

Preparation for Worship — A Model For Preparing to Meet God

A Brief Examination of Exodus 19:16-17

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Throughout redemptive history, we find in the Word of God that the people of God prepared themselves to meet God. Approaching God was not flippant. One could not simply enter the very presence of the Omnipotent Creator and then worship in any form, fashion, or way he desired. God prescribed not only *that* worship should be done but *how* it should be done — and the Scriptures reveal that this solemn time of “meeting with God” required preparation.

The modern church today could learn from the example found in Exodus 19 when the people of Israel receive the Law from Yahweh [God] Himself. Below is the text of Exodus 19 and I want to then provide a number of practical thoughts about how we can prepare for worship and rightly prepare to “meet God.”

Exodus 19:16-17:

So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. And Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they stood at the foot of the mountain.

Here are three ways that we can prepare to meet God:

1. Anticipate the Very Presence of God

The text reveals that on the third day when the Israelites came out Egypt and into the wilderness of Sinai, when it was morning, that God revealed Himself as He said He would earlier in the chapter (Ex 19:11). The presence of God is described in some very illustrative imagery: וַיְהִי קֹלֶת וּבְרָקִים וַעֲנַן [There were thunder and lightning flashes, a thick cloud over the mountain and a sound of an exceedingly loud trumpet.]. These are biblical descriptions of a theophany — that is, an appearing of, or manifestation of, God (cf. Ps 29). The Israelites knew that God was meeting with them and they knew that they would meet God (Ex 19:17b).

In the same way, we as the people of God today can, and should, anticipate the very presence of Almighty God when we approach God. We should readily prepare to meet with God. We should anticipate the fullness of God to be present in our midst as we as the Church approach Him in worship. If we had *this* kind of perspective of meeting with God, and if we had this kind of realization of *who* this God really is, we might deliberately choose to prepare more properly for our “meetings with God” in the corporate assemblies.

2. Tremble Before the Holiness of God

When God reveals Himself, the people trembled. Meeting with Almighty God created consternation and an awe-inspired trembling. The text reads that וַיִּחַרְדוּ כָּל־הָעָם אֲשֶׁר בְּמַחֲנֵה [And all the people in the camp trembled.]. Everyone trembled. Everyone was filled with awe. One ancient translation speaks of all the people being “startled” or “terrified” (LXX: ἐπτοίθη). When God came down, the people fell

down. When God revealed Himself, the people trembled before Him! And this is not an *individualistic* response. It's not merely the response of the leaders alone. It's not the super spiritual ones who fall prostrate in reverence. All who were in the camp trembled.

This does not seem to characterize the average church gathering in our era. Do all the people tremble before God? I do not believe that the Israelites trembled before God out of sheer terror that God would strike them dead with the very lightning flashes with which He revealed Himself. No! God just said that He “bore them on eagles’ wings, and how God brought them to Himself” (Ex 19:4). The people see God for Who He *really* is, and they respond rightly to the sovereign, supreme, sacred and, can we say, scary presence of God. God is so utterly holy, pure, powerful, and divine that all His people should rightly tremble before the holiness of God.

We would do well to remember just *Who* it is that we worship. We do not worship just another god. We don't come to the weekly social club. We must not assemble to punch the card and hope that this god will be pleased with our weekly effort or deed of 'going to church.' Far from it! We must worship God with trembling and with awe because of *Who* He really is. As we prepare for worship, we may rightly remember the eternal truth from Psalm 2:11: “Worship the LORD with reverence And rejoice with trembling.” We will worship God more appropriately when we tremble before Him reverentially.

3. Approach God Through the Intercessor that He Provides

God determined that Moses would intercede for the Israelites in worship. God told Moses to bring the people to God. And, in a way, God would bring God to the people. The text reads that: **וַיֵּצֵא מֹשֶׁה אֶת-הָעָם לִקְרַאת הָאֱלֹהִים** [And Moses brought the people out to meet God.]. This statement reveals something amazingly profound (and sadly forgotten by many today): God cannot be approached on our own terms by any way that we wish. Note that Moses had to bring the people (that is, the entire congregation) to meet with God. To state it negatively, Israel could *not* meet with God on its own terms. The nation needed a mediator. And God chose Moses to be the mediator so that they may “meet God” (לִקְרַאת הָאֱלֹהִים).

How we must remember that as the people of God our only hope for meeting with God is to come *through* God's appointed mediator, namely, Jesus Christ. He alone is our mediator. There is one God and *one mediator* between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:4). He brings us to God and we can draw near to God through the better hope which is found in Christ Jesus (Heb 7:19). Those who draw near to God *through Christ* are saved forever (Heb 7:25). We as the church are commanded to “draw near to God and He will draw near to us” (James 4:8).

Let us prepare for corporate worship by always preparing to meet with God *only because of* the gospel of Jesus Christ. He is the way to God. Let us prepare to meet with God as we permeate our minds with the gospel of grace. Approaching God requires the intercession of Christ. We do well to remember this and prepare our hearts rightly by treasuring, thanking, obeying, and consecrating ourselves to the Lord Jesus Christ, our Mediator.