

Title: Worship Matters
Text: Exodus 20.18-26
Theme: The enormous tension of living with God
Series: Exodus # 38
Prop Stmtnt God's law reveals Christ and our absolute need of him.

Matthew Stafford was selected by the Detroit Lions as the first choice of the first round in the 2009 NFL draft. Instantly Matthew two ridiculously large things were given to him. 1) He received a signing bonus and salary in the millions of dollars and 2) He was given the responsibility and the expectation to save the worst team in the NFL. The #1 draft choice brings messiah-like expectations from people. High privilege carries with it, high responsibility. What is true in a general sense is put on display in an absolute sense in this passage before us.

The good news is that out of all the nations of the earth, God chose the children of Israel to be his through whom he would show his glory to the rest of the world. The children of Israel were the 1st round draft choice with the expectation that they would live in such a way, that the rest of the world would see, fear, come to love and trust in the one, true God. Therefore, the book of Exodus is more than history explaining the birth of a nation. These people were redeemed in order to worship. Moses relayed God's command to Pharaoh and said, "Let my people go, that they may go and serve (worship) me." The rescue was tied to worship. The redemption was connected to service. The freedom that was granted was granted in order for the people to be free to live as God's treasured possession and represent him among all of the nations of the earth.

You want the privilege of being called by God? Then, you need to understand what that means. As long as God was dishing out the goodies, the people liked being called by God. God did phenomenal miracles. God gave them relief. God gave them wealth (spoiling the Egyptians). God gave them water in the desert. God gave them daily manna and they were happy. But, God is not a cosmic candy jar. The initial thrill of being rescued by God is now set aside as God now discloses himself and his law to them.

I remind you of the scene. The children of Israel are camped around the base of Mt. Sinai. Moses has already gone up and down the mountain three times relaying messages from God to the nation, and from the nation back to God. This was all done to prepare them to hear the terms of the covenant that God was establishing. They had to know that this was a serious event. When you make a vow before God, it is a sacred commitment that carries with it extremely significant implications. The terms of the covenant were introduced by God in what we call the 10 commandments. Now, there is a short break while the people respond to God's revelation. Following this, God resumes giving the terms of the covenant, which is what the chapters 21-23 are about. According to 24.7 these chapters are called "The Book of the Covenant." This is very important for you to understand. This covenant is not a constitution under which every one is governed. This is a treaty between the King and his subjects. As the King, his word is law. Live by his word or be banished from his kingdom. The benefits of his kingdom are eternal. The consequences of banishment are eternal as well. This is serious business. In chapter 24,

this covenant is ratified and the people are ceremoniously set apart as God's. So, we are building toward this moment. The people are starting to realize the enormous weight that they are being called upon to carry. After all, everyone wants to go to the promise land, but not everyone is willing to live under the King. The text before us reminds us that God's laws (which themselves are an act of grace) must be understood against the backdrop of his awesome power. And this text which deals primarily with worship begins the book of the covenant. When the terms of the covenant are concluded in chapter 23, God once again returns to talking about worship. Worship frames the life of the follower of God. Everything in life is part of your life before and with God.

Read Text:

Back in 19.8 the nation said, "We will do everything the LORD has said." Now, God demonstrates the power of his Word through the use of thunder, lightning, the sound of a trumpet and even smoke. All of this along with what he reveals, now has the people scared for their lives. Their panic is justifiable. They are in a mess. I addressed this a few months ago, when I preached on the topic, "Dead if we do, damned if we don't."

1. God demands a standard that they cannot obtain.
2. God's Word is terrifying because God is truly full of awe.

When God appeared to Ezekiel, he fell facedown. When God appeared to Daniel, he said, I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. When God, in Christ appeared to John on the island of Patmos, John fell at his feet as though dead.

And this, my beloved is why I am convinced that authentic Christianity is so rare and so rejected. When you realize who God really is, it makes you aware that he alone possesses the right to do whatever it is that he wants to do. You are not in charge. It is not your life to do as you please. For all of us self-made people, that is devastating. What is worse, is that he is not only God, but he will always be God. Forever he will be God. No one can dethrone him. No one can replace him. That makes many people angry. No wonder it seems that most people in our culture think that God's last name is damn it. They are so full of anger at his Sovereignty, authority, power and immutability that they want to scream. You don't reject him, he rejects you. In other words, you may chose to reject him, but that rejection does not change the fact that he is King. When you reject him as King you are banished from the Kingdom.

The people realize that they cannot stand their and listen to the Word of God and live. So, they beg Moses to be their mediator. This role that Moses plays is all a preview of Christ. Which he does; but think of this. God has just begun! He just got done with the 10 commandments and they are already begging him to stop because they can't handle it. If hearing the law was such a terrifying experience can you imagine what it would be like to stand before God after having broken his law? But then we come to verse 22. What are you tempted to do when you don't think you can handle the truth about God and the truth about yourself? The answer is: modify the truth.

Think about that for a minute. What does it mean to modify the truth? If you modify the truth, it is no longer the truth. If you change the definition of God, what you believe is no longer God. So God warns them. God commands them. God forbids them. Whoa! Stop there for a second. Don't you hate it when someone tells you, "NO!" Prohibitions go against our nature of self-worship. God said, "You have seen for yourselves that I have spoken to you from heaven." I am in heaven – you are not! I am King, you are subject. "Do not make any gods to be alongside me; do not make for yourselves gods of silver or gods of gold." This sounds a lot like the first two commandments doesn't it? This isn't the last thing in the Bible that God says about idolatry, is it?

Please do not miss this!! You cannot use the creation to define the Creator. The Creator defines the creation. And that my friend is what our world finds so incredibly offensive about God. You have no right to come up with your own views of God. You have no right to modify what God has revealed about himself. You have no right to alter God's law. In fact, whatever you make in an effort to depict God, even if it is from the most precious metals that you can find, is infinitely offensive to him. What you make on your own and what you do is not good enough. What you do and what you make as an effort to earn God's favor only adds to your own judgment.

Notice how this plays out in the next few verses. You cannot make your own rules. You cannot make your own god. And, you cannot create your own way to God.

Read verses 24-26

These verses anticipate the rest of the sacrificial system that God is going to reveal to the nation of Israel. The sacrifices were all temporary means of dealing with sin, until the final and ultimate sacrifice of Christ could be made. So, as you look at what God is saying here, there are a couple of glorious truths that are so good for our souls. What God is saying here reveals the fact that God knows that we cannot keep his law. God knows that we will sin and fall short of his glory. God knows that we will attempt to rob him of the glory that he is due. So, God provides a way for our sins to be forgiven. For the children of Israel, the way was a way that was NOT like the pagan nations around them. You are not like the other nations. Why? Because your God is the true God and they are following false gods. Therefore, you do not follow their forms of religion. You follow me! Some of the prohibitions that are given here are for no other reason than, you are to live in a way that is unique from the nations around you. The other reason why this passage is so important is because we begin to see how careful God is about how he is to be worshiped. Worship matters. Therefore, you are not free to build an altar the way you want. Neither are you free to offer whatever you want. There is no room for, "where at least he means well" sort of stuff. Over and over we will see these three issues repeated by God.

- 1) No idols of any kind
- 2) You only build what I determine
- 3) You only sacrifice what I command

These three issues can be summarized in this: You cannot worship me the way you want. You have to worship me in the way I command. I am the LORD, and there is no other. If you want to worship any way you want, go get another god, because the true God can only be worshipped in a true way.

1 Cor. 10.11

These three commands are all inter-related.

Take, for example the prohibition against making idols, or using any sort of an idol to represent God. God is passionately opposed to the use of idols because they make him to be something less than what he is. Idols that are made out of gold or silver reflect the effort of the craftsman or the wealth of the owner. So, if you have a little image of god in your pocket that is made out of silver and your neighbor has one made out of gold, then his god is worth more than your god. Or, if you won't leave your house unless you have your little image of god hanging on your neck, then what are you doing. You are attributing your security to a piece of jewelry instead of to God. God vehemently opposes idolatry because, we become what we worship.

God has set these people apart to be his people. Let MY people go, so that they can worship me in the desert. What do the people of God look like? If they are the people who are of God (source), then they must look like God. So, how can you ever become like God? We become what we worship! Have you ever seen an older woman dress like she is still in high school or college? It's disgusting. I saw a store the other day called, "Forever 21." No you're not! Get over it. If I started one, it would be "49 for just a Moment." It probably wouldn't do real well. If a woman is worshipping her kids, or is worshipping the idol of "youth" then she will attempt to become what she has set her heart upon. We become what we worship. An angry man worships power. If we truly worship God, we will become more and more like him.

The people of God are here to put God on display. In order to put God on display, you have to know what God is like. In order to then reflect him, you have to spend time with him. So, no idols of any kind. If you worship the idol, you will become like the idol instead of like god. Another issue related to this, is that idols are man-made. You can take credit for the size and quality of the idol. Again, this is what is so offensive to God. Your efforts are not worth anything. And that is what is so offensive to most people.

National Review had a cartoon depicting Moses on top of Mt. Sinai looking up into the clouds and saying, "Only one God? That is going to sound pretty intolerant?" Brothers and sisters, do not apologize for that or back down from that. God is intolerant of anything that will rob him of the glory that he is due. Pretending that other gods are valid, is not being authentic. God is intolerant of fake. The truth is, we cannot add to his glory. We cannot make ourselves redeemable. We cannot do anything that achieves righteousness on our own. That is why, God says to only build what I tell you to build. And when you build an altar, it must be simple. Notice this. If you use a tool on it, you will defile it. Do not dress up the stones. Use the stones I made. You cannot add your

efforts to the altar. Neither were they permitted to build stairs. That is, they were not to build these elaborate high places with ascending stairs even if at the top altars were constructed to be used for sacrifices for God. The immediate issue that is mentioned here is because of modesty. Later on in the OT account we find out that high places, were found throughout the Canaanite peoples and these high places were sadly imitated and repeated by the Israelites in their own land in violation of this command. Those high places eventually became places of idolatry, which reduced the people of Israel to being like all the other people.

Why was God so picky about this?

The altar was the place of sacrifice. The primary purpose of a sacrifice in the OT was not to show others how much you have given up for God. The primary purpose of a sacrifice was a substitute in your place. It was not the only reason, but it was the major one. In order to truly understand the nature of a sacrifice, you needed to realize that you belonged on that altar as payment for your sin. But, here is an offering in your place. We are so blessed in that we can look back, not only to the cross, but we can look back to the OT and see how God was setting everything in place to point to Christ. Christ really is our only means of forgiveness. And if you mess with that truth, you destroy the only hope that you have. Early on God was making it clear that you don't mess with the means for your very life.

Worship is at once the most important and the most dangerous activity that we could ever be engaged in. It is not optional and it is inherently sacred. These warnings are designed to guard us against saying:

- 1) Look at what I have done to make God so great!

If you begin to think like that, it is a short distance to...

- 2) I can worship God however I want, after all, I am the one who makes God great. God needs me. God should be glad with what little I offer, since I do more than most.

Pretty soon, that thinking will lead to...

- 3) I can worship whatever I want.

Last Sunday, Patrick preached from Jonah 2. Do you remember verse 8? "Those who cling to worthless idols, forfeit the grace that could be theirs."

God knows that we cannot rescue ourselves, does not expect us to rescue ourselves, but has happily sent us a redeemer!