, and a symbolic removal of the things that are unholy. The idea that God’s holiness is so intense that even the hint of uncleanliness had to be removed before approaching him is sort of a given to the Israelites. They understand that they cannot approach God in an unmediated way.

Later in Exodus 28 when God establishes the office of high priest, it’s established that even the high priest can only enter into God’s presence one day a year, having been consecrated beforehand. Being in the presence of God isn’t a small thing.

It’s mind-boggling then that we read in Hebrews 10:19-22, “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20 by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.”

You and I live in a time when we can enter into the presence of God with confidence. We don’t have to slink away, or wonder whether we will be destroyed. Through Jesus we have assurance that we can draw near to God.

Do you think of drawing near to God as a big deal, or are you used to it? How would one of the Israelites have responded if you told them you had confidence in entering into the presence of God?

**4/18/2019 (Thursday)**

***Drawing Near***

“Now when all the people saw the thunder and the flashes of lightning and the sound of the trumpet and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid and trembled, and they stood far off and said to Moses, “You speak to us, and we will listen; but do not let God speak to us, lest we die.”

Exodus 20:18-19 (ESV)

A healthy fear of God is an appropriate thing, but a crippling fear of God can end up distancing us from God.

Fear of God is rightly oriented us to the awesome majesty of our great Creator and King. However the incredible might of God, that rightly produces a righteous awe in us, is not the place where God has left us.

The Israelites send Moses ahead to speak with God because they understand that God is radically transcendent, impossibly powerful, and rightly to be feared. But they haven't learned yet that God is also scandalously near to us, God has chosen to know us by name, and has invited us into deeper relationship with him.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, but we can't stop at the foot of the mountain, trembling, afraid to draw near. Through Jesus we have the means of drawing near to God.

Hebrews 7:25 tells us, “He is able to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.”

Do you find yourself more comfortable with the fear of God or the nearness of God? How does that influence the way that you relate to God in your life?

## **4/19/2019 (Friday) *God in the Thick Darkness***

“The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.” Exodus 20:21 (ESV)

When Moses first encountered God, it was through the light of a burning bush. God was literally illuminated to him, and he was drawn into relationship with God through that light. But God is not revealed just in these bright moments, we also learn to understand who God is through the thick darkness.

Gregory of Nyssa commented on this passage, “This is the true knowledge of what is sought; this is the seeing that consists in not seeing, because that which is sought transcends all knowledge, being separated on all sides by incomprehensibility as by a kind of darkness.”

Besides writing an incredibly complicated sentence, Gregory manages to point out to us a fundamental truth: We are ultimately unable to know God fully. The more we learn about God, the clearer it becomes that God completely transcends our ability to understand him.

You might have encountered this in whatever field that you work in, the more you know about it, the more you realize how little you really understand. It can be like wandering into a “thick darkness” when we grow to understand just how massively incompressible God is. So while Moses may have first encountered God in a moment of illumination, he’ll eventually grow to understand that knowing God means recognizing how much we don’t know about God.

More simply, God makes himself known to the smallest child, but isn’t fully understandable even by Moses. We will never exhaust the mysteries of God, and the more we know him, the clearer that becomes.

Is the idea of understanding God in the “thick darkness” frustrating or encouraging to you? What would a God who was completely knowable be like?

**4/20/2019 (Saturday)**

***More of God***

“Please show me your glory,” Exodus 33:18 (ESV)

The life of Moses can fairly described as complicated. He was technically a criminal from the moment he was born under the laws of Egypt, he was a murderer under the laws of God, he argued with God, complained, disobeyed, and often acted in anger. He was also patient, long-suffering, and relentlessly devoted to God. However, Moses’ most admirable trait may have been his willingness to draw near to God wherever and whenever.

From the first time he experienced God in a burning bush, he drew nearer. Honestly that’s a lifetime's worth of experiencing God for some people, it would mark you until the day you died. God speaks to him regularly, acts through him to liberate the Israelites, and invites Moses up into the darkness on Mt. Sinai.

By the grace of God, Moses enters into the presence of God that would utterly unmake any living creature, but however much of God Moses experiences, he keeps asking for more. The presence of God doesn’t just satisfy Moses, it creates in him a desire for more of God.

Colossians 3:15 tells us of Jesus, “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.” You and I have even greater access to God than Moses had, through the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

The question we have to ask is “Do you want more of God?” Will you stand far off, or will you draw near?

You may be in a place where you have become content with what you’ve known of God. You may have experienced miraculous and terrifying things on par with the Exodus, or you may have been just dipping your toe in the water.

Whatever the case, know that God is waiting to show even more to you.

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