

Moses, Part 2: Covenant Mediator

Thunder on the mountain, blood of the covenant, and the fear that makes God's friendship sweet

SPEAKER Matt Ryniker

DATE Sunday, November 21, 2021

PASSAGES Exodus 19:3-20:20; Exodus 24:7-11; Numbers 12:1-15; Zechariah 9:11; Matthew 26:28; Proverbs 9:10; Proverbs 8:13; John 6:68

MESSAGE Begins at 1:11:39 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

At Sinai God came down in fire and thunder so that Israel would fear him and listen to the man he chose to speak for him, and he bound himself to them in a covenant sealed with blood. Jesus does the same at his table, with his own blood and his chosen messengers. The God who calls us friend is the God whose unveiled presence would undo us — and fearing him rightly means relating to him on his terms, including the words of those he chose to speak for him.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Caring for a nation takes a great deal, and the wilderness stories make the point: Moses is not the one feeding Israel. God is.
- ◆ God wanted Israel to obey his voice and keep his covenant, and to be his treasured possession and a kingdom of priests to the nations.
- ◆ At Sinai “the fear of the Lord” meant actual fear. Without that fear, our sense of God’s sweetness is diminished, not protected.
- ◆ Sinai was a covenant ratification: terms, a book, blood thrown on the people, and a meal before God. The upper room follows the same pattern.

- ◆ Miriam and Aaron asked, “Has the Lord spoken only through Moses?” God’s reply: why were you not afraid to speak against my servant?
- ◆ We do the same when we wave off Paul or Peter. Submitting to Scripture is part of submitting to God himself.
- ◆ What runs cover to cover is not any one controversy but how we relate to God’s authority when it bothers us.

► 1:11:40

Matt asked for prayer for clarity: the Lord had put “lots of kind of odd things on my plate to speak from the texts” this week. It was the last of the Old Testament figures before Advent — though, he hinted, there would be a sneak preview of the coming King.

Who is feeding this nation?

► 1:12:45

Delivered from Egypt, Israel complains of hunger in the wilderness, then of thirst. It’s easy to call them “complaining pants,” Matt said, but a forgotten lunch can ruin our workday. God feeds them miraculously and brings water from the rock (Exodus 16:1–4; Exodus 17:1–6). These stories show “it actually takes a lot to take care of a nation,” and when the people complain to Moses, Moses asks why. He isn’t taking care of them. God is.

A treasured possession, a kingdom of priests

► 1:14:19

“You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles’ wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine; and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”

EXODUS 19:3–6 ↗

► 1:15:34

Two things God asks — obey my voice, keep my covenant — and what they will be in his hands: a treasured possession, priests to the nations. God wants a name worldwide, and the fear of God is part of that.

► 1:16:07

The people answer, “All that the LORD has spoken we will do,” and Moses carries their words back to God. Then: “Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever” (Exodus 19:7-9). Hold onto that, Matt said: God wants the people to see him in Moses’ relationship with him, and to believe what Moses says.

Putting the fear back in the fear of the Lord

► 1:17:44

“On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings and a thick cloud on the mountain and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.”

EXODUS 19:16-19 ↗

Matt has always longed to have been there — “but on the other hand I feel like if I was there, I would be doing the same thing they’re doing: trembling.”

► 1:19:40

We casually ask God to show up. But without supernatural power to stand, “it might make you throw up ... it would melt your face right off. I know that’s pleasant. Good morning.”

► 1:20:14

And who is blowing that trumpet? It is the Bible’s first trumpet, mentioned so casually. The last trumpet in the Old Testament is the Lord’s own, in Zechariah 9:14, and John later hears “a loud voice like a trumpet” (Revelation 1:10; Revelation 4:1) — an allusion, Matt thought, to this mountain.

► 1:21:18

Then God speaks the ten words: no other gods; no carved image; not taking his name in vain; the Sabbath; honoring father and mother; no murder, adultery, stealing, false witness or coveting (Exodus 20:1-17).

► 1:22:27

“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.’ Moses said to the people, ‘Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin.’”

EXODUS 20:18-20 ↗

“God’s good at nailing stuff that he wants to happen.” Without the Spirit’s power, Matt admitted, he too would have said, “make it stop.”

► 1:23:40

Today we often treat the fear of the Lord as “a wink and a nod in the general direction of the Lord ... maybe a wink and a gun,” or a solemn friendship. But in the biblical sense, it means what it sounds like: afraid, because his power is so intense, and because Israel had seen him judge sin with death. That is the fear that is “the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10), the fear that is “hatred of evil” (Proverbs 8:13).

► 1:25:34

“I don’t want you to remove the sweetness. In fact, I think you have a diminished sense of God’s sweetness without the fear.”

To see the terror God inspires and then grasp that he wants to call you friend magnifies both. If we church up the Bible and keep only the sweet parts, “we’ll become spiritually diabetic.”

The blood of the covenant

► 1:26:55

“Then he took the Book of the Covenant and read it in the hearing of the people. And they said, ‘All that the LORD has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.’ And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant that the LORD has made with you in accordance with all these words.’”

EXODUS 24:7-8 ↗

► 1:27:34

Matt pointed to Meredith Kline's work: the proceedings at Sinai match the form of Hittite treaties between overlords and vassal states. Israel would have understood it as a legal ratification, not a string of random acts; God adapted the legal forms of the day as an object lesson that he is their overlord.

► 1:28:34

Then the sneak preview of the King. In the middle of a confusing book, Zechariah speaks of a coming king, the Lord's trumpet, and this:

"As for you also, because of the blood of my covenant with you, I will set your prisoners free from the waterless pit."

ZECHARIAH 9:11 ↗

► 1:29:48

And Jesus at the table: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matthew 26:28).

"Then Moses and Aaron, Nadab, and Abihu, and seventy of the elders of Israel went up, and they saw the God of Israel. There was under his feet as it were a pavement of sapphire stone, like the very heaven for clearness. And he did not lay his hand on the chief men of the people of Israel; they beheld God, and ate and drank."

EXODUS 24:9-11 ↗

► 1:31:11

They should have died; this is God's kindness. Then God calls Moses higher still, apart even from the elders and Aaron, to receive the tablets: the covenant mediator speaking God's terms.

► 1:32:31

"They beheld God and they ate and drank" — so much like the disciples. "Seeing Christ is seeing God" (John 14:9). In the upper room there is covenant blood, terms and stipulations, and leaders of his choosing, eating and drinking in his presence.

"Why were you not afraid?"

► 1:33:02

Later Miriam and Aaron speak against Moses over his Cushite wife, and ask, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" (Numbers 12:1-2). Technically, Matt

said, they had a point. Aaron was the front man: his staff, his voice before Pharaoh and the people. “You would have thought, oh, surely God has spoken through Aaron.” But something about this challenge irritated God, “because it actually was directed against him, not Moses.”

► 1:34:55

“Come out, you three, to the tent of meeting.” The Lord comes down in the cloud, calls Aaron and Miriam forward, “maybe there’s like a long parental pause,” and then:

► 1:35:37

“Hear my words: If there is a prophet among you, I the LORD make myself known to him in a vision; I speak with him in a dream. Not so with my servant Moses. He is faithful in all my house. With him I speak mouth to mouth, clearly, and not in riddles, and he beholds the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?”

NUMBERS 12:6-8 ↗

► 1:36:23

“There’s that fear again.” Miriam is struck with leprosy — not being Egyptian is no immunity — and Aaron begs Moses to heal her. She is shut outside the camp seven days, and the whole camp waits (Numbers 12:10-15).

Why Moses’ authority matters to us

► 1:37:01

Israel needed enormous care, and God gave it, even keeping their sandals from wearing out. But he also wanted them to know him. “Who knows what God is like? God does. So who is able to authoritatively say what God is like? God.” He chose Moses and spoke to him plainly, which is why it was arrogant and wrong to speak against him.

► 1:38:20

That cuts against our culture’s sense that God speaks to all of us equally. An Israelite could have said, “I heard his voice on the mountain too.” And it is true God wanted a nation of priests: “I will be their God” (Genesis 17:8), “I will take you to be my people” (Exodus 6:7), “I will dwell among the people of Israel” (Exodus 29:45). “But God wanted it his way,” and he reprimanded even Aaron — “big dog Aaron,” the front man of the whole freedom movement.

► 1:39:52

The parallel to Jesus is plain. He ratifies his covenant in his blood at a feast, for whoever eats and drinks; he gives his disciples stipulations; and while he spoke to the crowds in riddles, to the men he chose he spoke plainly, as God did to Moses.

Two points of clarity

► 1:41:09

First: if most of us err, Matt said, we err toward painting God “like a Precious Moments doll,” struggling to fear him because it seems to undercut his niceness. But he really did show up and people really did freak out, and he himself was the destroying angel. “I want to embrace the softness of calling him Father,” and of Jesus calling us friends ([John 15:15](#)). “But who is being nice to us? The one who, if he showed up all the way, would just blow you to smithereens.” Have only one side, “and you’d end up with neither ... you’d have an idol.”

► 1:42:16

Second: in our culture’s battles — over Christ’s role, repentance, and especially sexual ethics — we do exactly what Miriam and Aaron did. Doesn’t God speak to me too? Do I really need to submit to Paul or Peter or John? “We often feel like because Paul’s not Jesus, we can be like, ah, that’s just Peter. But we should be afraid to do that. And I mean that really, in a literal sense.”

► 1:43:36

Matt spoke personally. He felt called to ministry in high school, after moments when God’s presence fell on him like a heavy blanket. He never imagined how often people would ask him about sexual ethics, a topic that doesn’t especially interest him.

► 1:45:43

Hope holds a conservative sexual ethic, he said — not condoning premarital sex or blessing cohabitation without public vows, condemning adultery, and not performing gay weddings. Why does he hold it, even as a millennial for whom it “pricks against me”? “Because I fear to do otherwise. And when I say fear, I mean in the ordinary sense of the word.”

► 1:46:48

But it isn’t really about that topic. In a hundred years there will be some other awkward sermon. Sexual ethics is a minor theme in the Bible; “what’s cover to cover heavy is how you relate to God’s authority, even especially when it bothers you.”

► 1:47:21

“Will you or won’t you relate to God as the overlord, and you his servant? Because cover to cover he says: you will be my people, and I will be your God.”

► 1:48:08

And how he does it is many-sided: defender, strong tower, refuge, warrior who sets his people free, forgiver, friend. In Christ we inherit every promise. He is also the mighty God who will judge the living and the dead, and it will be fearsome even to see him from behind, as Moses did ([Exodus 33:22-23](#)).

On his terms

► 1:48:46

So, to recap: we struggle to fear God appropriately, and we should embrace that fear, letting it guide how we handle any controversial passage. “There’s what I want — this is what would make my life easier — and then there’s: I tremble before the Lord, because I want to serve him as he is.”

► 1:49:26

That includes the New Testament. Paul, Peter and John will all “smack you in the face a little bit” at some point, and we can say “I don’t follow Paul, I follow Christ” — which Paul himself mocked in [Corinth \(1 Corinthians 1:12\)](#). We submit to God’s word not in competition with submitting to God, “but because we want to submit to God himself ... and apparently, if you read the Bible, he wants to relate to you on his terms.”

► 1:50:33

“There’s not another option out there. So we’ll just follow Peter’s advice: where else are we gonna go? Who else has words of life?” ([John 6:68](#)). He closed with a blessing, thanking God for forgiveness “in the blood of your covenant,” for “friendship, softness and terror,” and asking that the church embrace him as he really is.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Exodus 16:1–4
- Exodus 17:1–6
- Exodus 19:3–6
- Exodus 19:7–9
- Exodus 19:16–19
- Zechariah 9:14
- Revelation 1:10
- Revelation 4:1
- Exodus 20:1–17
- Exodus 20:18–20
- Proverbs 9:10
- Proverbs 8:13
- Exodus 24:7–8
- Zechariah 9:11
- Matthew 26:28
- Exodus 24:9–11
- John 14:9
- Numbers 12:1–2
- Numbers 12:6–8
- Numbers 12:10–15
- Genesis 17:8
- Exodus 6:7
- Exodus 29:45
- John 15:15
- Exodus 33:22–23
- 1 Corinthians 1:12
- John 6:68

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt said Israel's complaints in the wilderness were understandable. What does it take for you to start complaining, and to whom do you complain?
2. How would you describe "the fear of the Lord" before this message, and how does Sinai challenge that?
3. What do you see when you set Sinai's covenant meal beside the Last Supper?
4. Where are you most tempted to say "that's just Paul" or "that's just Peter" about a passage that bothers you?
5. What would it look like this week to relate to God on his terms in an area where his authority bothers you?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m1pL_OIWio4&t=4299s

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.