

Good Friday, April 10, 2020

Pastor Peter Gregory, Our Savior Lutheran Church, Westminister, Massachusetts

Mount Sinai to Mount Calvary

Exodus 20:18–21; The Passion of our Lord

In the name of Jesus, God crucified. Amen.

For three hours, darkness covered the land.

The earth shook and the rocks split when Jesus breathed His last.

His death absorbed the wrath of God against all unrighteousness.

His death brought sacrifices and services in the temple to a halt,

the blood of bulls and goats were placeholders for the blood of Jesus.

His death broke open tombs and gave life to the dead.

His death brought the Roman centurion to his knees,

as he confessed, “Truly, this Man was the Son of God.”

Mount Calvary forms a bookend to Mount Sinai. Between these two mountains is a distance of about fifteen centuries and two hundred and forty miles.

On Mount Calvary, the Lord God gave His written law, the Ten Commandments.

Having saved His people from slavery and death in Egypt,

He describes who they will be: A people

- who will have Him as their God;
- who will use His name to call upon Him;
- who will hold His Word sacred;
- who will honor parents and respect authorities;
- who will help and support their neighbors in every bodily need;
- who will honor and uphold marriage;
- who will protect their neighbor’s property and possessions;
- who will defend the reputations of their neighbors;
- who will be content with the people and things God gives them;
- and who will not do anything against these commandments.

In Exodus, after the Lord gave these commandments, it says:

“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; 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.’ The people stood far off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.” (Exodus 20:18–21)

They were right to be afraid. To fear God's wrath, His judgment, His condemnation and punishment of sin. But there at Sinai they only had a glimpse of what that meant.

Like us, God's people Israel broke His law, even before Moses returned with the tablets. Over and over again. In thought, in deed, and in word. By the evil they did, and by the good they failed to do. Their thoughts and desires were soiled with sin. Their fear of God didn't last long.

That's why God sent His Son. Sent Him in our flesh. As our substitute. Our perfect substitute.

Perfect in carrying out God's will as we should have,
in keeping the commandments,
in loving God with His whole heart, soul, mind, and strength,
and in loving His neighbors above Himself.
His obedience, my righteousness.

And perfect in suffering the punishment we deserve,
in bearing the full weight of death and hell,
in enduring our shame and defilement.

O perfect life of love! In perfect love He dies!

The people of Israel knew they needed a mediator,
someone to stand between them and God.
They thought they had that mediator in Moses.

When he went up Mount Sinai,
after forty days the people of Israel thought he was never coming back.
They assumed He was dead. That it was the end. It wasn't.
Moses returned alive, bringing with him the tablets of God's law.
The law that always accuses. The law that shows us our sin.

Jesus, the perfect mediator, went up Mount Calvary,
He wasn't bearing the tablets of God's law.
He was carrying the shattered fragments from our sin.
He entered the darkness. He did what needed to be done. He finished it.
He brought the condemnation of the law to an end.

See, O sinner, your Savior. Consider what He has done to rescue and redeem you.
Ponder His great love.

It is the end, the end of sin and death, but *not* the end of Jesus. Amen.