

Covenant: Promises Made, Part 6 - Moses

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- [0 : 00] Who does the Lord speak to in verse 3? It's really interesting, the choice of words. Moses went up to God. The Lord called him from the mountain and said, this is what you are to say to the house of Jacob.
- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all received that covenant promise of blessing from God. And here's a reminder, God is keeping that promise. He said there would be 430 years in slavery, but then there'd be freedom.
- Then they would take possession of the land of blessing. And here they are on the move to become God's people, to become a nation, to receive the land of promise. How did they get to this point?
- Again, verse 4 is making it absolutely clear. It's all about God's initiative. You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt.
- So there's a reminder, God has acted to judge the enemies of Israel. The way that they are free is because God has acted decisively against Egypt. That's God's doing.
- [1 : 05] You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt and how I carried you on eagle's wings. So God delivered Israel and then God, by his power, protected, provided for all of their needs while they're wandering in the wilderness, opening the Red Sea so they could walk through, providing for them as they journeyed.
- God is delivering his people from slavery. And he's doing that in order that he might bring them to himself. See that there at the end of verse 1?
- I carried you on, verse 4, sorry, I carried you on eagle's wings and brought you to my cell. So God's doing this. He's judging enemies. He's delivering the people.
- He's drawing Israel to himself because the goal of the covenant is that the people might enjoy life with God. They might enjoy relationship with him.
- That's always the ultimate goal of God's salvation, that we might know and enjoy him. And then in chapter 20, verses 1 and 2, we get a mini prologue to the Ten Commandments.
- [2 : 17] Verse 2, I am the Lord your God who brought you out of Egypt, out of the land of slavery. Covenant Lord has redeemed them, therefore, the Ten Commandments.
- So we need that right order. And Moses, as he writes the book and God as he acts, is very clear on the order. Israel is saved by grace to become God's people and their obedience to the law comes as a response, not to gain a reward.
- It's about gratitude, not trying to gain favor. Toy Story 4 is out. And one of the nice stories along the Toy Story films is that of the relationship between Mr. Potato Head and the aliens, who are saved from the claw and various other calamities.
- And maybe if you've seen Toy Story, I think it's Toy Story 2, you'll remember the aliens speaking to Mr. Potato Head saying, you have saved our lives. We are eternally grateful.
- And Mr. and Mrs. Potato Head can't escape these aliens who are always trying to do them good. Because they had been saved, they wanted to show gratitude by serving. And that's the point of the Ten Commandments.

[3 : 31] And that's the point of the Gospel. Jesus has taken our judgment for sin. He has delivered us from our spiritual slavery. He has brought us into the family of God.

Therefore, we obey as a way for us to say, we are eternally grateful for your salvation. We honor God in our lives in light of his saving grace to us in the new covenant.

It should be a joy to us to obey, because we remember what God has done for us in rescuing us and providing for us. So that's one reason to obey. We obey because of what God has done.

The second reason is we obey because of who we are. And that's made clear as well in Exodus chapter 19. One of the things as you follow the line of the covenant, it keeps on expanding.

So it begins with one man, Adam, and his wife, Eve. Then one family, the family of Noah. Then the family of Abraham, primarily. And that expands now to one nation, Israel. And then you get to the new covenant.

[4 : 38] You see God's church goes fully global. But as God is calling and as God is promising, he's also establishing for his people a new identity.

And with that, then new obligations for how to live. So verses five and six are really helpful in this regard. Now, verse five says, Now, if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you'll be my treasured possession.

Now, it's really important for us at this point to recognize that when God says obey me fully, he's not expecting perfect obedience. We said that last time. God doesn't expect perfect obedience because he knows that's impossible of us.

And that's clear in Israel's story. And Psalm 106 that we just sang makes the point that even before the people got to Mount Sinai, they've been set free over here in Egypt.

Even before they get here, they're grumbling, complaining, they're lacking faith. And even while they're at Mount Sinai, they make the golden calf, the image. But God is still faithful to his covenant.

[5 : 46] And so he's not expecting perfect obedience. And we know that too, because within the law, chapters 21 to 24, and then in the book of Leviticus, we see there are lots of sacrifices so that the people might be forgiven.

So built into God's law is the recognition that they will need to receive mercy. And so there's sacrifice and forgiveness built in. But they're told, when you obey, when you live as my people, certain realities will be true for you.

First of all, in verse five there, you will be my treasured possession. Just as kings at the time of Moses would have their treasure chests, all their wealth, it was sometimes on display.

God is saying, my treasure will be you, my people. He's saying that he values his people highly. Although the whole earth is mine, you will be for me a kingdom of priests.

So the nation as a whole, we're given this responsibility to represent God, to be, as it were, the mediator between God and the surrounding nations, praying for the nations that they might be brought in, praying that God's will might be done on earth as it is in heaven.

[7 : 17] So they are to serve God, and they are to be a holy nation. Holy, to be set apart. From what is common for special use.

The people of Israel, one of the things that their laws were to do was to set them apart as being different, living by a different set of values, following a different God, living as a holy nation, again, with a mission aim.

That as they lived holy lives to the glory of God, others were to be brought in. Now, it's interesting. So God is blessing the people here.

He's saying, you will be my treasured possession. You'll be a kingdom of priests. You'll be a holy nation. But those blessings are also obligation. And so they are to live out this new identity.

But one thing that says to us then is that doing God's will is good for us. Rather than it being a chore, these acts of obedience are actually a way for us to receive God's blessing.

[8 : 28] Keeping God's law to honor our creator, to honor our savior is good for us as people. And so this is who Israel were.

And then Peter, when he is describing the church in 1 Peter chapter 2, he goes to this passage and he uses the exact same language to describe the church.

So in 1 Peter chapter 2, verse 9, he says, So there's a reminder too that for us, our identity is to have a missionary purpose.

That we live to the glory of God, to praise him for that wonderful change. We used to be in the kingdom of darkness and we've been brought into God's kingdom of wonderful light.

And we are to live out that identity. Living to praise God, living to please God, living to serve God. That by faith in Jesus, we are a new creation.

[9 : 46] And our calling then is to live like this is true. To live those set apart lives. To live secure in our identity, knowing that we are valued by God.

This is our mission as a church. You know, there are some cultures where, for example, there's a picture up there on the screen.

If I was to say to most people here, probably most people on the street, the word Amish, then instantly we'd have ideas about value, about culture, about identity, living off grid, living a simple way of life, strong sense of community, horse-strong carriages, sort of opposition to modernity.

Their identity shapes how they live. And there are some cultures that are really strong and have that kind of influence. Well, when we say, I am a Christian, that identity should shape every part of our life.

Not just on Sunday, but every part of our lives. That God wants us to be communities of light and of love. It's one of the great things about simple things like going to the meadows and having a picnic.

[10 : 55] Here we are as a group of God's people brought together simply because that we love God and we love one another and we want to spend time together. But in all that we do, we are to be declaring God's praise in our word and in our witness.

Just like Israel, they were called together as this nation to represent God and the earth. So God calls churches together. He calls Christians together, places them in families and community groups and in congregations so that we might display the praises of God.

And so it's important for us then to examine our own lives and to think, well, what is my identity truly based on? Whether we're Christians or not, we need to ask ourselves the question, truly, what is my identity based on?

Is that then reflected in how I choose to spend my time or my money or the priorities that I set for my life? Life. We're told that we should obey God's law because of who we are.

And then the last reason from the prologue to the Ten Commandments for obeying the law, we obey because of who God is. So the rest of this chapter is really a reminder of the character of God, the one who enters into covenant with his people.

[12 : 20] So we're being reminded that there is a God who speaks. One of the unique things about the Ten Commandments is that they're spoken directly by God so that the people hear the voice of God.

And we know this because at the end, towards the end of the chapter, of chapter 20, chapter 20 in verse 19, the people say to Moses, speak to us yourself and we will listen, but do not have God speak to us or we will die.

So here's the speaking God, speaking his will directly to the people so that they can hear. And that was terrifying to them because they realized they were in the presence of a holy God.

But there's good news there too because we have a God who speaks, a God who relates, a God who wants relationship, a God who reveals himself so relationship is possible.

One of the things that the Ten Commandments does is it reveals something of the character and the will of God and that's good news for us. We don't need to be wondering what's God like, how does he expect me to live?

[13 : 26] He gives us his word and he gives us places like the Ten Commandments where that becomes really clear. And then ultimately the God who speaks, speaks to us through his son who comes in human form.

The God who speaks, it's important for us to recognize too that this God who speaks, although he terrifies Israel because of his holiness, he is the God who is for them. He is on their side.

We see that despite unfaithfulness, he remains faithful. God is the unchanging God. Paul reminds us of that in Romans 8. Since God is for us, who can be against us?

There is reason for hope for Israel. There's reason for hope for the church when we feel small and weak and isolated. Our God is for us. He knows what he's doing.

He's in control. The speaking God is also the sovereign God of the universe. So this God is a God who speaks. He's also the God who provides the mediator for Israel.

[14 : 33] Verse 9. The Lord said to Moses, I am going to come to you in a dense cloud so that people will hear me speaking with you and will always put their trust in you.

Now that's interesting because you would expect, naturally, I'm going to speak so that the people would put their trust in me as their God. But no, he's saying so that people will trust you as the mediator, the one I've chosen to be the deliverer.

Here in the book of Exodus, we are seeing God's pattern of salvation. God saves through his mediator. God saves through his rescuer. Sometimes that's the judges.

Sometimes that's the kings. Ultimately, that then is Jesus. Now Moses is a picture for us of Jesus. That just as in this covenant, Moses was provided.

So in the new covenant, there is Jesus. He is provided. He is the one who acts to save us. He is the one who even now is acting for us. He's praying for us. He promises his presence with us and he'll finally bring us to God forever.

[15 : 43] So in this moment, we're seeing a pattern of redemption, of salvation being set up that we'll see all through the Old Testament climaxing with Jesus. But the main thing that becomes clear about who God is in this section of Exodus chapter 19 is the God who is holy.

That's the dominant theme that we have. So in verse 10, the people are told, go and consecrate yourself today and tomorrow.

Why do they need to wash themselves? Because when people are before a holy God and a pure God, they must be cleansed. They're warned in verse 12, put limits for the people around the mountain and tell them, be careful you do not go up the mountain or touch the foot of it.

Whoever touches the mountain shall surely be put to death. Why that warning? Why those limits? Because people must not get too close to the blazing holiness of our God.

God is a burning light. And so there should be a sense of awe and there's a sense of separation between a holy God and this sinful people.

[16 : 57] There is the thunder, there is the lightning, there's the trumpet blast of verse 16. A reminder, here's the God of all glory and power. And the people, as we've seen, have that sense of fear and have that sense of awe because it's made very clear to them in a number of different ways.

The God who is speaking to you, the God who has called you is also the God who is perfectly holy. Who is God to Israel, he is their holy savior.

That's an important reason for them to obey God's law. It's an important reason for us to obey God's law because our God is holy. Be holy because I am holy.

And so these laws, they express God's holy character, God's holy and good and perfect will. And as such, they're good for every age and every generation.

While people might like to put them to one side and say they're outmoded and outdated and now that grace has come, there's no need for the law. This law reflects who our God is.

[18 : 09] It reminds us of the holiness of God. And when we stop and think about it, we recognize the goodness of these laws. Imagine a world where the Ten Commandments were kept.

Imagine a world where when you switched on the evening news, there were no horror stories, no murders, no rapes, no warfare and bloodshed.

Imagine a house where there was no family fallout because there was honor, because people were being careful with their words. There'd be no wars, there'd be no armies, there'd be no being hurt by gossip and lying, there'd be no need for a police force or locks on our doors, there'd be no burnout from overwork because people would be resting.

The Ten Commandments, if they were ever lived out, would actually be so good for nations and societies. Now because they come from a holy God who is a good God, who loves His people and makes good provision for His people.

To love God and to love others is our greatest good. And so to keep the law is good for us. So we recognize they come from our good covenant-keeping God.

[19 : 30] So why obey the law today? Because just like in Moses' day, we obey in response to God's grace in making us His people. We become the people of God by grace and grace alone.

Then we behave out of thankfulness for what He's done. We obey because God is our Father and we are His children. They're our guide to how we live as a family.

Historically, they've always been an important way for discipleship. How do we teach young people, young Christians to follow God? The Westminster Confession of Faith, the Heidelberg Catechism, they all go to the Ten Commandments because they're so foundational for how to live well for the glory of God.

And we obey because God is holy. We want to be holy because He is holy, to be holy because God is with us, to be holy, to do it, to honor Him so that we might be consistent in our mission, in our witness, so that others ultimately might be brought in to know this God that we love and serve.

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