



A Call to Intimacy

by Pastor Steve

A couple of years ago I learned that I was being laid off from my job at the end of the month. I had been working at this particular job for five years and it came as somewhat of a shock that I was being let go. In the days following the announcement I experienced a broad range of emotions. One day I would be excited about the possibilities, the next day I would experience anxiety attacks. Some days I could pray in faith believing in God for miracles but other days I couldn't pray at all. Finally, near the end of my employment, my emotions began to stabilize and I could hear God's voice and direction more clearly.

God led me to the story of the children of Israel when they were encamped at the Red Sea. Israel found themselves literally between a rock and a hard place. That's where I was or at least perceived that I was. I quickly learned that my emotions and attitudes resembled that of Israel as they murmured and complained to Moses about their situation. Despite the condition of my heart God told me the same thing Moses told Israel, "Do not be afraid. Stand still and see the salvation of the Lord..."

God brought Israel out of the bondage of Egypt, delivered them from the armies of Egypt at the Red Sea and later took his people into the Promised Land. However before he brought them to the borders of Canaan he led them to Sinai.

And Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain, saying, Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the children of Israel: You 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, then you shall be a special treasure to me above all people; for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel.

Exodus 19:3-6

The Lord went on to instruct Moses to have Israel wash their clothes because on the third day he would descend on Mount Sinai in the sight of all the people. Moses obeyed all the words of the Lord and on the third day led Israel out of the camp to meet with God.

Many of us have in our memory bank the movie "The Ten Commandments" starring Charlton Heston. In the movie when God gave Moses the commandments a huge fireball burned the words on a large stone while this booming voice sited the commandment that was being written. However, the first time the commandments were recited was in the hearing of all the children of Israel. All of Israel had the opportunity for God to speak to them personally and witness his glory. Moses recalls the scene forty years later.

These words the Lord spoke to all your assembly, in the mountain from the midst of the fire, the cloud, and the thick darkness, with a loud voice; and He added no more. And He wrote them on two tablets of stone and gave them to me.

Deuteronomy 5:22

As the children of Israel drew near the mountain and heard the voice and saw the glory of God they became afraid. The bible says, "they stood afar off." Moses encouraged them not to be afraid and said that God was testing them so that they would fear him and not sin. Israel's response to Moses was, "You go hear what God has to say and come tell us; all that the Lord says we will do. But don't let God talk to us or we will die."

How that must have broken the heart of God. His greatest desire for Israel was not to take them into Canaan. It was to bring Israel to himself. His desire was for them to be a special treasure to him and a kingdom of priest, a holy nation. He no longer wanted a mediator to stand between him and his people. He wanted to speak with all of Israel face to face.

God was calling Israel to intimacy, but there was a condition to that intimacy. The condition was holiness. Israel didn't pass God's test because they were not willing to obey his voice and keep his commandments. The light of God's glory exposed the true condition of their hearts, and they shrank back instead of pursuing God. We know this because a short time later they disregarded God's commandment and made a golden calf to take his place.

Has God not dealt with us in much the same manner as he did Israel? He has brought us out of spiritual bondage and delivered us from an enemy too strong for us. Now his deep desire is to bring us to himself. He wants us to be his special treasure, a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The Apostle Peter said it this way,

But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, his own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light...

1 Peter 2:9

God's desire is for us to be intimate with him, but there is a condition to intimacy. That condition is holiness. The real praises of God come from a kingdom of people who are pursuing holiness. Psalm 96:9 instructs us to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. You see, we come to God on his terms. King David wrote, *Who may ascend into the hill of the Lord? Or who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not lifted up his soul to an idol, nor sworn deceitfully.* (Psalm 24:3-4) The writer of Hebrews concurs by writing, *Pursue peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord...* (Hebrews 12:14)

The closer we get to God the more the light of his glory exposes our darkness. The question is, "Will we go to the mountain or will we stand afar off?" Do we want to pursue holiness and be intimate with God or do we love our sin more? Do we really want to see his glory or do we want to wander in the wilderness?

The wilderness is a good place to be, at least initially. In the wilderness God calls us to himself. It is our response to God's call that determines how long we stay in the wilderness. The group of people who shrank back at Sinai was not the same group that inherited Canaan. The group that shrank back refused to go into Canaan because of the bad report of ten spies. However, the reason they spent the next forty years in the wilderness was not because of their refusal to enter Canaan. It was their refusal to pursue intimacy with God. Instead of pursuing God they all died in the wilderness except for Joshua and Caleb.

After losing my job our family experienced miracle after miracle. As great as the miracles were I learned that God brought us to the wilderness to bring us to himself.

The bible says that God had Moses set a boundary so the people couldn't touch or come up the mountain. God knew their hearts. Yet, I am convinced that if the children of Israel had possessed a heart that wanted to pursue God, all of them could have gone up the mountain. I don't know about you, but I don't want to spend year after year going around the mountain; I want to go up.