

The Third Day of the Heart

By Richard Farmer

Richard Farmer:

--A graduate of a Christian college, and I think we tend to know of each other, we learn about the other colleges as we're doing our work. And so I've known of you for a long time, but never have had the joy of being on your campus. So thank you very much for the invitation to be here.

Before I forget, I need to see Heather Doud, D-O-U-D, I guess, it's--I assume the pronunciation is Doud, but you have a friend, at Taylor, and I announced that I was coming to Biola and she said, I have a friend there. I said, well, write your friend a note and I will hand deliver it. So you have mail. Please come see me, Heather and I will give you a note from your friend at Taylor University. I am from New York City. I collect New York City stories. Most of them are not true, but I collect them. And I want to tell you one New York story, then we're going to dive into this text in Exodus chapter 19.

It is told that a group of New Yorkers one day presented themselves to St. Peter at the gate, and one of them, being the spokesman for the group said, how you doing? Peter said, may I help you? Yeah, we-we'd like to get in. Peter says, where are you from? New York. We've never had anybody qualified from New York to get in here, but could-could you just wait right here? I will talk to God about it. Right, no problem, take your time. So Peter goes to God and he says, listen, I got several guys from New York City at the gate, they'd like to get in. God said we've never had anybody from New York City even make it into heaven, it might it might be fun. Yeah. Let them in. I think that'd be good. So Peter goes back to the gates and in seconds he is back to God. He says, I think they're gone. God says all the guys from New York are gone? No, the gates! The

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gates. We do not all steal in New York City, but I just thought I'd share that story and may it edify you.

I want to read from the New King James Version of the Scriptures from the 19th chapter of the Book of Exodus, in what Marva Dawn calls the first Testament. She says the word old has such negative connotations in our culture that she is calling the two parts of the Bible the First Testament and Second Testament. And I'm beginning to try to remember to do that. So in the First Testament Exodus chapter 19, while the entire chapter would be my text, in the interest of time, I want to simply read the first couple of verses and then I will point you to other verses. As we work our way through this message, I want to take on the theme of this conference and talk to you about the third day of the heart, the third day of the heart. Exodus 19:1 from the New King James Version.

In the third month after the children of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on the same day they came to the wilderness of Sinai, for they had departed from Rephidim, had come to the wilderness of Sinai and camped in the wilderness. So Israel camped there before the mountain. Interesting way to celebrate a third month anniversary coming out of Egypt on your third month anniversary. You celebrate your coming out by going in. Out of Egypt and into the wilderness, not a great itinerary. As difficult as that sounds as a journey, it is a viable survivable because God speaks to them. I can go a long way if I simply know that God will talk to me. I heard the story recently of a--in fact, it was last summer, I was preaching at a church in Detroit and went out to dinner with a family and they were telling me that their house got TP'd the night before.

Toilet papered. And that someone had come. And the son, the high school aged son, said it was done in retaliation because I TP'd her house and he said she is a rank amateur.

She only used twenty-four rolls of toilet paper on my house. I used 250 rolls on her house. And he said, when I TP'd her house, her father was so angry the next morning that he didn't even talk to her and he said, her father and that student were very close and he usually says, goodbye, honey, I'm going to work now. I love you so much. And he said that he just opened the door and said, have a good day and just slammed the door. He was so annoyed that toilet paper was all over his lawn and in his trees, wrapped it around the chimney everywhere. The children of Israel can go a long way because God is not so ticked that he will not speak to them. They have been rebellious, and hard hearted, and stiff necked, it is true, but God is not simply opening the door saying have a nice day and slamming the door. He-he's talking to them. In fact, it is the only thing that gets Israel through the night. It is that Yahweh is still on speaking terms with us.

So the passage begins that they came out of Egypt or came out of Egypt, went into the wilderness and they're in the wilderness. God would speak, but that's-that's all I need. God first calls them to remembrance. Moses went to God and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, this is what I want you to tell my people. In verse four, he calls them to remember who he is. Listen to what he says. You have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on Eagle's wings and brought you to myself. Now, therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice, now stop there. You-you remember what I did before, don't you? He says you have seen me work, haven't you? You know my track record, don't you? Now, Moses, when you talk to them, I'm still speaking to you. When you talk to them, tell them to remember that I am still talking to them

and remind them of what I have done, how I have borne them on eagle's wings, remind them of my love for them.

Remind them that I have gone to bat for them. Then he calls them not only to remember, but to realignment. He said, Now, now you folks get yourselves in gear and obey me and remember to keep my covenant. Then you will be a special treasure to me above all people. Now, let's not mess this up. Come out of Egypt into the wilderness. But I want to call you to remembrance and a realignment. Now get yourselves in game. Remember my covenant. Don't waver. Well, this is good. God issues a call to worship. When I go around the country and talk about worship, I remind people that in spite of the fact that worship has become an industry now, worship is not our idea. I know you think you are doing God a favor and you have decided you're going to put together a worship band and you're going to like, praise him. But I'm going to tell you, it was his idea. I go, I'm in a different church almost every weekend of my life, and I'm appalled to hear some of the language, it's very telling.

I'll hear especially 20 somethings say something like this. Well, this church is about 60 years old, but in the last year since I've been here, we're really into worship. You imbecile. But you mean to tell me they didn't know how to worship until you came? Well, aren't we fortunate that you've come to show us the Father? Well, aren't we blessed, I guess for the first fifty-nine years of our life here, we just were dinking around. But you came and now we're into worship. What an affront to those who built that church. What an affront to those saints who now sleep in death, who prayed and who gave and who shaped the vision of that church so you can have some place to say your ignorant comments. You know, the call to worship is not our idea. We didn't come up

with this. And worship is older than integrity music. It's older than Maranatha. It's older than Don Mowatt. It's older than your favorite artists. It's steeped in the tradition of a God who dares and deigns to speak to us, who don't deserve to have a word from papa. Tell them to continue to follow me and hear my voice. I'm still speaking. And you have come out of Egypt, but you're not so far out that you don't need a word from me. And you're in the wilderness, but you're not so far in that you don't need a word from me. So tell them to remember and tell them to continue keeping my covenant. Oh, this is good.

And then God calls them to worship. You-you'll be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. These are the words you should speak. So Moses came in and called for the elders of the people made before them the words the Lord commanded him. It's a call to worship now, Moses. You go and you call them to come and remember my word. And every time we gather in the name of this speaking God, we gather to remember his words. We gather to remember his deeds. We gather to celebrate his character. And we come and once again give him our hearts. I used to think that in my tradition, the preachers were terribly, terribly stuck. Because in my tradition, no matter where the preachers would begin the sermon, they end up at Calvary. They could be-they could start off preaching and one of the genealogies. But before it was over, they were going to take you to the cross. And I used to think, come on, this is not even faithful to the text.

It's an Old Testament text, and you need to talk more about how you need to be looking at the history and who was on the throne at the time and how-how did we all of a sudden jump and get to the Second Testament. And as I have gotten older, I have discovered the glory of their calling us to remember it's every week. So you'd have these preachers. And I come from a great

preaching tradition. You have these preachers just before I take my seat this morning, I won't tell you about Jesus and what he's done for me came into my life. It was a dark night, but he became the light of the world for me. I was spiritually hungry, but he's the bread of life and-and he rehearses all that Jesus is and was and shall be. I don't care where we started. We were going to end up talking about Jesus. That's precisely what God is saying to Moses. And I don't care what you've been through. I don't care where you're going. Let's go over this again.

I brought you out of Egypt. I brought you into the wilderness. I'm the God who has raised you up and who has borne you on eagle's wings, and make sure they don't forget that I'm the God who establish my covenant and I'm calling you to come to me again. The call to worship is issued by God. And I want to suggest that in worship, the call to worship is a call that comes upon us. And in worship we act and the direction is up. We come into the face of this papa and the direction is up. We focus on him at Taylor University. I must tell you that I don't allow announcements in chapel at all, period. None. Just won't have it. Not as long as I'm there. There shall be no announcements in chapel now. I'll make an announcement before chapel, but once chapel begins, the focus is up and I don't want to come down for some announcement.

And it may be a necessary announcement, but we have to find another place to put it, another way to get it known. But we are not going to come down with from the beginning of worship, we're going this way and we're not stopping to talk to announce the scores of some soccer game. I don't want to interrupt it to talk about some gathering tonight at nine o'clock and one of the dorms as important as that might be. So we'll do it a minute before 10:00. But the moment chapel begins, focus is up. This is what God tells Moses. Now you go to Israel and remind them where

they ought to be looking. And remind them what they ought to be thinking. It is a call to worship and the direction is up, but it's also a call to wonder, and the direction is now gone. Issues a call to wonder.

Let's listen to verse nine. And the Lord said to Moses, Behold, I come to you in the thick cloud so that the people may hear when I speak to you and believe you forever, I come and I reveal myself in this thick cloud. Now this wonder worshippers, when we bring out acts of adoration and reflection and remembrance and realignment to this covenant, making covenant keeping God and the direction is up. Now there is wonder and the direction is down. That is, God in all his glory, speaks from heaven and shows himself from heaven and condescends to our lowest state. He comes down to us. Tell them, Moses, that I'm not so high that I cannot come and visit them in the cloud. I want the cloud. I preached a sermon some years ago, I really ought to preach it again. I liked the text.

It is the text in which the priests are overcome by the cloud of God's glory. I call the sermon clamoring for the cloud. And I told that congregation that-that my goal in life is to be absolutely overwhelmed by the cloud of God's glory, where our heads are literally lost in the clouds. We're more in a state of glory than we are in anything else. That's what God says to Israel, you make sure they come to me and that they remember and their focus is up, but I'm also going to come to you and the focus will be that I will come down, look down, send the cloud down, and it is enough for them. God also issued a call to consecration here in which boundaries are acknowledged and maintained.

There is in this text in Exodus 19, a wonderful mystical experience that these people have wherein they are invited to come close, but not too close. Come here and talk to papa. But respect the boundaries and maintain them. Go to the people and consecrate them today and let them wash their hands. Remind them that this is no ordinary deity. They're getting ready to have a confrontation with the eternal king of kings. Now, tell them not to take that lightly. I must tell you that before I went to Nyack College, I had had very little exposure to the Anglo or dominant culture worship life. And because I went to a predominantly Anglo college and was active in ministry there, I became introduced and got thrust into the Anglo worship world. May I tell you one of the first things that offended me, it was that the heart of the worshiper in the Anglo tradition seemed to know no appropriate boundaries.

Let me tell you what I mean by that. When I was raised the great Trinity Baptist Church in the Bronx, when you came into the church building, there was something that turned on you and you were told, this is church. This is a building set aside for a specific purpose, and you don't conduct yourself in this building like you might conduct yourself elsewhere. So there was no yelling across the room. And-and you-you never, for instance, allow communion table. The communion table is almost a sacred piece of furniture, you never laid your hymnals on it. And I started traveling around the churches and I see people take a communion table. I saw one guitarist. He put his foot up on the communion table and was singing. And I said, you do that to the communion table, same table on which we serve the Lord's Supper. The first time I went into a church of the dominant culture and heard one of the parishioners call the pastor by his first name, I almost had a stroke, mild stroke.

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You you call him Pat?! You call him by his first name. Well, in our tradition, it's reverend or pastor or doctor. But you you never called him by his first name because there was something in us that knew there were boundaries. Now, listen to me. I'm really not here to argue for a table not being used for other purposes or for arguing against the multipurpose building. I don't even care if you call your pastor by his first name, but God help us if we don't recognize the line between us and God. It's real, I'm glad to talk to you, but just understand, we are not on the same level, we're not here. I am Yahweh and you're not. I am the king of kings and you're not. I created the world and you did not. So tell them to come, but tell them to wash them so they can't come to me in any old kind of condition.

They got to get ready. There are boundaries, acknowledge and tell them they just don't come on up cos they got to be invited. Tell them that there are boundaries between us and God, between them and God. And so verse 12 says you shall set bounds for the people all around, saying take heed to yourselves that you do not go up to the mountain or touch its base. Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. It is the call to proximity and at the same time a call to respect the boundaries around the eternal. It is the holy ground model. It is the-this is someplace else and we're talking to somebody else. Let us remember that. And God issues this call to preparation and anticipation. And this is where the-the third day idea comes. There is such anticipation here as God says to Moses, now, I tell you, I want you to go and tell them to come worship me, but tell them to take a little time now to get ready, because on the third day, we're going to meet God.

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Now, I'm afraid that we-we don't know this third day concept, but this-this is the idea of anticipation and preparation. I must tell you that I still live for Sunday mornings. Oh, I can hardly sleep on a Saturday night. I don't even have to be preaching the next morning, although I frequently am. But Saturday night, I'm so excited because tomorrow we get to go to worship and it's different from the worship we have all week. Most of our worship during the week is private worship or small group worship. But-but tomorrow morning I get to be with a few hundred other people who-who love Jesus and we get to sing together somewhere. I can't always experience in private devotion, but I get to hear the voices of other people. And tomorrow morning it's church. In my tradition, we had Sunday clothes. So you-you dress differently. And there was a different mindset. We live ten blocks from our church. I live in a housing project. We didn't have a car and we'd walk ten blocks.

My siblings and the Jackson children, of whom they were ten, the ten Jackson children and their parents, or 12 of them. We'd walk like a little mob to the Trinity Baptist Church. And I was so excited on Saturday night I could hardly sleep. Tomorrow I get to put on my church clothes and get to be with church people and we get to sing church songs and we get to hear about God. And I was so excited, and I still am. I'm going to be forty-nine next week-- next month, rather. I'm still like a little kid on Saturday night. We get to go meet God tomorrow morning. This is what Moses is told to tell the Saints. You tell them that on the third day something's going to happen. Tell them to get ready for the third day.

I want to suggest that as God is calling us and calling for our hearts, he-he is daring us to-to get ready for the third day to-to expect that God will arrest us and gauge us, call us to himself and

that something significant will happen. I want to give him my heart, but I want to make sure that I've got regularly this third day of the heart going on where the heart anticipates a confrontation with the eternal. Tell them that on the third day, I'm going to do something different, something significant, and let them be ready for the third day. Verses 11:4, on the third day, the Lord will come down upon Mount Sinai in the side of all the people. Third day, God's going to show up. Don't-don't miss third day because on the third day God's coming. This is the sense of anticipation that marked Israel, it is a sense of anticipation that I would-would mark us all.

Now, it is possible to go at this text strictly from the academic side. Yes, what we have here is a revelation of your way to the people of Israel. And we have here a sense of expectation as the eternal God would see to it that there is some kind of event in which the people of God recognize the presence of the God of history. Yeah, there is that aspect. But that's only--do you get to verse 16 when you can't be terribly academic because it's all sensory, came to pass on the third day in the morning, but there were thunder and lightning and a thick cloud on the mountain. And the sound of the trumpet was very loud so that all the people who were in the camp trembled. Well, there was something to see, something to hear, something to feel. By the way, don't be afraid of a spiritual experience that you feel. It's no less valid than the one you see and the one you hear about and the one you write about.

Every now and then, you ought to tremble. Physically, there ought to be some visceral response to the God who has condescended to speak to us. In fact, I'm not sure I want my--in fact, I'm sure I don't want my faith to be all academic. I want to know the facts. I want to have my mind stimulated and fair. I don't want to have to kiss my brain goodbye just to follow Jesus. But every

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now and then I want the wind to blow. Every now and then, I want some thunder and lightning. And every now and then I've wanted it to cause me to tremble, tremble, tremble. Were you there? Every now and then, I want verse 16 to happen in my life, I want this third day of the heart where the heart is arrested and where the heart has as its regular habit, this coming before Sinai and accepting the possibility that the eternal God may arrest us not.

Let me talk to you chapel attenders, as I know you will, as the product of a Christian college. I went to chapel every day, five days a week. I was a campus pastor at a college where we had chapel three days a week and I now am a campus pastor where we also have chapel three days a week and Sunday night. Let me tell you what some of you think. You think chapel is a big waste of time with a capital W. Big upper case, twenty-four point font W, waste, bold type, waste of your time, and you might be right. Because if your heart has no anticipation of a third day, it will just come right over you. Did you feel the trembling? Nah. Did you hear the thunder in chapel this morning? No. Did you did you see the lightning of God? No.

Reminds me of what was said about a young lady. She's very beautiful. They said she's all vogue on the outside, but all vague on the inside. If you don't have this third day of the heart where you anticipate the presence of the eternal showing up in the cloud, you miss it. Tell them, Moses, that on the third day I'm going to show up and I know it is possible to come to chapel week after week after week and week, week, week, because you don't expect that God will speak to you. Now, with the college where I am now, we have a voluntary chapel and it's full every day. Every day we have chapel packed out. But I know some of you come to chapel because you must.

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Here's what I want to suggest to you. Since you have to be here anyway, why don't you anticipate that God might get his book in you?

But since you've got to show up, why don't you treat it like a third day and expect that it is possible that he is going to show up in the cloud and arrest me and have my undivided attention? Since you have to be here anyway, why not lay bare the heart and expect that the habit of that heart will be to welcome the eternal as he condescends to us? I got to wrap this up. I want to suggest that ecstasy can lead to presumptuous. You can get to the point where you think things have to happen because I am worshiping now as part of my concern about the name it and claim it, grab it and grab it, crowd who tell me that because they've used certain phrases, God has to do certain things. He doesn't have to do anything. He's not bound by your presumption. But it is possible to presuppose that since I have come to worship and since I have cooperated with God as he displays himself, displays his glory, he must-he must do certain things.

I love the warning in verse twenty one as this chapter comes to a close, the Lord said to Moses, Go down and warn the people lest they break through to gaze at the Lord and many of them perish and let the priests who come near the Lord consecrate themselves lest the Lord break out against them. Don't-don't think you're all that and a bag of chips. Remind them that they-they still couldn't take it if I displayed my full glory, tell them to watch the boundaries and don't become so ecstatic that they forget who they are and who I am. Tell them not to be presumptuous lest they gaze upon me inappropriately, and tell those who serve me that they still should consecrate themselves, that this is a different kind of meeting. Tell the people they can't just come boldly up to Mt. Sinai. They must watch the boundaries.

I was at a Christian college recently for a series of services, and I told someone that I was very strangely stirred in a negative way by a worship team whose leader closed her eyes at the beginning of the portion of worship she led and never opened them once. And I told them I felt like a voyeur. She was in the zone, she was just in another world and was almost as if she was touching God, but we were not permitted to come, certainly, where she was. She was there and we were left out there watching her as she was in the zone. God, says Moses, now tell them, don't get so ecstatic that they forget where they are. And who they are and with whom they are dealing. Tell them not to come so close that they forget that I'm the eternal God and there must be some distance between us, tell them that I'm the eternal God and they can't just come sauntering up to the mountain saying what it is, I'm here now.

Tell them they must still walk on tiptoe for their coming to deal with the king of kings. Tell them that I display my glory, but on my terms. Tell them to get ready for the third day. And on that third day it was glorious. Did you read it in the text? On that third day God showed up. I can do ministry if I-if I simply know that God will show up. If the habit of my heart is to come with this third day anticipation, believing that God will anoint and sanctify and use me and use my ministry, I can go a long way. I want to tell you, I checked the record. The God of Moses in Israel and Exodus 19 is our God. Today he's still calling us and he's still daring us to come appropriately close. And he's still telling us if you just stay right there, just wait. I'll show up in all my glory and I will lavish upon you the crown you need to do effective ministry. So you may be anointed for his purposes, used by him in glorious ways.

And this is the good news of the gospel. Let the habit of your heart be this regular trip to Sinai, this regular sense of anticipation that the Lord may meet us there and change us and do wonderful things in us and speak to our hearts, we who do not deserve to be spoken to. Let us believe that he has a word for us and that word will make every difference in us. I still live for Sundays, I still live for Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings in Upland, Indiana. I still live for a Sunday night when I get the chance to mount the pulpit and declare the purposes and the verities and the character of this God. So may your heart be stirred and drawn. And when Papa God looks on you, may he see in you no resistance. Hey, you come to the mountain. Is about to put on a show. And may he have your heart? Amen. I'm going to ask you to stand for the benediction, please.

I want to lead you in prayer, and when you hear the phrase "and now my brothers and sisters," at that moment, I would like you, please, to open your eyes and look at me. I would like to pronounce upon you a benediction, and I will give that to you with eyes open. I want to look into your faces and pronounce it upon you. But in the early church it was the good saying, the final blessing. We will pray. And then when you hear the phrase "and now my brothers and sisters," at that moment, if you're praying with eyes closed then please open your eyes when you hear that phrase. Let us pray. Thank you, God of Israel, God of La Mirada, for speaking to us and for giving us a sense of anticipation. Grant to us, we pray, a worshiping heart, a worshiping mind. Grant us the excitement that ought to mark those who walk with you, forgive us our dullness, forgive us our boredom with things divine. Forgive us for dragging ourselves to worship, if we are guilty of that, and grant that they may-they may be the sense of wonder and worship as we come into your presence. Often, always.

And now, my brothers and sisters, may the Lord bless you, and may the Lord keep you, and may the Lord cause His face to shine upon you, and may the Lord grant you His peace. May the Lord put in you a hunger for Him, go from this place, loving God more and more daily. May the Lord make light dance in your eyes. May He put a bounce in your step. May He put anticipation in your spirit. Now go, in the strong name of the Lord of hosts, your way, Elohim, Jehovah, go in the name of Him who loves you more than you love Him, and in the name of Him who sings over you more than you sing to Him, in the name of Him who's more loyal to you than you are to Him. May He keep you, for you surely cannot keep yourselves. And when Papa God looks on you, may He say of you what He said of His Son. Jesus, this is my beloved. And in her-and in Him I am well pleased. Amen.