

Exodus 23:20-33

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[0 : 00] Good morning. It's good to be. And Joan, thank you for your music, your ministry this morning.

Savior, like a shepherd, lead us. Don't you want that kind of guidance and direction and protection from God in your life? As I think about the next 30 days or so, it's likely my last time preaching in the cafeteria. Praise God for the opportunity to serve at this place for a decade now.

And as we travel abroad to HTC Mathare in Kenya, we'll be gone for a couple of weeks. I appreciate your prayers. Thanks for praying this morning. God is doing something in us. He's doing something among us and he is doing something through us for his glory in the city and in the world.

And I trust that with your whole heart, you're embracing God and what he's doing in his work through Holy Trinity Church.

[1 : 23] Let me pray and we'll get into God's word. Father, we love you. We give thanks for your tender care. In and through Christ, great shepherd of the sheep.

Thank you, Lord Jesus, that you give face to the Lord as my shepherd and I shall not want. We bless you this morning. And may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you.

And may through that, you be pleased to bless your people this morning. That's our prayer in Christ's name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Did you notice our text today that there is a shift from where we have come?

A shift in language. A shift in the tone. We have moved from the legal language that we found in the last few chapters of Exodus.

And we are moving, we have moved into a zone in which we really get a picture. A graphic, if you will, of the one whose agenda is to get his people settled in the very place that he has designated for them.

[2 : 54] In a literary sense, we've come to an epilogue. On the front end, chapter 20, verses 22 through 26, we got an introduction. An on-ramp, if you will, into the legal language, the directions that God had for his people.

As it concerned him, a devotion to him, what that looked like. As it concerned their just dealings with one another. But that's behind us, in a sense, right now.

And the verses that we've come to today, they're buffer-like. They stand in between the giving of the words and the rules and the confirmation of the covenants.

Matter of fact, if you look at chapter 24, verse 3, Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord and all the rules.

That has come and gone at this point. And again, the confirmation of what he has said, the ratification, if you will, that law will come in next week's text.

[4 : 08] But there's a buffer of sorts between the two. The God of the covenant certainly was a sovereign, law-giving, law-enforcing God who demands the devotion of his people and that they deal justly with each other.

Make no mistake about it, that's who he is. That's part and parcel of his character. But he is also the one who personally attends his people.

He personally attends them so that he can secure their well-being by getting them to the place that he has promised.

That's the one that we see featured in our text today. And what we see here has a way of reassuring us and comforting us as it relates to who God is.

He's one who gets his people to the place that he has promised them. He is one who helps them, if you will, along the way of life.

[5 : 23] And all of us are in one way or another. We are in life. We are on a path. We are people that are in motion. And it's good to know that we are not alone regardless of where your life might be taking you right now.

The first thing that comes into view, we see it in verses 20 through 22, is protection by God. Here we see the God who protects his people on the way to the place.

Did you notice that in verse 20? Behold, I send an angel before you to guard you on the way and to bring you to the place that I have prepared.

Huh? God had, if you will, a protection plan for his redeemed people. There's a sense, friends, in which protection goes along with redemption.

Huh? In verse 20, we see the means by which God was going to protect his people. I send an angel before you to guard you.

[6 : 42] What a wonderful biblical word, Shema, that we see there. On the way and to bring you to the place I have prepared. Huh? Now, the words that immediately precede today's text, they refer to life in a land that would eventually belong to them.

So he gave directives as it concerned the feast that they were to observe in honoring God, allowing land to rest, and so forth and so on.

But they were not there yet. And God had a plan to get them into the land. God's people would not remain a wandering people.

They would eventually settle into a designated place, one that had been designated for them by God. This was part and parcel with the covenant.

I mean, we see it earlier in the books. As a matter of fact, turn back in your Bibles to Exodus chapter 3. Exodus chapter 3. Take a look.

[7 : 46] This is where God's call to Moses. Look at verses 16 and 17. Go and gather the elders of Israel and say to them, The Lord, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, has appeared to me, saying, I have observed you and what has been done to you in Egypt.

And notice verse 17. And I promise that I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt to the land of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites to a land flowing with milk and honey.

Again, this is not the only time we've seen that kind of promise. As a matter of fact, Genesis chapter 12, God's in the Abrahamic covenant included land. For God's people.

The place had been promised. And he would personally attend his people and protect them. How would he do that?

He would do so through his angel agent, if you will. This person, this being who acted with God's authority for God and as God, the Lord would be present to protect his people through an angel.

[9 : 15] His angel. And of course, this angel has been the subject of much debate. Who was this angel that would guard them, that will protect them along the way?

Well, what can we note from the text itself? According to verse 20, he is on assignment by God, sent by God to guard on the way and to bring them to the place.

This was his charge, if you will. According to verse 21, he is vested with God's authority. He's under orders.

He's acting in the Lord's name with God's standards. Not on his own accord. God's standards are his standards. Note the text. Pay attention, careful attention to him.

To and obey his voice. Do not rebel against him. For he does not pardon. He will not pardon your transgression. For my name is with him.

[10 : 22] He's invested with God's authority. He's under God's orders, acting in accord with God's standards as it relates. They're not going to get away with just anything.

Verse 22, his words are God's words. But if you carefully obey his voice and do all that I say, then I will be an enemy to your enemies and an adversary to your adversaries.

His voice, obey his voice and do all that I say. Huh? His voice is to be equated with the voice of God. His words are to be carefully heeded.

So, questions that are right then to ask. Is this a theophany? Is this an appearance of God himself in another form?

You could ask that. Is this an appearance of Jesus, second person of the Trinity, second person of the Godhead before the word was made flesh?

[11 : 28] Huh? Because the word can be translated, angel can be translated messenger. Is this a reference to Moses? Is this a reference to Moses? Or is this a reference to Joshua?

Huh? Or is this angel a supernatural heavenly being, an agent that's been deputized by God on assignment for the purposes of God for his redeemed people on earth?

Huh? Huh? Let's take a vote. No, we're not going to take a vote this morning. Pinpointing the identity, friends, does not diminish what really is being emphasized here.

Huh? The point is that God was providing protection for his people along the way. That is what's being emphasized.

That's the very point of the text that's here. He's providing protection for his people along the way.

[12 : 35] And it is the mention of the angel is fitting because they're God's agents for God's care and God's protection. What could God's people expect along the way?

Based on what we see here, God's people can expect God's protection. Protection by God is really what's coming into focus.

Huh? Several weeks ago, Shirley sang and blessed our hearts. Trials dark on every hand and we cannot understand all the ways that God would lead us to his blessed promised land.

But he will guide us with his eye and will follow till we die and we'll understand it better. By and by. God has a way of protecting his people along the way. And all of us are in motion and on the way today.

[13 : 47] Huh? Be assured. God has a protection plan for his redeemed people. God does not abandon those whom he has rescued and called to himself.

All the forces of heaven and in earth are at God's disposal. And according to what we understand in the New Testament, not one hair will fall from the head of the redeemed without the very notice of God.

Huh? God's protection along the way. The passage is about God's presence and his protection.

Huh? For behold, I'm sending an angel before you to watch over you, to guard your way and to bring you into the place that I prepared.

Huh? Safe passage for God's people to the place he has prepared. And do not passages like Romans chapter 8 speak about this?

Romans chapter 8 speaks about the sufferings of this present world. And how that in spite of them, that God's plan to eventually and ultimately get his people to his place, i.e. glorification, huh?

[15 : 19] Is going to happen regardless. Matter of fact, just let me read a little bit of Romans chapter 8, verses 31 and following. What then shall we say to these things, believers?

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all. How will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation or distress or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? And all of these things were more than conquerors through him that loved us.

Verse 38. I'm sure that neither knife or death or angels or rulers or things present or any or things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation can separate us from the love of God that's in Christ.

God is going to get us. God is going to get us to the place that he's prepared. So there to pay attention. Verse 21. Back in Exodus.

[16 : 25] And obey his voice. They're not to God's people. We're not in that setting. We're not to rebel against him. And interestingly, the word pay attention is the same word, basically, from the word that we see to guard.

And again, it speaks about giving special attention. God is going to give special attention to his people. But God's people are to give special attention to his word and what God says.

God has a protection plan for his people along the way. But as we look in verses 23 through 31, he also had a preservation plan for them when they arrived to the place that he had prepared for them.

There was a protection plan for the journey, but there was a preservation plan for when they actually arrived. Take a look at verse 23.

When my angel goes before you and brings you to the Amorites and the Hittites and the Perizzites and the Canaanites, same one we heard, peoples that we heard earlier in Exodus chapter 3, the

Hivites and the Jebusites, I will blot them out.

[17 : 39] You shall not bow down to their gods or serve them, nor do as they do, but you shall utterly overthrow them and break their pillars in pieces.

How was it that God was going to preserve his people? The God who preserved his people when they arrived to the place, he's going to protect them along the way, but he's going to preserve them once they are there.

How was he going to do it? It would mean the eventual eviction of those who inhabited the land. Verse 23, I will blot them out.

Huh? What we have here is akin to clearing of the land so that something would be freshly planted. It's sort of like when you plant a garden, you get weeds out, you get stones out.

And in a way, that's what was happening. God was clearing out the land in order that his people might be planted there and would be fruitful and grow.

[18 : 49] Huh? The gods of the land then were not to be worshipped. Their worship centers were to be wiped out and be removed from the land. And all of that was a part of the preservation of God's people.

They belonged to the God who had redeemed them and they were not to adopt the practices of the people of the land. They were distinct people on a distinct mission.

Chapter 19, verses 5 and 6. How would the Lord preserve his people? Note in verses 25 and 26. You shall serve the Lord your God and he will bless your bread and your water.

And I will take sickness away from the midst among you. None shall miscarry or be barren in your land. I will fulfill the number of your days.

I once was a part of a body of people. And you heard me sort of slip into King James a little bit as I was reading that. Because every Tuesday night at the church that I belonged to, guess what we would do?

[19 : 57] We would bring in bread and water. Literally. Because we believed, we took that verse, we took that literally.

But we also took literally the idea of serving the Lord your God. This is the idea of worshipping him. Worshipping him exclusively. And again, I know that that's a bad interpretation. Oh, but we were serious about it. But what it does, it has the idea of a people being dedicated to God.

We were dedicated to God and God alone. They were worshippers of the Lord and his blessings. The blessing of the Lord would then be the portion of God's people.

It would be seen and sensed in their everyday living, in their life cycles, in the cycles of their fruitfulness of their crops.

[21 : 08] The blessing of God was going to be visible upon his people. God was going to preserve the people that he had brought out from Egypt, placing them in the land. And he was not going to abandon them, but he was going to be with them in a way that would be palpable.

And tangible. And seen and sensed. God would be in and amongst his people. The hand of God would be upon them for good. And not for ill.

Our Lord's words that we hear in Matthew are somewhat instructed for us as we hear an echo of this particular verse in Matthew chapter 4.

This is when the devil took him upon a very high mountain, showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. And Satan gave Jesus this visual sort of panoramic view, trying to divert him from his mission, keep him from the mission of God and ultimately from the cross.

Huh? And Jesus told him, he said, then Jesus said to him, be gone, Satan, for it is written, you shall worship, you shall serve the Lord your God, and him only will you serve.

[22 : 32] Huh? Again, something that Jesus took upon himself and again, echoing what we hear in or from Exodus chapter 23, verse 25, you shall serve the Lord your God.

He will bless your bread and your water and I will take sickness away from the midst of you. Preserving God's people meant the annihilation of those who inhabited the land.

It's interesting that the Lord would do for his people all that he said that he would do. He would move others out. He would make and bring them in.

The images of God's preservation are sort of all over this particular text, particularly in verses 24 through 26. Daily provision for food and health.

It's a picture of God's shalom, his peace, his well-being for his people. Fruitfulness, births, no, births would not be aborted. Lives that were full of days.

[23 : 42] Preservation in the land. The Lord indeed would preserve his people. What we see in verses 27 through 31 is one on which we see that God is on the offensive.

He's on the move for the well-being of his people. He sets all, has all of these forces at his beck and call. Notice in verse 27, I will send my terror.

Verse 28, I will send harnets. And then this repeated phrase as far, I'm going to drive them out, I'm going to drive them out. Again, God establishing the well-being of his people, preserving them in the land.

Huh? Methods are noted. Terror, things that cause terror. Harnets, it could have been an army that was coming in and it could have been the actual insects.

Or just a general sense of panic and alarm. We see this in Joshua chapter 2. You remember the word to Joshua, he said, these folks are really scared of you guys.

[24 : 49] They've heard about what God is doing or has done in and through you. Just this general sense of panic for the people in the land. God was at work expelling the inhabitants of the land, giving them an eviction, and bringing his people in.

Huh? One of the worst things that could happen when I was in school as a kid way back when was for somebody to get expelled.

Huh? To be kept from something that everybody else was enjoying. Again, God was in the expelling business as far as getting one people out of the land to get his people in.

Huh? The assurance of God's presence to protect his people along the way. The assurance of God's power to preserve God's people once they were in the land.

That's the God that's featured in the text. Huh? And as such, that is the portion of God's people throughout the ages.

[26 : 04] He is the helper of his people. Luther said it well, didn't he? Our helper, he amid the flood, a model prevailing.

Huh? Psalm 121 majors on the word translated guard. Huh? As a matter of fact, turn over there with me. Psalm 121. where the psalmist refers to God as his helper, as his guard, as his protector, as his keeper.

Huh? That's what we see of God in this particular text today. The Lord who protects and preserves his people.

gospel. It's a very poetic compliment to what we see in our text today. I will lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come?

My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth. And notice the word translated ESV keeper is the same word that we see in our Exodus text as it relates to the one who guards and what God's people should be doing as far as carefully or paying attention to God himself and his word.

[27 : 31] He will not let your foot be moved. He who keeps you will not slumber. He who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.

Huh? Doesn't take a nap at all. The Lord is your keeper. There it is. The Lord is the shade on your right hand. The sun shall not strike you by day nor the moon by night.

The Lord will keep you from all evil. That's the word. The Lord will keep your life. The Lord will keep your going out and your coming in from this time forth even forevermore.

He's the Lord who protects and preserves his people. And at HTC we have embraced a song that expresses those very sentiments from this song.

I will lift up my eyes to the hills from whence cometh my help. My help cometh from the Lord who made heaven and earth. All of my help comes from the Lord.

[28 : 40] Protection by God. Verses 20 and 22. preservation by God verses 23 through 31. And finally notice in verses 32 and 33 perseverance by God's people.

You got protection by God and preservation by God but you've got perseverance by God's people. Notice what it says. You shall make no covenant with them and their gods.

This is with the people of the land and the people in the land that were being evicted that were being expelled from the Lord that are going to be displaced by the people of God.

Make no agreement with them and their gods. They shall not dwell on your land lest they make you sin against me.

If you serve their gods it will surely be a snare to you. Huh? Here's a warning. He's giving his people assurance of God's protection and his preservation but here's a warning for the people of God and

it's a warning for you and me.

[30 : 01] To persevere in the midst of an ungodly culture. There was not to be compromised. They were not to enter into covenants with the people of the land.

They were not to intermarry. They were not to adopt their practices. They were to be a distinctive people for God and for God's glory in the world.

They were to reflect his heart and they were to exercise his character. When onlookers looked at them they were to get a reflection a glimpse of how God would respond in the midst of the world. And through their witness they were to call others to God. there was to be no deadly dosages of compromise among them.

The consequences of that compromise is noted in verse 33. They would be snared like an animal in a trap by idolatry.

[31 : 06] Idolatry is when we give our allegiance and honor and commitment to those things or people that are other than God. Giving to others or someone else what properly belongs to God.

John put it this way. Little children keep yourselves from idols. Idols remain a perennial problem for God's people of any error.

And thus there are warnings of plenty. But in spite of God's people were to persevere in the midst of an ungodly culture.

The Lord who had delivered his people had a plan to establish them and to prosper them. And here was great assurance for them even before the covenant was ratified.

That God's people would be reassured of God's ability in their midst to establish them and to preserve them. Isn't that the kind of assurance that you and I need today?

[32 : 14] Even as we are people in process in life and all the way from earth to glory God is going to finish just what he started in his people.

God is going to finish just what he started even though the waters have to be parted. Lift up your heads don't be broken hearted. Why? Because God is going to finish what he started in you.

He that began a good work in you is able to complete it. He's able to complete it. All the assurance that God gives us that what he has begun in us he will finish in us and he will see us through even in the midst of an ungodly culture as we make our way from earth to glory.

The reassurance of God's people can strengthen their resolve to be God's people in this world. That to me is the encouragement of this text for us today.

even though our timing is not necessarily God's timing. Oh don't you wish that we would get everything all at once and that we would not be people in process but God said oh I'm going to I'm going to you're going to conquer the land but it's not going to be all at once.

[33 : 46] It's going to be little by little one step at a time. Don't you wish that all of the things that grabbed you and tempt you and assail you don't you wish that you were rid of those things?

I do but little by little God's process in order to preserve us those are the things that are part of our lot in this life.

The God who delivered his people had a plan to establish them and to prosper them and to preserve them in the land that he had for them.

Promise of his protection preservation perseverance of God's people. God's going to finish what he started in you and in me.

Let's pray this morning. Lord we bless you this morning and give you praise and honor and glory and I do pray Lord that you would finish in us what you've started that we would not be overthrown in the wilderness as some of them were that you would give this perseverance and this persevering strength to make our way in and through this world for the glory and honor of your name.

[35 : 25] Lord Jesus as Dave led with John 14 this morning thank you for the place that you've prepared for us and may we every step of the way under your guidance under your protection under your preservation may we make our way there in faith the glory and honor of your name amen