

God's Word changes posture and praise

Pastor Chris Baker //03.26.23 // Centralia FBC

Good morning, church! Kindergarten through third graders, we're excited that you'll be staying with us for the sermon this morning. In today's bulletin there was a special note sheet just for you. It has a spot where you can take notes and a really important section down at the bottom where it asks you to write down something that you didn't understand and something that you learned. On your way home today, show that part to your parents or whoever you came here with so you can talk about what God is teaching you and get help understanding things that aren't clear the first time, ok?

We're going to be reading from Exodus 20 in just a minute. It'll be on page 64 of the black bibles in the pew rack in front of you. We spent the last two weeks studying the 10 Commandments. And now we get to see how Israel responds.

Read

Pray

This passage shows us how Israel responds when God speaks. The Bible teaches that God's words are the most powerful force in the universe, do you remember that? Genesis 1. God spoke and creation blossomed into existence. God spoke and planets lined up in their orbits. God spoke and the ocean filled. God spoke and the sun began to burn. God's Words are the most powerful force in the universe.

In Exodus 20, God spoke. And the people felt just a sliver of the power of those words. We know that because their immediate response is to run away in terror. They had approached the mountain with Moses, God revealed Himself in thunder and lightning, then He spoke the 10 Commandments. . .and the people ran away terrified.

That might be a surprising response to you. But when we see God's instruction in these verses, it establishes a pattern for us that should help you and I to understand what we do when God speaks.

God doesn't speak to us today through thunder and lightning, at least not typically. The normal pattern is that God speaks through His written Word to the church today. And here's the truth modeled for us in these verses.

Hearing God's Word changes your posture and your praise.

That was true of Israel on Mt. Sinai. When we are exposed to God's Word, it should change both our posture—our orientation toward God, and our praise—the way we worship Him.

Posture toward God

Let's think about posture first. Our posture is how we stand—and I mean it both physically and in our attitude. Israel's physical posture certainly changed when they realized they were in God's presence.

We now call this a fight-or-flight response. It's illustrated well in the greatest cartoon of all-time. I'm glad to have our kids in here today for this. When I count to three, turn to the person sitting next to you and tell them your favorite cartoon. 1-2-3

I heard a lot of answers. There's only one right answer. Kids, unfortunately the farther we get from the Garden of Eden the worse cartoons are getting. They were better when I was a kid than they are now. I know Anime is a big thing now. Those are cartoons made by people who can't draw good.

But the greatest cartoon ever produced was titled, *Scooby Doo, Where Are You?* The title character is a Great Dane and later on in the series you meet his nephew, Scrappy Doo. When trouble pops up, as it does often, they have very different responses. Scooby is as big as a grown man and when he gets scared you can hear his teeth chattering and he runs away. Scrappy is the size of a Baptist Hymnal. And when there's danger he meets it head on. Let me at 'em, I'll splat 'em.

Scrappy is fight, Scooby is flight.

When faced with danger, you either respond by standing up to fight or by running away in fright. Israel was certainly in no position to fight after seeing God's power. So they fled. They trembled and stood at a distance according to verse 18.

Feeling the magnitude of God's presence changed their posture. It changed their physical stance and their heart attitude. They ran and they were terrified. Church, let us never forget that being in the presence of God should be a terrifying thing for sinners.

God is intimate, yes. We long for intimacy with God. He's a good and kind and loving Father. He tells us to come to him as Father with a childlike faith, and so we should. Viewing God as only big and distant could require a course correction, but I just don't think that's where most people in our day are. We don't have too formal or too reverential a view of God. For the most part, we don't take God seriously enough. Israel will demonstrate that they don't in the ensuing chapters.

But in this moment the Israelites truly got the holiness and glory and power of God. They responded accordingly. Church, you don't come into God's presence and hear God's Word without being changed.

There's never a net neutral effect when you hear God's Word. You either embrace the truth of it or you reject it. There's a sense in which we recreate this Exodus 20 moment every week. God's people are called by God's word to gather in God's place and hear God's Word proclaimed. That's what we do every single Sunday morning.

Now, it's important to realize that there's a sense in which God is no more present in this room than He is in your house or your car or your office. That's very true. This room isn't special, this altar doesn't carry some additionally mysterious presence of God.

But, the pattern of God's people gathering around His Word as it is proclaimed is established by Scripture, we believe it's commanded by Scripture, and as it is faithfully preached it should have the effect of changing our posture.

It should change how we think and what we do. Remember, the 10 Commandments dealt with our thoughts, words, and actions. What God does in these verses is begin to apply the 10 Commandments.

So we see in verses 18-19 that God's Word changes their physical posture and it also changes their heart posture. The attitude of their heart. Look at verse 19:

19 "You speak to us, and we will listen," they said to Moses, "but don't let God speak to us, or we will die."

They recognize at the heart level that they are unworthy to stand before God. Thunder and lightning and fire? Get us away from that. The mountain covered in smoke? We don't want that smoke.

Moses, you stand in our place. We're not worthy to stand before God. They ask for a mediator. Moses had been doing just that throughout their whole experience with him so far, remember? God spoke to Moses and Moses spoke to the people. He spoke to Pharaoh, he spoke to Egypt, and he spoke to Israel.

But, Israel wasn't happy with that. Remember back in chapter 16? We dealt with that earlier this year.

Exodus 16:3 *The Israelites said to them, "If only we had died by the Lord's hand in the land of Egypt, when we sat by pots of meat and ate all the bread we wanted. Instead, you brought us into this wilderness to make this whole assembly die of hunger!"*

God, you sure aren't taking care of us. We had it better in slavery. You've put this guy in charge and he's lost and he's going to get us killed. That was the posture of Israel's heart in chapter 16. Now? Now they've been exposed to just a little bit of God's own glory. They've heard His Word and His Word revealed they were unworthy to stand in His presence so they come begging Moses to mediate for them.

Not just that, but they promise to listen this time. Do you see that? Moses, you speak and we will listen.

What Israel is essentially saying here is that we know we're not worthy to stand before you, God, but we want to be obedient, so let Moses lead us and we will follow.

They see God's holiness, they know their sin, so they need a mediator. If you can ever come into the presence of God and think you're just fine on your own, then you've got a very messed up perspective on God or on yourself. Probably both.

Our culture is obsessed with affirmation. There was a book written all the way back in 1967 titled *I'm Ok-You're OK*. You're probably not into 56-year-old psychology books, so let me give you a summary. I think it hits the nail on the head for our culture today. The author says we're all born with a default position of 'not ok.' And the secret to happiness is to realize we have the power to change our 'not ok' status into 'I'm ok.' The key to happiness is realizing that you're okay and the people around you are okay, too, and the key is to accept yourself and accept everyone else around you as okay.

When Israel is exposed to the presence of God, they're not okay. And neither are we. We need someone to stand in God's presence for us. That's what Moses does here. Look at verse 20:

20 Moses responded to the people, "Don't be afraid, for God has come to test you, so that you will fear him and will not sin."

Now hang on a minute. What in the world, Moses? Don't be afraid, God has come so that you will fear? Moses means two different kinds of fear, church. Hear this: There is a world of difference between being frightened of God, and fearing God.

God has shown Himself and He has spoken. He has drawn them near to Himself so that they can have the right perspective of Him. The first kind of fear is dread. It's terror. Are you afraid of heights? I'm with you. That's a great fear. It's a terror and the only solution is to get back onto the ground. That's not the fear God wants to invoke—but if we're not in right relationship with Him it's the fear we need.

God doesn't want those who belong to him to be terrified of Him, He wants them to be in a reverence that leads to obedience.

God's displays of His power reveals to Israel that they should be judged. They're sinful. The 10 Commandments, as we discussed the last two weeks, show us that we come up short. But, at the same time this awesome and mighty God is a merciful God and He has provided a mediator. That mediator rescued them from Egypt and now stands between them and this good God.

I keep using that word mediator, and I just want to make 100-percent sure we're all on the same page about what it means.

A mediator attempts to resolve a dispute between two parties.

1 Timothy 2:5 says ***For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus***

God's dispute with us is our sin. We've all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God, according to Romans. We've broken God's Law and earned God's wrath.

Nothing we could do on our own would be sufficient to mediate between ourselves and God. No amount of good works or law-keeping makes us righteous enough to stand before a holy God.

Without a mediator, we are destined to spend eternity in hell, for by ourselves salvation from our sin is impossible. Jesus represents those who have placed their trust in Him before God's throne of grace. He mediates for us, much as a defense attorney mediates for his client, telling the judge, "Your honor, my client is innocent of all charges against him." That is true for us also. Some day we will face God, but we will do so as totally forgiven sinners because of Jesus' death on our behalf. The "Defense Attorney" took the penalty for us!

(gotquestions.org/Jesus-mediator.html)

2 Corinthians 5:21 ***He made the one who did not know sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.***

If hearing God's Word has convicted you that you need a mediator to stand between you and God, then today is the day you should repent of your sin and ask Jesus Christ to save you. If you're here and you have repented, you do belong to Jesus, then I hope seeing God reveal Himself this way to Israel reminds you of the reverential awe you need for Him.

Our posture toward God sometimes needs to be pulled back into check.

C.S. Lewis captures this beautifully in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* in that famous scene where Lucy and Susan are talking with Mr. and Mrs. Beaver about Aslan, the lion. It goes like this: "Is—is he a man?" asked Lucy. "Aslan a man!" said Mr. Beaver sternly. "Certainly not. I tell you he is the King of the

wood and the son of the great Emperor-beyond-the-Sea. Don't you know who is the King of Beasts? Aslan is a lion—the Lion, the great Lion." "Ooh!" said Susan, "I'd thought he was a man. Is he—quite safe? I shall feel rather nervous about meeting a lion." "That you will, dearie, and no mistake," said Mrs. Beaver; "if there's anyone who can appear before Aslan without their knees knocking, they're either braver than most or else just silly." "Then he isn't safe?" said Lucy. "Safe?" said Mr. Beaver; "don't you hear what Mrs. Beaver tells you? Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good. He's the King, I tell you." "I'm longing to see him," said Peter, "even if I do feel frightened when it comes to the point."

(Lewis, C.S.. The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe (Chronicles of Narnia Book 2) . HarperCollins. Kindle Edition.)

That's exactly how the fear of God is. He's great! He's the King. There's nothing safe about Him. But He's good. And you cannot help but be drawn near to Him.

Only God can make God safe for sinners and God has done that in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

We go from a posture of entitlement to a posture of reverential awe. A respect and love for and appreciation of God that changes our thoughts, words, and actions.

Then we see how that posture is put to work. What God cements as true in our hearts is lived out in our worship just like it was for Israel. Look at verse 22:

Praise before God

22 Then the Lord told Moses, "This is what you are to say to the Israelites: You have seen that I have spoken to you from heaven. 23 Do not make gods of silver to rival me; do not make gods of gold for yourselves.

24 "Make an earthen altar for me, and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, your flocks and herds. I will come to you and bless you in every place where I cause my name to be remembered. 25 If you make a stone altar for me, do not build it out of cut stones. If you use your chisel on it, you will defile it. 26 Do not go up to my altar on steps, so that your nakedness is not exposed on it.

Here's what God tells Israel—and it's a great way to define what we call praise: Take the Word I have given you and go do it. The first half of Exodus is about God saving His people, the second half is about God teaching His people to worship Him and He does it all for His glory.

God revealed His Will by His Word and He's now telling the Israelites through the mediator Moses to carry it out.

He just gave them the 10 Commandments and He immediately begins applying them. Verse 23 combines the truths of the first two commandments. Back up in verse 3: Do not have other gods besides me. Verse 4 Do not make an idol for yourself.

He puts those verses into practice in verse 23. God's Word drives God's worship, church. Do what God tells you, don't do what He forbids, and don't live like the world around you. Those are the three applications God makes for the first two commandments.

What God does when He's making these applications is actually teaching us a pattern for worship. Worship is more than what we do in this room on Sunday mornings. John Piper explained worship well in a sermon back in 1997. He said:

(W)orship is what we were created for. This is the final end of all existence: the worship of God. God created the universe so that it would display the worth of his glory. And he created us so that we would see this glory and reflect it by knowing and loving it – with all our heart and soul and mind and strength.

(<https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/worship-god--2>)

Seeing His glory and reflecting it. We do that with our whole lives, church. We do it here, during the time we're gathered together and we do that because God's Word has called us to gather as a church. But we don't limit our worship to this time on Sunday mornings. All of life is worship.

God lays down a pattern for living life as worship by teaching three things through Moses here:

Do what God tells you, don't do what He forbids, and don't live like the world around you.

Do what God tells you. Again, He reiterates the first two commands. God has spoken and if we belong to Him, and if our posture toward Him is right, then we cannot ignore His words. What did Jesus say in John 14?

15 "If you love me, you will keep my commands.

The first way to worship God rightly is to know and apply His Word. Church, we have to know God's Word. We cannot lead a life pleasing to God if we don't know how and we're not going to learn it unless we know His Word. This is how He speaks to us today. It's no longer through thunder and lightning and fire. It's through the Bible. If you want Him to speak out loud, then read it out loud, ok? Do what God tells you.

He gave Israel instructions for their formal worship and He expected them to be followed. When we are gathered here, we do our best to carry out what God has told us to do. We sing, we pray, we read God's word, we proclaim God's Word, we baptize, we observe the Lord's Supper, we give back to God, and we don't do much else.

Paul wrote in Colossians 3:

16 Let the word of Christ dwell richly among you, in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another through psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. 17 And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

We try to let that guide our time together as a gathered church, and in a sense everything we do here should be a reflection of what God does in us all the days we aren't here. We should sing, pray, read God's Word, proclaim God's word, celebrate God's work in our lives together, give back to God, all those things we do gathered we should do scattered. That's how all of life is worship. That's how we do what God has told us to and thus carry reflect what He's teaching Israel in this passage.

We do what God has told us to, and we

Don't do what He forbids.

He tells them not to follow in the tradition of the Egyptians and other pagan people around them. The Egyptians were so serious about building temples and altars for the worship of their false gods that some of them are still around today.

God says it's not the altar that is important. It doesn't need to be ornate. It's not the outward form that matters, it's the change that takes place in the heart. It's the obedience of the sacrifice, not the design of the altar that is important. God will give them some very specific instructions for the Ark of the Covenant in a few chapters, but here He's guarding them against trying to do what they have seen other nations do.

God knows they'll be tempted. God knows they'll struggle. So He even gives them specific instructions about *how* avoid this, about how to avoid living like the lost world around them. He sets some boundaries that would be important to them.

The stone altars are to be uncut, he says in verse 25. The pagan religions around Israel would have had these incredible ornate altars. God knows our heart. We see what they have and we want it, right? We look at the world around us, see what they do and how they live and we say, that's not so bad.

The exact thing God is forbidding here happens in Israel's history 2 Kings 16:10

King Ahaz went to Damascus to meet King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria. When he saw the altar that was in Damascus, King Ahaz sent a model of the altar and complete plans for its construction to the priest Uriah.

God, this altar is awesome! Let's make one back home. No. Don't be like the world around you.

Verse 26, many of those same pagan religions prescribed a form of ritual nudity. God says I don't want to see that. God's own word shapes our praise. God is serious about how He is to be worshipped, He gives specific instructions and examples here and He cares just as much about how He is worshipped today.

We've summarized those patterns around here for the past few years this way: we gather together, grow together, and go together. Worship is so much more than the time we spend in this room. The Christian life is described by a series of one-another phrases in the New Testament. That means that you can't do it alone. You need other people. God is to be worshiped in community. A gathering like this is an indispensable part of that. God calls us to gather. But you need to be in community with others outside this room. That means there need to be other people you're reading the Bible with, praying with, asking real heart questions with. The truths of the gospel need to be lived out in your day-to-day life with a smaller group of people. That's grow together.

And we worship by going out together to fulfill the Great Commission wherever we are. Jesus said to go make disciples. The way that's phrase in the original language a better translation would be as you are going. You go somewhere during the week. To work, to class, to the store, wherever you go there are lost people there. There's probably believers there, too, and God didn't deploy both of you there by accident. Everywhere you go, everything thing you do, God has placed you there for His glory. Recognizing that and embracing it is how we live all of life as worship.

Church, hearing God's word changes your position and your posture. It does. Even if you reject it. If you reject it, your heart posture hardens and your praise dries up.

James teases out this truth for us in his letter over in the New Testament. Turn there with me if you will. We'll close with this.

James the brother of Jesus writes this:

James 1:22 But be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. 23 Because if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like someone looking at his own face in a mirror. 24 For he looks at himself, goes away, and immediately forgets what kind of person he was. 25 But the one who looks intently into the perfect law of freedom and perseveres in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer who works— this person will be blessed in what he does.

If we don't apply God's Word, James says we have spiritual amnesia. We forget who we are. God revealed Himself to Israel in a mighty way. He spoke His Word to them. Hearing God's Word changes the posture toward God and your praise before God. It either helps you see Him clearly and understand how to worship Him, or you reject it and it drives you further away. We'll see both in Israel as we study their story.

Church, let God's Word change the posture of your heart and the rhythms of praise in your life today. Let me close by asking you three questions:

What's your posture toward God?

Are you worshipping how He said to?

Are you different from the world around you?

Let's pray and consider these questions as we transition to our time of response.