

I Will Not Leave the Tent

Exodus 33:7-11

God is holy and dwells among those who obey Him.

Exodus 33:7-11 Now Moses used to take a tent and pitch it outside the camp some distance away, calling it the “tent of meeting.” Anyone inquiring of the LORD would go to the tent of meeting outside the camp. And whenever Moses went out to the tent, all the people rose and stood at the entrances to their tents, watching Moses until he entered the tent. As Moses went into the tent, the pillar of cloud would come down and stay at the entrance, while the LORD spoke with Moses. Whenever the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance to the tent, they all stood and worshiped, each at the entrance to his tent. The LORD would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend. Then Moses would return to the camp, but his young aide Joshua son of Nun did not leave the tent.

Note that Joshua didn’t leave the tent. He gets very little attention; all eyes are focused on Moses. It doesn’t matter to him. Why?

I’m going to tell the story of Exodus. This is a high-level summary to draw out points that can’t be seen by scrutinizing details. There is Biblical precedent for this sort of sermon—e.g., that of Steven (Acts 7).

This comes from my recent personal review of Exodus through Deuteronomy.

- My Jewish friend calls on most Sundays, and we talk for an hour or more about the Bible.
- To make our discussions more fruitful, I wanted to recall the most relevant portions of these books of Moses.
- What confronted me was a renewed and powerful sense the absolute holiness of God, and the extent of His grace in Christ, in light of the enormous chasm between our sin and His righteousness.
- 1st I’ll review Exodus at Mt Sinai. Then we’ll see how the Gospel sheds a new light on it:
 - Through Jesus’ atoning blood we are made holy.
 - His resurrection led to the coming of the Holy Spirit—God with us.

I. Let’s review the overarching story of Exodus.

A. Moses goes up and down Mt Sinai 6x! The story conveys clearly: **God is holy.**

1. 19:3 Moses went up to God on Mt Sinai 3 months into their journey.

a. God reminds him to tell the people to obey.

b. God promises they will be a Kingdom of priests and a holy nation. (*Now fulfilled, I Pet*).

I Peter 2:9 “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” (*See also Rev 5:10*).

c. Moses goes down and tells them God’s message.

- d. They promise, “We will do everything that the Lord has said.”
 2. Moses goes up 2nd time.
 - a. God told him to go down.
 - b. Tell them to consecrate themselves and be ready by the 3rd day.
 - c. Don’t let anyone touch Mt Sinai, or they need to be executed by stoning or arrows (don’t touch the unclean!).
 3. Moses goes up 3rd time.
 - a. 19:21 God tells Moses to go back down and warn them, “so they will not force their way through to see the Lord and many of them perish.”
 - b. They will die if they see God in His holiness.
 4. Moses goes up (#4): *(See why, with so much exercise, he lived to age 120!)*
 - a. 10 commandments.
 - b. Moses returns to get the elders and tell them the commands.
 - c. They promise again (24:3).
 5. Then Moses goes up a 5th time and spends 40 days and gets the tablets.
 - a. The elders see God’s amazing glory from a distance, but on the 7th day Moses & Joshua enter the cloud.
 - i. All the glory of God is revealed in Jesus.
 - ii. Worship Him! He is God.
 - b. They broke their promise immediately with the golden calf.
 - c. So God commands Moses urgently to go back down yet again.
 - d. Moses sees all, and then he pleads with God.
 - i. Don’t kill them all in the desert (and start all over again with Moses)
 - ii. Moses offered himself on behalf of Israel. God did not accept. Jesus is the only man who can be sacrificed as a substitute for men’s sins. This is a warning to us: Do not offer false mercy or false hope—only Jesus saves.
 - iii. In all this, we see God’s inapproachable holiness—He is set apart from sinful men.
- B. Now I want to turn the focus onto **God’s presence**.
1. Moses’ 2nd request: God to go with them. This turns out to be a huge request.
 2. They don’t yet have a tabernacle. God has not yet come to dwell in the camp.
 3. So Moses set up a tent outside the camp to meet with God.

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4. Joshua knows the great value of being in God’s presence. He doesn’t bear the responsibility to take care of the people. So he stays there. He does not need to leave, and so he doesn’t leave.
- C. 33:14 God consents to Moses’ plea: “My Presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”
 1. Moses goes up 6th time and gets the replacement tablets.
 2. There is no 7th time.
 - a. They build the Tabernacle according to instructions.
 - i. God has a separate inner dwelling place for His glory.
 - ii. This is now in our hearts!
 - b. They implement God’s commands for elaborate preparation in Holiness, beginning with the priests and then the people.
 - c. This time God goes to dwell in the camp.
 - d. The 7th time, they enter into His rest (connect Sabbath).
 3. God says, “I will go with you.”
 4. But there is a cost. The holy and unholy cannot dwell together!
 - a. They must be made holy, or they will die; or else He will depart from them again.
 - b. Knowing who God is instills awe, reverence, a kind of fear.
 - c. Therefore, they must follow every detailed instruction precisely.
 5. This is the context of the entire sacrificial system of Leviticus (next sermon). It is the blood that atones!

II. We have a greater Covenant than Moses.

- A. God promises to go with us.
 1. His Holy Spirit dwells not in a Tabernacle but in our own hearts. He is no longer unapproachable.
 2. Yet He will not dwell with uncleanness.
 - a. He has made us Holy by the blood of Jesus.
 - b. This is a huge privilege, and it came at a terrible cost.
 - c. Therefore, abide in Him.

3. No sin! How abhorrent is sin in light of the Holiness of God and the price He paid to be with us!
 - a. No hint of sin, no wisp of untruth, no retaliating anger in relationships, no pinch of pride...
 - b. Share God's view of sin. "Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect" (*Mat 5:48*).
4. God forgives sin, egregious as it is.
 - a. Yet God is merciful to erase past sin if we confess it to Him. **I Jn 1:9** "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."
 - b. During the 1920's & 30's, God brought revival in multiple places around China, including Shandong Province. Often during prayer, the Holy Spirit brought conviction on the foreign missionaries to humble themselves, interrupting meetings to confess sin. Seeing their repentance, Chinese church leaders would follow. Then conviction of sin impacted those outside the church, leading to waves of many thousands of new believers. Sin confessed before God is absolutely expunged in Christ. Through confession, God made His people holy. This was the engine that drove the vast growth after the missionaries departed following 1949.
 - c. For example, at a meeting led by Jonathan Goforth in Nanjing in 1909, an evangelist asked his mother to stand up, and he confessed bad temper toward her, and begged her forgiveness. He then told of how shamefully he had treated his wife... He went on, "The love of Christ has not constrained me in my ministry. When I give an address on Sunday, the people praise me and say that I have done well. Even the foreign missionaries sometimes compliment me on... splendid preaching. But it is all on the surface. I have no love for souls in my heart. If they all perished it would make no difference to me... For a long time I have been using the church collections for myself." He promised restitution. "I have a younger brother who is an opium addict and a beggar. It is all due to my harshness. I never tried to win him with love... Now I won't rest until I find him." **By My Spirit**, Jonathan Goforth (chap 12).
 - d. Seeing His holiness obliterates pride. Pride is diametrically opposed to holiness. For example, when someone at work dismisses what I have worked hard on and know to be true, how do I take it? How do I handle insults and jabs from family members? Jesus was mocked and humiliated. I should take similar treatment with His same attitude.
 - e. *Jonathan Edwards*: "A truly humble man is sensible of his natural distance from God; of his dependence on Him; of the insufficiency of his own power and wisdom..."
5. John Wesley began spiritual accountability groups at Oxford over 200 yrs ago. People mocked it, calling it "The Holy Club." In small groups they used discussion questions which provoke thought:
 - a. Am I creating the impression that I am better than I really am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?
 - b. Do I confidentially pass on to others what has been said to me in confidence?
 - c. Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying? (*Ask your teenage kids!*)
 - d. Am I enjoying prayer?
 - e. When did I last speak to someone else of my faith?

- f. How do I spend my spare time?
 - g. Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold resentment toward or disregard? What am I doing about it?
- B. By the resurrection, **God is with us**, and the Holy Spirit is in our hearts. (Reminder of Nick's Xmas message...) Matthew's Gospel is framed by Jesus being God who is with us:
1. Immanuel means "God with us;" Yeshua, Jesus' Hebrew name, means "God saves!"
 2. And the Great Commission: He is with us so that we can be His witnesses. He is with us to save the world from its sins.
 3. Because God is with us, we are able to do His will. *John Wesley*: "Give me one hundred preachers who **fear nothing but sin**, and **desire nothing but God**, and I care not a straw whether they be clergymen or laymen; such alone will shake the gates of hell and set up the kingdom of heaven on Earth."
 4. In the 1930's in China, Jonathan Goforth had disciples leaders, who in turn had established a community of believers in a bad neighborhood. One day, bandits arrived at one home, and all the family except two girls aged 12 and 14 had escaped. The younger hid in an inner room, but the elder stood in the center of the main room, quietly praying as the bandits rushed in. While many of them began looting, the leader seized the girl by the throat, threatening to choke her if she did not tell where her father had hidden. "I don't know," she responded. Then he tightened his grip so that she was nearly choked, exclaiming, "You lie!" She replied, "I am a Christian," and then with a sudden inspiration, she blurted, "I think you would like me to sing." At this the men stopped looting and shouted for her to sing to them. Calmly she sang a verse of "Jesus Loves Me." They were all so delighted that they called for more. "My cousin sings better than I do. I'll call her." When the hidden child appeared, the two sang together the second verse of "Jesus Loves Me." Then the bandit leader called the others to stop looting and to return everything that had been removed. They left. Jonathan's wife Rosalind, upon hearing the story, asked, "Did you not feel greatly terrified when the bandits were all about you?" "Oh no!" she replied, "**I knew the Lord was with me.**" *Jonathan Goforth*, by Rosalind Goforth, p.144 (Bethany House, 1986).
 5. More from *Wesley*. Listen for our core values of **faith**, **community**, and **mission**: "I continue to dream and pray about a **revival of holiness** in our day that moves forth in **mission** and creates authentic **community** in which **each person** can be unleashed through the empowerment of the Spirit to fulfill God's creational intentions" (from *How to Pray: the Best of John Wesley on Prayer*).
- C. You do not need to leave the Tabernacle to go take care of the people.
1. Like Joshua, you have God's presence continually. He goes with us into the world.
 2. You do not leave the Tent. You are the tent.
 3. You bear the presence of God.
 4. The world does not defile you. You bring His holiness into a broken and vile world.
 5. Be who He has made you to be. Will you surrender yourself to a life of holiness?

Further resource: John Wesley's Self-Examination Quiz

Here is one set of questions similar to what John Wesley gave to members of his groups more than 200 years ago. The questions have their origin in the spiritual accountability group started by Wesley when he was a student at Oxford — a group that people disparagingly called "The Holy Club."

1. *Am I creating the impression that I am better than I really am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?*
2. *Do I confidentially pass on to others what has been said to me in confidence?*
3. *Can I be trusted?*
4. *Am I a slave to dress, friends, work or habits?*
5. *Am I self-conscious, self-pitying, or self-justifying?*
6. *Did the Bible live in me today?*
7. *Do I give the Bible time to speak to me every day?*
8. *Am I enjoying prayer?*
9. *When did I last speak to someone else of my faith?*
10. *Do I pray about the money I spend?*
11. *Do I get to bed on time and get up on time?*
12. *Do I disobey God in anything?*
13. *Do I insist upon doing something about which my conscience is uneasy?*
14. *Am I defeated in any part of my life?*
15. *Am I jealous, impure, critical, irritable, touchy or distrustful?*
16. *How do I spend my spare time?*
17. *Am I proud?*
18. *Do I thank God that I am not as other people, especially as the Pharisees who despised the tax collector?*
19. *Is there anyone whom I fear, dislike, disown, criticize, hold resentment toward or disregard? What am I doing about it?*
20. *Do I grumble or complain constantly?*
21. *Is Christ real to me?*