

The God Who Sets Apart His People

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Date: 18 June 2017

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- [0 : 00] All right, let's come to our God in prayer as we prepare to hear from his word in Exodus chapter 19. Our God, I confess my incredible inadequacy to preach this morning.
- I know I cannot do justice to your word as beautiful as it is, as beautiful as you are, as good as you are. And I pray that whatever failure of the messenger there may be, that the power of your word, oh God, would it exceed our imagination?
- Would your word be so powerful as your spirit works it within us? That we would see Jesus clearly, that we would love him, that we would long to be known as his people, and to be known as people of the living God.
- Amen. Okay. Well, I think in your bulletins, we had set this up as being about the entire chapter of Exodus 19, and made the decision late in the week that this was going to have to be shortened to just verses 1 through 8.
- So, we'll get to the rest of chapter 19 soon, but not today. As for verses 1 through 8, I want to sort of start out with a little bit of, let out the American side of me a little bit.
- [1 : 33] So, those of you who don't know, I'm half American, half Canadian, a dual citizen. And honestly, if I'm going to be completely honest, I think I like the Canadian side of me a little bit better. So, you know, yeah.
- This is a morning for the American side. Because I went to high school in the United States, and I am horribly out of touch with Canadian history. I have no idea. I don't, I know it's what, 1867, right?
- That's when Canada was formed as a confederation. But, yeah, I don't know a lot. And for some reason, nobody talks a lot about Canadian history, even in Canada.
- My theory, running theory, has been it's just a little bit too boring. There's no real wars, no revolutionary war, no civil war. You know, there's just not been all the fireworks around it.
- No one ever creates a movie like National Treasure, starring Nicolas Cage, about Canadian history and artifacts.
- [2 : 35] No one, you know, Nicolas Cage, he didn't try to steal the proclamation of confederation. So, I guess, because of that, we're going to, I'll use American history as an analogy for what takes place in Exodus chapter 19 and Exodus chapter 20.
- And this week, specifically, as we look at chapter 19, verses 1 through 8. The formation of a new nation. We're going to be looking at the Declaration of Independence for the people of God.
- The Declaration of Independence for the people of God. The Lord has rescued his people. He's rescued the people of Israel from slavery under Pharaoh, king of Egypt. And the Lord has brought them, as his great traveling company, this huge caravan, into the desert of the Sinai Peninsula, on the way to the promised land, on the way to the land of Canaan, that he has promised to their ancestors that they will receive.
- But, as we've seen, as we've been notified many times so far, there's going to be an important stop on the way to the promised land. All the way back in chapter 3, the Lord appeared to Moses as fire in a burning bush on the slopes of Mount Sinai.

And at that time, he said to Moses in Exodus chapter 3, I will be with you. And this shall be the sign for you that I have sent you. When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you shall serve God on this mountain.

[4 : 00] And now that's about to come true. The people of God, they have arrived at this mountain, at Mount Sinai. And we see this in Exodus chapter 19, verses 1 through 8. Now, if you're using one of the blue Bibles that Russia has handed out, as we mentioned earlier, that's on page 60.

And in Exodus 19, verses 1 through 8, the people of Israel, they're arriving at Mount Sinai. And there they are receiving their own declaration of independence. There they're receiving their own proclamation that they are a new nation.

So let me read verses 1 through 8. 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, while 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.

[5 : 08] 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.

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. So we begin here with, you know, first couple verses, just to give us an update on the people's travels.

It's been about three months since they left Egypt, when they finally arrived at Sinai. They've been traveling through the desert for three months, as the Lord provides them water, as the Lord provides them food, as the Lord protects them from their enemies, as the Lord helps to structure them as a nation.

And now they're finally here, and Moses hikes to the top of the mountain in verse 3. We've got an 80-year-old man summiting Mount Sinai. So the guy was in shape.

[6 : 17] And then the Lord speaks to Moses on the top of the mountain. The Lord delivers to him a proclamation. And this proclamation announces the people's identity and announces their mission. And usually, when one nation breaks away from another, just as Israel's breaking away from Egypt, when one nation breaks away from another, the announcement of their independence is going to give the rationale.

The rationale for why they are seeking independence, why they are striking out on their own. So, for example, in the U.S. Declaration of Independence, a big chunk of the document, this is the part that nobody really reads, a big chunk of the document is devoted to listing all the grievances the colonists had against their British rulers, against the parliament, and against the king.

Now, the Israelite Declaration of Independence, it could have done that. It could have listed all the grievances that people had against Pharaoh, all the reasons why they should not be a part of Egypt anymore, why they should not be under Pharaoh's thumb.

Their grievances would have been far more severe, far worse than anything that any American colonist ever had to endure. Pharaoh had enslaved their people.

Pharaoh had been working them to death. Pharaoh had been issuing population control decrees to kill their children. But we don't find any of that here.

[7 : 39] We don't find a list of grievances. Instead, what we find is this. The rationale for Israel's status as a new nation is that the Lord has acted.

The Lord has acted in his sovereign power to set them apart. It is the Lord who sets apart his people. It is the Lord who sets apart his people.

That is all the rationale that they need for their existence as the people of God. Now, a nation's identity, a nation's mission, they are going to be shaped a lot by their origin story, by the accounts of their origin, by their history that's sort of passed down from generation to generation, is almost this historical mythos of how this nation came to be.

And that shapes the character of the nation. I think the fact that Americans tend to be a little more aggressive, is that the right word, than Canadians, in general more distrustful of authority, that has a lot to do with their, I think, with their origin in a revolutionary war.

That, you know, that war story being passed down from one generation to another. And you can see that influencing Americans even today. For the people of Israel, their characteristics, who they are, their origin, it's shaped by who their God is who brought them out of Egypt.

[9 : 06] It's shaped by the nature of the God who sets apart his people. Now, we've seen over and over again in Exodus that the Lord is revealing three big ideas about himself to his people.

I'm just curious. Anyone kind of, anyone picked up on what the three big ideas are? God is, you know, we'll see. Sorry? All right, we're hearing three things.

God is great, God is good. Is there a third one? Yeah, God is with us, or God is present. God is great, God is good, God is with us. That is going to, we're just going to beat that to death for the entire rest of the year.

God is great, God is good, God is with us. And notice in verse four how these three ideas, they're revealed in the Lord's sovereign act of salvation. So verse four, the Lord says, you yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians.

You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians. So the Lord is reminding them of the great plagues that he inflicted on the nation of Egypt that we read about. He's reminding them of the crossing of the Red Sea, how he brought Israel through safely, but how Pharaoh's army was drowned in the waters.

[10 : 16] You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians. He's reminding them that God is great. Then again in verse four, you yourselves have seen how I bore you on eagles' wings.

How I bore you on eagles' wings. Now, if there's anything more American than being carried on the wings of an eagle, I really don't know what that would be. But we don't want to misunderstand the imagery here.

We want to take care to understand it in the way that Scripture explains it to us. And it's actually very helpful to look at Deuteronomy chapter 32 where Moses, in a great song that he writes, he explains this poetic image more fully.

In Deuteronomy chapter 32, Moses says, but the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted heritage. He found him in a desert land and in the howling waste of the wilderness.

He encircled him. He cared for him. He kept him as the apple of his eye. Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, that flutters over its young, spreading out its wings, catching them, bearing them on its pinions.

[11 : 31] The Lord alone guided him. No foreign god was with him. It was the Lord alone. Eagle's wings. This isn't about giant American flags and nobility and courage and freedom.

This is an image of tenderness. Fatherly care. The Lord is reminding us this Father's Day that his people are being cared for by a true father who has compassion on them.

He's like this great father eagle and he's got a nest full of those ugly, fuzzy little eagle chicks and he's teaching them how to fly and so what he does is he stirs them up.

He pokes them out of the nest until they leap out and they spread their little wings, their scraggly little wings and their flight doesn't go very well but he glides underneath them to catch them when they fall.

He carries them back safely to the nest. It's like a dad teaching his little boy or little girl how to ride a bike and saying, I won't let go and following through, I'm not going to let go.

[12 : 45] I'm going to teach you. I'm going to be with you. I'm going to make sure you're okay. The Lord has brought them safely through the desert. We've seen him week in, week out providing for their every need along the way.

The Lord is reminding them not only that God is great but that God is good. God is good. And then finally, the Lord says to them in verse 4, you yourselves have seen how I brought you to myself.

I brought you to myself. And the Lord has finally brought them to a place where he promised, he had promised Moses all the way back in chapter 3 that he would meet him there.

The Lord has brought them out of Egypt. He's brought them through the desert, through the wilderness, through all of the obstacles they've encountered and he's brought them to the mountain of God, to Mount Sinai.

And the Lord is reminding them that not only that God is great, not only that God is good but that God is with us. So God's people have been called out as a nation.

[13 : 53] They've been called out as a people. And they've been called out entirely by the greatness, the goodness, the presence of their sovereign God, their Heavenly Father.

It is the Lord who sets apart his people. He's the one who does it. Now we've emphasized one difference already between this proclamation on the one hand and the American Declaration of Independence on the other hand.

We've emphasized that it's a different rationale. It's the Lord accomplishing this, the Lord making this declaration and not the people. We're going to uncover more significant differences in verses 5 through 6.

If you read the Declaration of Independence, you'll find the document emphasizes human equality and human rights. A very famous passage. We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

That to secure these rights, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. So first of all, not only is the emphasis on equality and rights, note that in the Declaration of Independence, the government finds its basis in the consent of the governed.

[15 : 20] It's from the people. The people are acting to set themselves apart. It's their consent. Well, with the Lord's people, the situation is very different. It is the Lord who sets apart his people with a good identity and a good mission.

It is the Lord who sets apart his people with a good identity and a good mission. And I think it's helpful here to say how much better this proclamation is.

This proclamation that the Lord gives his people is so much better. Because what the Declaration of Independence says, it's good stuff, the equal value of all human beings.

That's a great thing to promote and defend. And that's something that's very clearly taught in Scripture. But a good, God-given identity, that's an even better thing.

That's taking it a step further. Now, in our culture, equality is a buzzword, but identity is what people are truly seeking. What people don't know. Who am I?

[16 : 22] Who are we? What am I deep down? We're always looking for identities and for labels to apply to ourselves. people need to know who they are.

And here, the Lord gives his identity to his people. At the same time is that the rights of human beings, that's a good thing to promote and defend as well.

But a good, God-given mission or purpose, that takes it a step farther. That's an even better thing. In our culture, rights, they're the buzzword of the day, but mission and purpose.

That's what people are really seeking. That's what people are longing for. Not only who am I, but what am I here to do? What's my life about? It's that identity.

It's that mission or purpose that people are constantly struggling about and trying to figure out answers for and making up answers for and settling for less than what God has intended them to be and to do.

[17 : 27] So the Lord gives his people a proclamation that is far superior to any declaration of independence. He gives his people a good identity and a good mission.

But first, God gives them a requirement. He gives them a qualification necessary for their good identity, necessary for their good mission. And this requirement, this condition, it's given in verse 5. If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant.

If you will indeed obey my voice and keep my covenant. His people need to listen to his words. His people need to remain faithfully committed to the terms of that clearly defined relationship with him.

This isn't just some sort of sentimental bond. This isn't just a feeling. This is something that is clearly defined, clearly marked out. Our deepest relationships are like that.

The marriage relationship, you say vows. Why? Because it's a covenant. Because you're committing to words. His people need to listen to his words.

[18 : 40] His people need to remain faithfully committed to the terms of their clearly defined relationship with him. That is what's necessary in order for them to fulfill their good identity and carry out their good mission.

They need that. And the problem that we're going to run into very, very fast in the book of Exodus is that the people, they're not going to listen to the Lord's voice. They're not going to keep his covenant.

They don't really buy into the truth that God is good. They don't really think that his way of living is the best way. They think they can come up with something better.

They think that, they don't really buy that his commandments are the way to love him. The way to love one another. That failing to follow his commandments is failing to love.

They don't really buy into the truth that God is with them. That they don't have to rely on other gods anymore. He'll take care of them. He'll give them what they need.

[19 : 43] And they need someone because they can't keep this covenant, because they can't listen and pay attention to his word. They need someone to stand in their place. They need someone to fulfill this covenant for them.

To love when they won't love. To obey when they can't obey. To be right in God's eyes when they can't be. They need a substitute. They need someone to stand up for them.

To stand in their place. They need to be, not only have that substitute, but they themselves need to be made new again. To be given new hearts. That know and see and believe the truth about God.

New hearts inside of them that long to obey the Lord. They need a savior. They need to be made a new creation. And what they need is what the Lord God has provided for you and me.

He's given us the man Jesus Christ. God's only son. His beloved son. And everyone who believes in Jesus Christ, who trusts that they're welcomed into God's family.

[20 : 47] Do you trust that? Do you trust you're welcomed into God's family because Jesus died, because Jesus rose again for you? Everyone who believes that is united with Christ.

in the New Testament, the Apostle Paul calls that being in Christ. United with Christ, in Christ, belonging to Christ. You're part of a family now.

And Jesus stands up for you. In 2 Corinthians chapter 5, the Apostle Paul writes, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation.

The old has passed away. Behold, the new has come. All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation.

There's your mission. That is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses, their wrongdoing, their sin against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation.

[21 : 58] Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ. God making his appeal through us. We implore you, on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. For our sake, he, that is God, for our sake, he made him to be sin who knew no sin.

For our sake, God made his son to be sin. His son who knew no sin, who lived perfectly. Yet he took all our sins on himself and he bore the punishment for them all.

So that in him, we might become the righteousness of God. Our new identity, right in the eyes of God.

Righteous. We belong. And so because you and I who believe in Christ are in Christ, because we're united to him, because we're belonging to him, we too, we are welcomed into the people of God.

And we too share this good identity and good mission. And the good identity that we share, it's found in Exodus chapter 19, down in verse 5.

[23 : 15] the Lord promises, you shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine.

You shall be my treasured possession among all peoples, for all the earth is mine. Now, in that time, in that place in world history, nearly everybody was a polytheist.

Nearly everybody believed. There's many different gods, and all these different gods have these little domains. You know, this is the god of the Amalekites.

This is the god of the Moabites. This is the gods of Egypt. Or these gods are in charge of different things. You know, this is the god in charge of growing grain. This is the god in charge of the rain.

This is the god in charge of this and that and this and that. This is the god in charge of this geographical region. Once you go inside that region, he doesn't have power anymore. Well, the Lord is explicitly saying here, all the earth is mine.

[24 : 18] He is not a regional god. He is not a limited god. He is the creator. He is the sovereign god.

He is god over all of the universe. He is god over all people everywhere and they all belong to him. He has ownership rights. He is the creator.

But in spite of his supremacy, in spite of his ownership of everyone, that could be just a thing where he just, you know, he has this huge domain and he just, you know, because it's so big, maybe we're lost in the shuffle.

Maybe he doesn't give special attention. But he says he has chosen one little unimpressive nation. Not that big, not that impressive, not that righteous, but they're his treasured possession.

They're his crown jewel. That's the way the Lord thought of Israel. That's the way the Lord thinks of you, of me.

- [25 : 30] You are his crown jewel. You are his treasured possession. And he loves you. The Declaration of Independence, it focuses on human equality, but God's proclamation focuses on his supremacy.

The Declaration of Independence focuses on human rights. God's proclamation focuses on his rights over all the world. And because God has ownership claim over the whole world, this means that the people of God, we have a mission.

We have a purpose. At our mission, our purpose is to declare the supremacy of God. To announce he has a kingdom that is coming to this earth and in many ways is already here.

He is king. He is sovereign. He owns it all. And he has rights over all of it. Be reconciled to God. This is our mission.

That's our message and that's our responsibility. That's why the Lord tells Moses in verse 6, You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.

- [26 : 51] A kingdom of priests and a holy nation. What the Lord is doing is he is giving his people something better than mere rights. He is giving them a good relationship with good responsibilities.

They're going to be priests. A kingdom of priests. Royal priests. God's mediators. A priest is a bridge.

A priest is a bridge between God and human beings. A priest is a conduit through whom God's goodness can be brought to the world. There are going to be mediators between God and all the nations of the world.

And we already saw last week a little hint of that. How the people of Israel have brought good news to foreigners like this man Jethro, Moses' father-in-law, who comes from another nation and yet comes to believe in the Lord, who hears the wonderful things he's done and he believes.

He says, there is no other God like you're God. That's how we came here. You and I are believers because Jesus Christ, the true Israel, he is the true king and the true priest.

- [28 : 11] He has brought the good news to us. Jesus Christ is the one mediator between God and man. Jesus bridges the relationship between God and between you.

And so, because we're in Christ, we too now become mediators. We too now become priests. Every Christian, every believer is a priest. You are.

A royal priest. Mediators to a world that doesn't know God. There are times I'm talking to an unbeliever and I'll offer to pray for them.

And one of the reasons I do that is because I don't know that God, I have no promises that God will hear them, but I have a promise that God will hear me.

I can be a priest. And we are ambassadors for Christ. That's why Paul said that in 2 Corinthians 5. We are ambassadors for Christ because we represent Jesus first of all to one another.

- [29 : 17] Priests to one another. ambassadors to one another. And then priests and ambassadors to all those who don't believe. Who show them our Lord.

And by the kindness of God, He has given us special access to Him. Special power to approach His throne. Special influence.

He has given us the opportunity to pray. Encouraged us, urged us to pray and to pray big. To intercede for one another before our Father.

That's why the Apostle Peter writes in 1 Peter chapter 2, you, you, are a chosen race. A royal priesthood.

A holy nation. A people for His own possession. That's who you are. That's, that's who you are. And that's your mission.

[30 : 24] That you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who called you out of His darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people. You had no identity.

You didn't belong. Now you are God's people. Once you have not received mercy. Now you have.

Now you have received mercy. We are called out as God's people. Called out of darkness into His marvelous light. Peter makes clear in his letter this allegiance, this identity, this mission comes at a great cost.

1 Peter has written to people who are suffering. Who are enduring incredible hardship because of their commitment to Jesus Christ. But we find in this identity, in this mission, great joy.

Because we're a treasured possession of the Lord. We live in His marvelous light. We're people who have received His mercy. We belong to Him.

[31 : 29] We're loved by Him. The Lord has set us apart with a good identity and a good mission. And as for that covenant that was being formed at Mount Sinai, the people of Israel, they chose to sign that covenant on the dotted line.

Verses 7 and 8 we read. 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.

All that the Lord has spoken we will do. And Moses reported the words of the people to the Lord. So what the people are doing is they're getting together, they're meeting together, they're talking with their leaders and they're telling their leaders, yes, we'll do it.

All the elders, the leaders of the people, they come to Moses and they say, all that the Lord has spoken we will do. The people are ratifying the proclamation, they're signing it, they're affirming the words of the covenant.

And we're going to see later in the book that their resolve is going to waver. Their commitment to the Lord, it looks really strong now but it isn't going to be very strong. And that should bring us pause because you and I, we are prone to wander.

[32 : 46] We are prone to be pulled away from obeying the commandments and the teachings of our God. prone to thinking our own ways are what's wise and what's right.

And that's why you and I need Jesus. That's why we need Jesus. Because Jesus, unlike me, unlike you, Jesus never fails.

Jesus never falls short. Jesus lived a perfect life. Jesus died and he obeyed his father to death. And he rose again to bring new life to you and to me.

Thanks to Jesus, the right requirements of God's law, they've been accomplished on our behalf. It is finished. Jesus, our Lord, has done it all for us.

He's done it so that we can be reconciled to God and made a new creation so now we can live the good life God has called us to.

[33 : 58] So that we can have this new identity, this new mission to proclaim his excellencies. It is the Lord who sets apart his people with a good identity and a good mission.

Let me pray. our God and our Father. Whom have I in heaven but you?

There is nothing on earth I desire besides you. My heart, my flesh, they're going to fail. You are the strength of my heart. You are my portion forever. forever. Only Jesus, we cry.

He is all that we have. He is the only thing, the only thing, the only one that can never be taken from us. He is the good life, the eternal life to know him and to know you, our Father.

Thank you for him. He stands in our place. He is our access to you, our God. And through him we are made new.

[35 : 22] Amen.