

# Friendship First

## Setting the Table for a God Visit

Exodus 19

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As we begin I would like to engage your imagination. I want you to imagine this morning that the queen of England is coming to Colorado. And that the queen in an attempt to try to really get a feel for American life has decided to have dinner with the typical American family, and you get the call. The queen is coming to your house. Now you wouldn't think of having the queen of England in your home without cleaning it from top to bottom without getting the kids bathed and prepared, probably buy new clothes getting your husband a suit instead of that old Hawaiian shirt. You pull out the recipes that are your family favorites you spend all day in the kitchen preparing a meal that would be fit for a queen. And then you set the table. You pull out the fine china, the best crystal, and you gather the family. Isn't that how your table looks every night? Certainly is how it is at my house. The family is gathered, and you wait for the guest of honor.

Well, in a way church staff is all about preparing for spiritual meal. Every one of you has been invited to participate in this special occasion called *friendship first*. I am sure we are going to enjoy what's been prepared. It's going to be fun doing it together. But I also want to make sure that we are prepared for the guest of honor. Because even more important than us meeting together and enjoying one another's friendship over the next month. I want to make sure that we are prepared for the guest of honor. That also have a time that we meet with God. We have been setting the table for a God visit. Without God at the table our human friendship will be lacking.

To set the framework for our discussion this morning, I want to take you back to a story in the Old Testament that happened about 3,450 years ago. It is a spectacular God-encounter that I find really

intriguing. I want us to try to understand what happened in that story. As you know from the book of Exodus, it is the story of the people of Israel leaving the tyranny and bondage of Egypt and making their way to the promise land. And God through Moses delivers the nation of Israel from the Pharaoh they cross the Red Sea and they are confidently marching toward the promise land. They number a little over 2 million people by now and they have been on the road for 60 days in Exodus 19 opens with the nation of Israel 2 million people standing at the foot of this imposing mountain called Mount Sinai. And the Bible says that Moses climbed the mountain in order to appear before God. This begins one of the most intriguing God encounters found anywhere in the Bible. From this story I want to draw out some principals and applications that you and I can use to think about how we can spiritually get ready for what's going to happen during *friendship first*. So let's jump in. Here's number one:

### **1. Look back and remember God's FAITHFULNESS**

As we think about where we are headed in the next 40 days I would encourage you the starting place just to stop for a moment and remember what God has already done. In fact the Lord says in verse 4 of Exodus 19 God says to Moses, “*You have seen what I did to the Egyptians you know how I brought you to myself and carried you on eagle's wings.*” When a young eagle learns to fly the mother eagle often flies just underneath the baby eagle with her wings spread out to support and catch if needed. What a great picture of God's faithfulness. Always ready to be there in a time of need to support us when we are in trouble.

When Jeremiah talks about God in Lamentations 3 verse 23 he says, “*They are new every morning.*” and he says, “*Great is your faithfulness.*” God is faithful. He is reliable. He is trust worthy. His word can be depended upon. We see his faithfulness in the universe for every morning when you wake up and the sun rises in the east and the evening sets in the west it is

evidence of God's faithfulness. Every 24 hours when the earth revolves around its axis and tilted at a 23 degree angle and it creates the right atmosphere and conditions so you can live on this planet it is evidence of God's faithfulness. And when each day the sun hangs in the sky for another day and you feel the warmth of the sun on your skin it is further proof God is faithful to keep the universe running.

I want to ask you to do something right now. Take your outline, and I want you to write in the margin one area where you have seen God be faithful. Maybe take just a moment right now to celebrate God's faithfulness in your own life. Listen to these words from Deuteronomy 7 verse 9, "So know that the Lord your God the faithful God he will keep his agreement for love for a thousand lifetimes for people who love him and obey his commands." I hope when you look back over your life journey that you see God's faithfulness and that your heart fills with gratitude. As we think about what God has in store for us in the next 40 days, I want us to remember how faithful he has been in the past and the same God who is faithful in the past will be faithful in the future. To become a friend of God, you need to see his faithfulness! Here is the second thing I want to encourage you to do:

## **2. Look ahead and celebrate your FUTURE**

Again the Lord says in Exodus 19, "*If you obey me and keep my covenant you will be my own special treasure among all the nations of the earth, for all the earth belongs to me and you will be to me a kingdom of priests, my holy nation.*" Now again remember who God says this to. This was a vagabond group of nomads. Sixty days ago they were slaves. They were nobodies. They were poor, they had no influence and no political clout and now two million strong God looks at them and says, "You are my special treasure." Here's a truth I want you to learn about them and about us that is you will be a cherished possession. The truth about that is that some of us who are in the

room today really just have a hard time believing that God thinks about us in that way. You might look around and say to some people I can understand why God would feel that way if them. I mean they are gifted, they are talented, they are put together. I mean they even look like a special treasure. God certainly couldn't feel that way about me. If he really knows what's in my past and what's in my world there's no way he could feel that way about me. My friend, the truth is he does. You are valuable to him. You matter to him just as anybody else in the room and he's just as crazy about you as he is about anybody else. You need to accept this by faith to have room for a friendship with God!

Folks, God has pursued us. Even though our lives might be surrounded by garbage and trash, when God looks at you, you are a cherished possession. Because God thinks so highly of you, over the next 40 days he wants to do something wonderful in your life. He wants to continue to work in your life to make you like his son Jesus. You are a **CHERISHED POSSESSION**. But he doesn't stop there. He also goes on to say about them that they are **CHOSEN PRIESTS**. He says in verse 6 of Exodus 19, "*You will be a kingdom of priests.*" He says that not just to the clergy, not just someone who has been to seminary he says it literally to the entire nation. Some of you are thinking right now okay, I have sort of been hanging with you up to you at this point but you just crossed the line. There is no way that I am a priest. The priesthood is reserved for people who are a lot more holy than me. Look with me if you would at these words from first Peter 2, and they are written to average Christians just like you and me. "*But you are a chosen people a, what, royal priesthood.*" Circle those words. "*A royal priesthood a holy nation of people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful life.*" Now, you have been called by God to be a priest.

Three things priests do:

Number one is priests have **DIRECT ACCESS** to God. It's what we call the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer that you don't have to go through any one else in order to get to God. You have a direct connection. And in just a little bit later in the service we are going to take time to actually pray. Here's the good news. You can go directly to God and your heavenly father is waiting and welcoming you to come to him. Would you read with me out loud the words from Ephesians 3 verse 12 let's read them together, "*Because of Christ and our faith in him we can now come fearlessly into God's presence assured of his glad welcome.*" You have direct access to God.

Number two, priests **REPRESENT** God to people. A priest speaks on behalf of God, he represents God. They don't just live to do what they want to live on their own agenda they have an assignment from God, a sacred responsibility. Do you realize this morning if you are a Christ follower you carry the reputation of God around with you. And what some people think about God is directly shaped by how you live as someone who represents him. That how you respond to God's invitation of friendship through the Death , Burial and Resurrection of Jesus influences whether others will accept him as a friends. So if you are angry and mean spirited, harsh and legalistic, then some people are going to conclude well that must be what God is like. But if you are kind, compassionate and patient and forgiving and loving, in short a friend then people are going to know that that's what God -- that's what God is like.

You see in Friendship first it's not going to be just about us getting together as a church family it's about us serving in our local community. And you and I have the wonderful privilege and responsibility out there to represent God. To our neighbors and co-workers to people in need, to be a priest that speaks on God's behalf. So as a priest you have direct access as a priest you represent God, but thirdly as a priest you have dedicated self yourself to a life of **SERVING GOD**. In this particular story as he talks about the priesthood it's not just about a vocational choice it's a calling.

You see your strongest devotion in life is not to be to your career but rather to your calling. Your highest calling in life is not to your profession it's to your priesthood. And your job is to stay faithful and serve God as a priest all the days of your life. And sometimes it will be the most rewarding and fulfilling thing you will ever do and sometimes it's hard and sometimes it's lonely and sometimes you are misunderstood. But there's no retirement. You have been called to give a lifetime of serving God as one who represents him.

Listen to what Paul says in Ephesians 4, *"I urge you then I who am a prisoner because I serve the Lord live a life that measures up to the standard God set when he called you."* So we look back at God's faithfulness and remember all that he's done in the past. We look ahead and realize we are his cherished possession that we are called upon to be priests on his behalf.

But there's a third encouragement I want to give you and that is to look around. Listen to this:

### **3. Commit with the COMMUNITY.**

Let me explain what I mean by that. After God challenges the nation to obey him completely and follow him wholeheartedly the people respond back to God. And in fact, their words are recorded in Exodus 19 verse 8, I put them in your notes, *"Then all the people answered together we will do everything that the Lord has said and Moses reported this to the Lord."* The word I want you to zero in on the word I want you to circle is the word together. As a community of God followers they unanimously responded to God and said, "We will obey, we will follow."

I want you to understand this, this morning. We are more than just a collection of individual Christians who happen together for worship at the same time on the same day. We are a community. We are a family. We are a church. We are the body of Christ. In Christ we are friends with God and each other. And Paul says in Romans 12 that each part belongs to the other. You and I are connected. And during this campaign of friendship first we are asking for the same

kind of corporate commitment. We're asking as many small groups, children's ministry and Sunday night to study the friendship first curriculum. Our children and our students and adults are all going to be studying and talking about the same theme. We are all going to be in this together. That's why it is not an exaggeration to say we are hopeful that every single person who considers ECC their family will say, "I am in." And I hope that there is something inside of you in your heart that when you hear, hey, this is what our church family is doing, that your response is, "I will do my part." Because I am a part of a community. It's not just about me and my things. I am a part of a family. If the family is doing it, then I want to be a part of it, because I belong here. So commit with the community. Now let me give you the fourth encouragement:

#### **4. Look inward and prepare yourself SPIRITUALLY**

As we think about starting this campaign next week what does it look like to get ready spiritually? Listen to the words of God again in Exodus 19 it says, *"The Lord told Moses go down and prepare the people for my visit, purify them today and tomorrow and have them wash their clothing. Be sure they are ready on the third day for I will come down upon Mount Sinai as all the people watch."* Tucked in these verses are three very practical steps you and I can take, I believe, to get ready spiritually for what God wants to do in these next few weeks.

Here's number one. Set aside **TIME**. God says over the next three days I want you to get ready to meet with me. Remember, these people are just like us. They have jobs and they responsibilities and they have families to take care of, they are tasks that are on their list. And yet God says, this is important enough. I want you to carve out time to be involved with meeting me. So again just to be very up front if you are going to get the most out of friendship first it's going to happen partly because you set aside time

The second thing you can do to spiritually prepare is take **INVENTORY**. You know when a business does an inventory in a way it's a reality check it's saying here's what we have and here's

what we don't have. I want to ask you to do the same thing spiritually to take a spiritual inventory an honest assessment right now and just answer the hard question, "Where am I with the Lord right now in my own relationship?" If I want to be in the right place in my heart to let God to a great work in my life I need to have an honest assessment about my relationship with God. There's this great passage in Revelation chapter 2 where the Lord is speaking to the church at Ephesus a very busy, active church very successful but God looks at the church and says, "*I have one thing against you, you have left your first love.*"

The honest truth I am sure in a room this size with this many people is even though outwardly we are very busy and involved in the church for some of us the fact is our hearts have drifted in our relationship with God. This is a time for us to just stop and say is there anything blocking my relationship with God? Is there some sin I have been clinging to or have I just drifted and I need to come back in my friendship with God? I hope your heart's cry is the cry of David in Psalm 51 when he says "*Create in me a pure heart, God, and make my spirit right again.*" Take inventory, set aside time.

And then number 3 maybe this is the most important one, is to pray **DILIGENTLY**. Nothing will draw our heart to God's heart like prayer. Nothing will remove the spiritual obstacles and roadblocks like prayer. Nothing will reignite our love relationship with God like time alone just talking with him. Nothing will invite the presence of God into Friendship First like a congregation who is committed to praying, and nothing will set the table for a God visit like prayer.

Conclusion: I just wonder that day when 2 million people left Mount Sinai after hearing the thunder and the mountains shaking and the fire and the smoke if that day when they went home if they didn't go home with the smell of smoke on them, the smell of God on them. Because the presence of God had marked them. And I got to thinking wouldn't it be great if during *40 Days of*

*Friendship First* that people would say about us when they watch us, they smell like God. Maybe they don't own a Bible, maybe they don't go to church, maybe they don't claim the name of Christ but when they look at what we do and how we live and what we are like, that they say that must be what God is like.

As I close I want to fast forward you to a day 40 years later when Moses is challenging the people as they are about to enter the promise land. Finally they are here. Moses is not going to accompany them but he begins to warn them and gives them instruction and he says when you cross the Jordan you get on the other side and life gets good and easy and comfortable and prosperous he said don't forget God. Don't forget everything he has done for you and be sure and pass on to your kids and your grandkids all that God has done, the stories of faith and the very first example that Moses uses is Exodus 19. In Deuteronomy 4 verse 10 it says this, "*As Moses says tell them,*" speaking of kids and grandkids, "*tell them especially about the day when you stood before the Lord your God at Mount Sinai.*" Forty years later Moses points back to Exodus 19 as the defining moment in the history of the nation of Israel. Forty years later he points back and he says, don't forget to tell your kids and your grandkids about the day when God came down. So my mind jumped to 40 years from now wouldn't it be great if we could sit with our kids and our grandkids and say, let me tell you about one of the most incredible experiences I ever got to be a part of I was a part of Elbert Christian church at a time when God did some things that only God could take credit for, and we were a part of a wonderful ride in this journey with God where he showed up and people's lives got changed and our community got touched and we were forever different because of that day. I hope that over the next few days you will be praying that there will be that kind of God visit with us as we start Friendship First.

Let's pray together. Lord, we want you to be the guest of honor. We don't want this to be all about

our plans. We don't want this to just be a program. We want it to be a time when your spirit changes us, changes our lives and changes our community. We can't manufacture that. We wouldn't want to even if we could. But we ask you to do it by your power. Thank you that you have invited us to the table and that some powerful things are going to happen in the next few weeks and we pray that it would all be about you. We point people in our families and in our church and in our communities to you and that you would be honored in Jesus' name, Amen.