

We're going to take the next few Sunday evenings to talk about worship and the church.

Hebrews 12 tells us that we have come
not to the earthly Mount Sinai,
but to the heavenly Mount Zion –
not to a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken,
but to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

Hebrews 12:19 says that Israel came to a voice whose words were terrifying.
Hebrews 12:24 says that we come to the blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.

When was the last time you heard blood speaking?

If you go back through the book of Hebrews,
you will realize very quickly that the author of Hebrews is not hostile to the OT.
Hebrews is the best book of the Bible to learn how to read the OT,
because the whole book is all about how the OT points us to Christ.

If you think in terms of architecture,
the OT sets forth the blueprint;
the NT reveals the building.

Or in terms of sewing,
the OT gives you the pattern;
the NT gives you the garment.

As Hebrews 8:5 says regarding the priests:
*They serve a copy and shadow of the heavenly things.
For when Moses was about to erect the tent, he was instructed by God, saying,
See that you make everything according to the pattern
that was shown you on the mountain.*

God gave Moses a pattern.
We heard that in Exodus 25:9.
When Moses was on the mountain,
God showed him a pattern for the tabernacle.
What Hebrews is saying,
is that the pattern was modeled after Christ.

The earthly tabernacle was a copy and shadow of the heavenly pattern.
What Moses saw on the mountain was a reflection of Christ.

So it is useful for us to examine OT worship
and see how it shows us Christ.

1. Israel at Sinai: the First Worship Service

Israel's worship at Mount Sinai is the first example of corporate worship in the Bible.

We hear of various sacrifices being offered in the book of Genesis,
but never before have we seen the whole people of God
gathered for worship together.

Part of the reason for this is throughout Genesis God dealt with the patriarchs
as representative heads of their people.

Think of Abraham,
or Jacob at Bethel,
even Moses and the burning bush.

In each of those instances the covenant mediator speaks with God one-on-one.

But now, God has done something new.

God has chosen a whole nation to be the covenant mediator.

God said to Moses:

Israel is my son, my firstborn.
And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

Israel is to be the mediator of the covenant blessings and curses to all nations.

Those who bless Israel shall be blessed.

Those who curse Israel shall be cursed.

And so like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,

Israel, as the son of God, may now enter the very presence of God.

But there is still a problem.

Israel is a sinful people.

The son of God is a rebellious son.

And so we heard last week of the warnings given:

19:10-13

The people must sanctify themselves in order to come even "afar off" from God.

God warns that if anyone comes up on the mountain he shall be put to death.

And yet, in ch 24, the 70 elders of Israel come part way up the mountain,
and see the God of Israel!

How can this be?

God says "don't do it!" in chapter 19,

but then says "come on up" in chapter 24.

Why?

To understand this we need to look at the nature of covenant worship.

We have seen that covenant is the relationship of father and son.
God has chosen Israel to be his son,
 or perhaps better, God has delivered his son from bondage,
 and through an act of new creation
 has constituted Israel as his son and heir.

The relationship between father and son is expressed in the language of covenant.
And the response of the son to the father,
 is expressed in terms of worship.

What does this worship look like?

Exodus 19-24 provides the first detailed example of Israel's worship,
 because it is the first corporate worship service in the history of the church.
All Israelite worship services will look back to Sinai as they renew the covenant
 which God made with their fathers.

Notice how Exodus 19-24 describes this:

First comes the warning not to come up to Mt Sinai (19:16-25)

 Only Moses is called to come up, and then he is sent down to warn the people again

God speaks a second time in the proclamation of the Law (20:1-17)

 The people respond with fear and trembling (20:18-19)

 Moses replies with the assurance of God's mercy (20:20-21).

 "God has come to test you, and that His fear may be before you,
 So that you may not sin."

 The glory of the Lord—and the thunders of the law
 are designed to remind his people of his holiness.

 When we remember who God is

 —then we are reminded more clearly of who we are,
 and how we are to live as his people.

Then God speaks a third time (20:22-23:33)

 —what could be called an exposition of the Ten Commandments.
 concluding with the promise of the Land (ch 23).

 Then Moses is sent down to report all these words,

 and the people respond "All the words which the Lord has said we will do" (24:3)

Obviously this is an unrepeatable event.

 God is establishing his covenant with Israel.

 But notice the pattern:

 God calls his people to worship (though only one can enter his presence)

 The law of God provokes fear and trembling, requiring an assurance of mercy.

 The Word of God is proclaimed,

 and the people respond with a profession of faith and obedience.

But then notice what happens the next day.

 The establishment of the covenant at Sinai did not involve the people very much.

It is the following day that the covenant is ratified.
And this covenant ratification ceremony is what
becomes the pattern for Israel's worship.

2. The Book of the Covenant and the Blood of the Covenant

Ex 24:4-11

What is the difference between Exodus 19-23 and Exodus 24?

The content is precisely the same.

Moses reads the Book of the Covenant (Ex 20-23)

The people profess their faith and obedience once more.

The difference is found in the blood of the Covenant.

Moses builds a stone altar (according to Ex 20) with 12 stone pillars (to represent the tribes).

Then he sent the young men (note that the priesthood is not yet established)

to offer burnt offerings and peace offerings.

(Burnt offerings were to remove sin;

peace offerings were to communicate the resulting fellowship between God and man)

Moses then takes the blood from the sacrifices,

and sprinkles half on the altar—the other half he reserves in basins.

Then after he reads the Book of the Covenant,

the people declare “All that the Lord has said we will do, and be obedient”

Then he sprinkles the blood on the people,

saying “Behold, the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you
according to all these words” (24:8)

Some people have suggested that the Mosaic Covenant

is a republication of the covenant of works.

And there is much in Ex 19-23 that would make it sound like it.

“If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant,

then you will be a special treasure to me above all people” (19:5)

This sounds very much like God's command to Adam of perfect, perpetual obedience.

Then again, it also sounds very much like God's call to Abraham:

“I am Almighty God; walk before Me and be blameless.

And I will make my covenant between me and you,

and I will multiply you exceedingly” (Gen 17:1-2)

The reason why all these commands are present is because God does in fact require obedience of his people.

But we also need to see that grace is embedded

within the very structure of the Mosaic Covenant.

If we see the call to obedience apart from the grace of redemption,

then we will forget the whole point of the Mosaic Covenant.

The Mosaic Covenant could be summarized simply in the Ten Commandments,
but its exposition in the Book of the Covenant (chapters 20-23)
is essential for understanding its context.

The very first item that God declares after the Ten Commandments is the law of the altar.
Israel is going to fail.
Israel will sin.

And therefore, right up front, at the very beginning of the Book of the Covenant,
God provides the way of dealing with sin—through the sacrifice.

The rest of 21-23 is mostly focused on life in community:
setting forth the basic principles of justice that Israel must follow.

God expects Israel to follow his law perfectly.

This doesn't mean that he expects Israel to be sinless.

Rather, he expects Israel to repent when he sins!

The law of the altar makes it clear that sinless perfection
is not an expectation of the Mosaic Covenant.

Indeed, according to Hebrews, this is one of the problems of the Mosaic Covenant!

The priests themselves have to offer sacrifices for their own sins!

How is this ever going to accomplish the salvation of God's people?

No, the Mosaic Covenant is not a republication of the covenant of works.

It did not set forth the expectation of sinless perfection.

Rather, the Mosaic Covenant sets forth the pattern of the New Covenant.

The reading of the Book of the Covenant calls forth the blood of the covenant.

The book of the covenant cannot be divorced from the blood of the covenant.

The book of the covenant is central.

This is where we hear the content of the covenant.

Without the proclamation of the word of God,
we have no clear idea what we are to believe concerning God,
or what duty He requires of us.

Indeed, the blood of the covenant is meaningless
apart from its connection to the book of the covenant.

If Moses had neglected the reading of the Book of the Covenant,
and merely sprinkled the people with blood,
what would it have meant?

It would have meant that they smelled REALLY BAD!!!

[and indeed the "worship" of the golden calf involved the blood
of the covenant without—and indeed against—the book of the covenant]

Hear Moses when he says:

"Behold the blood of the covenant which the Lord has made with you
according to all these words."

The blood of the covenant has meaning

only through its connection with the Book of the Covenant.

This is why we say that the Lord's Supper only has meaning
through its connection with the Word.

But the book of the covenant, by itself, only condemns.

The Word of God, apart from the sacrifice, can speak only judgment.

All the words in the world will do nothing to save the people of God,

So long as they remain only words.

The Word of God—apart from the sacrifice—condemns us.

The reason why the Word of God is powerful to save us is because

God's words are not empty speech.

When God speaks, things happen!

Recall Paul's reminder to the Corinthians,

“And my speech and my preaching were
not with persuasive words of human wisdom,
but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power.” (1 Cor 2:4)

Therefore our worship IS centered on the Word,

because in Jesus Christ, the Word has become flesh.

He has given his own blood as the blood of the covenant.

In Christ, the book of the covenant and the blood of the covenant

have come together in one person.

So now we are ready to behold the strange sight

of the 70 elders of Israel gathered together with Moses, Aaron, Nadab and Abihu,

eating and drinking in the presence of God.

What are they doing here?

God had commanded that no one was to come up the mountain.

But now he allows these 70 to come with Moses.

Why?

Because of the blood of the covenant.

The proclamation of the covenant is not enough.

The enactment of the covenant, through the death of the sacrifice,

MUST happen before Israel may come up the mountain.

And of course, here it only happens in a representative way.

Only 70 Israelite elders are allowed to see God.

And these 70 “worship from afar”.

Only Moses and Joshua are allowed to approach God himself.

But through these representatives, Israel comes into the presence of God,

because God has looked upon the blood of the covenant,

and his justice is now satisfied.

Now there is peace between God and man,

and so the elders partake of the covenant meal on the side of Mt Sinai.

Notice what they see:

“They saw the God of Israel.
And there was under His feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone,
and it was like the very substance of the heavens in its clarity.” (V10)
They are looking up, and they see a clear blue pavement above them.
And they see God’s feet standing on that pavement.
The pavement is said to be “like the very substance of the heavens in its clarity”.
In other words,
it looks like a piece of the sky has come down from the heavens,
and God has ridden it down to Mt Sinai.

God wants Israel to understand that heaven is his throne, and earth is his footstool.
When they look up to the peak of that blue dome above them,
he wants them to remember that he dwells enthroned in the heavens.
In other words, he is sovereign over the whole of creation (19:5).
But at the same time, he is a God who draws near to his people.
He is a God who rules over all,
And he is a God who comes near to His people.

The sovereign God of the universe desires to be near to YOU.
He *wants* to have fellowship with you.
You are not some tiresome pest that God begrudgingly saves.
NO!

You are a special treasure to him.
Because, in Christ, you are his child.

This is why Exodus 19-23 is incomplete without Exodus 24.
The proclamation of the Covenant is incomplete without the blood of the covenant.
And the blood of the covenant allows us to draw near to God,
and to partake of the covenant meal before him.

Conclusion: The Pattern of Worship

It is interesting to note that every biblical worship service is consistent with this pattern.
Throughout the OT, you see a consistent movement,
starting with the slaughter of the burnt offerings and peace offerings,
followed by the proclamation of the Word (the meaning of the sacrifice),
and the response of the people,
concluding with the covenant meal.
NT worship has the same focus.
Christ is our once-for-all sacrifice,
but you see the same twin focus on word and sacrament in the NT.
The Book of Revelation even sees the history of redemption in liturgical terms.
It starts with the sacrifice of Jesus (chs 4-5),
moves to the proclamation of the Word (the various sevens),
each concluded with the response of the saints,
and concluding with the wedding supper of the Lamb.

This is why Christian worship has always followed the same pattern as that of Exodus 24.

We come into the presence of God on the basis of the sacrifice.

Without the sin offering, the Word of God can only bring judgment.

But then, having received the forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ,
we may hear the Word of God—the Book of the Covenant—read and preached.

And in response to that Word, we profess our faith and obedience,
asking in our prayers that God will continue to be faithful to His Word,
and declaring in our confession of faith that we believe his promises.

And finally we come to the covenant meal—the Lord's Supper,
where we partake of the same blood of the covenant that has washed us.

We eat and drink before God.

We do this because in our worship we are reminded of our true identity—
our true place in redemptive history.

Redemptive history moves from the sacrifice (Jesus)

to the Word (the apostolic preaching)

to our response (faith and obedience—the spread of the church)

to the covenant meal (wedding supper of the Lamb).

And our worship every Sunday participates in this.