Following God into The Unknown - Part 10

# (Exodus 25:2, 8-9)

We’re continuing our series, “Following God into The Unknown” this morning and we are walking together with the Israelites in the desert. We are walking with them and they’re in between Egypt where they were delivered from and the land flowing with milk and honey that they have been promised. It’s been a season of preparation where God was separating them from Egypt, separating them from who they were, separated them from their old identity, and bringing them out into a new place, into a new identity as the nation of Israel. But right now, it’s a difficult place, because the desert is a lonely place, it’s an unstable place, and they’ve been in the desert for many months. They’re feeling the uncertainty of their environment, they had lost so much that they were accustomed to, but God wasn’t calling them to be comfortable, he was preparing them for their purpose.

You see, God had taken them out of Egypt, out of the environment that they had become dependent upon, and he took them into the wilderness so that they would have nothing to depend on but him. God was separating them from what they had become familiar with and he was giving them the opportunity to recognize the distinctiveness of who they were as the children of God. We saw last week how God met with the Israelites at Mount Sinai and told them,

*“'You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:4-6).*

And so, God called them, inviting them to come into an agreement with him, to be his covenant people, his treasured possession, to be different from the other nations, because he wanted them to be holy, to stand out and be distinctive. God chose the people of Israel to be a kingdom of priests, a holy nation upon which his name could rest, but they struggled with understanding how to live that out.

You see, they wanted to fit in, they wanted to be like the surrounding nations, and yet like us God separates you from people, separating you from comfortable circumstances, separating you from what is familiar, so that he can set you apart for his purpose. This is exactly what we have seen in the life of Moses, he spent 40 years in Midian separated from what he was born into; 40 years separated from his people; 40 years separated from what he was raised in; 40 years in the desert herding sheep so that he was prepared to lead his people out of Egypt. God was separating him from his background, separating him from who he thought he was, and bringing him into his new identity; revealing who he really was as he prepared Moses to go back to his people and deliver them into his Promise.

That was the context in which God came near, speaking to Moses from a burning bush, introducing himself saying,

*“Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground." Then he said, "I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob." At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God” (Exodus 3:5-6).*

From the very beginning Moses had excuses, because he was afraid, but God called him to separate himself from his excuses and to separate himself from his perspective of himself, so that he could see himself as God saw him and truly embrace God’s purpose for him.

You see, God was preparing Moses to understand the difference between what he was not and what he was. God was preparing Moses to understand the difference between what he said and what people, or his past, or his weaknesses said. But God was speaking a much better word over Moses’ life which would propel him into his calling as the deliverer of his people. This is what God was doing in Moses, it’s what he was doing with the nation of Israel, and it’s what he’s doing in this place today. His desire is to set you apart for his purpose as he speaks his words over your life; and so he is separating you from your past, separating you from the pain, separating from you the worry about your health or your future.

God’s words to Moses, his words to the Israelites, and his words to the Church today are the same. Just as Isaac said to his son Jacob, “Come near so I can touch you” (Genesis 27:21), God said,

*“Come near you nations and listen…” (Isaiah 34:1).*

In other words, he is setting you apart for his purpose as he speaks his words of blessing over your life. His words for the Israelites and you and I are the same, stop holding onto what is familiar, stop trying to be like the world, stop trying to look like what you came out of, and stop being scared of being different. He said that he gave himself for us…

*“…that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14, KJV).*

And so, you and I are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that we may proclaim his praise (1 Peter 2:9). You see, God didn’t start Christ’s Community Church to be like the other churches in this community and that’s why many of you are here today, it’s not because we’re like the others, it’s because God is doing something special in this place. And in the same way that God separated the Israelites in the wilderness, he separates us so that we are prepared to receive all that he has in store for us. You see, he is preparing to come near and so he says,

*“Therefore, come out from them and be separate... Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters…” (2 Corinthians 6:17-18).*

Now, last week, we saw God sitting down on the couch with his children, like a father with his kids, and he was putting some boundaries in place. They had been rebellious and disobedient, they had been grumbling and complaining about their leaders, but God gave them bread on the dew of the morning and water out of a rock. Now he was about to do something even greater and so he’s preparing them as he gives them his law, because it’s his Word that is life changing, it strengthens, it heals, and it delivers.

In chapter 23, at verse 20, God said,

*"See, I am sending an angel ahead of you to guard you along the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Pay attention to him and listen to what he says. Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him” (Exodus 23:20-21).*

In other words, he says, “listen to my Word.” Now, some people have thought that this “angel” or this “messenger” was Moses, Aaron, or Joshua, but most Bible scholars and I believe it is most likely the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, because God said in verse 21, “My name is in him.” And we know that,

*“There is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12).*

And so, this is that great Angel of the Covenant, this Angel going ahead of them, guarding them, bringing them to the place he has prepared is the One who said,

*“If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am” (John 14:3).*

This is the One in whom dwelt all the fullness of the Godhead, this Angel is the Lord Jesus Christ who said,

*“Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one” (Mark 12:29).*

And so, this is the Christ who was in the wilderness with Israel, it’s Christ who was in the cloud, it’s Christ who was the Rock, it’s Christ who was the manna from heaven, and it’s Christ that is all that we need.

As God comes down to speak to his children at the base of Mount Sinai, they’re questioning why they’re there, how did we get to this dry place, why are we experiencing what we’re experiencing and their perspective was way off. They are wondering why things are happening the way they’re happening, everybody’s fighting, everybody’s treating everybody so badly, but that’s what happens when there are no boundaries. Without having requirements in place or boundaries of the law, chaos is born and so they brought this upon themselves, because they were missing the whole point of this excursion into the desert.

If you remember, God had told Pharaoh,

*“Let my people go, so that they may worship me in the desert” (Exodus 7:16).*

And so, he didn’t intend for Moses to take the Israelites out into the desert so that they could have a Christian Woodstock, a music festival of some sort where they were dancing, shouting and singing hosannas. His desire was for them to worship him and show him what he is worth. That’s what worship means, and so worship is both an attitude and an act, the word implies the worthiness of the one receiving the special honor or devotion. And so, God is very specific about how he wants to be worshiped, he put boundaries in place, and he’s teaching his people that worship is not about doing your own thing, how you want to do it, or even when you want to do it.

In Exodus chapter 20 and following, God describes how his people are to spiritually and positionally prepare themselves to meet with him. And then he tells them about this place that they’re going to build where they can hang out with him; and he goes into great detail, right down to the cubic inch, what he wants built, how it’s to be built, who’s going to build it, and what it’s function is. And so, after he gives them the law, in Exodus chapter 24, Moses wrote down everything the Lord had said.

*“…He got up early the next morning and built an altar at the foot of the mountain and set up twelve stone pillars representing the twelve tribes of Israel” (Exodus 24:4).*

Then Moses directed the Israelites to offer burnt offerings, fellowship offerings, and after reading to them the book of Law, he sprinkled the blood of the covenant on the people according to the Word of the Lord. God was preparing them, he is doing a new thing, he is getting ready to visit with them, and the Bible says,

*“Moses and Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Israel went up and saw the God of Israel. Under his feet was something like a pavement made of sapphire, clear as the sky itself. But God did not raise his hand against these leaders of the Israelites; (even though) they saw God, and they ate and drank” (Ex. 24:9-11).*

And so, this was new, God had spoken in times past, he’d revealed himself in various ways, but this may be the first time there had been a corporate meeting, a board meeting with the CEO of the universe. And after they fellowshipped together, eating and drinking in his presence, God told Moses, “Come up to me on the mountain and stay here” (Exodus 24:12).

*“Moses went up on the mountain, the cloud covered it, and the glory of the Lord settled on Mount Sinai. For six days the cloud covered the mountain, and on the seventh day the Lord called to Moses from within the cloud. To the Israelites the glory of the Lord looked like a consuming fire on top of the mountain. Then Moses entered the cloud as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights” (Exodus 24:15-18).*

God hangs out with Moses for 40 days and 40 nights and during this time he gave Moses the plans and dimensions to build a tabernacle, a meeting place, a pattern of what’s in heaven. He’s like, since you can’t come up, I’m going to come down and meet with you, and so he’s designing a new hangout spot so that he could come down and dwell among his people. He lays out his plans for this earthly tabernacle in chapter 25 through chapter 31, and if you’d like some homework this week you can read over that, but what he’s describing is a copy, a shadow of the heavenly tabernacle.

God is preparing a place, he is coming near, he is coming to dwell among his people, and there’s even going to be a site map because there are privileges and degrees of dwelling. The tabernacle is going to be placed strategically in the middle of the 12 tribes of Israel, they’re going to be camped all around, and so if you look to the East you will see the tribes of Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. If you look to the south, there’s Ruben, Simeon, and Gad, if you turn to the west there’s Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, and then to the north is Dan, Asher, and Naphtali. And so, no matter which way you look, the Israelites are gathered on every side, and the tent, the tabernacle is right there in the midst of them because God is coming near, he is dwelling among his people. And so, now it’s time to start building and the Lord said to Moses:

*“Tell the Israelites to bring me an offering. You are to receive the offering for me from each man whose heart prompts him to give… Then have them make a sanctuary for me, and I will dwell among them. Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you” (Exodus 25:2,8-9).*

And the Israelites were excited about this opportunity to fellowship with God and so they gave generously, so much so that in Exodus chapter 36, Moses had to tell them to stop giving. They considered it of great worth to have this privilege of having an intimate relationship with God and they gave joyfully, but unfortunately, they found it easier to give than to obey and yet God desires obedience more than sacrifice (1 Samuel 15:22-23). In other words, it’s not enough for God to dwell with you if you don’t dwell with him.

Over and over Jesus reminds his disciples to remain in him in John chapter 15, and in verse four he said,

*“Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me” (John 15:4).*

In other words, Jesus reminds us that there are some things you can get by dwelling that you don’t get by visiting. You know, some of us only visit God when we’re in trouble, but the real benefits come from dwelling with him in the good times and the bad times. And so, he says “Remain in me” because you can’t bear fruit unless you remain in him. In fact, the Bible says in Psalm chapter 25, that there are some things that God won’t show you until you dwell with him. Verse 14 says,

*“The Lord confides in those who fear him; he makes his covenant known to them” (Psalms 25:14).*

He said, “Remain in me and I will remain in you.” And so, we want to dwell with him, we might be going through a difficult season, but we’re not just going to visit God, because if he wants to dwell with us, I know I surely want to dwell with him.

In fact, the Bible says in Psalms 91,

*“He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty” (Psalms 91:1).*

And so, I’m going to dwell, because the secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and our children forever (Deuteronomy 29:29). And now he’s planning to come closer, the Lord is not just going to be in the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, but now he’s going to be on the ground and he’s inviting us to come in. The Bible says,

*“Come near to God and he will come near to you” (James 4:8).*

God brought them out of Egypt with a mighty hand to worship him in the desert, to worship him in the middle of their troubles, to praise him when they’re waiting for an answer, to praise them when they don’t know how things are going to end, just to stand still right there in the middle of the desert and worship him. He’s been leading them through this wilderness trying to get them to understand that they can praise him when they don’t have anything to drink, they can praise him when they don’t have any food, they can praise him when the enemy is chasing after them, because he is their provision, he is their protection, and he is their ever present help in time of trouble.

And so, no matter what you’re going through today, you need to remember that:

*“God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble” (Psalms 46:1).*

And he invites us to come near, he has positioned himself to be your provision, and even though you may be in a place of trouble, discomfort, or distress; even though you really don’t like what’s going on around you, God wants to meet you there, he wants to be your provision, your protection, because he is your ever present help in trouble.

He’s coming to dwell among his people, he’s coming near, and he reminded them that he had called them out of Egypt to come worship him. Here they are in the desert, many of them feeling like they’ve been forgotten, overlooked, and just don’t stand a chance, but God saw them. They’d made a lot of mistakes, they grumbled and cursed God, they cursed God’s leader, they cursed Moses, but God knew them and was watching over them. The psalmist said it this way,

*“What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him” (Psalms 8:4)?*

Some of you need to know that God is mindful of you, that his thoughts are for you, and he is watching over you. In fact, he is coming near and he’s inviting you to come dwell with him. Come near to God and he will come near to you wherever you are. God knows what you’re going through, he knows how you feel, and he sees what’s happening, and so you don’t need to worry that you’re going to die in the desert, because God sees you.

When you understand the sovereignty of God, that he sees you, you can trust him to guide you, to provide for you, and to protect you, because nothing happens to us that isn’t under the jurisdiction of his mighty hand. We don’t always know what’s happening or understand why it’s happening, but we do know that God is on our side and he is fighting our battles for us. No matter what challenges or difficulties you’re facing today as you come near to God he comes near to you. He wants to protect you, to meet all of your needs in Christ Jesus, and he laid down his life so that you could know his love and his forgiveness.

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