

## **MOUNTAINTOP FELLOWSHIP**

EXODUS 14:1-2 and 9-11

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Years ago I served as the pastor of a rural congregation in the foothills of North Carolina. They had a wonderful tradition called the "Big Meeting." It was held each year on the first Sunday in November, and on numerous occasions it continued with a revival that would continue throughout the rest of the week. The "Big Meeting" was a special time in the life of the church. It not only meant that people from near and far would be returning, but it was also the kind of event that hopefully anticipated the presence of the Lord. If there were to be decisions for Christ or rededications to the work of His kingdom, it would take place during the "Big Meeting."

And as a part of all of that, there was one special event which took place just after the worship service on Sunday morning. It was called "Dinner on the Grounds." Spread out under maple trees still displaying their beautiful fall foliage, long tables filled with the best fried chicken and ham biscuits that you have ever eaten were lined up one after another. In addition, there were home grown vegetables, all kinds of deserts, and enough iced tea to float a boat. It was a grand occasion that I will always remember and cherish.

However, it could in no way be compared to what took place on Mount Sinai when Moses and the elders of Israel climbed the Mountain of God to meet with the Lord. Let's take a look at what happened as recorded in Exodus 14:1-2 and 9-11. First of all, who was invited? Moses, of course, and his brother Aaron. Then Nadab and Abihu who were two of Aaron's sons and finally 70 elders, leaders among the people of Israel. These people were, so to speak, a representative body for the entire nation. Second, what were they invited to do when they climbed the mountain? They were to fulfill the original purpose for this gathering which was to worship the Lord. This is what the Lord had said to Moses when He spoke to him at the burning bush. But except for Moses, their worship of God was to take place at a distance. Only Moses was allowed to draw near to the Lord.

Finally, what did these leaders of Israel see when they climbed the mountain and what did they do? Well, in terms of sight, they looked up and saw above them a pavement made of sapphire. This pavement was blue in color but it was also translucent. You could see through it and yet it was substantial like a giant blue piece of sapphire stone. And standing on this stone pavement was the Lord God of Israel. They actually saw Him, but probably not His entire countenance, just His feet because they were looking up into the heavens. And this was not a vision. It was something that they saw with their very own physical eyes because that's the meaning of the Hebrew word that is used here for seeing. If it had been a vision, something which could not be seen with the naked eye, another word would have been used.

And what did they do? They sat down and ate and drank in God's presence. Instead of being harmed or overwhelmed by the glory of God, the Lord entered into a time of fellowship with His people. It was an opportunity to solidify the bonds of friendship which had been established during the covenant making ceremony. It was a reflection of what took place all over the ancient Middle East. After a covenant between two parties was made, they celebrated the new agreement by sharing together in a festive meal. For example, when Jacob and Laban came to terms with one another in Genesis 31:44-49, even though they had previously been adversaries, they sealed the

end of potential hostilities with a shared meal. In fact, in our modern day world, I suspect that's what "state dinners" in Washington D.C. are frequently all about.

Regarding the meal itself, we can only guess as to what was served. Was it an extra large portion of manna or another flock of quail? Did God provide it or did the leaders of Israel bring it up the mountain with them? Personally I believe that it was a portion of the fellowship offerings that had been placed on the altar at the covenant making ceremony. The Lord had received His portion in the smoke that rose into the heavens, and the Israelites ate that portion of the sacrifice which had been reserved for them. They and the Lord had shared together in a common meal of which both had partaken. They were now bound to one another in a very real and genuine manner.

Now what does all of this say to us? What are its implications for our lives based upon this passage of Scripture? Once again, just as we did last week, let's turn our attention to the book of Hebrews. The writer addresses this very subject as he speaks to us about our relationship with God in Christ Jesus. Turn in your Bibles to Hebrews 10:19-22. As you will remember, last week we examined a portion of Scripture in chapter nine of this same book and discovered that Christ is our high priest who offered His own blood as a sacrificial offering for our sins. It was the fulfillment of everything that had previously taken place in the sacrificial system of the Jewish people, including the covenant making ceremony that took place at the foot of Mount Sinai.

Continuing in this same line of reasoning, the writer of Hebrews declares in chapter 10 that we now have permission to enter into the presence of God because of what Jesus did for us when He died on the cross. As the writer states in verse 22, "Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water." Because we have prepared ourselves to meet the Lord through baptism and the confession of our sins, we are now ready to enter into God's presence, because Christ has opened the doorway to heaven. And not only that, He has invited us to enter with Him. As you will remember, only the Jewish high priest was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies in the temple in Jerusalem. But when Christ died on the cross, the curtain which separated the Holy of Holies from the rest of the temple was torn in two. His life like that curtain was torn asunder so that by faith we too might enter into God's presence without fear or hesitation.

No longer do we have to be terrified of an awesome God who could annihilate us in a heartbeat. Instead we have entered into a time of fellowship with the Lord in which He welcomes us into His presence. Or as Paul stated in his letter to the Colossians, "And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, yet He (Christ) has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him (God) holy and blameless and beyond reproach" (Colossians 1:21-22). In other words, once we were God's enemies but now we are His friends, bound to Him by an everlasting covenant secured for us through the Lord Jesus Christ.

And not only that, in the future at the end of time, you and I will sit down at the great banquet hall in heaven, where we will be honored guests at the wedding feast of the Lamb. We will join with a countless multitude of God's people shouting, "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give Him glory!" (Revelation 19:6-7). And we will hear these blessed words, "Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!" (Revelation 19:9). It will be like what Moses and elders of Israel experienced on Mount Sinai, but a million times more wonderful.

However, even now we can have a foretaste of that event as we prepare to receive the Lord's Supper on this "World Communion Sunday." Like thousands upon millions of Christians around the world, we will gather together to partake of the bread and the cup of Christ, and perhaps even experience something of a similar nature to what took place just over 200 years ago at the Red River Church in Logan County, Kentucky. Reverend James McCready, a Presbyterian minister, led a revival that included the celebration of the Lord's Supper. In one of his messages, "A Sacramental Meditation" possibly proclaimed during that very revival, he reminded those in attendance of the importance of the Lord's Supper. Here is a brief outline of what he said:

- A sacramental table is a dreadful place; for God is there.
- A sacramental table is a dreadful place, because it is a striking exhibition of the most important transaction ever witnessed by men or angels, the redemption of guilty sinners by the bitter agonies, bloody sufferings and dying groans of the incarnate God.
- A sacramental table is a dreadful place; for the Holy One of Israel confers and sups with pardoned rebels.
- A sacramental table is a dreadful place; for here heaven is brought down to earth.

The results of that revival and the ones that followed cannot be overstated. Thousands upon thousands of people were saved. Families traveled long distances in wagons to attend outdoor meetings which on at least one occasion numbered over 20,000 people. The American frontier was transformed from a place of lawlessness and crime to a place of churches, schools, and family homesteads. It was the beginning of a spiritual movement known as the Second Great Awakening, and one of the most important aspects of this revival was the celebration of the Lord's Supper. So, it is my prayer this morning that what took place on Mount Sinai in the days of Moses and what took place on the frontier of America in 1800, will once again come to pass in the hearts and lives of God's people in our day and time, all across this land, beginning even now, right here in Bedford Presbyterian Church.