

SUMMER 2 - On Eagle's Wings

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[0 : 00] Right, now we can get underway, friends. Now, I just want to tell you that as we go ahead, that we are going to really only cover eight verses tonight.

But what we're going to do is do the same exercise we did on Wednesday. That is, we're going to engage in the task of biblical theology. So I'm going to show you this passage, and then I'm going to show you what I think it means in the context of the whole of Scripture.

And what I want to do to start off this talk is to get you to do just a little bit of travelling in your imagination. I want you to imagine we are somewhere in the world of the ancient Near East.

It's a mountain crag. An eagle is hovering above its nest, and she stirs up the nest to encourage the fledgling to leave. Anyway, on this particular day, the cool air of the mountain is buffeting up there, and wind pockets are lifting, and it's a good day for it.

Her mate is enjoying him flying himself freely, and she joins. Together they fly with ease through the air, and then they fly closer and closer to the nest, calling, beckoning, and then it happens.

[1 : 19] The fledgling just launches out into the air to join them. And there are some awkward flutters. Soon, though, the fledgling is flying himself as well.

But it's not with the ease of the parents, no. It's clearly tiring for this youngster who's never flown before, and he languishes. Friends, our natural historians tell us that such things do not happen, and that they are impossible.

However, there are scattered accounts throughout history of people that have seen this wonder.

They are rare, but they are there. I found records of them, and maybe such stories as this circulated through the world of the ancient Near East, or there were carrion birds that people knew who practiced this particular habit.

In any case, in a couple of places within Scripture, God alludes to something like this. Deuteronomy chapter 32 is one version, and the other is Exodus 19.

Look at those first four verses in Exodus 19. On the first day of the third month, after the Israelites left Egypt, on that very day, they came to the desert of Sinai.

[2 : 40] And after they set out from Rephidim, they entered the desert of Sinai, and Israel camped there in the desert, in the front of the mountain. And then Moses went up to God, and the Lord called to him from the mountain and said, This is what you are to say to the descendants of Jacob, and what you are to tell the people of Israel.

Now, you yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself.

Verse 4 is, in effect, a summary of the first 18 chapters of the book of Exodus. It tells us that God had heard the groaning of his people, he knew, he acted, he came down to rescue, and he brought them up out of the land of Egypt.

And on Wednesday night, we heard about the rescue that God, that Israel had remembered, in song. Remember Exodus chapter 15. And yet, chapter 15 to 18, show that the wonder that Israel experienced, and that they expressed in song, was very short-lived.

Within the space of a few days or weeks, the Israelites are whinging in the wilderness before God. They grumble, they complain, they say they want to return to Egypt, they even say that things were better in Egypt.

[3 : 59] And those chapters, show that the allegiance of the people of God, to God, is very fickle. Their allegiance, is to their stomachs, which is very strong.

In fact, it almost seems as though, their God is in their stomachs, as Paul the Apostle will later on intimate. And yet, God is still incredibly generous, and overwhelmingly kind.

He lovingly and patiently, in those chapters 15 to 18, leads them by the hand, and gives them more than they ask for. They ask for water, he gives them a paradise in the wilderness.

They ask for food, he gives them sweet bread, and tasty quail. He rescues them from their enemies, the Amalekites. He provides them with godly advice, on how to structure their leadership. And in these chapters, God is like a lover, with an ungrateful and responsive partner. Many years later, in the book of Hosea, Hosea will remember these days, and he will remember God alluring her, wooing her, wooing his bride, cajoling them, speaking tenderly to them.

[5 : 11] Later, we will see God respond in judgment, but not in these chapters. Here, he is a lover. Anyway, let's look now at chapter 19. So those are those chapters between, what we looked at on Wednesday night, and what we look at today.

As I've indicated, verse 4, sets the background for Exodus 1 to 18, or sorry, reminds us of the background of 1 to 18. Now look at verses 1 to 3. They tell us, the closer context of our passage. Three months have passed, since this bedraggled and but triumphant group of Israelites marched out of Egypt. They now sit in the desert of Mount Sinai.

They wait under Mount Sinai, where perhaps eagles teach their young to fly. And God has acted on their behalf. Now, he speaks to his people.

And look at what he has to say in those verses 4 to 6 again. And I want you to notice a few things about them. Now, there are a number of things that are of particular interest. First, notice who takes the initiative here.

[6 : 15] In the event of the Exodus, God does. And he shows his initiative by rescuing. You see, eaglets do not take the initiative in assisting their young.

Parents do. And so it is with God. The initiative is wholly God's. Second, I want you to notice that God expects a response from his people.

God's initiative in rescue is to be met by a response of obedience. In chapter 2, we were told that he remembered his covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and acted upon it.

Now, Israel is in turn to remember the covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob or that they had with God and they are to act upon it. That is, they are to obey God fully to keep his covenant.

Third, God promises. He promises that obedience will be met by God giving them a special status. And you can see it in verse 5. If they obey him, if they keep his covenant, then out of all the nations, they will be his treasured possession.

[7 : 23] Fourth, God describes the beneficiaries of all of this. See, what, that's what I think is meant by the phrase, although the whole earth is mine, you will be.

I don't think, because it doesn't look as though that's what God's saying, I need to explain it a bit. You see, I think that this phrase is intended to recall to us, Genesis chapter 1.

In Genesis 1, God creates the world. He is its maker. It belongs to him. It owes him dependence and allegiance. However, as the Bible goes on, it is clear that the people of God's world do not like depending upon God.

You only have to get to chapter 3 of the Bible to find that. They strike out at being masters and mistresses of their own destinies. And the result is that all humans are alienated from God.

And the story of the rest of the Bible is how God will therefore bring humanity back to him. In chapter 12 of Genesis, we are told how he intends to do it.

[8 : 28] The way he does is to choose one select man, Abraham, and from that man a nation will come. And they will be the means.

It is one elect, holy, chosen nation. They will be the means of God blessing the rest of the world. Abraham and his descendants are God's means of bringing blessing to the world again.

But the goal doesn't change. His goal always remains the world. I think that is why the Bible starts not with Israel, but with all the world.

Genesis 1 to 11, aren't strange in the library of a nation to begin not with yourself, but with someone else. And Israel does.

Their story begins with the whole world, because that is where God's intention lies. Now, can you see now what verse 5 is saying? God is saying that the whole world is his, but he has set aside within it a special nation to bring that world back to himself.

[9 : 35] That nation are to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation. Now, in order to understand those verses, we need to do some thinking about priests. Think about priests for a moment.

You see, in any society, I think that priests have a twofold function. The first function is active. It is that of being a mediator.

A priest, you see, stands between God and human beings, and communicates God's will to those human beings. You can see that in places such as Leviticus 10, which talks about the role of priests.

So that's the active role of a priest. Now, of course, they're to offer sacrifices and to pray for people as well. Basically, they're to serve God and the people.

As a nation, this nation, formed by the Exodus, are to be the world's priests. That is, they are to stand between God and the world and communicate God's word to God's world.

[10 : 38] They are to speak the words of God to the world. They are to be priests to the world. They are also to serve the people of the world. So that's the first function of a priest, active in relation to the world.

Second function is much more passive in relation to the world. That's probably not the best way to put it. It's the best way I could think of. You see, in any society, priests are also expected to be separate from their surrounding environment, aren't they?

That's why the world takes such delight in exposing fallen religious men and women. Because they're meant to be different, aren't they? And Leviticus 21 is all about that sort of role for priests. Priests are a special breed of people. They are called to represent God in the way that they live. They are called to be pure in their dealings with the surrounding world, to be separated from that world, to be holy.

And so that's what God is saying Israel is to be in the world. That is their role. They are to perform a priestly function in relation to the world.

[11 : 41] They are to speak the words of God to the world and to serve the world. But they are also to maintain their differentiation and distance from the world. They are to be holy as God himself is holy.

To live godly lives. And they do this by living lives of obedience. Can you see what I'm saying? I'm saying that the terms kingdom of priests and holy nation are virtually equivalent.

They are saying that Israel's function is to communicate God to the world and to be different from the world by being obedient to God. Israel is in essence to communicate God to the world.

And Israel is to be different from the world by being obedient to God. So there's God's word to his people here in chapter 19. Now let's see what the people do with it.

Look at verses 7 and 8. Moses takes God's word to the people. He tells them what God had commanded. And look at what they say. Their response is categorical, isn't it?

[12 : 46] The people all answered, ask one. Everything that the Lord has spoken, we will do. And then Moses takes this response back to God. And God makes preparations for giving the law.

And then he gives the law in chapters 20 through to 23. We'll look at 20 on Wednesday night. But his response to their response is really captured in one different place.

It's captured in chapter 24. So flip with me in your Bibles to chapter 24. We're doing lots of Bible flipping tonight. And we'll get toward the end of the Bible by the time we're finished.

So chapter 24. In chapter 24 of Exodus, there's an elaborate ritual. In verse 5, offerings are presented. In verse 6, blood is shed.

The book of the covenant is read. In verse 7. And the people respond in verse 7. And look at what they say again. We will do everything the Lord has said.

[13 : 52] We will obey. And then in verse 8, some more blood is sprinkled on the people. And look, if I can describe it this way. In some ways, except for the blood being sprinkled, it's a bit like a wedding ceremony.

There are oaths made. There are promises made. And the knot is tied between God and his people. And then the most...

That is, they are in their covenant relationship with each other. Everything has been signed, sealed. And then the most remarkable thing happens in verse 9 and following. A small group of Israelite leaders ascend the mountain.

And they see God. And what's more, they don't die. Or they dine with God. So there it is. God and Israel have as it were tied the knot.

Had a party to celebrate. And they're bound together. And Israel has promised that they will obey every word that the Lord had said.

[14:50] They will live by every word that it comes from the mouth of God. As the writer of Deuteronomy will say. So as you can see, this passage is filled with great expectation, isn't it?

I mean, this is... This looks grand. And you think this is going to be grand. And one of the most striking features is the way in which the people of God are so ready to embrace the covenant. Twice they pledge that they'll do all that the Lord has said. But anyone who's read Exodus and the history of Israel knows the nature of the people making this pledge.

After all, as soon as God has performed the spectacular delivery from the Red Sea, what do they do? They turn to whinging. And straight after the events of chapter 24, Moses will go up into the mountain to receive the commandments of God that Israel have said that they will do.

And while he's there, what will Israel be doing? They'll be breaking the first two commandments down the bottom by committing idolatry. Later in their history, they'll be just as confident as they are here at the end of the book of Joshua.

[16:07] And Joshua will tell them reality. And do you want to see it? Have a look at Joshua chapter 24, verse 19. So flip over in your Bibles, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua.

Joshua 24, verse 19. I'll give you a moment to find it. And I want you to look at what Joshua says. Joshua said to the people.

You are not able to serve the Lord. He is a holy God. He is a jealous God. And you know what? The history of Israel will prove Joshua to be right.

Israel will sin and sin and sin again. And they'll prove themselves incapable of keeping the law. They'll show themselves to be totally unable to keep the covenant and to keep their word.

And as I mentioned the other night, it's almost as though she traced through the history of the people of God in the Old Testament. You will see God exposing their sinfulness, particularly in the light of a great revelation.

[17:13] He'll then show just how sinful they are and how unable they are to keep it. And so the question that hangs over Exodus is this. Who is going to fulfill that charter for God's people if Israel can't do it?

Let me repeat it. If God's people are unable to keep covenant, who is going to fulfill it for them? Who will fulfill the charter outlined for the people of God so grand here in chapter 19?

Now I need to say that the Old Testament doesn't actually answer the question except perhaps in prospect. But it does point toward an answer. And it falls to the New Testament to provide the ultimate solution for Israel's weakness.

And it does that by telling us about Jesus. Let me tell you two of the things it tells us about Jesus. First, it tells us that Israel was able to do...

Sorry, that Jesus was able to do what Israel could not do. Jesus, the Son of God, like Israel was the Son of God.

[18:21] But he was the Son of God who was obedient to God and therefore functioned as a light to the nations. That is expected in passages such as Isaiah 42, Isaiah 49, spelled out in places like Luke 2, verse 32.

There we hear that Jesus will be a light to the Gentiles as Israel was meant to be. He will be the glory of... That is the thing that makes Israel shine. He'll be the glory of God's people, Israel.

So that's the first thing we learn from the New Testament. Jesus was the true Israel. He was able to do what Israel could not do. And in fact, what Adam could not do.

Second, the New Testament tells us that Jesus was the means by which God will work. So that sin is not remembered and human hearts are transformed.

That's hinted out in places such as Deuteronomy 30, verse 6. Jeremiah 31 and the New Covenant. Ezekiel 36 and the New Heart that will be given.

[19:27] And it's accomplished through the death of Jesus and the work of the Spirit. And that's spelled out in Romans 3 and Romans 8. Those of you who are at Belgrave Heights, a week or so ago, we looked at Romans 3 in depth.

God did not leave Israel on its own. God did not leave humanity on its own. God sent his son to fulfill the expectations of Israel.

And that son obeyed. If you read through Mark's Gospel, Mark chapter 1, verses 1 to 15, you will see Jesus systematically doing what Adam and Israel had failed to do.

You'll see him succeeding where they had failed. You see, God did not leave humanity on its own. He sent his son to fulfill those expectations of Israel.

And that son obeyed and was the source of blessing for the world. So that's the second thing we learned from the New Testament. Jesus was the means by which God will work so that sin will not be remembered and human hearts will be transformed.

[20 : 33] However, that's not the end of the story. You see, the New Testament points to Jesus, but also, in one sense, points through Jesus, beyond Jesus.

Let me explain what I mean. Look to the back of your Bibles now. I told you we'd get right up toward the end. Go to 1 Peter chapter 2. So just a few books of the Bible from the end.

1 Peter 2. And I want you to look at verses 4 through to 12. 1 Peter 2. Let's look at 4 to 12.

The book of Peter speaks to a group of people. There's a bit of debate as to whether they're Jews or not. But my guess is some of whom were Jews and some who had no Jewish background.

And Peter uses the passage we've looked at from Exodus and uses some passages from Hosea in relation to them. Look at 1 Peter 2, 4 to 12.

[21 : 29] First few verses speak of people's response to Jesus. 1 Peter 3. A new people of God. 1

Peter 3. A holy nation. 1 Peter 3. A new priestly kingdom. 2 Peter 3. New chosen ones. 2 Peter 3.

But particularly, look at 9 to 12.

I'll read it to you. But you are a chosen people. 2 Peter 3. A royal priesthood. 2 Peter 3. A holy nation. 3 Peter 3. God's special possession. 1 Peter 3. That you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light.

1 Peter 3. Once you were not a people. 2 Peter 4. But now you are the people of God. 1 Peter 4.

Once you had not received mercy. 1 Peter 4. But now you have received mercy. 2 Peter 5. Dear friends, I urge you as foreigners and aliens and exiles to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against your soul.

2 Peter 5. Live such good lives among the pagans that though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day He visits us. Now I need to just say the word translated praises there is a reference to the great deeds.

The great deeds that make someone glorious or eminent. 2 Peter 5. The great deeds that make someone glorious or eminent. The things that make them shine.

[22 : 42] A better translation might be the glorious deeds or the mighty acts. So I wonder if you can hear what God is saying about this group of Christian people.

Can you hear the echoes of Exodus 19? Through Peter, God is telling these Christians in the first century that they are God's new people. That's a remarkable thing to be saying.

As God's chosen people, as God's royal priesthood, as God's holy nation, they are to be active in relation to the world. Can you see what they're to do? Have a look at it.

They are to proclaim the glorious deeds, the mighty acts of him who called them out of darkness into his marvellous light. But they are also to perform what's a little more passive role.

That is, they are to be godly. They are to, do you see it there, abstain from sinful desires. They are to live good lives among the pagans.

[23 : 44] But do you notice that even that has the good of outsiders in mind? Because outsiders might see their good deeds and glorify God. Friends, the task given to Israel.

In Exodus 19, it is not just given to Israel. It is not just given to Jesus who fulfills it. It is not just given to this bunch of people in the first century either.

It is given to us. We too were once not the people of God. But now we are. As believers in Jesus, we are now God's chosen people.

If you like, God's holy nation. God's royal priesthood. And the job description is the same. We are to be active in relation to the world. And now that means, I think, what it meant for them.

That is, we are to communicate what God wants to say to this world. In the language of 1 Peter, we are to proclaim the excellencies, the great deeds, the glorious deeds of him who called us out of darkness and into his marvelous light.

[24 : 59] That is our first task. To tell the world that once we were not the people of God and now we are. Why? Why? Well, because of Jesus.

That once we had not received mercy, but now we have. Why? Because of Jesus. In other words, our first task is to tell people about Jesus and what he's done.

Our first task is, if you like, evangelistic. It is to tell people about Jesus. The other task is a little more passive in relation to the world. That's probably not the best word to use.

But I think you understand what I'm saying. But it still has a significant effect on the world. Verses 11 and 12 spill it out. We are to be holy as God is holy.

We are to recognize that we are separate from the world. We are therefore to abstain from sinful desires which wage war against our souls.

[25 : 57] We are to live godly lives among the pagans. And also that God might be glorified. It's God would direct it, isn't it? We are to not be like Israel who preceded us.

We are to be like Israel was meant to be. We are to have a solid goal of evangelism and a solid goal of living godly lives. We are to be priests to the world.

A holy nation. Friends, this is our charter, our task, our identity. And I wonder with that in mind if I might make some reflections upon us as individuals, Christian individuals and Christian churches. Let's just concentrate on us as individuals for a moment. I wonder if I might put you under the microscope as I put myself under the microscope just for a moment. Let me ask you, how are you going in terms of this twofold task that God has given us?

How are we going in being active in the task of making Christ known? How are we going?

[27 : 06] How are you going in the active task of proclaiming the great deeds of him who brought you out of darkness into his marvelous light? How are you going in doing the job of an evangelist?

Now when did you last talk to someone, just to put it really on the line again, when did you last talk to someone about Jesus or urge them to put their faith in him? And if that might even be just a little too bold for you, when did you last invite someone to an event where they might hear about him?

How are you going in that active task of making Christ known? It's very infrequent in the New Testament that we are told to evangelize.

And I've often tried to reflect on why that might be, I suspect because you didn't need to tell people. Because as Peter said, we cannot but help us speak of what we have seen and heard.

That it is the natural thing of Christians to do. How are you going in that active task? And while we're on it, how are you going in that more passive task? How are you going as being God's representative in God's world?

[28 : 21] Are you abstaining from the desires of the flesh that wage war against your soul?

Because that's what they do. They are waging war against your soul.

Is your life noted for its honorable conduct? Do the people that you live and work and mix with even know that you are Christian? Do your neighbors know?

Will they, the people that you mix with every day, glorify God for you in the day when Christ returns? Because that's what God's looking for from you.

Will they remember your godliness? And glorify God and thank God for you and your godliness? Even if they never come to believe in Jesus as you do.

But then I don't want to stop with us as individuals. Let's examine our sort of corporate lives as well. And at this point, I want to go out even more on a limb. You see, there's a trend I've noticed among an increasing number of Christian congregations here in Melbourne.

[29 : 30] And that trend among modern Australian Christians is away from seeing our role in the world as being one of proclamation. The focus, I think, with many Christians has shifted away from evangelism and proclamation.

And for many, it has shifted toward a dominant emphasis on social justice. Now, I need to just clarify myself here. The role of Israel in the Old Testament had a social justice element to it and it could not be removed.

You were to be godly. And that meant in relation to everyone. Jesus himself has an important social justice element within his ministry.

It was an important aspect of his ministry. He went around doing good. We remember in Acts chapter 10. However, and Christians themselves were to be good.

They were to be good citizens in their world. Paying taxes, living rightly with people, caring for people, doing good to all, especially those of the household of faith. However, just as Jesus sought to seek and to save the lost, so are we to seek and to save the lost.

[30 : 49] That is, we are to imitate our Lord's orientation and actions. We are to emphasize the proclamation of God's mercy in Christ. As God's people, we are to declare the great deeds of him who brought us out of darkness and into his marvelous light.

Friends, if you don't believe that I'm right in my analysis, then listen to Christians pray these days. Listen to what we pray for. In some congregations I've been in, missionaries are largely unmentioned.

The people that live in the suburb are largely unmentioned as people that we might be wanting to share the gospel with. How many of us regularly pray for our mission, whichever church you come from, how many of us regularly pray for our missionaries who work hard at proclaiming the gospel, for those gifted people in our congregations who are sharing the gospel all the time?

Our prayer and our Bible study groups often don't pray for the lost in our workplaces or in our communities. Our prayers for God to help us individually and corporately in the task of evangelism are often not as regular in our churches as they could be.

Now, I need to say I can commend our congregations here at Holy Trinity. I think this 6pm congregation has done a lot in this area in the last 12 months.

[32 : 18] It's been great to see evangelism grow and to see a commitment to evangelism growing here. I have seen a growth in missions commitment growing here.

But I don't think that this congregation is representative of the mass of Christians here in Melbourne. I think that corporately in our churches we often rightly pray for our world.

But so often our prayers are not for that world's lostness. They are not for the fact that our world is without Christ and without hope, without him.

Friends, God has given us two tasks in his world. One is active. It is to mediate God's word about Christ to his world.

The other is a little more passive. It is to live godly lives so that the world might come to our God and give him glory. And friends, that is why we here at Holy Trinity are committed to mission and evangelism.

[33 : 21] We're committed to it because God's committed to it. We spent a whole year focusing on this last year. God, friends, is an evangelist. That's why you are saved if you are Christian.

Because God is an evangelist and being so committed to it, he gave his son for you. He let his son die an ignoble death for you.

God is an evangelist. So, so should we be. We should seek to produce them.

Our God is a missionary, if you want to put it that way. So we want to promote and produce mission. It's part of what makes us the people of God.

So, friends, I hope you've sort of seen how this flows through all the way through scripture. Starts in Genesis. Flows through the people of God. Flows through Abraham, who's to be a blessing to the whole world.

[34 : 20] Flows through the descendants of Abraham. Flows on into the people of God in the New Testament. And flows on into eternity. You see, that is to be our orientation, our character.

That is who we are. With that in mind, let's pray. Father God, we thank you. That you have called us to be your people through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Father, we pray that we might declare the great deeds of him who is called, of you, who have called us out of darkness. Into your marvelous light. Particularly, Father, may we declare that great deed performed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

His death on the cross. For us. And, Father, we pray not only might we do that, but may we live good lives among those who are outsiders, among the pagans, so that as they see our good deeds, they might glorify you.

So, Father, may our orientation in the world be that the Lord Jesus is known and therefore you are glorified.

[35 : 31] We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.