

September 14, 2003  
AM Service  
Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

“Why Settle For Less?”

Deut 9:9-12, 15 - 17

9 When I went up on the mountain to receive the tablets of stone, the tablets of the covenant that the LORD had made with you, I stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights; I ate no bread and drank no water. 10 The LORD gave me two stone tablets inscribed by the finger of God. On them were all the commandments the LORD proclaimed to you on the mountain out of the fire, on the day of the assembly.

11 At the end of the forty days and forty nights, the LORD gave me the two stone tablets, the tablets of the covenant. 12 Then the LORD told me, "Go down from here at once, because your people whom you brought out of Egypt have become corrupt. They have turned away quickly from what I commanded them and have made a cast idol for themselves."

15 So I turned and went down from the mountain while it was ablaze with fire. And the two tablets of the covenant were in my hands. 16 When I looked, I saw that you had sinned against the LORD your God; you had made for yourselves an idol cast in the shape of a calf. You had turned aside quickly from the way that the LORD had commanded you. 17 So I took the two tablets and threw them out of my hands, breaking them to pieces before your eyes.

The Israelites saw Mount Sinai ablaze with fire and out of the fire, cloud and darkness they heard the voice of God, Himself. While they were in God's presence God spoke to them about His Ten Commandments. The Israelites told Moses that they were afraid that if they continue to hear God's voice it would be fatal. So they asked Moses to be a mediator between God and them. Whatever God told Moses, Moses would then related to them, and they would obey. God heard the people. More importantly He knew their attitude was sincere, but He also knew it would not last. His desired was that their hearts would always be inclined toward Him and that they would have a reverent trust in God that would include a commitment to keep His will. It is possible for us to have our hearts inclined toward God and be in His presence continually – but many do not experience it.

Moses goes up Mount Sinai by himself. He is there for forty days and forty nights. And during that time God wrote the Ten Commandments on two stone tablets, thus the saying “written in stone.” In other words these commands are permanent and can only be changed by God Himself.

While this is going on the people (Ex 32:1-4), when (they) saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, they gathered around Aaron and said, "Come, make us gods who will go before us. As for this fellow Moses who brought us up out of Egypt, we don't know what has happened to him."

2 Aaron answered them, "Take off the gold earrings that your wives, your sons and your daughters are wearing, and bring them to me." 3 So all the people took off their earrings and brought them to Aaron. 4 He took what they handed him and made it into an idol cast in the shape of a calf, fashioning it with a tool. Then they said, "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt."

Three things we can learn from this incident:

1. The human race is incurably religious. We are going to worship something or someone. It may not be the God of the Bible, but there is something that is most important to you. Yet, The God of the Bible says that He alone is God. There is only one God and He is the God of the Bible, and He said, "You shall have no other gods before me."
2. We want something to worship that we can see and touch. When Moses was taking a long time to return the people asked Aaron to make an idol they could see and touch even though God commanded them saying, "You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. You shall not bow down to them or worship them." God wants us to exercise faith. Without faith it is impossible to please God. But we want to live by sight and not by faith.
3. We want to worship on our own terms. We want to create God in our image. We don't want the God of the Bible we want a god we can control. We want to make a god that will be according to our own ideas and feelings. I have heard people say we are all worshipping the same God, but it is not true. People have their own ideas, different ideas, about what God is like. They are correct in saying there is only one God, but He is the God of the Bible. He is the God revealed in the Bible. He alone is God. He is the God we must accept, trust, worship and obey.

Ex 32:5-6 NLT

5 When Aaron saw how excited the people were about it (The gold idol he made), he built an altar in front of the calf and announced, "Tomorrow there will be a festival to the LORD!" [They didn't see any thing wrong in what they were doing]

6 So the people got up early the next morning to sacrifice burnt offerings and peace offerings. After this, they celebrated with feasting and drinking, and indulged themselves in pagan revelry (noise & merry partying).

They worshipped, they offered sacrifices and they had some good fellowship. It was all very religious. But God was not a part of it. Is it possible for a person or a Church to believe they are alive spiritually but really be dead? It was true of the Church in Sardis.

Rev 3:1-3

3:1 "To the angel of the church in Sardis write:

These are the words of him who holds the seven spirits of God and the seven stars. I know your deeds; you have a reputation of being alive, but you are dead. 2 Wake up!

Strengthen what remains and is about to die, for I have not found your deeds complete in the sight of my God. 3 Remember, therefore, what you have received and heard; obey it, and repent. But if you do not wake up, I will come like a thief, and you will not know at what time I will come to you. [Yes, it is possible to be dead even when we think we are alive. We need to wake up and realize that God offers more than we are experiencing.]

Just up the mountain was the presence of God. Moses was in the presence of God not far away from where the Israelites were. Yet, they settled for less. It was all very religious, even spiritual and they were enjoying themselves. They wanted *a* god while *The* God was right near them. Moses was seeking the face of God, they were settling for less.

I thought of the time Jesus came riding into Jerusalem on a donkey. While He was doing that there were religious people in the temple...perhaps disturbed by the loud noise of the people praising Jesus. They may even have been praying in the temple and the noise was distracting to them. They may even have been praying that God would send the Messiah. They may have asked who was causing all that ruckus and someone would have said, "see that man out there on that little donkey..." They would have been praying for the Messiah to come and there He was right outside their door and they miss Him.

The Israelites want an idol that is no god at all, while right near them is the real thing – the presence of The God. How many are in church, praying and doing other religious things, yet don't experience the "presence"? His presence may not even be a priority.

How many know their Bibles but don't know Him? How many are involved with church programs but never experience God's presence.

Last week (Deut 5:23-27)

23 When you heard the voice out of the darkness, while the mountain was ablaze with fire, all the leading men of your tribes and your elders came to me. 24 And you said, "The LORD our God has shown us his glory and his majesty, and we have heard his voice from the fire. Today we have seen that a man can live even if God speaks with him. 25 But now, why should we die? This great fire will consume us, and we will die if we hear the voice of the LORD our God any longer. 26 For what mortal man has ever heard the voice of the living God speaking out of fire, as we have, and survived?

What was their attitude: Repentance, humility. They didn't bark like dogs or laugh uncontrollably or do anything weird when they experienced the presence of God. They were quiet, repentant, and reverent and their lives were changed. Their hearts were turned toward God and they were committed to obey His will, word and command.

I am open to have God reveal Himself to us any way He chooses. The Jews did not recognize the Messiah when they saw Him because He did not come on their terms. I am not asking God to come on my terms but any way He wants to reveal Himself to us. I just want it to be authentic. Not like the golden calf down in the valley but what Moses was experiencing up on the mountain.

We know that God is everywhere. Therefore He is always present. But there are times when He makes Himself known in a more powerful way. Some have called this the “manifest presence of God.”

How do we experience His presence? It is really up to God, however there is a certain attitude we ought to have:

1. First we must know that there is more and that we need more. We will seek Him only because we see our spiritual poverty. This is a necessary first step. Matt 5:3 “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”
2. And we must be hungry for more. We have just as much of God as we want. How hungry are we to experience the presence of God in our life? Matt 5:6 “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.”
3. Therefore we must seek Him with all our heart not half-heartily. Matt 5:8 “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.” The pure in heart are those who desire just one thing. Do not separate your life: one half your secular life and the other half your sacred. Pure in heart means without mixture or defilement. God must be our all in all. Nothing must compete with Him for our heart. Repentance means turning to God with our whole heart. How much do you desire Him? Blessed means “oh, how happy.” Be holy and be happy. Turn from sin and anything that competes with seeking God. Ask God to purify your soul. Desire Him above all things. Have a reverent trust in Him and live by His Spirit.
4. Then we must seek hard after God. Deut 4:29-30 “But if from there you seek the LORD your God, you will find him if you look for him with all your heart and with all your soul.” We seek Him only because He first put the urge in us to seek Him. He gives us a pure heart. That does not mean we are perfect. “God does not make us holy in the sense of character; He makes us holy in the sense of innocence, and we have to turn that innocence into holy character by a series of moral choices.” (Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost For His Highest*). This is part of seeking hard after God. We also must seek God in prayer. He must know that we are serious about wanting Him. And so...
5. Finally, Ask. James 4:2 “You do not have, because you do not ask God.” Pray and wait upon God. Ask God to purify your heart. Ask God to fill you. Ask God to reveal Himself to you. Tell Him you are hungry for His presence. Seek His face that He may turn His face toward you and be gracious to you and give you peace. Why settle for less? There is so much more of God than you are experiencing ...how hungry are you?