

The MARK OF GOD
Exodus 33:1—6; 12—18

The Gathering Place
May 30, 2004

Good News – Bad News Story.

I have good and bad news for you. The good news ... you don't need glasses. The bad news?

The good news is, my research shows eating chocolate can be beneficial to your health. The bad news is I've gained 5 pounds.

The good news is that under the new tax plan you get a \$2,312.70 refund. The bad news is that it was so complicated you owe me \$2,310.60

Well, in Exodus 33 God has Good News and Bad News for Moses.

The GOOD NEWS. Its time to move on from Mt Sinai. They have been there long enough. Sinai was not their final destination. It was an important stop on the way to the PROMISED LAND. It was a place where the recently freed slaves of Egypt could leave behind the shame, and hurts, and brokenness of their past. It was a place where they would receive their new identity as “the people of God”. A people in covenant relationship. It was the place where they had promised God ...”Everything the Lord has commanded us, we will do.”

BUT IT WAS NOT THEIR ULTIMATE DESTINATION.

There was a land that flowed with milk and honey they were to enter. A land beyond the river. A land of plenty. A land of rest.

Staying at Mt Sinai or wandering around in the desert for 40 years was not progress!

- No matter how optimistic their administrators might be.
- No matter how many miles they covered.
- No matter how much their flocks increased.
- No matter how many children were born to their families.
- No matter how much their tithes and offering increased.

THEY WERE NOT WHERE THEY WERE SUPPOSED TO BE!

They had been camped too long. They had been at ease too long. Some may even have forgotten about the Promised Land – they were doing OK! Some may have even thought they were in the promised land. But they weren't, they had so much time on their hands they got into trouble. They crafted a golden calf, an idol. So God gives the GOOD NEWS to Moses and Israelites was ITS TIME TO GO FROM HERE. *Leave this place, you and the people you brought up out of Egypt, and go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, saying, I will give it to your descendants. I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey.* Exodus 33:1 & 2

And then God delivers the Bad News in verse 3– *but I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way.*

DISTRESSING WORDS. And all the people understand the seriousness of the news. They begin to mourn. No one even cared to put on their ornaments. They were in a time of grief – is there anything to live for without the presence of God? God orders them to take off their ornaments – their jewelry – most likely stuff that reminded God of their most recent failure when Aaron had taken some of those

same ornaments and made a calf from it that they had worshipped with wild abandon in an orgy of fleshly indulgence and immorality.

Everything comes to a stand-still. Nothing is of importance. The people of Israel strip off their ornaments and wait. While they wait, Moses goes into a tent – (not the Tabernacle – it hasn't been built yet) – and the presence of the Lord appears. Moses and the Lord have a conversation.

There are things for us to note:

1. Moses reminds the Lord that it was not Moses who decided on this mission of deliverance for the Israelites. God had called him while he was shepherding sheep in this very place months and years ago. Moses says to the Lord ***“Remember that this nation is your people.”***
2. God says, ***“My presence will go with you, and I will give you rest.”***
3. The response of Moses to these reassuring words of God need to be indelibly printed on our minds and hearts:

If your Presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? WHAT ELSE WILL DISTINGUISH ME AND YOUR PEOPLE FROM ALL THE OTHER PEOPLE ON THE FACE OF THE EARTH.

The distinguishing mark of God on the life of God's people is not the kind of clothing they wear, nor is it their ritual of worship, nor is it the keeping of the law and the commandments, IT IS THE PRESENCE OF GOD! Some will have you believe that it is the keeping of the Sabbath, or some other outward observance. What distinguishes the people of God from all other peoples on earth is God's PRESENCE among them

Now lets scroll ahead 2000 years or so.

Another leader – another mountain – another group of followers. Matthew 28:16 ***Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go.***

And another command to LEAVE THIS PLACE – TO GO!

They are to go and make disciples. **Disciple-making disciples.**

Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age.

Matthew 28:19 & 20

Reminds me of God's promise to Moses: ***My Presence will go with you.***

But before they go, Jesus tells them to wait in Jerusalem. Luke tells us in Acts 1:5 & 7 that Jesus added the words – ***Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit ---and you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria and to the end of the earth.***

To make a distinguishing difference in the world. To be God's hands extended, they needed more than theoretical truth. They needed the presence of God manifested in their lives.

Jesus had promised them: ***I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Counselor to be with you forever—the Spirit of truth, The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.*** (John 14:16 & 18)

And on the Day of Pentecost it happened! They received the MARK OF GOD!

Paul writing to the churches at Ephesus and Corinth:

You were marked in Him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance. (Ephesians 1:13)

He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

The badge of Christianity is not an outward sign, not the wearing of a cross or a crown, but it is that which reveals the union of a man or woman with the Living God. It is His Spirit within. that motivates and empowers us to live changed lives! Changed lives that will make a difference in our world.

Today, we have baptized believers.

We celebrate Pentecost.

But it must be more than an event that happened 2000 years ago and which we celebrate today. It must be a living reality in each of our lives.

The road to the fulfillment of the Great Commission is not paved by good intentions, or even inspiring worship services, or powerful prayer meetings. They are all important and necessary but the road to the fulfillment of God's plan for your life and mine takes more than church buildings, and church budgets (even the paying off of the mortgage), it takes more than great outreach endeavors, and Children & Youth ministry programs. **EVEN SMALL GROUPS WILL NOT DO IT!**

The one thing that makes it possible for the church of Jesus to be distinguished from all the others peoples of earth – is the seal of God – the **MARK OF GOD**, the **HOLY SPIRIT**.

If we have truly been born again and have received the Spirit of God we are different! We don't receive the Spirit by being different – it isn't law – it isn't self-righteousness – it isn't trying to do better.

It is giving up ourselves – losing our life – taking up the cross – dying to self.

Listen to Romans 8:5—11

If we really yield ourselves to God -- let Him mark us with His Spirit, we will be changed and the world around us will be changed. Our marriages will be changed, our families will be changed, the way we do business will be changed, the way we find pleasure will be changed, everything about our life will be changed, and the world around us will see and know, **WE ARE THE PEOPLE OF GOD!**

Someone has said: "People are like stained glass window, they sparkle and shine when the sun is out, but in the darkness, beauty is seen only if there is light within."

Is there light within?

Have you been marked by God?

Do you have His PRESENCE.

Let us pray.

Dear God, I need YOU. I need Your presence in my life.

I believe you sent Your one and only Son to die for my sin and to make it possible for You by Your Spirit to live in me.

I am sorry for my sin and repent. I invite you by Your Spirit to come and live in me. I receive Your Son, Jesus Christ as my Saviour and Lord, and from now on I will live for Him.

Thank you Lord for the promise of Your presence. I now receive you, in Jesus Name. Amen.