**Prayer and Praise Service**

**August 28, 2024**

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In 1988 Dick Bass and Frank Wells became the first persons to climb the tallest mountain on each continent. They wrote a book about their adventures called *Seven Summits*. In 2015 Peter Van Kets followed with a book called *The Eighth Summit*. Taking his readers on three of his greatest expeditions across the Atlantic in rowing boats and across the icy high plateau of Antarctica, Kets focused on helping people climb the highest summit of life – yet this is a summit everyone can and must climb, the summit of self. In fact, the to *The Eighth Summit* is *Row the Atlantic, Trek the South Pole, Conquer Yourself.*

In some ways, our series *To the Mountain with God* helps us conquer ourselves and grow closer to God. We want to climb each of these mountains and learn to seek God, see God, and serve God. When your life is all about God, you conquer self.

Noah had to conquer self to be lifted to the mountains of Ararat and experienced the God of Promises. Had Noah not conquered self, he would have given into doubt and never built the ark. He would have perished along with everyone else, and we would not be here today.

Abraham had to conquer self to climb Mount Moriah and lay his son on the altar. Had Abraham not conquered self, he would have given into the seeming irrationality, even insanity, of God’s command, talked himself out of obedience and failed the faith test. We are not sure what would have happened had Abraham flunked out of faith school.

Climbing the various mountains of life requires conquering self. But when you conquer self, you experience the joys of the climb and the beauty of the summit!

As hard as the climb was for Abraham, the beauty of the summit of Mount Moriah made it all worthwhile. I’m not talking about the physical beauty of the summit, because there probably wasn’t much to it. But the spiritual summit at Mount Moriah was spectacular for at least two reasons:

First, at the summit of Mount Moriah, the blessing of Isaac became all the more sweeter to Abraham. Isaac was the long-awaited son of the promise. But now, Isaac was, as Alexander Maclaren says, “doubly a child of wonder.” He was born by miracle and now delivered by miracle.[[1]](#endnote-1) Every time Abraham looked at Isaac he would know that not only does God make promises and keep promises but he also puts exclamation points at the end of His promises. But that exclamation point came because Abraham was willing to lay down his son on the altar. “We never know how sweet our blessings are till we have yielded them to him.”[[2]](#endnote-2)

Second, at the summit of Mount Moriah, Abraham’s exemplary faith in God brought glory to God. It had been a long journey of many decades and many ups and downs getting there, but the strength of Abraham’s shines on Mount Moriah. But “the shining” does not place the spotlight on Abraham, rather, it puts the spotlight on God. That is what increased faith always does. Abraham went through the same process of growing in faith that every one of us goes through. Kent Hughes explains it this way:

The process is this: God comes to us with his word, and we are challenged to believe. When we believe his word, he tests us by stretching our faith so it can grow to greater dimensions than before. There are always valleys next to the hilltops of faith. There are ups and downs. But God grows our faith incrementally, so that we are enabled to give our “Isaacs” to God.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Warren Wiersbe says, “Our faith is not really tested until God asks us to bear what seems unbearable, do what seems unreasonable, and expect what seems impossible.”[[4]](#endnote-4) So, while God’s command is completely unreasonable and illogical, faith does not argue or “demand explanation; faith rests on promises.”[[5]](#endnote-5) Notice: if we allow God to take us on the faith journey, ultimately we will be able to do whatever He asks us to do, no matter how irrational or impossible it may seem. When our faith is stretched to its max and it holds up to the pressure and grows yet again, God is glorified.

Mount Moriah is a moving and challenging place to visit. It causes us to look deep within our hearts, to conquer our self and selfish desires, and calls us to a greater walk with God.

As we look back to Sinai, let’s take a moment to examine our hearts and relinquish any selfishness that prevents us from laying everything on the altar. To guide our prayer, I’m going to read the words to an old gospel song written by B.B. McKinney. Mr. McKinney was a charter member of our church (Pineville) and a graduate of Louisiana College who and went on to write the words and music to 149 hymns and gospel songs. He was also the editor of the Broadman Hymnal from which some of our eldest members may remember singing this song. Let’s pray: [Click for Link to “All on the Altar”](https://musescore.com/user/61620676/scores/14333527)

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Just as Mount Moriah causes us to conquer our self and calls us to a greater walk with God, so does Mount Sinai. On Sunday, we will fast forward about 700 years in OT history from the time of Abraham to the time of the Exodus. We’ll spend our time Sunday in Exodus 19. Here, Moses and the Israelites come to the base of the mountain, and Moses goes up to meet with God. It is a powerful story that highlights the holiness of God and helps the people begin to get to know their God of the covenant.

Mount Sinai is also called Mount Horeb in the Bible. Likewise, both names are used for the region. We get this from a comparison of Exodus 3 and Exodus 19. Moses first met God in Exodus 3. Notice where he was. **READ Exodus 3:1-3.**

Moses goes to the bush, and God calls Moses to lead the people out of slavery in Egypt. Now, notice **vv. 11-12 READ.**

So, the location of the burning bush in Horeb is the same region to where God will bring the people and they will worship him, which in Exodus 19, is Mount Sinai. Only Mount Horeb/Mount Sinai and Jerusalem are ever called “the mountain of the Lord” in the Bible.

But where is Mount Horeb/Mount Sinai? While we know the location of the Sinai Peninsula, there is debate as to the location of Mount Sinai. The location largely depends on the **route of the Exodus** you settle upon. “The Bible contains many geographical notations in Deuteronomy, Numbers, and Exodus about the root of the exodus. . . . Yet the information provided can be interpreted in several ways, leading to different ideas about the route. Scholars have proposed 3 basic routes - northern, central, and southern - each based on the biblical text. Over a dozen mountains have been identified by different scholars as suitable candidates for Mount Sinai.”[[6]](#endnote-6)

The traditional site for Mount Sinai is Jabal-Mousa (*jabal* meaning mountain; *mousa* meaning Moses, Mountain of Moses) located in the Sinai Peninsula (noted as 1). Another popular Mount Sinai is Jebel El Lawz in Saudi Arabia (noted as 2) because it has what appears to be a burned top. Which is it? Who knows! Archaeologists debate them all at length. You can nerd out on articles, books, and YouTube videos for days. The fact that we do not know which mountain is Mount Sinai does not matter nor does our lack of knowledge do anything to discount the biblical account. There was an exodus of God’s people out of Egypt and God led them to some mountain.

The people reached the base of Sinai about 3 months after leaving Egypt. Sinai is the scene of all the biblical events from Exodus 19 through Numbers 10:11. They lived and worshiped at the base of Mount Sinai for almost two years – about 20 months.

What the people experienced at Sinai was powerful. Though they had seen the majestic power of God in leading them out of Egypt through the plagues, parting of the Red Sea, and guiding them with the pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night, it is at Sinai that the people really get to know the God of the covenant. Here they will hear the voice of God, receive the law of God, learn to worship God, and even be disciplined by God. They will also experience what Moses experienced when He first came to this spot, “Do not come any closer because you are standing on holy ground.”

The importance of what will happen at Mount Sinai is found in **Exodus 19:3-6 READ**.

As God’s treasured possession, Israel is to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. We’ll unpack those designations on Sunday.

In his book, *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity*, Chuck Swindoll relates a *Newsweek* article about a new wave of mountain men:

It’s estimated that there are some sixty thousand serious mountain climbers in the U.S. But in the upper echelon of serious climbers is a small elite group known as “hard men.” For them climbing mountains and scaling sheer rock faces is a way of life. In many cases, climbing is a part of their whole commitment to life. And their ultimate experience is called free soloing: climbing with no equipment and no safety ropes.

John Baker is considered by many to be the best of the hard men. He has free-soloed some of the most difficult rock faces in the U.S. with no safety rope and no climbing equipment of any kind. His skill has not come easily. It has been acquired through commitment, dedication and training. His wife says she can’t believe his dedication. When John isn’t climbing, he’s often to be found in his California home hanging by his fingertips to strengthen his arms and hands.[[7]](#endnote-7)

Just as a mountain man must constantly prepare to climb a mountain, so we should prepare to climb the mountain with God. I encourage you to read Exodus 19 in preparation for Sunday.

1. Maclaren, 159. [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Maclaren, 160. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Hughes, 305 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Wiersbe, 109-110. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Wiersbe, 110. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Holman Bible Atlas, 66-67. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Swindoll, 236, quoted at https://www.sermonsearch.com/sermon-illustrations/912/mountain-men/. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)