

AM Exodus 19 & 20:18-26 Redeemed to be Holy

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Date: 03 May 2026

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[0 : 00] Now to Exodus chapter 19, and that's on page 72 of the Church Bibles. Exodus chapter 19, on page 72 of the Church Bibles.

! The children of Israel are encamped at Mount Sinai, and they're about to receive the Ten Commandments. And this is just the section before the Ten Commandments are given. On the third day, on the third new moon after the people of Israel had gone out of the land of Egypt, on that day they came into the wilderness of Sinai. They set out from Rephidim and came into the wilderness of Sinai.

And they encamped in the wilderness. There Israel encamped before the mountain. Well, Moses went up to God. The Lord called to him out of the mountain, saying, Thus you shall say to the house of Jacob, and tell the people of Israel, You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself.

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples. For all the earth is mine, and you shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

[1 : 35] These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. So Moses came and called the elders of the people and set before them all these words that the Lord had commanded him.

All the people answered together and said, All that the Lord has spoken we will do. And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord. And the Lord said to Moses, Behold, I am coming to you in a thick cloud, that the people may hear when I speak with you, and may also believe you forever.

But Moses told the words of the people to the Lord. The Lord said to Moses, Go to the people and consecrate them today and tomorrow, and let them wash their garments, and be ready for the third day.

For on the third day the Lord will come down on Mount Sinai, in the sight of all the people. And you shall set limits for the people all around, saying, Take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it.

Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. No hand shall touch him, but he shall be stoned or shot. Whether beast or man, he shall not live. When the trumpet sounds a long blast, they shall come up to the mountain.

[2 : 46] So Moses went down from the mountain to the people, and consecrated the people, and they washed their garments. And he said to the people, Be ready, for the third day do not go near a woman.

On the morning of the third day there were thunders and lightnings, and a thick cloud on the mountain, and a very loud trumpet blast, so that all the people in the camp trembled.

Then Moses brought the people out of the camp to meet God, and they took their stand at the foot of the mountain. Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because the Lord had descended on it in fire.

The smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain trembled greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder. The Lord came down on Mount Sinai to the top of the mountain, and the Lord called Moses to the top of the mountain, and Moses went up. And the Lord said to Moses, Go down and warn the people, lest they break through to the Lord, to look, and many of them perish.

[3 : 56] Also let the priests who come near to the Lord consecrate themselves, lest the Lord break out against them. And Moses said to the Lord, The people cannot come up to Mount Sinai, for you

yourself warned us, saying, Set limits around the mountain, and consecrate it.

And the Lord said to him, Go down and come up, bringing Aaron with you. But do not let the priests and the people break through to come up to the Lord, lest he break out against them.

So Moses went down to the people, and told them. And just a few verses at the end of chapter 20 of Exodus. Verses 18 to 26 at the end of chapter 20.

Now when all the people saw the thunder, and the flashes of lightning, and the sound of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, the people were afraid, and trembled, and they stood afar off, and said to Moses, You speak to us, and we will listen, but do not let God speak to us, lest we die. Moses said to the people, Do not fear, for God has come to test you, that the fear of him may be before you, that you may not sin. The people stood afar off, while Moses drew near to the thick darkness, where God was.

[5 : 14] And the Lord said to Moses, Thus you shall say to the people of Israel, You have seen for yourselves, that I have talked with you from heaven. You shall not make gods of silver, to be with you, to be with me, nor shall you make for yourselves, gods of gold, an altar of earth, you shall make for me, and sacrifice on it, your burnt offerings, and your peace offerings, your sheep, and your oxen.

In every place, where I cause my name to be remembered, I will come to you, and bless you. If you make me an altar of stone, you shall not build it, of hewn stones, for if you wield your tool on it, you profane it, and you shall not go up by steps to my altar, that your nakedness be not exposed on it. And may God bless that reading from his holy word. So let's turn back to the passage that we read in Exodus chapter 19.

Let's think about verses 4 to 6 of Exodus chapter 19. You therefore have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself.

Now therefore, if you will indeed obey my voice, and keep my covenant, you shall be my treasured possession, among all the peoples, for all the earth is mine. And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation.

[6 : 48] These are the words that you shall speak to the people of Israel. Let's just bow in prayer before we turn to God's word. Gracious God, we are conscious that we are, we come before your holy word.

We thank you that you are a God who speaks. We thank you that you are not a dumb idol, but you are the living and true God. And you have spoken through your word, through the prophets, and most of all through your Son.

And as we turn to your word now, Lord, we pray that you would enlighten our minds, warm our hearts, we pray. Deliver us, O God, from some going through the motions.

But Lord, may we truly hear your voice today, and apply your word to our hearts, we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. It's hard for us to imagine what it must have been like to be a slave in Egypt for 400 years, for what it must have been like to sit under the bondage of the Egyptians.

But it wasn't just slavery that the Israelites experienced. They would have spent 400 years surrounded by the false gods of the Egyptians.

[8 : 03] They would have spent hundreds of years surrounded by idolatry. And God comes and he redeems his people.

He redeems them with an outstretched arm. And within a few months, he brings them to the wilderness of Sinai and to the foot of this mountain.

Imagine how the Israelites must have felt so bewildered after generations of being in slavery and surrounded by idolatry. And now they find themselves before this mountain where there is thunder and there is lightning and there is smoke.

What is God communicating to the people at the foot of this mountain? Well, surely what he's communicating is that you have been surrounded by many gods for many hundreds of years, but now I am calling you to serve one God, the living and true God.

And this is a God who the Israelites didn't know. And God is revealing the kind of God that he is.

[9 : 19] The Israelites may have been asking the question, who is Jehovah? What kind of God is he? And God communicates to them through Moses what kind of God he is.

He is a God who is holy. But he is also a God of grace and mercy, a God who has just redeemed them after being in bondage for hundreds of years.

He is a God of relationship. The whole of this chapter is covenant language. He is a God who wants to bring his people into relationship with himself.

He makes it very clear in this passage that what he wants is a holy people. He wants to make these people his treasured possession, but they are to be a nation of followers in terms of obedience and a nation of worshippers.

God was not redeeming this people so they could go and do what they wanted and please themselves. He was redeeming them to be a holy nation that followed his laws and his commandments.

[10 : 34] So I want to ask the question this morning and I hopefully answer it by the time we're finished. What does God reveal about himself at Mount Sinai? I think he reveals three things about himself.

He first of all reveals that he is a God of gracious, of glorious grace. He is a God of glorious grace. Secondly, he is a God of fearful majesty.

And then thirdly, he is a God of gracious provision. So first of all, we see that he reveals at Mount Sinai that he is a God of glorious grace.

It says in verse 4, you yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. I was saying to the children that the Bible very often mentions animals to demonstrate an aspect of God's character.

And here, God represents himself as an eagle. And we can notice two things under this heading of a God of glorious grace.

[11 : 41] First of all, we see God's sovereignty and salvation. Before the Lord gives the law, before he gives the Ten Commandments, he reminds the children of Israel that he is a God first and foremost of redemption.

He's a God of grace. He's a God of mercy. Before he gives the law, he reminds them of his redeeming grace. I bore you on eagles' wings and I brought you to myself.

What do we think of when we think of the eagle? I wonder if some of the young people have seen an eagle. An eagle, more than any other bird, soars at great heights because of its power and its wingspan.

It's an animal of both power and an animal that demonstrates here God's love for his people because an eagle is so powerful it's able to swoop up its young and its prey.

And it can soar at great heights. The eagle is used many times in the Bible. It's used in Deuteronomy 32 verses 10 to 11 like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions.

[13 : 07] The Lord alone guided him. No foreign God was with him. God reveals himself like a majestic eagle, redeeming his people in sovereign grace.

Just as the eagle would rescue its young from the coming storm or a coming predator, God has swooped up his people from the clutches of the Egyptians.

When a storm comes, most of us hide, don't we? Animals hide when a storm comes, but not the eagle. The eagle is the only bird that flies into the storm.

And it uses its special wing structure to the storm guides it to great heights so it's above the storm.

It flies above the storm. And as the Israelites came out of Egypt, a storm was coming, wasn't it?

The Egyptians were pursuing them. And yet God protected them. God protected them. He was like a powerful eagle.

[14 : 23] This reminds us that God is a God of sovereign grace. He sovereignly redeems his people. The Egyptians, sorry, the Israelites, they didn't save themselves, did they?

They didn't make spears or swords and rise up against the Egyptians. It was God that saved them by his sovereign grace. They were hopeless and they were helpless but God saved them like an eagle.

When we think about the plagues in Egypt, sometimes we just think they're just random plagues, don't we? These ten plagues of Egypt. But what God was doing in the plagues of Egypt is he was systematically destroying the gods of the Egyptians.

The gods of the Egyptians worshipped gods like livestock. They worshipped frogs. They worshipped Pharaoh.

They worshipped the sun god Ra. And what God was doing in the plagues is he was systematically destroying each of the Egyptian gods to prove that he was the only god, the living and true god.

[15 : 41] He was saying to the Israelites I am destroying all these gods that you have seen worshipped over these hundreds of years and now I want you to worship me as the only living and true god.

And what was the final plague in Egypt? It was the plague of the death of the firstborn. And what were the Israelites called to do? They were called to slaughter a pure and innocent lamb and to daub blood on the door posts.

The sacrifice of an innocent lamb and the shedding of blood would save the Israelites from the angel of death. And you see God's redemption in Egypt foreshadows the gospel.

It foreshadows the Lord Jesus Christ coming as the lamb of God. Before there can be life and salvation there must be death and there must be sacrifice.

And God's redemption of the Israelites foreshadows the glorious gospel of redeeming grace. And that meal that the Israelites are commanded to have before they leave Egypt, the Passover, which we now have as the Lord's Supper, it reminds us of the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

[17 : 11] So we see God's sovereign grace and salvation but also under this heading we see God's purpose in salvation. We see the redeeming grace of God but what is the purpose of God's salvation of the children of Israel in Israel?

Why does God redeem his people then and why does God redeem his people now? Is it to give us a purpose in life? Is it to make us happier?

Is it to give us wealth? Is it to give us happiness? What God says is that he says you shall be my treasured possession for all the earth is mine.

You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. God redeemed them to be a holy nation. That's what they were meant to be.

They were meant to be the Lord's treasured possession and they were to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. The people of God that came out of Egypt were to be characterised by two things.

[18 : 24] Obedience and worship. That's the two hallmarks of the people of God. The Lord was going to be their lawgiver.

He was going to be their king. He alone was their king. Not Pharaoh, not the gods of the Egyptians. God alone was to be their king. They were to obey God and God alone.

They were to be citizens of that kingdom that God instituted. But they were also to be worshippers. Worshippers in the tabernacle.

Worshippers in the temple. God redeemed them so they could be holy. And you see what God is doing at Mount Sinai is he is saying this is the God who I am.

That's why he gives them the Ten Commandments. The Ten Commandments are a perfect expression of the character of God. And God is saying what I want now is I want you to reflect my holiness and my glory and my beauty through your obedience.

[19 : 35] You see what happened at Sinai is that God was not giving the law to redeem people. He had already redeemed them. He was giving the law so that they could follow him in love and obedience.

God is saying now that I've redeemed you this is what I expect of you to follow my law. God is saying I'm a covenant making and I'm a covenant keeping God but these commandments I'm going to give you these words they will enable you to keep in covenant relationship with me.

When you obey there will be blessings and when you disobey there will be judgment. You see God redeems before he requires. That's the pattern here.

He redeems before he requires obedience. I have redeemed you. I have taken you out of oppression. Now serve me in love according to these laws and commandments.

As John Calvin says God does not bind his people to himself by the law until he has first bound them by his grace. He redeems before he requires.

[20 : 55] And as we come to our own day, Christianity is not do this and live. It is live, therefore do this.

So we see a God of glorious grace. We see a God who is sovereign in salvation and a God who saves to make a people holy.

But then secondly, we see of God in this passage a God of fearful majesty. Not just a God of glorious grace but a God of fearful majesty. What is the main thing that we saw as we read this passage together?

As we read the whole of Exodus really? We see the holiness and the majesty of God. What is holiness? Well holiness is not a feeling.

It's not an emotion. Holiness is the transcendent purity of a perfect God. Holiness is the transcendent purity of a holy God.

[22 : 03] What did Moses say after the parting of the Red Sea in Exodus chapter 15? He says, Who is like you O Lord among the gods?

Who is like you majestic in holiness, awesome and glorious deeds, doing wonders. That's who God is, a God of glorious purity and majesty.

And you see that's why God gives the Ten Commandments so that people can understand what holiness is. The Ten Commandments are the perfect expression of a holy and transcendent God. God is saying at Mount Sinai, he's saying to the people, I am nothing like the Egyptian gods. Don't compare me to the gods of livestock and the gods of frogs and the gods of the sun and the gods of Pharaoh.

I am nothing like that. I am a holy God. I am a God who is separate from sin. As it says in Habakkuk, I am of purer eyes than to behold iniquity.

[23 : 17] That's why there is all this preparation for the giving of the law. And we just see two or three things under this heading. We see in verses 7 to 15 the preparation of God's presence.

God gives Moses all these instructions about how the people are to consecrate themselves and prepare themselves before the mountain, before the law is even given.

They must wash themselves. They are to abstain from sexual relationships for a period of time. God is reinforcing that he is holy and that we can't just come to his presence in any old way.

There needs to be preparation. There needs to be separation. He is emphasizing that sin separates the people from him.

He is different from the sinful people. And you see under the old covenant people didn't have full access to God. They had to go through all these rituals and all these ceremonies.

[24 : 28] And it reinforced how sinful they were and how holy God was. God was emphasizing that he dwells in unapproachable light. God sets a boundary.

God sets a boundary and you shall set limits for the people all around saying take care not to go up into the mountain or touch the edge of it. Whoever touches the mountain shall be put to death. This takes us very much back to the garden of Eden doesn't it?

God sets boundaries. He says you can do anything you want but don't do this. Don't cross this boundary or it will lead to death. The people of God could go so far but no further.

And then we see throughout the rest of the chapter from verse 18 just how God manifests his holiness. We see smoke, we see thunder, we see lightning.

All the things that we think of when we think of uncontrollable power, thunder and lightning and smoke and fire.

[25 : 44] And we see that God is represented by a kiln or a furnace. There in verse 18, the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln and the whole nation trembled greatly.

Just like when God met Moses at Mount Horeb, God is presented as a consuming fire. What does fire do? It consumes everything before it.

It burns up all impurities. That's why we have the image of a kiln here or a furnace. There is no impurity in God. That's why he's represented as the smoke of a kiln.

God's holiness consumes all impurity and all sin. We see this also in the story of Sodom and Gomorrah back in Genesis chapter 19.

Behold, the smoke of the land went up like the smoke of a furnace. God was consuming all the iniquity and all the sin before him. And what's the response of the people?

[26 : 52] The whole mountain trembled greatly. But in verse 16 it says, all the people in the camp trembled. As we stand before the holiness of God, what is our response to be?

It's to be fear and trembling. God is not a God who can be messed with. He is a God to be feared. God's holiness should lead us to tremble.

God is God's God. So what is the hope at the foot of Mount Sinai? As the people stand before this holy God?

What is their hope? Maybe the people are saying we'll never be holy enough to be accepted by this God. We'll never be holy enough to keep his laws.

we'll never be able to consecrate ourselves enough to be in the presence of God. It's great that God has redeemed us but we stand condemned in the presence of this holy God.

[27 : 58] What hope is there for us? And that brings us to our third point, the God of gracious provision. God provides a mediator and God provides a sacrifice.

The psalmist in Psalm 24 asks, Who shall ascend the hill of the Lord? Who shall stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.

Who can ascend into the holy hill of God for sinners like us? Who has clean hands and a pure heart? Who can ascend into the holy hill of God?

Well, there's only one person who had clean hands and a pure heart and that is the Lord Jesus Christ. What we need as we stand in the presence of the commandments of God and the holy presence of God is we need a mediator and we need a sacrifice.

We need a gracious provision on our behalf. God's holiness and God's commandments, they were always meant to drive us to a mediator.

[29 : 17] For those of us who try and keep the commandments perfectly, they lead us to despair, don't they? Trying to rely on our good works, it leads us to despair. What we need is a mediator and we need a sacrifice.

sacrifice. That's what we see and that's why we read the verses in chapter 20. Chapter 20 verse 21, the people stood afar off while Moses drew near to the thick darkness where God was.

Moses was the mediator. He represented the people to God. He mediated between God and man. that's what mediators do.

They mediate between two parties. And we see later on in those verses in chapter 20 that God had instituted a system of sacrifices.

The people had to shed the blood of an animal to atone for their sins. God knew that he would never be able to keep the commandments perfectly. So he made a sacrifice he made a system of sacrifices.

[30 : 27] There needed to be a mediator and there needed to be a sacrifice. God's holiness requires mediation and sacrifice.

And this morning friends we are no different. We stand before Sinai. We stand before the Ten Commandments and we say we can't keep these commandments.

The situation is hopeless. we need a mediator and we need a sacrifice. God's commandments expose us.

They expose our sinful hearts. They expose our disobedience. They expose how far we fall short of God's glorious mark.

That's the purpose of the commandments. It's to expose our sins. sacrifice. And the question this morning is where is our mediator and where is our sacrifice?

[31 : 25] Well it's not at Sinai. It's at Calvary. What happened at the cross? Psalm 85 tells us truth met with mercy righteousness and peace kiss mutually.

Truth springs from earth and righteousness looks down from heaven high. What happened at Calvary was God's righteousness and his rightful demands were met with mercy and the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The justice of God was satisfied at the cross so that you and I this morning could have life. The obedience that you and I need this morning was satisfied by Jesus the perfect keeper of the law.

It says in the larger catechism why is our mediator called Jesus? Our mediator is called Jesus because he saves his people from their sins. We need a mediator that will save us from our sins.

Moses and you see what Moses was doing he was pointing forward to the perfect mediator. Aaron and all his priests and all the Levites they were pointing forward to the perfect sacrifice.

[32 : 52] You think about all the thousands probably millions of bulls and goats and all the animals that were sacrificed all the blood that was shed not a drop of that blood could save anyone from their sins.

all these sacrifices were pointing forward to the great sacrifice that they all needed in the Lord Jesus Christ. The blood of bulls and goats didn't forgive a single sin.

They were pointing forward to the cross. God So what does Mount Sinai teach us about God? It teaches us that he is a God of glorious grace he is a God of fearful majesty and he is a God of gracious provision.

Why did God give the law? He gave the law to drive us to Christ. That's what the law does. If we stop at the law we despair but the law drives us to despair to drive us to Christ.

That's what it says in Galatians isn't it? Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ that we might be justified by faith. You look at the law you study the law and you despair at your own sinfulness and your own disobedience and you're driven to the arms of your saviour.

[34 : 12] You're driven to a better mediator and to a better sacrifice. Is the Christian still under the law? No. The Christian is no longer under the law for righteousness.

The law is now a joyful and glorious rule of life to keep us close to our saviour. The law cannot save us.

It is now a rule of life for our obedience. When somebody becomes a Christian they lovingly want to keep the commandments of God. They lovingly want to keep the law of God but it is not a means of righteousness it is now a rule of life.

God says these are the boundaries these are the guidelines and if you cross over those guidelines it will lead to disaster. That's what the commands are for now they are not to lead us to righteousness they are a rule of life that we keep joyfully as Christians.

Mount Sinai makes us tremble before a holy God but it drives us to the glory of Calvary to our only hope.

[35 : 22] We no longer tremble before Sinai we bow before our Saviour at the cross of Calvary and trust in his finished work. Somebody said that God's holiness means that he is too pure!

to ignore sin too great to be managed and too glorious to be approached unless he thank God this morning that he made a way by the way of the cross.

Psalms 68 says thou hast O Lord most glorious ascended up on high and in triumph victoriously Captive captivity! When Christ went to heaven he took captivity captive so that we no longer need to be under the bondage of sin the yoke of sin Christ at the cross took captivity captive when he ascended up on high he's given us the gift of life this morning the gift of new life in Christ have you received that life that is the question this morning have you received the finished work of Christ on the cross we need to do this morning in the gospel is reach out with the empty hands of faith and receive the finished work of Christ sin destroys but calvary gives life sin drives us to despair but calvary gives us hope sin is pointing to the need for a mediator and a sacrifice and the glorious thing is that we have that sacrifice and that mediator in the

Lord Jesus Christ my friends don't look to your obedience this morning look to Christ don't look to your good works look to the finished work of Christ on the cross may God's fearful majesty drive you to the glorious provision that we have at the cross may God bless these thoughts to us let's pray our gracious God we thank you for your your gracious redemption your love we thank you for your glorious majesty and we thank you oh lord for your gracious provision oh lord we pray that sinai would drive us to a better mediator and a better saviour and a better sacrifice we thank you oh lord that Christ gave his life to give us life and to give us freedom we thank you for the freedom that we have in Christ not a freedom to do what we want but a freedom to be holy and a freedom to worship and we pray that oh lord we would be characterised in our lives by lives of holiness and lives of worship we pray that whatever else we would be known for we would be known for obedience and worship we thank you oh gracious god for the clarity of your word we thank you oh god that we know what your law demands of us and we freely acknowledge oh lord that we cannot meet those demands but we thank you that we have a who can and we ask oh lord that you would help us to put our faith and our trust in that saviour this morning bless our time together lord bless the word that's been preached we pray to the salvation of sinners for all we ask is in Jesus name amen