

Stand in Awe!

because...

- I. the LORD your God is holy
- II. the LORD your God is merciful
- III. the LORD your God is to be worshiped

And God spoke all these words:

- ²“I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. ³“You shall have no other gods before me.**
- ⁴“You shall not make for yourself an idol in the form of anything in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the waters below. ⁵ You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I, the LORD your God, am a jealous God, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me, ⁶ but showing love to a thousand generations of those who love me and keep my commandments.**
- ⁷“You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God, for the LORD will not hold anyone guiltless who misuses his name.**
- ⁸“Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. ⁹ Six days you shall labor and do all your work, ¹⁰ but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates. ¹¹ For in six days the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, but he rested on the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and made it holy.**
- ¹²“Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.**
- ¹³“You shall not murder.**
- ¹⁴“You shall not commit adultery.**
- ¹⁵“You shall not steal.**
- ¹⁶“You shall not give false testimony against your neighbor.**
- ¹⁷“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”**

There was a little boy who loved football. Every Sunday afternoon from September through January, he would be glued to the television set. As soon as the game was over, he was in the backyard, catching passes from his father. After school he would round up other boys from the neighborhood and they would play tackle football until the sun set. The little boy would walk around the house carrying his football. Eventually it was time for high school. The boy tried out for the football team. But he wasn’t very tall, or fast

or strong, but he still loved the game. He eventually attended college in another state, which happened to be the home of his favorite professional football team. Before the end of the school year, this young man attended the football team's training camp. There he sat on the bleachers, in awe, watching his favorite players practicing for the coming season. As the players headed into the locker rooms for lunch, the young man raced to the fence line to snap some pictures, hold out his training camp brochure and pray that one of the players would stop. And they did! He stood in awe of these giants, who were achieving what he only dreamed of as a child. That little boy was me.

Have you ever stood in awe of someone? Perhaps you were privileged to meet a president or a general, or you happened to run into a movie star? Maybe it was with a person who accomplished some great feat or did something so magnificent that you literally stood before the person in awe of who they are and what they did.

This morning in our lesson from Exodus 20, the children of Israel were in awe, and it wasn't because Miley Cyrus decided to perform a free concert for them in the wilderness. Picture yourself camping in a tent near a mountain. Suddenly, out of nowhere, you hear a loud trumpet blast. You run out of your tent and look up. The mountain is covered in a thick, black cloud. Thunder and lightning dance around in the cloud. At the foot of the mountain you see a man. It is Moses. He motions to you and the other 2million people camped around the mountain to come closer. The trumpet blast grows louder. The cloud looks like smoke from a fire that seems to consume the mountain. The ground shakes. But Moses motions to come closer.

How would you feel? In the section of Scripture immediately after our lesson Moses records that the people **trembled with fear** (vs18). There at the foot of Mount Sinai they stood in awe.. They stood in the presence of God himself with only a dark cloud veiling them from His full glory. But what terrified them more was the wrath of this just God in the words that he spoke to them from this mountain of billowing smoke and thunder.

Here at Mount Sinai God was giving His holy Law to his children Israel. The 10 commandments are God's eternal will for his people – i.e. how he wants them to live their lives. These commandments are not suggested guidelines, but God demands that all people obey these rules according to God's standards. He doesn't say, "Do your best and that'll be good enough for me." Later when he repeated these laws to his people He said, **"Be holy because I, the LORD your God, am holy."** (Lev. 19:1) In other words, we are to stand before Him in total perfection or we are unable to stand at all. There is no middle ground. He demands that we be as he is, holy, without sin. That's enough to make us tremble and stand in awe of our God. Then he pulls out the sledgehammer and says, "This is what happens if you don't meet my demands..."

He told the Israelites flat out, **"I will punish..."** Here in Exodus 20, when the LORD says that he will punish the children for the sins of their fathers, he is talking about temporal punishment. For example, when the people of Israel rejected God and worshiped false gods, he sent neighboring nations to oppress his people for many years. But later in Scripture, Ezekiel 18:20, the LORD is very clear that he holds each

individual accountable for his/her own actions. Those who blatantly violate his covenant and show that they reject their LORD and Savior through their words and actions will be punished for all eternity. It was one thing to witness the awesome power of God. It was another thing to know and feel in your heart that God must punish sin. That is why the people said to Moses, “**Do not have God speak to us, or we will die.**” (vs19)

People do not want to hear about this side of God, his just and holy side. People do not want to hear about the Law, about sin, about punishment, damnation, hell, anything that has to do with the negative consequences of our sins. Joel Osteen, the pastor of a megachurch in Texas said in an interview with Time magazine that he doesn't preach the Law in his church because people are beat up enough about their sins. A poll taken by Fox News (10/2005) showed that more Americans believe in heaven than those who believe in hell. People do not want to hear about the consequences of their sins. That's why the people of Israel stood trembling and in awe.

Why these high standards, why these serious consequences? God is serious about our relationship with him. He tells us that He is **a jealous God** (vs5). In other words, he demands exclusive devotion to him and him alone. In the very first commandment God lays down the foundation for following all of His commands. He – and He alone – is to be God. That is a simple statement, but oh, how hard it is! God is serious about not wanting us to make idols for ourselves, whether those idols are things we can see and touch and are made out of plastic, chrome, wood, dollar bills or anything else, or whether the idols are hidden in our hearts so that only we can see what we love most and hold dearest.

I hope when you look at the very first command of God that you truthfully ask yourself, “Is God always first in my heart, my thoughts, my actions? Or is there somebody or something that I put before him? Do I put me before God?” Take a close look at your life. If you were not in church and somebody asked you a simple question, “What is most valuable to you?” what would automatically come rolling off your lips? My family, my spouse, my children, my home, my friends, my stuff? Truthfully, where would God be? Would you think to include him on your list of most valuable and important in your life, let alone let him be first?

Oh, I think if we stood before the holy God on that day on Mount Sinai, you and I would be shaking in our sandals. I hope that as you sit there you squirm a little in your chair, as you ponder God's wrath over your sins. I know I do. On our own, we stand before God in terrified awe of His holiness and justice. Yes, when we are truthful and look into the mirror of God's holy Law, we have to confess in terror that we deserve the just punishment for our crimes against God. The children of Israel as sinners were in terror of this holy God. They stood in awe of Him, mindful of his just wrath over sin. But that is only part of the story. Yes, like you and I they were sinners, yet, at the same time they were not terrified. They were sinners who had been confronted by a merciful and forgiving God.

God showed His mercy when He addressed Moses and the people. Did you catch it? The very first words that he spoke displayed his mercy, **“I am the LORD, your God.”** When you look at this phrase in your bulletin, you see the name **LORD** is in all capital letters. This name is YAWEH, where we get our English name *Jehovah*. It is the name God gave to Moses when Moses asked who He was. It stands for the Savior God. He is the **LORD** of the covenant who promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob to send a Savior. He is the **LORD** who promised and delivered them from slavery. That is what *LORD* means.

Now look at the two words that follow: **“YOUR God.”** The **LORD** says that He is their God. And in turn they are His people. What a powerful statement! He is their Savior God. He is the one who will rescue them from sin and death just like He promised to rescue them from slavery in Egypt. Even though all have sinned against Him, even though all have broken His Law, even though all rebelled against Him, the **LORD** in mercy promises grace and gives forgiveness.

My dear friends, the Holy Spirit wishes to say to you today through this section of Scripture, **“The LORD is YOUR GOD, and you are his people.”** We come before our Lord with our heads bowed down in sin and disgrace, deserving His just wrath... but instead He reaches down and picks us up. We look into His face and do not see an angry God but our **LORD** who says, **“I forgive you.”** We see the hands that picked us up have nail scars on them, for He himself said, **“I will suffer God’s holy wrath and justice in your place,”** he so he paid the price of our disobedience by giving His perfect life as payment on the cross. Now, you and I stand before him not in terror and shame. But we stand in awe before our **LORD**, because we stand holy and perfect in the sight of the Heavenly Father through Jesus, our Lord. The apostle Paul, in our Second Lesson from Romans 8 said it beautifully, **“There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”**

A little boy stands in awe of his heroes; football players, who win battles on the gridiron. How much more do we, his children, stand in awe of our Savior, *Christus Victor* (Christ, the Victorious One) who won the battle over our sins, took our just and deserved punishment on the cross! Here, in a few moments, we will stand before the altar in awe, as our Lord and Savior offers us his true body and blood to eat and drink with this bread and wine, to reassure us that the payment for our sins against the 1st commandment is complete, that we now stand holy and perfect before our God, because of his body and blood. At the beginning of the service, we stood in awe, as we remembered our own baptisms, when Jesus Christ washed our sins away through water and Word. Wow! We didn’t earn it and we certainly did not deserve it. But the **LORD**, our God, has mercy on us. And so we stand in awe before our God and we worship Him..

He deserves our worship. Our God is worthy of our praise and thanks. He is worthy to have the position of respect, honor and love. As Martin Luther said in his explanation of the 1st Commandment, we will **fear, love and trust in Him above all things.** We will put him first in our lives, as worthy of more attention than our TVs, our hobbies, our cars, our homes, our education, our jobs, yes, as worthy of more time and love than even our

families, our children or friends. You and I will love him above all things, not because we have to, but because he first loved us.

A little boy stands in awe of his heroes. As children of God you and I stand with mouths gaping, staring at the cross, where we see the full force of God's wrath and vengeance. We stand before the cross in awe, for there we also see the full extent of God's lovingkindness for you and me. We stand in awe –forgiven – eager and ready to carry out his commandments. May he grant it to us for Jesus' sake. Amen.