

The Year of the Story
Chapter 5: Will You Obey?
Exodus 19-40
2/8/15

- In the mid 1950's, when Christian Herter was governor of Massachusetts, he was running hard for a second term in office. One day, after a busy morning chasing votes (and no lunch) he arrived at a church barbecue. It was late afternoon and Herter was famished. As Herter moved down the serving line, he held out his plate to the woman serving chicken. She put a piece on his plate and turned to the next person in line.
 - o "Excuse me," Governor Herter said, "do you mind if I have another piece of chicken?" "Sorry," the woman told him. "I'm supposed to give one piece of chicken to each person." "But I'm starved," the governor said. "Sorry," the woman said again. "Only one to a customer."
 - o Typically, Governor Herter was a modest and unassuming man (unlike most of our politicians today), but he decided that this time he would throw a little weight around. "Do you know who I am?" he said. "I am the governor of this state."
 - o "Do you know who I am?" the woman said. "I'm the lady in charge of the chicken. Move along, mister."

- There is something about us and our human nature that tends to prompt us to get a little too big for our britches. Remember that old phrase? It was used for someone who thought of themselves a little too highly, someone who thought they were a little more important than they really are.
 - o There is something in most all of us that struggle with that. Do you know who we probably struggle with this the most? God. Somehow and for some reason, it is easy to think we are more important than we are.
 - o That's when rebelliousness kicks up in us. We don't like what God is doing in our lives, we don't agree with something he has said, we want to do what we want, regardless of what Scripture says, we aren't going to submit to God's authority or to the authority he has set over us...that spirit of rebelliousness begins to give us a false sense of importance.
 - o We forget that God is the one in charge of the chicken! He's not only in charge of the chicken, but he's in charge of everything!

- Sometimes, we joke about this strong-willed, rebellious spirit that is in us. We refer to how we have it in our blood. And, often that is true. A rebellious spirit can most definitely be passed down from generation to generation. Even when people are in the church, it is hard to control this rebelliousness.
 - o I knew a family who were all raised in the church. In fact, the father served as an associate pastor for many years. Yet, all of them had this spirit of rebelliousness. If they didn't agree with something, they didn't feel like they had to obey it. The set rules or guidelines were only obeyed if they like them and felt like keeping them.

- Anybody else come for a blood line of rebellious, stubborn people? And, we can joke about it. But, deep down, that spirit in us of self-importance and rebelliousness can be dangerous, especially to our relationship with God.
- The nation of Israel in the Old Testament – they were a people with this spirit of rebelliousness and stubbornness as well. So, most of us should be able to relate to them well! They are also going to see how dangerous their rebellious spirit is in their relationship with God.
 - As we have been going through The Story of the Bible. We have two stories emerge: the Upper Story and the Lower Story. The Upper Story is why God does what he does and God’s plan and purpose for humanity. The Lower Story is our human experience. God wants his Upper Story to intersect with and make a difference in our Lower Story.
 - We have seen that the biggest theme in God’s Upper Story is that he desires a relationship with people. For this reason, He continues to build a plan so that all people would know that he is God – he is the I AM which we learned last week becomes his name Yahweh.
 - We are at the part of the story where God has been working to build a nation of the people of Israel. The I AM freed them from slavery in Egypt through some pretty amazing miracles and acts of power. Now, they are on the way to the Promised Land – the land God promised them. Yet, God has them stop first in an area called Sinai.
 - In the front of your Story on the map, you might want to draw a stone tablet under the word “Sinai.” God has them stop here for a while because he wants to establish some things with the Israelites in order to get them ready for living in the Promised Land.
- See, God desired to dwell with the people of Israel. Although God had continued to interact with his people after he expelled Adam and Eve from the Garden, it was always from a distance. This time, however, he so wanted his people to get it right that he decided to come down personally and dwell with them again. His desire for intimate relationship with us is the heartbeat of the Upper Story.
 - Yet, in order for God to dwell with Israel, He had to see if they were willing to follow three national systems that he would establish. Let’s read **Exodus 19:1-6**
 - So, in the desert of Sinai, at the base of Mount Sinai, God brings the people and then God speaks to the people through Moses to establish these systems. He tells them clearly that if they do, they will be his treasured possession and a way for their whole world to know God. What a blessing!
 - Then, God sees if they will, in fact, be willing to follow his systems. Or, would their rebellious, stubborn spirits kick up against him, making it impossible for him to dwell with them.
- The first thing God wants to set up are some National Commands. God insisted that his people must live by a set of guidelines. This is the part of the story where we get the 10 Commandments. However, God is wanting to see if the people will do more than just follow the 10 Commandments.

- As the people are camped in the Sinai, God, in addition to giving them the commandments, behind the scenes, God puts them through some tests and observes them to see if they are really going to obey him fully.
 - Through this observation of the people and the establishment of these systems, it seems like God is asking some questions. On your outline, you will see the three systems he's establishing and the questions he is waiting and observing to see how the people answer.
- The first question is "Will you really listen to me and the one I chose to lead you?" We read in The Story in Exodus 19 that God told Moses he was going to speak to Moses so that the people would put their trust in Moses as a leader. God was going to communicate to Moses up on the mountain.
 - God then gave Moses some instructions to the Israelites that they are not supposed to go on the mountain. God said, "Don't go on the mountain, don't even touch the foot of the mountain. Not even an animal is supposed to touch the mountain. If someone does, they are to be put to death. No one is supposed to go on the mountain except Moses."
 - That is a pretty strict law and disobedience was punishable by death. God was dead serious that Moses was the leader and it would be through Moses that God would communicate to the people. He didn't want anyone else thinking that they could see God and communicate with God directly in the way Moses did.
- God wanted the people to know that there was a hierarchy here. There was one chosen leader and that was Moses. God wanted to make that clear from the get-go because he knew the human tendency to buck against authority. We see this bucking in children.
 - It's like a story I read about a little 5 year old girl was having a troubled-filled day, arguing back and forth with her mother. Finally, her mother in exasperation said, "Jenny, I want you to sit in the corner right now! And don't you get up until I tell you to!"
 - Little Jenny went over to the corner and sat down a few minutes, and as she thought about it, she yelled out to her mother, "Mom, I'm sitting down on the outside, but I am standing up on the inside! Ooooo....there's that rebellious, stubborn spirit, huh?"
 - The Israelites had some of that going on.
- See, God wanted to make certain that these people are going to follow Moses. If they didn't, it would bring destruction to the whole nation. Just like if a child doesn't learn to respect and listen to their parents, they will end up doing some really bad things as they get older.
- You know, it's the same in the church. God calls some to lead. And he then sends leaders to lead churches. His question is, "Will you really listen to me and to the one I chose to lead you?" If people in a church chose not to listen to the pastor, it can destroy the whole church.
 - We've seen it, haven't we? I know of churches that are no longer in existence because people in the church decided they didn't like the direction the pastor was taking. It wasn't because the pastor had an issues with morality or there was any

- moral failure. It wasn't because the pastor was doing anything against the Word of God. It wasn't because the pastor was a dictator or on a power trip.
- It was just because the pastor had a vision that they received from God and the people didn't like it. Or it was because the pastor didn't live up to their expectations and preferences. And, God is saying, "Don't you go on the mountain! I'm talking to the one I chose to lead. The one I chose is in charge of the chicken, not you!"
 - In effect, God is also saying to the Israelites and to his church now, "If you don't listen to the one I chose, then, in effect, you are not listening to me."
 - That doesn't mean that people and leaders can't enter into dialogue and come to a compromise or an agreement about things. But, when God speaks to a leader, he is expecting that leader to lead and for the people to follow.
- God wanted to make sure the Israelites were going to listen to him, through Moses. When God saw that the people were willing to listen, he calls Moses back up on the mountain and then gave Moses some more specific commands about how they were to relate to God and to others.
 - God wanted the Israelites to be a community of love and a community of relationships that mirrored the perfect love and relationship of the Trinity. God, the Father, God, the Son and God, the Holy Spirit enjoy perfect love and relationship together. He wants that for us.
 - So then, the Ten Commandments revolve around relationship. These aren't some random laws. These are how a real community of God is built.
 - Commands 1-4 apply to our vertical relationship with God. All four ask us to treat God with ultimate respect.
 - We are to worship only him; we are not to create our own gods by making images or idols; we are not to misuse or trivialize the name of God; we are to honor him by observing a day of rest and worship of him.
 - In these first four rules, God invites his people to completely devoted to him. There is no room for God plus something else. For this perfect community to work, God has to be number one, respected over everything and everyone else.
 - Then Commands 5-10 guide us in our horizontal relationship with others and how we treat each other.
 - We are to honor our parents; we not to murder anyone; we are not to sleep with anyone who is not our spouse; we are not to steal anything that isn't ours; we are not to lie and we are not to covet anything that doesn't belong to us. To covet it to desire wrongfully or without due regard for the rights of others.
 - God is asking, will you relate to me and to each other in the right way?
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 - After he tells Moses the commandments and also gives Moses a Book of the Covenant which consisted of expansions of the Ten Commandment, Moses presents them to the people with God's next question: Will you covenant to obey my commands?

- As we have said before, a covenant is a strong agreement, a guarantee, a promise. God is asking the people of Israel to enter into a covenant with him where they agree to be his nation, abide by the Ten Commandments and the Book of the Covenant that God has provided. Moses reads this all to the people in Exodus 24.
 - The people agree. They say they will do everything the Lord says. It looks like this new nation is off to a great start!
- Until God asks, “Will you trust and wait?” After the people agreed to obey everything that the Lord said, the Lord told Moses he was going to make stone tablets with the Ten Commandments on them. He invites Moses to come up again to the mountain.
- This was not unfamiliar by this time to the Israelites. Moses had been up and down that mountain meeting with God a few times now. But, this was different. Exodus 24:18 says, “Then Moses entered the cloud (which was the presence of God) as he went on up the mountain. And he stayed on the mountain forty days and forty nights.
 - This time, Moses going on the mountain was different. This time, Moses stayed up there for nearly six weeks! This time, the people were just saying to themselves, “What? We’re expected to wait?? By ourselves? In the desert? Not hearing anything? What? That’s not right! What kind of God makes you trust and wait like that? What’s the point?”
- I was reading about the rigorous training that Arabian horses go in the deserts of the Middle East. The trainers require absolute obedience from the horses, and test them to see if they are completely trained. The final test is almost beyond the endurance of any living thing.
- The trainer forces the horses to go without water for several days. Then, he turns them loose and of course they start running toward the water, but just as they get to the edge, ready to plunge in and drink, the trainer blows his whistle.
 - The horses who have been completely trained and who have learned perfect obedience, stop. They turn around and come pacing back to the trainer. They stand there quivering, wanting water, but they wait in perfect obedience. When the trainer is sure that he has their obedience he gives them a signal to go back to drink.
 - Now this may be severe but when you are on the trackless desert of Arabia and your life is entrusted to a horse, you had better have a trained obedient horse.
- If the Israelites are going to be able to be God’s chosen nation; if they are going to be able to enter the Promised Land and face enemies; if they are going to remain pure and worship God alone, they better be able to trust and wait on God, being obedient no matter what.
- If we are going to make it through life, we, also, better be able to trust and wait on God.
- This test, the people failed – big time! They felt abandoned and discouraged and they decided that they could make their own god that at least wouldn’t make them wait! So, they convinced Aaron to make a new god for them. They all contributed some gold jewelry and the melted it and molded it into a golden calf.

- Within six weeks, God's people went from making a covenant with him to bowing before and dancing around an idol in a drunken, wild party. And, God is ticked! That is not a good thing.
- On the mountain, God tells Moses what is going on down below and then he tells Moses how these people are going to be punished. Within this conversation, another question emerges, "Moses, will you be a servant leader?"
 - Let's read **Exodus 32:9-14**. God not only desires for the people to rise up and be people of God, he wants Moses to be a true servant of God because only a true servant can be a true leader. Remember, Moses was an unlikely leader. He didn't want the calling to begin with. But, God had been molding him and working in him.
 - To the point that now Moses intervened for the people so that God wouldn't destroy them. Moses has come a long way as a true leader.
- God wanted to make sure the Moses was going to carry this thing and lead to the end. Only a servant leader can do that.
 - A servant leader is needed because a servant leader puts the people even above themselves. A servant leader is needed because leading people can be a real pain – we like to gripe and complain and not follow. And if you don't really love people and are willing to serve them, you will burn out and fizzle out so that God can't use you.
 - A servant leader is a Reflection of Jesus. Just as Jesus still stands between you and me and the Father and intercedes for us, that's what God wanted to see in Moses. And, that is what Moses did over and over again when the people strayed and God had just about enough.
- Speaking of the people straying, there was a question from God there, too "Will you stand when everyone else bows?" We look at Aaron here. Aaron, Moses' brother, the one who was 2nd in charge and supposed to help Moses, popped under pressure like a cheap balloon.
 - Did you notice his justification for the golden calf? On page 65-66 of The Story, Aaron is blaming the people for pressuring him to do something and he says they gave him their jewelry, he threw it in the fire and out came a calf! Wild! Just like that, mysteriously a golden calf just came out of the fire. Come on, Aaron.
 - One of the greatest tests of our lives is are we willing to stand when everyone else bows.
- Moses again pleads for God's forgiveness for the people and begs for God's presence to continue to be with them for God said that if he remains among the people, he might just end up destroying them. Have you ever felt that way about some people? You know if you're around that certain person for too long, you might end up wringing their neck. Well, God understands that feeling!
 - Yet, because of his love for Moses and his unfailing compassion, he agrees to dwell among the people and to be with them, guiding them all the way.

- Exodus 40:36-38 states how the presence of the Lord was evident. It says, “In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out;³⁷ but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted.³⁸ So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the Israelites during all their travels.”
 - Every day the people had to look at the cloud of the Lord for their directions. Every day, they had to answer God’s last question, Will you follow me? Will you trust me to stay when I stay and to go when and where I go?
 - Every day, we have to answer that same question, don’t we.

- For the Israelites, once God established the commands and the people understood the severity of not following God, God established a system of National Worship. God would reside among his people.
 - And so, he asked, Will you make me a dwelling place among you? God gave Moses very specific instructions about building a tabernacle. This tabernacle was a large portable tent.
 - God’s detailed instructions used the best wood, gold and linen for the tabernacle. God is asking the people not only will you make me a dwelling place, but also will you give your best in worship?
 - They were willing to give their gold to make a new god, will they give their best to worship the one true God? See, through its construction, God wasn’t just building a sanctuary or a fancy place to worship. He was trying to get their full attention and build a nation that revolved around him. He needed to know if the Israelites, would obey him completely and put their money where their mouth was.

- And, he needed a place that reflected his power and majesty. He wanted the people to understand that he is God, they are not. Even in the tabernacle, there was a section that only the priests could go and then a section that no one could enter except the high priest and only once a year. In that Holy of Holies was where the Lord dwelt.
 - The laws and instructions regarding the special place of God was in effect God asking, “Will you set me apart as the holy I AM?”

- In the church in Eaton where I served with my father, every year for about 7 or 8 years, the church went through a church-wide campaign called The 50 Day Spiritual Adventure. It started 50 days before Easter and went until Easter. Every year, the topic was different. But, it was 50 days focusing on a spiritual topic with a book that people could read, small group curriculum, etc. – kind of like The Story campaign that we are doing only 50 days instead of 31 weeks.
 - One year, the topic was living and worshipping as if Christ was here with us. Dad was on vacation and I preached the first two Sundays of the adventure and shared the question, “How would our worship be different if Jesus were to physically be here with us? How would we live differently if Jesus were physically beside us? What would we do at work? How would we treat people?” I bet we would do things very

differently if Jesus were physically here. Our church service would look completely different. Our actions, attitudes, everything would change.

- Later that week, I was leading a small group for adults during the 50 Day Adventure and we asked some of those questions – how would we be different? One man said, “You know, I’ve been thinking about this and I disagree with what you were preaching. Because, if Jesus were to appear, I would probably just invite him to go fishing with me. He wouldn’t be anything special. He would just be my fishing buddy.”

- WHAT?? What is it about us that thinks this way about Jesus? Listen, at the very core of rebelliousness is this attitude! Jesus is special – He’s the I AM! When God set himself apart from the Israelites so that no one could enter into his presence, it was so they would get it – they would get that he is above them. He is so above them that to be in his presence would cause their death.
 - This is the same I AM that when Moses asked to see his glory, God said, “I’m going to pass by you with my glory, but I need to hide you in the cleft of this rock and I’m going to cover you with my hand so that you just see me from the back because if you saw the fullness of my glory in your human state, you would not be able to contain it!”
 - That sounds like more than a fishing buddy to me.

- Now, on this side of the New Testament, we know that Jesus came and when he died, the curtain in the temple was torn so that we could have access to the presence of God. His sacrifice made a way for us to approach the throne of God. He was our ultimate intercession. I am so thankful for that! I love that Jesus did that for us!
 - At the same time, we have to be careful that we don’t become so familiar with who God is. He is still God. He doesn’t allow access to him so that he can become like us. He allows access to him so that we might become like him!

- There’s a song by Christian artist Nicole Nordeman that ponders the way we approach God. It says,
 - Have I come too casually?
Because it seems to me
There's something I've neglected
 - How does one approach a deity
With informality
And still protect the sacred?
 - 'Cause You came and chose
To wear the skin of all of us
And it's easy to forget that You left a throne
 - And the line gets blurry all the time
Between daily and divine
It's hard to know the difference

- Oh, let me not forget to tremble
Oh, let me not forget to tremble
Face down on the ground do I dare
 - To take the liberty to stare at You
Oh, let me not
Oh, let me not forget to tremble
 - God wanted to make sure that the Israelites knew he was holy, he was the I AM, he was the everything, he was the one who they were dependent upon. We need to know the same. We still need to tremble before the majesty, glory, dominion, and power of the Almighty God of eternity!
- And, because he is holy and set apart, God needed to establish a system of National Atonement for the sins of the Israelites. The end of Chapter 5 in The Story alludes to the book of Leviticus where the sacrificing of animals becomes institutionalized so that sin could be atoned or covered.
 - See, God knew that this people would sin again. The sin nature is the main thing that keeps us separated from God. Each of us has a sin nature. God knew that while the nation he was building was on the right path, for now, their rebellious spirit would kick-up again. They were still stiff-necked and stubborn. He knows that about us as well.
 - Their sin must be dealt with and covered so that God's might dwell with them. The shedding of blood is a pretty serious thing to have to do to cover sins. God is saying through this system, "Do you understand the magnitude of your sin?"
 - Do you understand that I cannot dwell in the presence of sin? Do you understand that your sin will cause your death? Do you understand that the only thing that will cover your sin is the blood of the purest and most valuable animals you have.
 - If you understand that, Will you surrender your best to atone for your sins?
 - To give us insight into this system, Randy Frazee, in his book "The Heart of the Story writes, "In our current age, the idea of animal sacrifice seems primitive and cruel. A pure, innocent animal of great value in essence took their punishment. Instead of the sinful person being struck down for his sins, the lamb accepted the punishment so that the person could live and enjoy a relationship with God Almighty.
 - Unfair? That's exactly the point God was making. Yes it is totally unfair that an innocent creature gets what you deserve. But it's the only way because you cannot get rid of your sin by yourself. But, because I want to be with you so much, I am providing a way for you to pay for your sins."
 - You know, for us, God sets up the same systems, asks us the same questions and desires the same answers only under the new covenant, or New Testament, they come to us in a different order.
 - Jesus, the perfect, blameless Lamb of God came for us and shed his blood so that our sin could be covered for one and for all. With the blood of Jesus on the doorframe of

your life, you are forgiven and given direct access into the Most Holy Place and into the very presence of God.

- When we accept Jesus as our Lord and ask him to cover our sins and our lives with his blood, we are forgiven and blameless so that God can now dwell in us. We are the place where God dwells. We are the new tabernacle. The church is not a building, the church is us and we are the place where God resides.
 - With God, the Holy Spirit, dwelling in us, we can obey The Great Commandment that Jesus gave us and modeled for us - to love God with everything in us and to love each other as we love ourselves. If we do this, we keep all of God's laws.
- All the questions asked of Israel, God also asks us. The underlying question is: Will you obey? When the rebellious spirit in us kicks up. When our stubbornness kicks us. When we are tempted to think we know more, we know how and that people, even God, need to know who we are, will we remember that we are not in charge of the chicken – God is. Will you obey?
- The cost of obedience is nothing compared with the cost of disobedience.